



Pro Bono Q&A: Houston Food Bank

PRO BONO Q&AS

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In the third in a series of Q&A's spotlighting food banks across the country, we talk with Brian Greene, president/CEO of the Houston Food Bank, about the organization's work in the community during the pandemic. DLA Piper is proud to partner with the Houston Food Bank as part of the firm's signature pro bono project focused on fighting hunger.

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Q: Tell us about your organization and the community you serve.

Brian Greene: Houston Food Bank's mission is to provide food for better lives. Last year we provided access to 104 million nutritious meals in 18 counties in southeast Texas through our 1,500 community partners which includes food pantries, soup kitchens, social service providers, and schools. We have a strong focus on healthy foods and fresh produce. In addition to distributing food, we provide services and connections to programs that address the root causes of hunger and are aimed at helping families achieve long-term stability, including nutrition education, job training, health management, and help with securing state-funded assistance. We are a resource for individuals and families in times of hardship. We are a solution to food waste, working with grocery stores and growers to rescue food before it reaches landfills. In collaboration with our community, we advocate for policy change and promote dialogue on ways to increase access to food and to improve the lives of those we serve. Houston Food Bank works alongside our partner food banks in Montgomery County, Galveston County, and Brazos Valley. Houston Food Bank is a certified member of Feeding

America, the nation's food bank network, with a four-star rating from Charity Navigator.

Q: How has the pandemic changed your daily operations?

Brian: The people served by Houston Food Bank, almost by definition, do not have the ability or the means to have food reserves. The Food Bank has ramped up distribution to continue to meet the critical need for food that has increased due to the COVID-19 situation, specifically for the vulnerable population including people who don't have other access to food, are impacted by school closings, those whose work hours have been cut, etc. Distribution is currently at 150% of its usual operation. Pre-COVID-19, food distributions at partner locations could see up to 250 families and now some partners are reporting to seeing double and triple the amount of families. Partners are also reporting serving people who have never sought food assistance before. The Houston Food Bank has also implemented alternative distribution methods to continue to serve people in the safest ways possible: drive-throughs, Neighborhood Super Site distributions, and direct delivery through partnerships. We are now employing groups of supplemental employees to help with the increased output. Some of these groups include hospitality and restaurant workers, YMCA employees, and county employees whose jobs or job functions are not currently in demand by their usual employer. These supplemental staff members perform functions vital to Houston Food Bank's operations such as sorting, inspecting, and packing food, housekeeping and cleaning, data entry, and distributing food. National Guard are also helping at large-scale distributions directing traffic, along with other duties. The collaboration and partnerships have been amazing and vital for us to continue to serve people.

What is the greatest need right now, and how should people reach out if they want to help?

Brian: Since the Food Bank is now experiencing 130%-150% increase in demand over the 1.1 million food insecure people in our service area, the need is massive. We are always looking for volunteers, so if you feel comfortable and are well please register online at [houstonfoodbank.org](https://www.houstonfoodbank.org) to find a shift that works for you. We are practicing social distancing with volunteers and staff. And we have individual and small group volunteer opportunities available. People can also donate online to help support the Food Bank's response to the growing community need, \$1 donated helps provide 3 meals. And if people are in need of help, they can visit our COVID-19 Resources webpage to find help near them: <https://www.houstonfoodbank.org/covid19/>