



TAKE WHAT YOU NEED, GIVE WHAT YOU CAN
Food Inequities in the Greater Richmond Area

by

Food Inequity Immersion Team 2021

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Introduction

Our immersion team was eager to learn and better understand the many challenges facing our region's food inequities. We discussed our reasons for exploring this subject and our interests. Eventually, our scope of work narrowed to impact some way and not merely be tourists in this realm.

Scope

Our research and interviews demonstrated the evident passion and involvement of many volunteers, donors, nonprofit organizations, and businesses seeking to address this severe environmental health issue plaguing our region. We examined multiple perspectives of the issue: larger nonprofits providing services, government policies and interventions, grassroots initiatives, business models to provide grocery access, and local food production models. We also learned about the impact of COVID-19 on food security, from the supply chain impact to the increase in individuals who are food insecure and unaware of how best to navigate the food security system.

Given the scope and complexities of this topic, we decided to break into teams to explore four themes that we felt were most important: Access/Food Desert, Programs/Cost, Health/Nutrition/Education, and Waste/Supply Chain. We then set up several interviews with community leaders to dive deeper into our exploration of these topics. Our immersion team was eager to learn and better understand the many challenges facing our region's food inequities. We discussed our reasons for exploring this subject and our interests. Eventually, our scope of work narrowed to impact some way and not merely be tourists in this realm.

Journey

One of our most impactful meetings was with Doug Pick, President, and COO of Feed More, during which he shared statistics on food insecurity in the Richmond area. We learned that needs are not homogeneous through geographies, there are gaps in coverage, and conditions among seniors, already great, have only increased due to the pandemic. Our conversation with him helped us understand some of the difficult decisions families face in choosing between paying for food and other necessities, such as transportation, medical care, and housing.

We also learned about specific issues and challenges facing other local leaders. Shalom Farms focuses on healthy choices and fresh produce, as well as sustainable food production. St. Joseph's Villa highlighted for us how critical partnerships are, to expect the unexpected, and the need to create win-win solutions for clients, donors, and other stakeholders.

Findings and Overarching Themes

As we engaged in conversations with community leaders, several overarching themes emerged, such as:

- the complexity of developing business models that are sustainable for food access while providing inclusive options and pricing
- the importance of establishing trust and the tension between community engagement versus a top-down approach
- the importance of healthy eating and personal choice, balancing community and individual needs, and the many challenges with various programs models in this area
- exacerbated hunger issues resulting from the pandemic
- the need for making food production and supply more equitable
- avoiding duplication of effort and the need for sustainability of solutions
- the many innovative and inspiring ideas brought forth by our community, including new websites and platforms that are connecting folks to different options in the community, such as Aunt Bertha (now called findhelp.org)
- the impact of COVID19 has had on our region, increasing needs across our community

Recommendations

Early in our journey, we noticed a lack of a central hub or "ecosystem" connecting the many people involved in this system – from families in need of quality, healthy and affordable foods to volunteers, board members, community leaders, and philanthropic partners to resources and programs providing a wide-range of assistance, both locally and nationally. Alas, we deemed an early plan to create a hub untenable due to the volatility of the resources and the need for ongoing and diligent maintenance.

Once we learned about RVA Community Fridges from a social media post that caught the attention of one of our team members, we made a pivot. The simplicity of the statement on that post, "Take What You Need, Give What You Can," drew us in to learn more. We learned how this simple concept took shape from one individual's passion, founder Taylor Scott, and has grown from an initial idea in October to three fridges in the community in just six months. Taylor is creating partnerships (VCU, local restaurants, Virginia Free Farm) and creating a sustainable program to keep this running. These fridges serve the local community; they are anonymous and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Call to Action

Our team's interest is in helping RVA Community Fridges remain successful and sustainable. As such, we created a guide for RVA Community Fridges on the fundamentals of establishing a nonprofit entity. The guide provides information on board creation/development, legal and permitting considerations, and other key considerations they must account for as they expand their reach and solidify their presence in the area.

Our call to action for you:

- Donate your time, your money, your surplus food, your resources, and your connections.
- If not to RVA Community Fridges, consider another organization with a mission that speaks to your values and your heart.
- If you don't find one that speaks to you this way, create one!

Appendix/Resources:

Interviews

- Matthew Kreydatus, Director of Career and Transition Services, St. Joseph's Villa (2/22/2021, via zoom)
- Norm Gold, Developer/Operator, The Market at 25th (1/13/2021, in person)
- Dominic Gibbons Barrett, Executive Director of Shalom Farms (1/28/2021, via zoom)
- Doug Pick, President and CEO, Feed Moore (2/19/2021, via zoom)
- Taylor R. Scott, Founder, RVA Community Fridges (3/12/2021)

Sources

- <https://www.connectva.org/basic-needs-directory/>
- <https://www.gofundme.com/f/rva-community-fridges>
- <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/>
- <https://richmondmagazine.com/restaurants-in-richmond/food-news/take-what-you-need-give-what-you-can/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IH1lyQ54xRA>
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