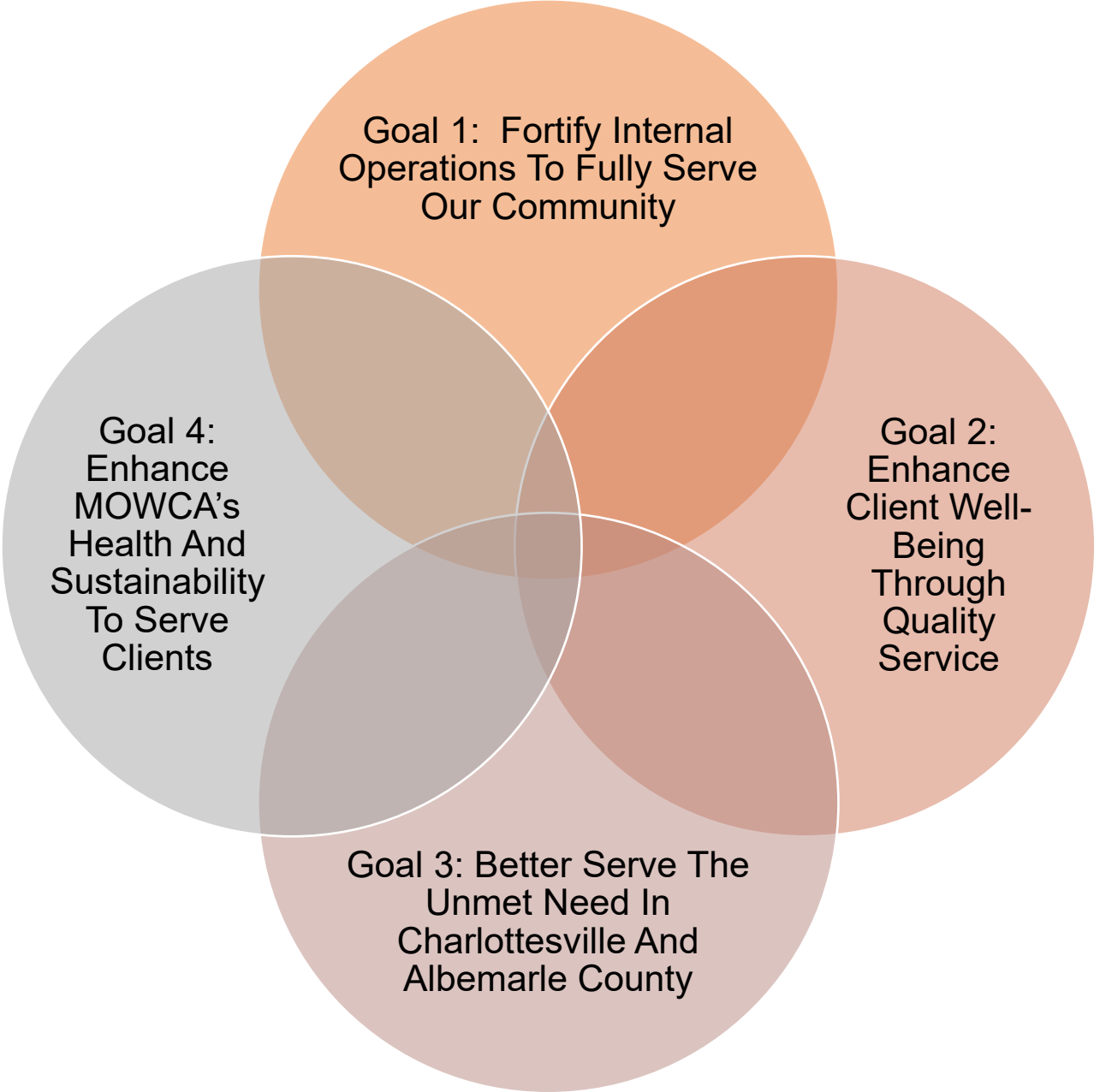


Meals on Wheels Charlottesville-Albemarle

Strategic Plan Overview
2022-2025



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Strategic Plan Overview

2022-2025

Goal 1: Strengthen How We Work So We Can Fully Serve Our Community

- Be clearer about who we are able to serve
- Work on finding more volunteers and keeping the ones we have
- Grow staff to meet all needs
- Use technology to serve our clients and volunteers better

Goal 2: Make Client Lives Better Through Our Services

- Create new and better ways to connect clients to other services through new and current partner organizations
- Do wellness checks for clients better and more often
- Create a process to start home visits
- Offer more food options to increase client choice and meet dietary needs

Goal 3: Better Serve More Clients in Charlottesville and Albemarle County

- Listen to what people in Charlottesville and Albemarle County need and make sure MOWCA is doing what we can to meet those needs
- Look into opportunities to grow like adding partners, adding services, or expanding our service area
- Make sure the partners that refer clients to us know what we do and who we can help

Goal 4: Make MOWCA Stronger So We Can Serve Clients Well Now and Into the Future

- Create a plan to increase and broaden our fundraising to support MOWCA's growth
- Make sure the board has the right skills to help MOWCA and represents the community we serve
- Make sure we have the staff we need to achieve our goals
- Create a plan to tell our story and advertise our work better



Meals on Wheels of Charlottesville/Albemarle

Strategic Plan: Preliminary Findings Report
June 2022

the
spark mill
we make change possible

Description of The Spark Mill

We are a regional strategic planning firm based in Richmond, VA. Serving clients throughout Virginia, we offer services in strategic planning, organizational development, nonprofit sustainability, board facilitation, and community engagement. We've been helping a wide variety of clients, including nonprofits, government agencies, associations, and businesses flourish and live into their mission and vision since 2009. Our nine-member staff prides itself on recommending cost-effective and practical solutions with tangible action steps that can be implemented by the organization and/or agency.

