SHORE DELIVERY CORPS: A COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

PROVIDING A VOLUNTEER-DRIVEN FREE GROCERY DELIVERY SERVICE FOR RURAL RESIDENTS IN NEED

A United Way Innovation Case Study
Shore Delivery Corps provides free grocery delivery services to older adults and individuals with existing health issues on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. By mobilizing a fleet of volunteer dispatchers and deliverers, partnering with grocery stores, pharmacies, community organizations, churches, and schools, and creating committee infrastructure to run the operations, Shore Delivery Corps fielded more than 1,800 calls from residents in need and dispatched more than 2,200 deliveries of food between April 1 through June 30, 2020. This document summarizes key components of the program's design and tips for communities that want to develop volunteer-driven food delivery solutions for those sheltering in place or unable to access essentials in these challenging times.

BACKGROUND

Jeff Holland is a life-long resident of Virginia’s Eastern Shore. During the day, he works as the Executive Director of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel, and outside of work, he’s an active member of the Eastern Shore community, involved in his family’s schools, church, and day-to-day life on the Shore. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Holland knew it was not going to be easy for older Shore residents to stay safe and still maintain their basic needs. Given the rural setting and lack of existing grocery delivery service infrastructure through companies like Instacart or PeaPod, Holland and long-time friend Susan Baer Mears settled on one idea: a volunteer-based grocery delivery service for older people and those with pre-existing medical conditions.

The Eastern Shore is home to Riverside Health System and several other rural health centers, who were very busy helping COVID-19 patients in March when both Accomack and Northampton Counties suffered a massive wave of COVID-19 — over 1,300 documented infections¹ in a community of just 45,000. In May, the Eastern Shore’s Accomack and Northampton Counties had the second and third highest rates of COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents in the commonwealth at 1,234 and 1,142, respectively.

Holland and Mears partnered with churches of all denominations on the Shore, who had congregants eager to help create Shore Delivery Corps (SDC), a grocery delivery service for high-risk Shore residents².

Healthy volunteers pick up food and medications and deliver them safely to people who are most in danger of becoming seriously ill from the virus. The Shore Delivery Corps’ mission is to keep vulnerable people home and out of public places. If a person is over 65, or has existing health problems such as diabetes, asthma, COPD, heart or lung diseases, they may suffer more if exposed to the virus. Shore Delivery Corps works to prevent that.

OVERVIEW: HOW SHORE DELIVERY CORPS WORKS

1. An older person or someone with an existing health concern who is interested in having their groceries delivered places a call to SDC. A volunteer at the Call Center answers. The client explains that they would like to have their groceries delivered. The Call Center volunteer explains Shore Delivery Corps to the interested client, verifies their eligibility as “high-risk,” and captures a few intake questions like their address, location, and delivery date. They also determine whether the client can pay or needs free food assistance.

2. If the client meets the high-risk requirement, the Call Center representative lists the participating grocery stores from which they can order a Shore Delivery Corps delivery. Participants include Food Lion, Matthew’s Market (a local market), Walmart, Quail Cove Farms, and two Spanish markets in Cheriton and Nassawadox.

3. The Call Center representative notifies dispatch volunteers that there is a client who would like their groceries delivered, to ready a volunteer to retrieve and deliver the groceries.

4. The client makes a phone call to their preferred grocery store and explains that they want to order through Shore Delivery Corps. Food Lion and Walmart have websites where clients can place the order themselves online. If a client does not have a computer, the Shore Delivery Corps Call Center representative can help them coordinate the phone-in delivery.

5. The grocery store employee takes their order and their credit card information over the phone.

6. The grocery store employee shops for the customer and processes the payment.

7. Dispatch sends a Shore Delivery Corps volunteer to retrieve the groceries and deliver them to the client’s home.

8. If the client is unable to pay, they can order up to $100 worth of food at no charge from Shore Delivery Corps and is recommended to a mobile food pantry from the Foodbank of the Eastern Shore. Shore Delivery Corps helps them coordinate the mobile food pantry visits to their homes.
Scheduling

Shore Delivery Corps did its best to allow the customer to control the scheduling of the delivery so that the timing was most convenient for them. Some of the grocery stores like Food Lion and Walmart allowed clients to visit their websites, place their order, and schedule a pick-up time online. The client and the Shore Delivery Corps representative discussed timing before the client placed the order, and Shore Delivery Corps could almost always accommodate the time the client designated for it to be picked up. Other stores did not have this option, and the client had to place the order over the phone and provide their credit card information to the store employee.

