

A CALL FOR WORKING TOGETHER FOR FOOD SECURITY

Why SNAP Matters

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) plays a critical role in helping families across our region afford groceries, stabilize household budgets and avoid difficult trade-offs between food, housing, utilities and healthcare. More than 140,000 residents in United Way of Greater Cincinnati's nine-county footprint rely on SNAP each month — representing nearly \$25 million in monthly household resources.

SNAP also functions through a critical partnership between federal policy and local nonprofit providers who ensure families can access food quickly, consistently and in ways that reflect community needs. This interconnected system is essential to maintaining stability across neighborhoods and reducing strain on broader social services.

What Changed Nationally

A recent federal funding pause, paired with newly enacted SNAP policy changes for eligibility and state cost-sharing, created significant uncertainty for families. While October benefits were processed on time due to advance obligations, the shutdown resulted in a nearly two-week delay in November benefits for many households.

With the government now reopened, states began restoring benefits as of Nov. 13. Even so, this disruption underscores a key lesson: Our nonprofit sector must continue to strengthen readiness for rapid shifts in program, policy or funding landscapes, so families are not left without support when systems change suddenly.

Local Snapshot: What We're Seeing

Even temporary disruptions make clear how essential our regional food assistance ecosystem is — and how quickly pressure spreads across providers when benefits are delayed.

United Way 211 plays a crucial role, providing resources to callers in need. In recent weeks, 211 launched a food-specific map cataloging 276 resources across the region, and the team handled a **177% increase in food-related requests for help.**



Households served by the median pantry with over \$18K in food costs



Additional households (30% increase) would add \$5,600 in food costs.

Increased Demand

The median pantry serves 275 households and spends \$18,604.75 on food each month. If need increases by 30%, that's 83 more households and an additional \$5,600 each month. That doesn't account for the added strain on people, space, equipment and delivery systems that pantries depend on.

Early insights from United Way's Food Pantry Capacity & Emergency Readiness Survey, completed by 50 local providers, similarly showed how quickly the increased demand stressed our local food assistance network:

92% of pantries reported increased demand, with 35% noting significant increases.

While funding shortages were the most commonly reported constraint, partners also noted:

- Food supply challenges
- Staffing and volunteer gaps
- Refrigeration and freezer limitations
- Storage and transportation constraints

Despite these pressures, providers continue to respond with commitment and creativity. Nearly every pantry expressed interest in shared purchasing, coordinated delivery or logistics partnerships, signaling strong readiness for collective action, whether SNAP delays reoccur or future surges in food need emerge.

Moving Forward Together

This moment serves as a reminder of the importance of coordination, shared information and rapid action. Our region is strongest when we operate as one system of care, working together rather than responding in isolation.

Our focus is on strengthening shared navigation, improving real-time communication and preparing our nonprofit ecosystem for future disruptions or surge in demand.

To support collective readiness, we are:

- Leveraging United Way 211 as the central hub for real-time food resource navigation, and offering webinars and tools to help community partners, employers and frontline staff use it effectively.
- Convening partners to identify specific gaps, align resources and strengthen coordination, including exploring shared purchasing, delivery efficiencies and culturally responsive support.
- Exploring a rapid-response funding pool to help our region mobilize resources quickly and equitably during future disruptions or sudden shifts in community need.

We All Play a Role in the Solution

Even as benefits resume, the recent delay demonstrates one clear truth: Our ability to coordinate is our greatest strength. When partners share information, align resources and center families, our entire community becomes more resilient — not only during a crisis, but every day. United Way remains committed to working side-by-side with nonprofits, funders, employers, volunteers and community members to ensure every family can put food on the table — every day, in every neighborhood.