The Process

We use creative methods to refine strategy and end with an actionable plan that is immediately useful to guide decisions. We work together with clients to design a process that meets the overall goals of the project. The exact steps and timeline are adaptable to your organization, culture, and expectations. We rely on a wide variety of resources and tools during our engagement, including interactive facilitation techniques, group-process dynamics, strategy development models, conflict resolution, financial modeling, and board governance best practices.

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Project Overview

Charge & Goal

In 2022, The Spark Mill was hired to guide Meals on Wheels of Charlottesville/Albemarle (MOWCA) in the development of its strategic plan. The project began with the Gather phase, gaining input and feedback from key stakeholders about how MOWCA can grow and serve more people.

This report is the summary findings of all the data collected during the Gather phase. The project now pivots to the Soak phase, where The Spark Mill guides the Strategic Planning Team in listening to stakeholder data and discerning how it will shape the organization's plan.

The last phase, and the ultimate goal of this project, is to transform all of the knowledge gained into goals and strategies that guide the organization as it looks to serve more people, improve community relationships, become inclusive of diverse communities, and become sustainable.

Process

We began the project in February 2022 with a kick-off meeting with Executive Director Robin Goldstein and Assistant Director Allie Dudley. At this meeting, we discussed an overview of the process and began establishing key dates for the project. To move us forward, we established a strategic planning team to support the development of the strategic plan by promoting board engagement, staff engagement, and offer definitive inputs throughout the process.

Strategic planning team members included:

- Jeff Boichuk
- Cheryl Cooper
- Allie Dudley
- Robin Goldstein
- Kevin Kollar
- Georgia Lindsey

During our March strategic planning team meeting, we determined which key stakeholder voices we needed to engage and how best to talk with them. Once the team created the stakeholder list, The Spark Mill began engaging stakeholders and gathering data.

Stakeholder Overview

We gathered data from approximately 135 people using one-on-one interviews, a donor survey, and a staff retreat with staff and volunteers. We also reviewed internal documents, including previous strategic and financial documents, annual reports, and other important organizational data. In the appendix, at the end of this report, you will find a list of stakeholders, as well as interview, and survey questions, and a list of most important things to consider from the staff retreat.

Upon completion of gathering data from internal and external stakeholders, we began sifting through data and identifying key themes to create this Preliminary Findings Report.

Inside the Report

Survey Data

This section will elaborate on primary findings from the survey conducted as part of Gather. You will find a summary of the survey on pages 7 and 8. The survey questions can be found in Appendix B and the full survey results will be provided to the MOWCA leadership.

Themes

In this section, we articulate the themes that emerged from the stakeholder data. A theme is a topic or idea that we heard in multiple stakeholder conversations. For each theme, you will find a brief narrative along with supporting quotes. Items in quotes are direct quotes from interviews, focus groups, and surveys. We identified the following five themes in our data-gathering:

- The Nuance Of MOWCA
- Reducing The Wait
- A Need For Operational Changes
- Collaboration And Partnership
- Access And Agency With Diverse Groups

Pathways

In this section, we identify potential opportunities for the organization to consider as it works toward implementing learnings from this report's findings. We identified four key pathways for you to consider as you create your strategic plan:

- Fully Serve Charlottesville And Albemarle County
- Expand Capacity To Fully Serve
- Use Collaboration To More Deeply Serve
- Take Control Of Your Story For Greater Impact

Survey Data

The donor survey was sent out via email on May 5th to 1,402 people from the MOWCA donor database. Two reminders were sent on May 23rd and June 2nd and the survey closed on June 7th. There were 155 email bounces and 57 people who have opted out of SurveyMonkey. You received 117 responses, which after bounces and optouts gave you a 10% survey response rate.

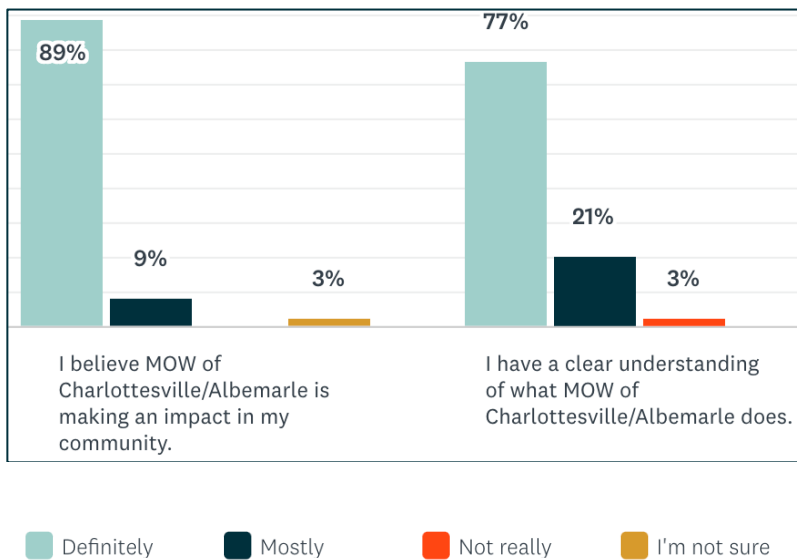
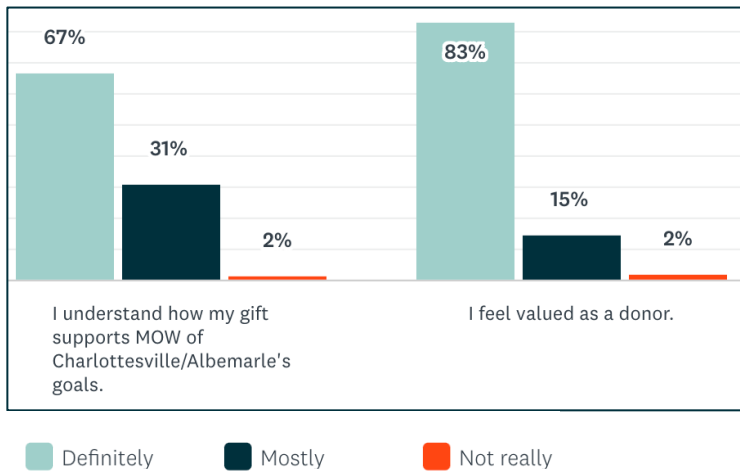
Demographics

Survey respondents were primarily women (68%) which is typical for most surveys, overwhelmingly white (92%), and skewed older (65% were 65+ and only 16% were under 55). The Spark Mill compared these numbers to another survey we conducted in the Charlottesville area in the last couple of years and their donors were 84% white and 28% were 65+. We know that the age demographic is partially related to the type of work that you, but it is definitely something to be mindful of as you think about financial sustainability and messaging for the future.