Most of the time, Dispatch could send out volunteers to deliver groceries at the time the customer requested. A few times, the Call Center fielded so many delivery requests that they had to move some of the deliveries to the following day, including one day when Shore Delivery Corps did 127 deliveries in one day.

CORE COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL

1) FUNDING & SUSTAINABILITY

Shore Delivery Corps serves under the umbrella of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Community Foundation and the United Way of Virginia’s Eastern Shore. The Eastern Shore of Virginia Community Foundation gave the Corps $25,000, and the United Way donated $2,000 toward the mission. SDC also raised $10,000 in private donations. The funding pays for marketing and groceries for those without funds. Expenses for April to June 2020 were $20,000.

2) COMMITTEE INFRASTRUCTURE

After learning there was a lot of interest among Shore residents to volunteer to deliver groceries, especially among home-bound college students and teachers, Holland and long-time family friend and local special education teacher Susan Mears put together several committees and tapped their networks for strong community leaders to chair them. Holland connected with the Superintendent of the Eastern Shore District of the United Methodist Church (48 churches and one Faith Community). After making the connection with the Superintendent, Holland reached out to other church leaders, mainly assembling volunteers through the churches, who were eager to help now that in-person worship had been postponed.

Each volunteer-driven committee plays a specific role:

Volunteer Recruitment: The recruitment committee sends out calls for college and high school students and other Shore residents who are at low risk for COVID-19 and eager to serve. They have created an application, screening process, and orientation to recruit volunteer candidates who are low-risk and passionate about helping their community.

Transportation: The Transportation Committee coordinates all the transportation needs for deliveries. The Eastern Shore Community Service Board offered their vans for volunteers to use if deliverers did not want to use their personal vehicles because of concerns about gas, mileage, or reliability. Shore Delivery Corps had liability coverage for the vans; the state of Virginia recently changed their Good Samaritan legislation whereby the property and general liability coverage for owners of vehicles that were being used to help during the Governor’s COVID-19 emergency declaration with needs.
that were mission-based would cover the operator of the vehicle, regardless of whether drivers were an employee of the business or not. This emergency provision made sharing their vans attractive to the entities that provided them to help with delivery. Shore Delivery Corps also offers reimbursement for personal car mileage.

**Safe Handling:** The Safe Handling Committee evaluates the best way to provide the packaging and delivery to be a “best practice” virus-free delivery for the high-risk population. Most of all, Safe Handling ensures that every volunteer has the right resources and equipment to serve a COVID-19 patient. Shore Delivery Corps has served many COVID-19 patients, and deliverers are instructed to take extra precaution when visiting these houses, such as setting the groceries on the sidewalk outside of their house rather than go up to their porch or patio.

The Safe Handling Committee also ensured that all the Shore Delivery Corps vans had special cases to keep perishable food chilled. Pat Coady, another community leader who helped start Shore Delivery Corps, created a system with Quail Cove Farms, a market that is far south on the Shore, to keep perishable food traveling long distances cool. Under the new system, if a deliverer picks up meat from Quail Cove and they know it will be two to two and a half hours until they reach their destination, Quail Cove provides them with a bag of ice so they can keep the meat cold.

**Needs:** The Needs Committee determines the most practical way to distribute Shore resources to those who need them the most. The Needs Committee has created a list of clients who they have identified as the highest risk citizens of the Shore, along with their contact information and address. The committee has generated a generic “needs” checklist that serves as a template to coordinate needs of the highest risk demographic with the supply chain committee.

