



Department of Community & Human Services

4850 Mark Center Dr.
Alexandria, VA 22311

alexandriava.gov

703.746.3400

Food Insecurity in the City of Alexandria, Virginia Research Study

Request for Proposals

Alexandria Food Security Work Group

RFP Release: May 15, 2023

Deadline for Proposals: May 29, 2023

Contract to start: July 1, 2023

Presentation of Deliverables: January 2024

Purpose of Project

The purpose of this research study is to assess the degree of food insecurity that exists in Alexandria by looking at the overall landscape and client experience. This study will be a key element in the development of Alexandria-wide food security strategic plan.

Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as the lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life. The USDA measures food insecurity at the national and state level through an 18-item questionnaire as a part of the annual Current Population Survey's Food Security Supplement. The national food insecurity rate is 10.2%¹ and the Virginia food insecurity rate is 9.2%².

Since 2011, Feeding America has conducted an annual study called Map the Meal Gap to improve understanding of food insecurity and food costs at the local level, including counties, food bank service areas, congressional districts, and states. *Map the Meal Gap* generates four types of local-level data: overall food insecurity estimates, child food-insecurity estimates, average meal costs and food budget shortfalls. According to *Map the Meal Gap*'s most recent data, the food insecurity rate in Alexandria is 8.4%, or 13,320 individuals.³

¹ United States Department of Agriculture. *Food Security Status of U.S. Households in 2021*. Available at <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/key-statistics-graphics/#foodsecure>.

² Food Research and Action Center. *State of the States: Profiles of Hunger, Poverty, and Federal Nutrition Programs-Virginia*. Available at <https://frac.org/research/resource-library/state-of-the-states-profiles?state=Virginia>.

³ Feeding America. *Map the Meal Gap: Food Insecurity among Overall (all ages) Population in Alexandria City County*. Available at <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/virginia/county/alexandria-city>.

Despite Alexandria's reputation as an affluent community, there are many households in Alexandria struggling with food security. Recently, the Capital Area Food Bank's 2022 Hunger Report estimated the prevalence of food insecurity in Alexandria as high as 31%. This rate was measured with a six-item short form of the USDA survey module conducted February-March 2022 with 3,769 adults aged 18 and older in the DC Metro Area. While this survey does not have the same breadth as the USDA survey or Map the Meal Gap, it makes clear that many households that may not be officially labeled as food insecure by government measures are still struggling to afford adequate food.

In 2022, the City of Alexandria hired a Food Security Coordinator to examine the state of food security in the city, and to lead efforts to create a baseline report and strategic plan to make improvements to the many efforts to address food insecurity among Alexandrians. The Alexandria Food Security Work Group was created by the Food Security Coordinator and brings together a variety of stakeholders in Alexandria. Key players include the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services, City of Alexandria Public Schools, the Department of Health, Parks and Recreation, Hungry Free Alexandria, No Kid Hungry, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, food businesses, and community members. The Food Security Work Group was launched in February 2023 and will continue its work for 12-18 months, concluding with recommendations for actions Alexandria and partners can take to improve food security for households across Alexandria.

Scope of Work

In order to tackle food insecurity, we need information about the landscape and client experience of food insecurity, especially the degree to which it is experienced by individuals and households. The contracted researchers will deliver a report detailing the landscape for food access, and the level of food insecurity experienced by Alexandrian's seeking food assistance. This report should include the following:

1. Identification of areas of need in the community, including the demographic and geographic populations in Alexandria where food insecurity exists and has unmet needs. The analysis should include race, ethnicity, age, household size, employment status, income, and other available factors. Analysis should identify areas of inequity and seek input from clients and community stakeholders about how to reduce inequities that are part of the food access and security systems. What can this tell us about how inequity plays out in Alexandria and how efforts to improve equity could be focused?
2. The degree with which households experience food insecurity using the USDA food security scale, including the length of time households experience food insecurity and an understanding of how many resources a household uses to meet its monthly food needs (e.g., how many pantries visited, how frequently accessing food, benefits used, regular income spent on food)?
3. Identifying the key drivers of overall financial insecurity and the degree to which non-food financial pressures affect a household's food budget. Do households use other non-food



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assistance programs to protect their food budget? Are there times of the year when food needs are higher or there are more people in the household or eating more meals at home (e.g., holidays, sick relatives, summer break)? What tradeoffs are made when money is tight? Do household members skip meals or eat less because of budget pressures?