You had a nice spread of recent to long-time donors with 17% reporting they have been giving less than a year and 21% who have been supporting MOWCA financially for 10+ years. Your survey respondents are also active donors with 83% giving in the last year.

We asked a few questions to assist development with how often and via what format to communicate with your donors. 90% of survey respondents said they feel like they receive the right amount of communication from MOWCA. As for how they prefer to be communicated with, 77% said emails, 38% said newsletter, and 11% said social media.

The next few questions were used to gauge your donor relationship and how well you are telling the story of your work. Overall, the results were positive – your donors feel appreciated and strongly believe MOWCA is making an impact. It is important to remember, however, that this is being asked of your own stakeholders who financially support your work. So, when the results to whether or not they have a clear understanding of what MOWCA does comes in under 80%, you have to assume that number would be significantly lower for those who are not current stakeholders. The other area to be mindful of is how clear you are in communicating with donors about the impact they are making by giving to you. The combined number of those who always and mostly understand how their gift is being used is fantastic, but it would be nice to see that “always” number come up a little bit.



Dream – How would you spend \$1,000,000 on MOWCA's behalf

Your donors had lots of ideas about what you could do with \$1,000,000. Below are some of the responses that came up more than once.

- Pay/reimburse drivers
- Expand kitchen space
- Make food better/healthier
- Expand service area
- Eradicate waitlist
- Staff – more, better pay
- Outreach for volunteers
- Bigger space/more parking/in-house food prep (some people see this as limiting the amount of people helped)
- Wrap-around services (social worker, mental health)
- New delivery bags
- Night/weekend food delivery

Themes

THE NUANCE OF MOWCA

Stakeholders have a general understanding of the Meals on Wheels program and appreciate the service you provide. When asked more specific questions about MOWCA, it became clear many do not have a full understanding of what clients get with your service, how this specific MOW operates, and how they can engage in your work. Some stakeholders aren't sure how you're funded and many donors reported not completely understanding how their donations are being used. Additionally, some stakeholders don't seem to be aware that there is a social interaction aspect of your work that is significant to many volunteers and clients. Stakeholders encourage you to build relationships with the whole community through information fairs and community events and connect with families and churches to increase awareness of your programs and services. These are the community members most likely to know where the hidden hungry and homebound are in the community and connect you to them.

[Best known for] "Prepared meals for elderly and disabled."

"Obviously known for bringing food to people who can't or are limited how much they get out of the house. And then the important secondary piece of that social interaction, even if limited, is a lot better than nothing."

"I think that they are known for having very committed volunteer support. The volunteers are just actively engaged in every part of the meal and the delivery. They just speak so well of the agency too. They really care so much and have relationships with the client so that is really telling."

"My hope for them is that they would be able to have such name recognition that if somebody gets into that category, that they know there's an option out there, or that somebody around them knows the option is out there."

"I don't know enough about [MOW] to say what area they could impact."

"If you do identify a need and are thoughtful about how you present it to communities, the money will come in. There is plenty of money in Charlottesville, so it's a very generous community; you need to do the groundwork."

"I can't begin to sing your praises enough. Your organization is amazing, I'm so impressed. It's not just about the mouths you know, it's about the heart."

"Continue outreach into the community, you know, continue being present in the community, not just with your meals on wheels, but in terms of being part of information fairs, going out talking to groups about the service, you know, continuing to work on being known in the community because the service is outstanding."

"My husband died last year but it's nice to have people still coming around and they are very nice and courteous."

"When you've got multiple agencies doing similar work, being able to sustain it and also not being confused with other agencies who are doing something like what you're doing but not exactly the same."

"I feel like it's doing good for the community. It's a very straightforward mission. And above all, the good feelings part of it. It's convenient for my schedule. I like the people who work there. I like visiting with the clients when I bring them food."

"If you look at the community holistically and figure out where your niche is and what your specific market is, that's the way to go. You're more likely to have success."

"One of the things that nonprofits do is we live and die by our reputation to the community; it takes one person to tarnish it."

"I would think in Meals on Wheels case, what where they'd be looking for referrals would be from medical providers, primarily, where people are identifying where a medical social worker is identifying somebody who needs prepared meals delivered."

"How are we getting to people who aren't getting out? It's like, well, it's hard to find them because they're not getting out. often, faith communities are better as like, [so and so] came for 5, 10, 20, 50 years. They notice when somebody stopped showing up."

"When you have volunteers delivering, the more volunteers you have, that is in and of itself, the building of a core of people that really, really know about the program."

"One of the most wonderful services, I get the chance to meet so many people, especially living alone and the protocols are amazing to really safeguard us"

"In general, just public awareness. If their family members or neighbors don't know about it, then how will they find out about it? It's not just raising awareness among the older adult population. It's raising awareness period."

"Food access a lot it but the importance of the social-emotional component is important as well. And relationship building. How can the volunteer be the person who navigates that"

relationship? Any way we can educate them and bring them along. Thinking through ways to use volunteers and even in the data-gathering phase to remove the barriers.”