**Marketing and Visibility:** The Marketing and Visibility Committee handles all print and social media, radio advertising, website, t-shirts, logo development, and magnetic emblems for the vans. A t-shirt company donated t-shirts for all the volunteers. The t-shirts allow the volunteers to show that they provided help during COVID-19, and, most importantly, spread the word to people who might need the services.

**Supply Chain:** The Supply Chain Committee coordinates with retail stores, pharmacies, and local markets, including small Spanish ones, to make sure they are aware of what SDC does and how they do it. When it started, the Supply Chain committee created an accounts receivable process with merchants so SDC can cover the cost of groceries for clients who can’t pay. They created a supply network for pickup of the necessary perishable and non-perishable items and medical supplies including prescriptions for the Shore Delivery Corps to serve the population at risk. For clients who are struggling with a variety of needs, the Supply Chain committee coordinates existing resources with entities such as the Foodbank of the Eastern Shore and social services to give them the help that they need.

**Community:** The Community Committee helps Shore Delivery Corps find funding to launch and sustain the operation. The committee has members from the Eastern Shore Community Foundation and United Way of Virginia’s Eastern Shore.

**Payment Processing:** The Payment Processing Committee is meant to handle unique payment situations. If a grocery store is out of stock of an essential good and the client really needs it, the Payment Processing Committee can work with wholesalers to receive core staples. This Committee is the only one that represents Shore Delivery Corps playing an assembly role rather than just a delivery role. Shore Delivery Corps has not had to engage any warehouses yet.

### 3) VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Shore Delivery Corps has the highest need for volunteers to do the following tasks:

1. **Delivering Groceries or Supplies:** Volunteers pick up pre-ordered groceries, prescriptions, and supplies (the volunteer does not shop) and deliver to their most at-risk neighbors on Virginia’s Eastern Shore (Accomack and Northampton counties). Volunteers are between the ages of 18–64, have a valid driver’s license, and are at low risk for COVID-19. They must also complete a background check.

2. **Call Center (working from home):** Volunteers submit their full name, cell phone number, email address, and mailing address to the administrator’s email address. To help with the Call Center, the volunteer...
needs good cell phone service and to install a Vonage System App to connect with the publicized telephone number. The volunteer should also be familiar with Google Docs. There are currently eight dispatchers, down from 19 when the pandemic was at its height.

3. **Trouble Shooters Available on Call (working from home):** Trouble shooters assist callers with questions about ordering and payment. Clients often call the Call Center with questions about how to order online with Food Lion, Walmart, and the pharmacies. The Call Center directs these callers to the “trouble shooters” who need to be available on call. Like Call Center volunteers, trouble shooter volunteers must also submit their full name, cell phone number, email address, and mailing address to the administrator at the Call Center to sign up.

**Background Checks:** To ensure that the volunteers are eligible to serve, Shore Delivery Corps works with another volunteer organization, VOLUNTEER Hampton Roads, to conduct comprehensive background checks via a remote, electronic process at a cost of $17 per person. The volunteers have the option to either be reimbursed for their own background checks or to cover the cost themselves. Only those delivering groceries are required to do the background check – call center volunteers are not.

**Serving Everyone: A Fleet of Bilingual Translators:** Shore Delivery Corps realized they needed to be sensitive to those who spoke French Creole and Spanish, so Holland and his network of churches on the Shore reached out via Facebook in the first week for bilingual translators. They found a combination of people who could volunteer from home. The Call Center would have a three-way call between them, the translator, and the client, to determine where the client wanted to shop. Sometimes the client did not want to shop at a generic market or grocery store; some wanted to shop at Spanish markets in Nassawadox or Cheriton.

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### 4) SAFETY PROVISIONS

Given the Eastern Shore’s high infection rate, Shore Delivery Corps enacted several provisions to make sure that both deliverers and clients were kept safe.

To keep themselves safe, deliverers are expected to:

- Wear personal protective equipment (rubber gloves and masks).
- Spray down the paper products with bleach and water (volunteer must provide spray).
- Wipe down grocery bags with wipes (volunteer must provide wipes).
- Call the client five minutes prior to arrival at the home.
- Upon completion of the delivery, confirm with dispatchers that the delivery went smoothly.
- Maintain a clean and virus-free working environment in the vans being used for the deliveries.

