



Hidalgo County • Department of Budget & Management
American Rescue Plan Act 2021



**Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act
Food Insecurity Assistance Program**



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Background Information

In the last two years, COVID-19 has greatly impacted the nation and, in particular, regions of low socioeconomic status. Currently, 33.5% of Hidalgo County’s population live below the poverty line; therefore, this population would benefit from a program that will address the food insecurities in the area, such as contributions to nonprofit food banks.

Food insecurity among low-income minorities directly impacted the community’s overall health, making them increasingly vulnerable to COVID-19. “The COVID-19 public health and economic crisis is bigger than any other we’ve seen in our lifetimes — while the pandemic has forced the U.S. economy into crisis, millions of Americans are struggling with food insecurity, unemployment, and falling behind on housing payments. Hunger has increased throughout the pandemic, with as many as 30 million adults and 12 million children living in a household where they may not always get enough to eat.”¹

“Further[more], the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing disparities in food insecurity. Black and Latino adults are more than twice as likely as white adults to report that their households did not get enough to eat.”²Nonprofits, which provide vital services to communities, have faced economic and financial challenges due to the pandemic. Nonprofits faced significant challenges in covering operating costs as a result of the public health emergency. Specifically, nonprofit entities such as food banks, which provide resources to underserved populations.

“The number of people affected by food insecurity had risen between 2014–2018, and the COVID-19 crisis has added more pressure on production, supply chains and household incomes with the poorest being most affected (The Lancet, 2020), and created an unprecedented rise in the use of food banks.”³COVID-19 has changed all of this and, given the sharp projected increases in unemployment (and, hence, food insecurity) the levels of food insecurity across the United States are likely to be far higher in 2020 than in 2018.

¹ *Biden-Harris Administration's actions to reduce food insecurity amid the COVID-19 crisis*. USDA. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/03/03/biden-harris-administrations-actions-reduce-food-insecurity-amid>.

² *Biden-Harris Administration's actions to reduce food insecurity amid the COVID-19 crisis*. USDA. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/03/03/biden-harris-administrations-actions-reduce-food-insecurity-amid>.

³ Gundersen, C. (n.d.). *Food Insecurity during COVID-19*. Food Insecurity during COVID-19. Retrieved November 22, 2021, from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/aapp.13100>.



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Many low to moderate income families also struggle to keep food on their tables due to the escalating cost of basic items as well as the weak economy. Tens of thousands of families in Hidalgo County struggle to buy groceries every month. Dozens of food pantries try to provide assistance to help these individuals make it through a difficult time.⁴

Program Description

The purpose of Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Food Insecurity Assistance Program is to provide funds to ensure that the residents of Hidalgo County have access to food, especially senior citizens and other vulnerable populations who have been impacted by COVID-19. This includes but is not limited to food delivery services, nutritious meals and necessary assistance for continuity of services. According to the ARPA interim final rule, "Assistance to households or populations facing negative economic impacts due to COVID-19 is also an eligible use, such as food assistance."⁵

"Additionally, it is crucial to safeguard access to nutritious foods, particularly for the low-income community. Maintaining the availability, affordability, and access to safe nutritious foods, is essential for safeguarding nutritional status during the COVID-19 pandemic and protecting immunity. Food systems will need to adapt to ensure sustainable healthy diets for all populations."⁶

Community factors such as a weak support system can directly increase a family's likelihood of having food insecurity. "Food banks are responding to the rise in food insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Food Insecurity Assistance Program will support nonprofit food bank networks throughout the pandemic, and ensure that they have the resources to meet the growing demand for food assistance. This program is seeking ways to remove barriers and make it easier for qualified applicants to receive assistance through certain programs."⁷ Funds can be used for a broad range of services, including: mass sheltering; mass feeding; assistance to food pantries and food banks.

⁴ Jon McNamara. *Hidalgo County Food Pantries*. Retrieved November 22, 2021, from https://www.needhelppayingbills.com/html/hidalgo_county_food_pantries.html

⁵ Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). *Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds*. (pg 33)

⁶ *External covid-19 nutrition guidance May 2020*. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1867/External-COVID-19-Nutrition-Guidance-May-2020.pdf>.

⁷ *Biden-Harris Administration's actions to reduce food insecurity amid the COVID-19 crisis*. USDA. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/03/03/biden-harris-administrations-actions-reduce-food-insecurity-amid>.



Response to COVID-19 Public Health Emergency

The American Rescue Plan Act provides a key opportunity to improve the health and well-being of children and their families by addressing food insecurity. The economic disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has placed many families in positions that leave their children vulnerable to the detrimental health effects that are caused by the lack of a proper diet.

“The Congressional Budget Office predicts that the negative effects of the pandemic will continue through most of 2022, with an average total of 44 million people on SNAP next year, before it begins to decrease in 2023. The impacts of the COVID-19 crisis have disproportionately affected Black and Hispanic households, who are facing double the food insecurity rates of white and Asian households.”⁸

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified effects on individuals and households in low- and moderate-income communities. The compound pre-existing vulnerabilities raise the risk of experiencing food insecurity. ⁹Most notably, low-income workers and their families are enduring a harsher experience, with an estimated “17 million adults living in households where there is not enough food to eat.” The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Food Insecurity Assistance Program aims to provide food assistance to families and children facing financial and emotional hardships.

Identification of Eligibility Category

The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Food Insecurity Assistance Program for nonprofit organizations is eligible under the ‘Negative Economic Impacts’ category as outlined by the U.S. Treasury. Specifically, section 2.1 ‘Household Assistance: Food Programs’ in the ARPA expenditure category. Impacted non-profits are also eligible to receive assistance to continue to provide services under 2.34 ‘Assistance to Impacted Nonprofit Organizations (Impacted or Disproportionately Impacted)’. The Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act

⁸ *Vice president Harris, rep. Lawson discussed food insecurity, vaccinations and American rescue plan during Jacksonville visit.* U.S. Congressman Al Lawson. (2021, March 22). Retrieved November 23, 2021, from <https://lawson.house.gov/media/press-releases/vice-president-harris-rep-lawson-discuss-food-insecurity-vaccinations-and-american-rescue-plan-during-jacksonville-visit->

⁹ Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. (pg 24)



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Food Insecurity Assistance Program will find ways to remove barriers and make receiving food assistance easier. In addition, it provides a critical opportunity to improve child and family health and well-being by reducing the poverty and food insecurity that too many families, especially families of color, experience.

Projects

Numerous projects will be included as part of the Hidalgo County American Rescue Plan Act Food Insecurity Assistance Program including, but not limited to, the project listed below:

- The RGV Food Bank-Project Number: ARPA-21-110-022