“I love the people; I'm homebound so it's so nice having people to talk to. The lady on my route has become my friend.”

“Volunteers are your kind of eyes and ears. They are your potential donors. They don't just come and do their hourly thing. Every week they talk about Meals on Wheels. They donate. They share and they help spread the word. So, I think it's important to have, and people want to feel like they're helping or that they're doing something good for their community. So it's a lot of facets to volunteering, I think.”

[Advice] “Maybe just more engagement. Just kind of getting the word out. A lot of times people don't know the nuts and bolts of something like Meals on Wheels. I think it's just sort of interesting, for me anyway, to kind of know like, what the details of how their program works. Who's eligible? How does it work day to day? I don't know if it would be cool to do maybe some posts about that or just so people are more familiar with the actual process.”

REDUCING THE WAIT

Stakeholders, who have worked with you, expressed concerns about your waitlist because of the implications for clients. Some stakeholders described a lack of transparency or communication about the waitlist, such as how long the wait is. Some wondered if there are policies in place to help manage capacity and expectations around how quickly you begin serving a new client. There was some feedback that because they don't understand the wait, people become reluctant to refer clients to you. The waitlist can also signal to the community that you are not a reliable supplier of food. Some stakeholders desire a better partnership with you so that people in need can still receive food until they are off the waitlist.

“If there's anything that I would improve it's getting rid of the waiting list, getting enough funding to be able to accommodate everybody. I think this is really what they want to do because a waiting list just says I can't help you right now and it begs the question who is helping you?”

“It seemed like things were either a waitlist or just really stalled time. And not really understanding why.”

“There tends to be a pretty long waitlist often to actually get enrolled in the program. And I know that that's just because of capacity limitations on their side. But that's a reason why generally when I'm talking to people, I don't necessarily refer them to Meals on Wheels.”

“So I guess my question would be, what are they waiting for [regarding the waitlist]? Are they waiting for the money to pay? Or are they waiting for the volunteer to come and be available? So I mean, that whole process would be nice to be clarified. And to streamline because we've got older adults who are in need of food.”

“They have a waitlist and we could be taking some clients off of their waitlist.”

“We would want them to have enough funding to be able to say yes, to everybody who asks. Because it doesn't help to have written name recognition and have a waiting list because then it doesn't take long, negative news spreads a lot faster than positive news. So, you don't want the wrong kind of name recognition.”

[Million Dollars] “They could expand what they're providing people and maybe they reduce the amount of waitlist.”

“They wouldn't let us open [clients] until they had taken care of number one and number two on our list, which was very frustrating and really didn't make a lot of sense, because we're both in the business of feeding folks. So if you had an alternative way to feed a group of people that would lighten your financial load, and they had the means to do that. It was disappointing that they chose to deal with their waiting list in that way.”

“So the question is, why is it taking so long? What is the drawback or the hindrance with getting [clients] open? Because that is that lack of communication with community partners about their process or what's happening or why? That doesn't build confidence in us that they can actually serve our clients.”

“With the waitlist, if they can't serve them right away, finding a way to get them shelf-stable meals or something in the meantime to kind of help support that person until they can get that daily delivery, you know, whether it's a partnership outside, or if it's something that they have shelf-stable meals, here's a box of 10 meals. I'm pretty sure they keep in contact with them anyway to let them know the status, but something like that I think would be beneficial as well.”

“I think in terms of, could they feed more people? Yes. Absolutely. I know there had been a waiting list for a long time. I think they've gotten lots of folks off that waiting list now and into their program. The only thing I can think of is, just feed more people.”

“We know that there are still people in our community who do not have access to the food they want. It's a tricky system to navigate for our new Americans and immigrants. Thinking about our senior population we are depending on technology- i.e. texting. There are all these things we are trying to do to make access easier but you have to know how to use them to work the system.”

“I don't have a good sense of, you know, how tight their policies and procedures are. That can always be a barrier for organizations if they don't have really strong policies and

procedures. If there aren't really clear guidelines— like an intake comes in and we expect to have that person served within five business days or whatever—then that can certainly be a huge barrier for the organization. And then, if other people are experiencing what we're experiencing, their reputation might be taking a turn. If there are people or even their clients, coming to them and they have to be put on a waitlist for a long time. Then they might not think of Meals on Wheels as a provider, someone that can be counted on to provide what they need.”

A NEED FOR OPERATIONAL CHANGE

Despite being concerned about the waitlist, stakeholders acknowledged this could be a symptom of operational challenges and growing pains; After all, with a global pandemic, people are asking for help more than ever. Several stakeholders acknowledged and agreed with the need for MOWCA to move into a larger space for more ease and capacity in your day-to-day operations. MOWCA staff desire to serve clients more deeply through assessments or provide volunteers with more training but both require time and capacity you currently don't have. When thinking about food sources, stakeholders wonder how MOWCA could partner with local food providers such as local grocery stores, local restaurants, local farmers, or farmer markets

“They seem to have an incredibly well-organized volunteer base that has consistently provided food and the consistency is really important for relationships and trust.”

“I would just say to remain open and curious to know what comes out of the process. I think often our ideas of what we think our organizations need to be doing are very different from what people on the other side might say so, just staying open and curious.”

“What are the systemic ways that Meals on Wheels keep abreast of the need because it's changing every day or year.”

[Advice] “Keeping the right people is probably the number one thing I would recommend.”

“Finding ways to really bring more users of the service into roles, leadership roles; either coming in as paid staff or having more opportunities to provide feedback and be involved in decision-making processes, maybe having users who are actually board members and things like that I think would be really, really amazing. And then also just trying to figure out, how can we be, as Meals on Wheels, as flexible as possible in terms of how, when and where we provide services, so that, they can really meet people where they are in their situation.”

“Building any efforts that they can make to have their services a more equitable, healthy and enjoyable to the recipients.”