### 5) COORDINATING INFRASTRUCTURE

**An Information Database:** In March, Holland’s son set up a master Google Document in just one night to act as a central source for volunteer information.

The master Google Document contains:

- The delivery locations.
- Notes about where the keys and vans are.
- Clients’ names and information (physical addresses, phone numbers, whether they have or had COVID-19, and any other specific information).

The volunteer coordinator has access to the master Google Document and shares the information with individual volunteers.

**One Call Number:** Patrick Coady, the first Executive Director of the Eastern Shore Broadband Authority, developed a remote Call Center. The Call Center allows potential new clients to call one phone number and Call Center volunteers can answer the calls from their own phones to work with clients. The volunteers can do all the work from the comfort of their homes.

**Scheduling:** The schedule was initially set up for two four-hour shifts each day, serving up to 32 people per location. The overall size of the delivery territory for a single day was large and required increasing from eight to 12 deliverers per day.
Holland often coordinated with the volunteer coordinator about number and timing of shifts. At its peak, there were 12 slots for northern, central and south Accomack County and Northampton County. As infection rates have stabilized in early summer 2020, the hours and shifts for the call center and deliverers have been reduced, but deliveries continue, and are prepared to ramp up if necessary.

**Delivery Vans Accessible to Volunteers:** To invite volunteers who didn’t have a reliable vehicle or who were concerned about gas or mileage, Shore Delivery Corps had a fleet of four delivery vans available for service.

The vans are located at the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel’s North Toll Plaza (far south), H.W. Drummond’s County Line in Exmore (south-central), and the office of the Eastern Shore District of The United Methodist District Office in Parksley (north-central). One of the delivery service vans was relocated from H.W. Drummond in Exmore (south-central) to Onancock Building Supply (North-Central) to make it more centrally accessible for their delivery drivers, as well as for the restock of paper supplies for those who choose to use their own vehicles.

**RESULTS**

From April 1 through June 30, 2020, Shore Delivery Corps:

► Has received 1,829 calls from members of the community seeking delivery assistance.

► Has made 2,253 deliveries to members of the community in need of delivery service.
  • Of those deliveries, 1,371 were deliveries to households as well as bulk deliveries to various apartment complexes.
  • 882 deliveries were made to school families impacted by COVID-19.

► In response to a community-wide need for necessary paper products, Shore Delivery Corps has delivered 12,623 rolls of toilet paper and 5,340 rolls of paper towels to community households in need.

**ADVICE FOR OTHER ORGANIZATIONS**

**How to Help Those Who Can’t Pay**

► Quite a few people called the Shore Delivery Corps phone number and explained that they needed groceries but couldn’t pay due to loss of a job, etc. For clients who could not pay, the SDC Call Center representative worked with the client and the market by taking the order, providing a copy of the receipt to the individual in need, scanning it and emailing it to Shore Delivery Corps. They set up similar processes with smaller businesses, including Quail Cove Farms located in Machipongo, VA. Then SDC pays the markets every ten days and requests that the markets add $5 to every order to act as a tip for employee time.

**Establishing Other Partnerships**

► **School Meals:** The school systems in Northampton and Accomack counties learned about the program and asked if SDC could help them serve low-income families struggling with food security. Given the abundant need, SDC reserved Tuesday and Thursday midday schedules during the school year for their deliverers to make school deliveries. They delivered meal kits from the Foodbank of the Eastern Shore. Because the living situations of the children varied quite a bit, all meal kits contained non-perishable food. The kits were paid for by a combination of COVID-19 relief funds and funding that the school regularly receives from the U.S. Department of Education from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

► **Paper Products:** Holt Paper Company of Maryland provides paper products to a wide swath of restaurants and stores from Philadelphia south to South Carolina. It made a large donation of paper supplies to Shore Delivery Corps, enabling SDC to provide free paper-only deliveries for five weeks as retail stores endured toilet paper and paper towel outages.

