



## **Beyond Food Pantries: The HOPE Model for Helping Communities Thrive Food Insecurity Immersion Team 2023**

Paul Bratton | Natasha Knight | Ibironke Lawal | Natasha Lemus | Chris Mayfield |  
Lauren Moore | Lindsay Lane Robinson | Shannon Ukrop | Hana Yun

### **Introduction**

Food insecurity is a nuanced issue that is often addressed as a singular issue. The US Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as "...a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity can be a temporary situation for a family or can last a long time. More than 34 million people, including 9 million children, experience food insecurity in the United States<sup>2</sup>.

Organizations like food pantries, community organizations, hospitals, and places of worship aggregate and distribute available food, but they lack the focused approach to make their efforts impactful in groups with specific needs, backgrounds, and cultural experiences. Waymakers Foundation (Waymakers) has been identified as an organization that has answered the call to action in food insecurity in a more targeted approach, addressing the cultural needs of a specific group by supporting them with appropriate resources that large organizations may not have the understanding, capacity, or bandwidth to address.

### **Journey**

Layering the immersion team's research and understanding of food insecurity and its drivers with observations of how Waymakers holistically addresses the needs of Hispanic families, the team reflected on and branded Waymakers' best-in-class approach "The HOPE Model". This model addresses four keys to preventing food insecurity – **H**ousing, **O**pportunity, **P**rosperity, and **E**mployment. The HOPE Model highlights what's needed to position communities for success rather than focusing exclusively on the direct response needed (food) to combat food insecurity.

Through conversations with local community leaders, research, and insights from LMR seminars, our team identified four key drivers of food insecurity: limited job opportunities, low wages, lack of affordable housing, and systemic inequities. Based on these drivers, we concluded that food distribution is only a bandaid for food insecurity, not a solution.

Natasha Lemus, has transformed the food bank culture in Richmond through her nonprofit organization, Waymakers Foundation. This is the first organization in the

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, SA. (1990). Core indicators of nutritional state for difficult to sample populations. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 120:1557S-1600S.

<sup>2</sup> Feeding America Network (2023) [Hunger in America](#)

region to provide food that honors the cultural heritage of the Hispanic communities it by providing access to culturally sensitive food. Additionally, Waymakers holistically addresses the needs of constituents by providing resources and programs focused on health, education, and the arts.

## Findings

The challenge to any nonprofit, and specifically Waymakers, is to support organizational sustainability and fundraising to enable continued impact in a targeted community. Launched during the COVID-19 pandemic and seeded with the influx of corporate and foundation funding tied to pandemic response, Waymakers has not found long-term funding to continue its work which requires a nearly \$40k per month operating budget.

Waymakers' HOPE Model is a highly effective and meaningful approach to reducing food insecurity because of its attention to the drivers of food insecurity, in addition to addressing food needs. The HOPE Model, paired with Waymakers' intentional focus on the specific needs of an ethnically diverse population, has placed them in a unique position to serve its community and reduce food insecurity for those whom it serves. However, as a young nonprofit that gained its start thanks to readily-available COVID-19 response funds, many operational threats exist as funding declines. Currently, Waymakers lacks the funds necessary to continue its work. Those barriers include:

- *Board engagement* → With a lean board, Waymakers has struggled to routinely bring its board together, making engagement difficult.
- *Fundraising* → As the philanthropic landscape moves to a post-pandemic reality, COVID-19 response funds have dried up, and Waymakers needs to focus on the opportunities to fund its work in a more "normal" funding landscape.
- *Operational Support* → Led by an incredible founder who is also a business owner and full-time mom, Waymakers is at a critical juncture and needs a dedicated executive director who can support board engagement, on-site logistics, and program management/measurement, and focus on fund development.

Waymakers' HOPE model provides an attractive and impactful investment opportunity for funders going forward. If supported effectively, Waymakers can continue to thrive in supporting the Hispanic community in Greater Richmond and create a national model for organizations to support other ethnic communities with attentiveness to their unique food and cultural needs.

## Recommendations

The long-term success and viability of Waymakers will require operational support and reliable fundraising. A refreshed sustainability plan (appendix A) and fundraising plan (appendix B) should be implemented with the current Waymakers leadership to support the organization's long-term viability. Highlights of the recommended plans for adoption by the Waymakers board of directors include:

- Refreshing the board of directors to bring on new members and those with the skills necessary to support the fund development success of the organization

- Adopting a refreshed board expectations document to support the growth of the board and transparency of responsibility
- A fundraising plan and executive director that can support a \$40k/month operating budget in the immediate future
- A diversified funding model that includes individual, foundation, and corporate support, as well as long-term partnership agreements, to support the continuity of operations

### **Interviews**

- Feed More: - Douglas “Doug” Pick, President and Chief Executive Officer
- Waymakers Foundation: - Natasha Lemus, Executive Director
- Children’s Hospital of Richmond: - Shari Barkin, MD, MSHS, Physician In Chief Department of Pediatrics
- Shalom Farms: - Ana Ibrahim, Executive Director
- Local Food Hub - Josh Rockett, former Executive Director