“Looking inward at how they can increase their capacity to serve more. I do think the waitlist is a hindrance to their growth. Kind of figure out what they can do within their agency to increase the amount they can give would be good.”

“[When clients no longer need service] You refer. That almost requires somebody who's devoted to following. It's a case management kind of thing.”

“Listen to the community and the people you are serving – let them provide information and guidance.”

“They package up the food and have very clean, thorough procedures in place for that. So I've always been impressed by that.”

“What they did with the news I have never seen before. And the executive director just feels far more accessible.”

“In the operations of things, and this may correlate with the timeliness of the intake process, there just seems to be a little bit too much stall time between communications, there is a bit of turnover at that time, and staff time to dedicate to the proper processing of clients, new clients, and getting their meals started.”

“Their space is pretty small. I think that that really does limit just how much they're able to do in terms of just like how many bags of food they can really pack and have on hand to send out.”

“The other thing that I've observed is just around turnover. [My colleague's daughter] was working at Meals on Wheels. I think she'd been there less than a year, but she found herself in a position of being like the senior person on staff, and so, obviously, that's a big challenge for any organization when people are kind of coming and going and you're not able to retain that institutional knowledge and build relationships.”

“I think they've been pretty resourceful in terms of like working with, like UVA, both kind of campus dining and like the hospital like I think that you know, they've been able to benefit from the food that's available through those sources.”

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP

The Charlottesville area is bubbling with nonprofit organizations working on food insecurity and food justice. While historically, many of these organizations have been siloed and somewhat competitive, the current climate is ripe for collaboration and sharing of resources. Most stakeholders expressed a desire to collaborate and partner with MOWCA to decrease food insecurity in the area. Stakeholders are curious about ways to leverage

your delivery system to get more food to clients and community members in need. Some wondered if there was a way to incorporate other supports or wraparound services for your niche client population (homebound), such as social services or voting. Stakeholders also stated collaboration can help increase community access to your program through referrals and client sharing. Regardless, food-serving organizations are eager for you to come out to mingle and see how their programs and services can align with MOWCA.

“Evolve into being more collaborative generally with other organizations and with the community.”

“A lot of us talk at the executive level at the program level and there's heavy coordination communication, referring people back and forth.”

“Being flexible and reducing barriers as much as they can. I think part of that, too is undergoing a process of talking with people and understanding what some of the barriers and difficulties in working with the program have been historically.”

“Something that I'm very interested in is really building more relationships between local farmers and community gardens and resources like that that are really very much community-based. I think it may be interesting for Meals on Wheels to explore some of those options that may be available.”

“There is a huge local food movement and farm to table with the local food hub. People were trying to get to farmers' markets and direct consumers to help people eat healthier.”

“Don't try to reinvent the wheel; work with others who are doing similar work. Find a model that you really like and I don't want to say duplicated or copied but there's nothing wrong with that if it's working.”

“Charlottesville is really rich in resources but not good at connecting them. I'd love to see connection points between all the different food organizations.”

“The reality of the Charlottesville community is there's no shortage of available food; there is a lack of access. And access can be money, it can be transportation, it can be language, it can be all sorts of things just not knowing how to get to it.”

“There's potential for a lot of overlap. So for lack of a better term staying in their lane is staying in our lanes. It's very important for each of us, and that's why we don't do anything other than provide food. We don't want to do deliveries.”

“The people who need the food, I don't think they really understand how it all works and it's incredibly complex.”

“I think from our perspective the homebound piece and helping some of our clients. More opportunities to use our services.”

“Maybe partnering more with other organizations. I think it's easy to overlook seniors and people homebound as we're looking at food equity issues. I know we're focused a lot on youth and the school system and those kinds of infrastructures, so having a more cohesive argument or stance or approach to our food system in Charlottesville for our organization, for Meals on Wheels, for other groups, too. I think that would be really helpful. Really understanding it as a system that is interconnected.”

“I think that would be tremendous for those members to be able to get, you know, peanut butter and crackers or apples or vegetables that they can snack on. Here's your meal, but here's a snack for you for later.”

“That's probably the biggest divide between our two programs as opposed to meals versus groceries is the getting here the transportation, the access, the physical access, because Meals on Wheels is beautiful and it's a delivery program, ours is not, and our board has been very intentional about that they don't want to get into the delivery business. So if we can partner with Meals on Wheels to get additional food to the people they help then that works better for me because I don't have to find the volunteers. I don't have to do the routing. The logistics of these businesses are huge.”

“Locally, they don't have much of a presence. They're not, I don't think, very well known. Low key as long as I can remember. They're not a major player in that they just they're not there. You don't see them out advocating so much. I tend not to see them at the same level I see JABA.”

“I think really partnering with the various food banks and food pantries in the area would be great to offer fresh produce, like a little kind of a grab bag. Yes, here's your meal. But here's some snacks that are healthy.”

“Kind of working together a little more smoothly to get meals to clients. And then I think the waitlist thing getting that figured out within the next few years would be beneficial as well.”

“In Charlottesville, there very much is that kind of situation where organizations are working in the same kind of area, but are independent.”

“They primarily provide hot meals for people which is not exactly what the food bank does. But over time, we found a way to kind of align our programs a little bit more.”

“Organizations in Charlottesville can tend to be very siloed; there are definitely opportunities to be more collaborative.”

“One thing I think about is the Food Justice Network that we have here in town, which brings a lot of people together and I don't think Meals on Wheels has really participated very much

in the past. I believe that that comes down to capacity, but I think it'd be great to see them interacting in that space.”

“There's a lot of good work going on out there but it's so under-resourced, and so, I think any partnership we can do out there that is by the folks who are already on the ground, I think is a good thing.”

“There's a lot of potential for our partnership and if they wanted to be part of the network, or if I learned more about them, but we currently aren't really that connected.”