Once retail stores resumed a normal supply chain of paper products, Shore Delivery Corps stopped free paper-only deliveries, and began to provide paper supplies only for those who are also getting groceries or prescriptions.

Shore Delivery Corps keeps the paper products in distribution centers throughout the Shore for the delivery drivers to access during their shifts. Paper product supplies may now be obtained from one of the following locations:

• United Methodist District Office in Parksley (north-central on the Shore)
Three Final Tips

► **Deliverers are important, but so are dispatchers.** Don’t underestimate the enormous need for delivery dispatch; each deliverer needed to be sent out by a dispatch volunteer, making dispatch a big job. At the beginning, Holland’s wife was dispatching volunteers to deliver around the clock, which was not sustainable.

► **Anticipate supply chain concerns for essentials from the get-go.** Instead of launching the free paper delivery services in early April, Shore Delivery Corps wishes that they had launched them in late March. It would have helped people without paper supplies and kept people out of the few retail stores.

► **Don’t be afraid to extend your reach.** Holland says that while he envisioned the program for the Eastern Shore of Virginia, in hindsight he wishes that they had extended the program into the Eastern Shore of Maryland (ESM). There was plenty of need for grocery delivery service on the ESM, and SDC had enough volunteers to help.

**LINKS**

Shore Delivery Corps [https://www.shoredelivery.org/](https://www.shoredelivery.org/)

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# RURAL GROCERY DELIVERY STARTING POINT – TAKE STOCK!

Assess your readiness against the indicators below to understand areas of strength and areas of challenge to see how ready you are to launch a volunteer-driven rural grocery delivery initiative. Use your scores to identify and prioritize strategies and action steps to help you ensure that you have the volunteers, community leaders, infrastructure, resources, and partners to successfully execute your rural grocery delivery initiative.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPONENT</th>
<th>3 WE’RE READY</th>
<th>2 IN PROGRESS</th>
<th>1 WE’VE IDENTIFIED THIS GAP</th>
<th>UNSURE/NA</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>NEED</strong></td>
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<td>Community members and organizations have identified: 1) that our community has a need for food delivery; and 2) there’s a gap in transportation services.</td>
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<td><strong>NEED TOTAL:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PEOPLE</strong></td>
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<td>We’ve connected with partners in our community who might have volunteers to help us. This could be faith communities, schools, community colleges and service organizations, and other groups in our surrounding community with potential volunteers, including informal networks.</td>
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<td>We’ve determined the eligibility requirements for clients needing our services.</td>
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<td>We have built out the needed volunteer infrastructure: besides deliverers, we’re recruiting volunteers to work at the Call Center, as troubleshooters, bilingual translators, and as dispatchers – or we are collaborating with 211 or our local volunteer center to help assist</td>
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<td>We have conducted a search for bilingual translators. We have learned how to set up a three-way call for the bilingual translator to be on the phone with call center and the client so we can all speak to each other.</td>
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<td><strong>PEOPLE TOTAL:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY</strong></td>
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<td>We’ve checked in with local community foundations (and our local United Way) and discussed our needs and the impact that we could have collectively.</td>
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<td>We’ve gone to churches and other community service agencies that have resources (vans to use for volunteer transportation, for example) to discuss our needs and tell them about our program.</td>
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<td>Nice to Have: We’ve worked with local t-shirt companies and learned about opportunities for free or reduced-priced shirts for our volunteers.</td>
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<td><strong>FUNDING AND SUSTAINABILITY TOTAL:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>COMMITTEES</strong></td>
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<td>We have groups of volunteers who oversee and implement:</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Safe handling procedures to evaluate the safest way to package and deliver the food. Make sure that every deliverer has the right equipment to keep everyone safe when they deliver food.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reaching out to community businesses for donations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Coordinating pick-ups with foodbanks to deliver food to indigent people/families with children.</td>
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</table>
- Volunteer recruitment, sending out calls for college and high school students and other residents at low COVID-19 risk who are eager to serve.
- Transportation, handling the renting of the vans, ensuring liability coverage, and reimbursing volunteers for the mileage on their personal vehicles.
- Marketing and visibility. Handles radio, Facebook, website enablement, t-shirts, flyers, and magnetic emblems for the vans.
- Hotline to assist with volunteer concerns/emergencies.