4. Analyzing how well existing assistance programs (food pantries, food distribution programs and benefits programs) are meeting households' food needs (quantity, quality, health benefits, and cultural appropriateness of foods). How do households learn about available resources? Are there common barriers to accessing these programs (e.g., transportation, limits on how much a person can carry, childcare)?
5. Analyzing how well households are utilizing federal nutrition programs. Are households familiar with the federal nutrition programs? Are they participating in the programs if they are eligible? What barriers are preventing eligible households from participating? If they have benefits are these enough to meet food needs? If not, what other sources do they use? If so, how long do they plan to be on federal nutrition programs and/or do they use these benefits?
6. The degree to which affordable and culturally appropriate groceries are accessible in communities. What type of food retail business (large grocery stores, small grocery stores, farmers markets, etc.) are groceries being purchased from? What barriers do households encounter that keep them from accessing groceries in the community? Can residents find and afford the food they want (prepared foods, fresh foods, shelf stable foods, culturally appropriate foods)? Can residents cook and prepare the food they want? How do households use benefits programs, like SNAP and WIC?

Applicants may also consider this question if their experience lends to it, but it is not required:

7. What innovative approaches are other communities employing that might help to address food insecurity in Alexandria?

Members of Alexandria's Food Security Work Group will be available to assist the researchers by providing additional community context, identifying clients for focus groups, or answering questions from researchers.

Timeline

The contract will begin in July 2023 with results produced by January 2024 and presented to the Work Group as a written report and a presentation.

Expected Deadlines and Deliverables

Interested research parties should submit the following by May 29, 2023, for consideration:

1. Proposal components

- a. Proposals submitted in response to this request shall not exceed five (5) pages.
- b. The name of the firm or individual submitting the Proposal, along with the name, telephone number, and email address of the individual legally authorized to represent the Proposer.
- c. Tentative/suggested methodology, referencing where previous research and data sources can inform the current opportunity, and articulating limitations and challenges anticipated.
- d. A proposed list of outputs including data tables, charts or maps that will be produced.
- e. An explanation of the team's capacity to gather and analyze information from non-English speakers, particularly Spanish speakers.
- f. An estimated timeline with deliverables for key outcomes.
- g. CV or resume for at least two key members of the research team, and briefly articulates individual role within team.

2. Budget

Applicants are welcome to provide 1-2 budget scenarios. Respondents may use any format they prefer. In submitting the proposed budget(s), please incorporate the following:

- a. Show a breakdown of direct and indirect costs, fees, expenses and charges associated with the full delivery of this project over the contract period.
- b. Wherever rates are identified as fees, should be specified, either hourly, daily or one-time.
- c. Consider all risks, contingencies and other circumstances relating to the delivery of the project and include adequate provision in the pricing information to manage such risks and contingencies.
- d. Document all assumptions and qualifications made about the delivery of the project.

3. Example of previous work

- a. Provide at least one example of a past research study or project completed by the project team or project lead.
- b. A list of three (3) references, which can attest to the Proposer's knowledge and experience in performing similar work to the requirements of the statement of work. For each reference, provide the following information: name of the reference, name of a point of contact, point of contact's job title, phone number, email address, and a brief description of the services rendered to the reference, dollar value of the contract, and duration of the contract.

4. Other documents

- a. Required information form



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- b. Insurance requirements

Evaluation of Proposals

Proposals will be evaluated by a committee that includes members of the Food Security Work Group and leadership at Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services. Evaluation of proposals will incorporate consideration of the following:

1. Did the research team include all requested information?
2. How well did the proposal address the scope of work?
3. Did the suggested methodology and outputs seem like a good fit for the City of Alexandria and the Food Security Work Group's work?
4. Does this research team show that they have the capacity and skills to accomplish this project based on the information provided in their proposal, work example, and resumes?

Contracting Authority

While this is a City-wide and Work Group effort, this RFP is sent out under the contracting authority of the Alexandria Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS). All contract and financial obligations under the contract will be the sole responsibility of DCHS.

Submission

Please submit proposals to Melissa Jensen, Food Security Coordinator, at melissa.jensen@alexandriava.gov by close of business on Monday, May 29, 2023. If you have any questions about this RFP, feel free to reach out to Melissa by email or by phone at 703-746-5760.