“If we're talking pie in the sky, I think some collaborative effort that took fresh, choice meals to both youth families and elders that are homebound.”

“In that million-dollar scenario, if they also did, sign them up for voting or you know, like could bring other city services that they didn't have access to, to their doors.”

“Unified data-sharing across all organizations so that we can see hotspots and get household-level data. The foodbank does that, MOW does that, - some kind of systems integration – how can we get on a map to see an overlay.”

ACCESS AND AGENCY WITH DIVERSE GROUPS

As you engage the community, stakeholders encourage you to be aware of the nuances of your diverse audiences. Two specific aspects consistently mentioned were age and culture. Stakeholders believe that understanding and responding to these nuances will enable those in need to connect with you.

For seniors, there is a barrier of pride around accepting “charity” despite the service being specifically made to support them. Some people have particular mindsets about accepting help, especially in the form of welfare. Additionally, as our society continues to advance its use of technology, our current senior population is being left out and left behind as this becomes a primary means of connecting with community.

The other social aspect is the diversity of the Charlottesville area. Stakeholders reflected on the growing number of Spanish-speaking community members and the presence of refugees and immigrants who speak a variety of languages. With diverse people come diverse palates, preferences, and diets. This is reflected in the client surveys as clients desire food options from their culture. Stakeholders believe clients should have diverse food choices that are healthy and meet the clients’ dietary needs.

“People have, I think, these just like very outdated images in their mind of like, what it looks like to be in the line at a food pantry or there's still a lot, especially in the older population, I

think, this mindset of, welfare is bad and the welfare queen and like all of those kinds of things that you come up against and so what we are trying to do is really working on, how can we make these spaces more welcoming and more comfortable for people to be in? Or how can we find ways to give food to people in a way that they feel is more anonymous?"

"I think amongst seniors, there can be a lot of prodding and not wanting to accept or take some of these services. Often, there's a belief that others are worse off than I am, so I'm not going to take this."

[Opportunity for Improvement] "I think offering more of a variety of types of meals while still meeting the nutrition guidelines."

"The connection point is the hardest part for people. Make it as easy as possible – meet them when they are asking and then help them for the long term."

"[Some have] had enough situations where they've checked out something and been told no, that they're afraid to hope, you know, and so the more volunteers that you have, delivering meals, the more people that are out there that that can say with their own personal experience. 'Yeah, this is a good program, and I've seen it and I've been part of it and you should check it out.'"

"Increase access for older adults and their families through like marketing outreach. One of our big goals too is just making sure that we are understanding the community and how best to connect with them. Where are those entry points in?"

"There are language barrier issues. How are we doing outreach in Spanish and Pashto and Dari, and all of these other languages that people are speaking?"

[From Client Survey] "No family in the area, so would welcome food any day of the week. Very lonely. From Puerto Rico, really loves rice and beans (specifically dry beans)."

"Psychological barriers, socio-economic barriers; I mean, if they are thinking that this is not the accurate or correct program for them, then you're going to see health and wellness impacted. Isolation numbers go up because they aren't quite sure how to request support and help. Educational barriers. So a lot of the individuals that we serve have like a middle school as an [eighth grade] education and so there's barriers to understanding information, understanding how best to get what they need."

"I think a lot of why people don't want to accept these services or they don't want to realize that they're kind of in a position of needing the assistance is because there's still so much stigma around needing to access any kind of food assistance."

"Shifting mindset – people want to have choice in the food that they eat. Family, community, and culture. Having some ability to have agency with the food they want."

“I think another thing too, is, again, it's kind of a mindset thing, but in the way that we talk with everybody in the community, whether they're folks who are experiencing food insecurity or they're our donors or volunteers is really kind of honing in on this message that these things can happen to anybody. Today I could go home and find that my house is burned down and that I lost my job or whatever and suddenly not be able to put food on the table. I think during the pandemic, people have seen how susceptible we all are to these things. So trying to just break down that kind of social barrier around class and who people think of when they think of folks that are coming to food pantries or receiving Meals on Wheels services.”

“One of the populations we were pretty sure did not get [pandemic relief] were seniors and seniors are living on a fixed income and Social Security does an annual adjustment of how much you're getting. I think the senior community is kind of an untapped resource that all of us are trying to figure out how to help. A lot of them are at home with family. There are many, many multi-generational households we serve and they've got somebody a child or a grandchild who is able to still prepare the food and feed the seniors in their household. But we don't really know how many [seniors] are out there that aren't getting help. I reached out to PACE, a senior daycare center. And they have been referring people to us if they need help.”

“We need more people, and organizations, advocating and raising awareness about the life-threatening situation that social isolation is.”

“I think the ability to effectively outreach isolated individuals. We assume that everybody is watching the news and listening to podcasts and on Facebook and get their newspapers delivered digitally, or whatever, they're going to church. They're just a lot of people who don't engage in the community that way.”

“Generationally, my mother is 94. [That generation is] too proud to ask for help. They came from the ‘pull yourself up by the bootstraps’ generation, and they don't believe in asking for help. And, it's an admission of failure in their mind and if we can kind of get past the stigma of needing help, just reassure them it's not going to affect how much social security they receive. It's not going to affect their benefits that they're that they are getting, and reassure them that this is just an additional way that they can thrive.”

“Having [a full-time dietician] expertise for me has been a game-changer because she is able to look at the food kind of holistically and the total nutrition balance and I think that that has been an amazing addition because we're really thinking not only about getting them food but getting them the right food, particularly for health reasons. I do think that looking at dietary concerns for the recipients is an important component of these programs. Now I think we have to think about whether this is the right food versus just food.”

“[My mother-in-law] resisted mightily because she viewed it as charity and charity was a bad thing. There are people that resist human service agencies, you know, I mean, because that's got to be for somebody else. A decline of abilities and strength and endurance made her

realize it's time to accept some help and that way she can use her energy for some other things.”

