



Pro Bono Q&A: The North Texas Food Bank (NTFB)

PRO BONO Q&AS

6 July 2020

The North Texas Food Bank (NTFB) serves approximately 800,000 North Texans who are food insecure (roughly 1 in 6 people) and is one of the largest members of Feeding America, a hunger relief organization with a nationwide network of food banks. The pandemic has strongly impacted NTFB's daily operations, leading to a 300 percent increase in client volume. DLA Piper is proud to be a longtime supporter of the NTFB, and here, we talk with Vice President-People and Culture, Suzanne Drotman about ways the community can help.

"With joblessness on the rise, the need in North Texas has skyrocketed in unprecedented ways. Since March 15, 2020, the NTFB has distributed more than 11 million lbs. of food and served more than 40,000 people via our mobile pantry program. Our partner agencies are seeing more first-time clients than ever before and have reported more than 300 percent increase in client volume." – Suzanne Drotman

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

Suzanne Drotman: In 1982, the North Texas Food Bank (NTFB) was established to address the critical issue of hunger in our community by distributing donations of surplus food and grocery products through a network of charitable organizations. In the first year, 400,000 pounds of food were distributed -- today, we provide more than that in one day with 91% of that food classified as nutritious. With COVID-19's impact needs skyrocketed and our food distribution more than doubled. In 2020, we surpassed our 2025 strategic plan goal of providing access to 92 million meals 5 years early.

We access food through government programs, donations and purchases. Food is then distributed through our 280 partner agencies (food pantries), direct programs for seniors, children or our mobile pantry. We also distribute “meals” through SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

NTFB’s service area includes 13 counties across 10,000 square miles: Dallas, Denton, Collin, Fannin, Rockwall, Hunt, Grayson, Kaufman, Ellis, Navarro, Lamar, Delta and Hopkins. With COVID-19 estimates, nearly a million people are expected to be food insecure with 380,000 children – 37% and 47% increases, respectively. This represents 1 in 5 people, or 1 in 4 kids. Those numbers are staggering, and we work every day to close the hunger gap.

How has the pandemic changed your daily operations?

With joblessness on the rise, the need in North Texas has skyrocketed in unprecedented ways. Since March 15, 2020, the NTFB has distributed more than 11 million lbs. of food and served more than 40,000 people via our mobile pantry program. Our partner agencies are seeing more first-time clients than ever before and have reported more than 300% increase in client volume. We typically have 200 volunteers work on our production floor each day for the sorting and kitting of food. Because our volunteer operations had to shut down, we would not be able to do the work alone. The National Guard has come in to support our work and has been pivotal in ensuring that food is received and distributed to our hungry neighbors.

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

People are having to make tough choices due to COVID-19 but these choices are not unique to those we serve. Should I pay my electric bill or eat? Should I get a prescription refilled? What about my car that needs to be repaired so I can get to work? Because of COVID-19, the need for food has been elevated to levels most of us have not seen in our lifetime. Monetary contributions allow us to order product in bulk needed to kit the volume of meal boxes needed for safe distribution. We also list needed food items on our website (ntfb.org) for donation purposes. Lending your voice to advocate for legislative policies that support hunger relief and social media advocacy are also ways you can help. For safety, volunteers are not on site at this time, but we miss them and hope to welcome them back soon. We utilized National Guard resources early in the COVID crisis but when they are removed, we will secure additional paid staff to ensure our operations can safely continue to meet increased food needs.

Also, last year we launched a “Partners 4 Hope” an annual law firm challenge that brings the legal community together for a friendly competition to raise funds to help feed our hungry neighbors for the 13 counties in North Texas we serve. 2019 was our inaugural year and participating firms raised over \$75,000! Details about timeframe and awards are TBD for the time being given the current circumstances. However, we most likely the campaign to late fall/winter. For more information, please visit <https://ntfb.org/partners-4-hope/>.

If you are interested in donating your time, talent or treasure, please visit <https://ntfb.org/about-us/our-impact/>.