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<tr>
<td>VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT</td>
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<td>We've identified an energetic, positive, responsive person(s) to manage our volunteers.</td>
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<td>We've set up a mandatory background check vendor and process for our volunteer deliverers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We've ensured volunteers will be equipped with necessary personal protection equipment. We have determined a safe handling policy that keeps volunteers and clients safe from COVID-19. We have obtained enough wipes for all volunteers to wipe down their grocery bags before they deliver them, we have made sure that every volunteer has rubber gloves and a face covering for their deliveries (and we have provided these items if they do not have them).</td>
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<td>We know how to easily reach our volunteers, especially when they are out doing deliveries.</td>
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<td>We've set up ways to easily communicate with our volunteers on a regular basis (email, newsletter, Facebook page, etc.)</td>
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<td>We know how we're going to celebrate and acknowledge our volunteers.</td>
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| COORDINATING INFRASTRUCTURE |               |               |                            |            |
| We have defined the reach (including geographic) or scope of our program. |               |               |                            |            |
| We've reached out to grocery stores and pharmacies in the area, explained our project and asked if they would be willing to participate in it. We've discussed the program requirements with them and ensured their willingness to: 1) take orders over the phone from individual customers; 2) take credit card information over the phone; and 3) have one of their staff members bag up the groceries. We've also reached out to food pantries for free food delivery options. |               |               |                            |            |
| We've created an agreement that grocery stores and pharmacies would take the payment over the phone from the specific client, so our program is not an intermediary in the payment process. |               |               |                            |            |
| If we want to provide groceries to people who cannot pay (and have the donations to cover payment), we have coordinated an accounts receivable process with the grocery store for them to tabulate the number of orders that they've provided for free, and we have a schedule in place to pay the stores every 10 days or so for those orders. |               |               |                            |            |
We’ve set up a secure, confidential online information database, with individual documents containing lists of volunteers, delivery locations, participating grocery stores, notes about where the keys and vans are, and clients’ names and information.

We have one phone number that interested clients can call and receive help using call forwarding (such as Vonage, which allows callers to call one phone number and have their phone call be forwarded to individual volunteers acting as a call center). We have checked in with our local broadband authority to see if they can help us set this up.

We have designated specific areas for deliverers to make their deliveries (e.g., north county, central county, south county) and assigned them shifts.

**COORDINATING INFRASTRUCTURE TOTAL:** /21

**DATA**

We have protocols in place to ensure the confidentiality of the information we're collecting about our volunteers and clients.

We’re collecting relevant data about what we’re doing in the community to:
1) bring awareness about the gaps and issues in our community; 2) attract volunteers, donors, advocates, and partnerships.

**DATA TOTAL:** /6

**DUE DILIGENCE**

We have liability insurance for the vans, meaning that our initiative is covered by our state’s Good Samaritan law, or we’ve identified some other way that protects us from liability in the case of damage or accidents involving the delivery vans used by the program.

We have safety protocols in place to protect our volunteers when they are out on deliveries.

We have safety protocols in place to ensure the safe handling of our clients’ grocery and pharmacy deliveries.

We have reached out to other organizations in the area and asked them how to coordinate background checks remotely. All deliverers must undergo a background check — other volunteers in the Call Center, dispatch, troubleshooting sides do not need to.

We have protocols in place to protect our clients’ private information. We’ve obtained signed photo releases for any photographs of clients, volunteers, etc.

**DUE DILIGENCE TOTAL:** /15

**PARTNERSHIPS**

We have reached out to local food banks and coordinated relationships with them so that they will deliver or provide food to people who are unable to pay for groceries.

We have reached out to the local school districts to see if they need help or can provide help to improve the project’s reach.

We have reached out to paper companies nearby and explained our mission and asked for donations of paper towels, toilet paper, etc.

**PARTNERSHIPS TOTAL:** /9

**TOTAL:** /96