“I think one of the things we think about so often, with program models like MOW and PB&J it's a lot of program-directed food. Any opportunity for participants to design to get their input on what they want. Meal kits? That could help them feel more empowered and give them agency? How are we giving people choice in what they get? More programming input and community choice.”

“I really do think a lot of it is that you know, their mindset. We're trying to get them to eat healthier because it's better. The education of why meals are healthy. Education for them on different aspects, from a registered dietitian, why it's healthier to do this type of meal instead of constantly eating out of a can.”

“First of all, Charlottesville has a higher food insecurity rate than the state. That would surprise a lot of people because a certain segment of our population view Charlottesville as such a foodie population. There's that perception of being a foodie town, but I think the reality of that is pretty striking. In Charlottesville, food inequity also goes along racial lines. I think it is reflective of the significant economic divide in Charlottesville that is built on the legacy of racism in our community over the years.”

“The biggest one I hear— ‘I don't need those services; someone needs it more than I do.’ It is not just around food. Whenever we're talking to older adults, and we're trying to do these assessments, we get a lot of “okay”, and “I'm doing all right with that.” Or “I can get a bath.” And then you have to say, well, how long does it take you? Three hours? Then you're struggling, right? So it's that whole social issue.”

“What do people need to get in the door? Make getting connected getting as easy as possible. Remove income verification if that is part of the process. Removal of the transportation barrier. This would be a big shift, not only do we think about the senior population, and what about other populations who are homebound?”

“The language barrier is huge – Spanish, Farsi, Dari? In addition to language, there are also cultural barriers – making sure we understand what they need. coming out of Covid there may still be people who are not wanting people in their home and others who are eager to see others. How do you differentiate –there needs to be consistency across the relationships.”

SPARKS

This section includes a couple of quotes we felt were important to lift up, but that did not specifically fall into the above themes.

“I’ve always wondered though when I have looked at how many people they serve and the size of their budget. Frankly, I’ve always wondered if they’re meeting the need; if they are great. But it seems like the number of people they serve seems small in a community of now 170,000 people in Charlottesville, Albemarle community. So, I guess the room for improvement is either to educate that we are meeting the entire need of our community or if they’re not, the room for improvement is to meet that need.”

“I think they should have more staff. Maybe a development director or something, but I think an organization that has a lot of volunteers is extra special to the community because it involves the community. We could staff the entire thing. We could have staff members packing the meals and we could have staff members delivering the meals; those could just be paying jobs instead of volunteers. But I think that misses the mark when it comes to a community organization and community engagement.”

Pathways

Fully Serve Charlottesville And Albemarle County

Through this community engagement, the need to serve your area more deeply was validated. While some stakeholders acknowledged there is a need for your service in rural areas such as Louisa and Bumpass, many acknowledged there is still a great need within Charlottesville and Albemarle County. Many stakeholders want you to make sure you're providing your service (food) to as many people as possible. This means all the homebound, "hidden hungry", and their network, are aware of Meals on Wheels and are able to easily access the service with as few barriers (such as language or technology) as possible. Additionally, a few stakeholders also acknowledged the value of the "check-in" volunteers provide when delivering foods. Client survey responses highlight how much they enjoy the social interaction of the deliveries. Senior citizen advocates emphasized how isolation is the most threatening experience for seniors, and really anyone who is homebound.

Expand Capacity to Fully Serve

While many stakeholders believe you have the ability to serve more people, it will be important to clarify what operational processes or behaviors create the waitlist and reduce your ability to serve the area fully. Is it a capacity issue due to limited staff availability and organization policy or a volume issue reflecting the need for more volunteers and space? As seen in the themes, stakeholders that know you, recognize the need for a larger, more functional space. An opportunity here is to consider and explore different ways to increase your capacity. As you explore a larger commercial kitchen, is there a partnership that could support this effort? As you think about the space you need, keep in mind that it doesn't have to be one singular space. Some MOW organizations have hubs across their service area to ensure the clients who live the farthest still receive hot fresh food.

When engaging with staff, they were very aware of the need for more staff. As you think about how to build your organization structure keep in mind what you truly need versus what would be nice to have. One stakeholder pointed out that you could replace volunteers with paid staff but this would lose the essence of your program – community members connecting with homebound community members. Consider what roles you need in your organization to increase your capacity to feed and check in on the

homebound hidden hungry. Additionally, consider partnership opportunities to increase the services to your clients, such as providing case management.

As you continue to evolve and grow, operational practices will need to change and adjust. Some of the options for this evolution were presented through the Formative Change Group presentation which provided ways to be more efficient, more eco-friendly, and how to maintain a feedback loop with your clients.

Use Collaboration To More Deeply Serve

As seen in the themes, other food-providing organizations in Charlottesville and Albemarle want to partner and collaborate with you to reduce food insecurity. Stakeholders spoke of the complexity of the food insecurity network in the area; there are many organizations that do similar things with slight nuances. The opportunity here is to utilize collaboration as a means to increase access to your services. Stakeholders talked about partnering with local food banks to supply clients with fresh meals and healthy snack options. Another suggestion was working with homeless services as some of their clients do not have access to a kitchen and are not able to leave to get more food. Through collaboration, you can understand where and how you fit in the food system in the area. Additionally, other organizations will have a better understanding of whom MOWCA serves and the service you provide to clients. With many organizations working to reduce food insecurity, connecting and collaborating with them moves the community closer to this common goal.

Take Control Of Your Story For Greater Impact

One thing that became clear during community engagement is those who are not deeply familiar with MOWCA do not have a full understanding of whom you serve and how to engage with you. You follow the national model of providing hot meals, a friendly visit, and a safety check to seniors but you also extend your services to anyone who is homebound and unable to prepare a meal. The opportunity here is to push out this message through active storytelling of MOWCA. Let your clients' and volunteers' experiences be the marketing of your programs and services.

Many stakeholders stated the whole community needs to know whom you serve and what you do. You might consider creating a client profile through a few closed-ended questions to help people understand your services exist for them, such as “does it take you longer than one hour to make a meal each day?” or “Can you prepare a full meal for yourself in an hour or less?” With a clearer picture of whom you serve, you can also understand which

community members and partners have contact with your target population. If the client profile is homebound and unable to prepare food, you might work closely with rehabilitation facilities of all kinds, discharge planners at local hospitals, or even homeless facilities.

The second opportunity is to “sell” the volunteer experience and recognize it as a pipeline. Staff, volunteers, clients, and partners all recognize your volunteer program as a superpower. Volunteers can be seen as an entry point for many as this is how they become aware of the great service you provide. Volunteers become donors to continue supporting the work when they no longer have the time or ability to physically serve. They refer their neighbors and family members and ultimately may become users of the service when they enter their senior years. Stakeholders reflected on how volunteering with MOWCA can be a whole family activity or social activity by engaging with clients. Continue to consider how to be intentional about the way you pull people in to volunteer; volunteers are an instrumental part of your success.

Appendix A:

Key Stakeholders Interviewed and Questions

One-On-One Interviews

- Jeanette Abi-Nader, Co-Executive Director, Cultivate Charlottesville
- Jane Colony Mills, Executive Director, Loaves of Fishes
- Janice Gentry, Regional Director, Valley Program for Aging Services
- Emily Foreman, MSG Manager of Senior Nutrition Programs, Jefferson Area Board on Aging
- Joe Kreiter, Partner Engagement Manager, Blue Ridge Area Food Bank
- Alex London-Gross, Executive Director, PB and J Fund
- Miette Michie, Board Member, Volunteer; Emergency Food Network
- Kris Shabester, Executive Director, Lynchburg Meals on Wheels
- Peter Thompson, Executive Director, The Center
- Michael Williamson, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Hospice of Piedmont
- Jayson Whitehead, Executive Director, PACEM
- Megan Hinger, Clinical Director, Charlottesville Free Clinic

Base Interview Questions

1. How are you connected to MOW?
2. What is MOW best known for?
3. What opportunities does MOW have for improvement?
4. What are the barriers to MOW doing their best work?
5. If you had \$1,000,000 for MOW, how would you want them to spend it?
6. What does food insecurity look like in Charlottesville/Albemarle? What support is missing?
7. To improve and/or diversify the food MOW serves, whom should they partner with? Do you have any thoughts on unique or "untapped" food sources?
8. What groups or communities in Charlottesville/Albemarle would benefit from MOW services?
9. What are barriers to engaging the senior population who may need MOW services?
10. How would you like to see MOW grow over the next three years?
11. If you could give one piece of advice to MOW as it sets its direction for the future, what would it be?

Appendix B:

Survey

Survey Questions

1. I believe MOWCA is making an impact in my community.
2. I have a clear understanding of what MOWCA does.
3. What is it about MOWCA that inspires you to give?
4. What is one thing you would change about MOWCA?
5. Dream with us: If you were tasked with deciding how MOW of Charlottesville/Albemarle should spend \$1,000,000 what would you have them do?
6. I understand how my gift supports Habitat NRV's goals.
7. I feel valued as a donor.
8. How long have you been a donor?
9. Approximately when was your most recent gift?
10. Which of the following ways do you prefer to receive communication from MOWCA?
 - a. Emails
 - b. Newsletter
 - c. Social Media
 - d. None
 - e. Other (please explain)
11. Do you feel you receive communication from MOWCA not often enough, the right amount, or too often?
12. To which age bracket do you belong?
13. How would you best describe yourself? (Race/ethnicity)
14. What is your gender identity?

Appendix C:

Staff Most Important

Increasing Volunteer Capacity

- Develop ongoing volunteer education program for client wellness and social interaction
- Educate our volunteers to screen for safety and eligibility
- Continue to show our volunteers appreciation and a smooth experience
- Expand volunteer base
- Expand volunteers to larger groups vs individuals

Staff

- Develop staff in a way that helps them thrive and live out the mission
- Hire an additional staff member
- Hire at least one employee for the supplemental food program and a nurse/dietician for the clients

Client Services

- Expand to better serve rural clients
- Figure out how to serve (deliver to) the clients in rural Albemarle
- Increase amount of clients served
- Establish means for ongoing client need assessment
- Provide better wellness checks for clients
- Find a way to re-instate effective wellness checks (even in [pandemic])
- Nourish human connection in a way robots and VR cannot
- Expand interest in our individual clients for sponsor a client
- Improve the interaction between volunteers and clients so that no meal gets left a door
- Find ways to limit our services to those actually in need

Marketing/Branding

- Become known for the voice of and provider for our homebound neighbors
- Constantly campaign on who we are, how we are different, and who we service so everyone knows
- Create a media campaign to differentiate our services from other nonprofits
- Promote our brand to the community
- Establish its niche of meeting community needs; community education

Strategy

- Plan
- Focus on tasks MOW is best at to avoid taking on too much
- Avoid getting bogged down by initiatives or the periphery that do not offer nutrition and connection
- Expand mission to provide food and safety to homebound folks

Increase Food Choice/Options

- Attempt to provide ethnic food selections
- Provide food selection even for those not cooking
- Provide more food options to clients
- Make our menu more diverse and healthy
- Create a system with other partner agencies to offer diverse food choices 3x per month
- Expand bonus pantry packs to twice a month with produce

Community Partners/Connections

- Expand community education as to food insecurity through partner collaborations
- Build community relationships for growth and expansion
- Cement our place within our community as a unique MOW
- Expand food partnerships
- Evaluate resources offered by our existing community partners
- Strengthen and investigate current partnerships to learn how we can utilize their resources and vice versa

Fundraising

- Rebuild the recurring monthly donors so that its 30% of yearly donations