

Produce Box Distribution Program | Site Visit Report

Baltimore City Food Policy and Planning Division



Introduction and Program History

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Food Policy and Planning Division (FPP) developed a comprehensive Emergency Food Response in collaboration with City agencies, nonprofits, businesses, and community partners. A key component of the response was the Produce Box Distribution Program. Launched in May 2020, the program provided 15-pound boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables, reimagining traditional food distribution for Baltimore City residents in Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPAs). Guided by both qualitative and quantitative community and stakeholder feedback, the program shifted the food boxes from shelf-stable to fresh produce. The response was overwhelmingly positive, drawing praise from residents, neighboring food councils, and international organizations. FPP successfully demonstrated that residents not only need but greatly value fresh, healthy food options.



FEMA-FUNDED

1.37

MILLION BOXES

MAY 2020

MAY 2022



ARPA-FUNDED

279,870

BOXES

JUNE 2022

DECEMBER 2024

With the support of over 100 community partners and three produce vendors (The Common Market, Coastal Sunbelt Produce, and Saval Foods) FPP distributed 1.4 million boxes, equating to 180 million servings of fresh fruits and vegetables from March 2020 to May 2022. FPP was able to secure full reimbursement for the program through FEMA, covering

the costs of produce distribution during what began as an emergency response to a global crisis has since evolved into an award-winning, nationally recognized initiative that continues to provide fresh produce to Baltimore City residents. Now sustained through American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding, the Produce Box Distribution Program operates with 30 partnering sites and a single vendor, The Common Market. This BI-POC founded and led nonprofit, based in Philadelphia, distributes 2,000 boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables weekly. All of the produce is sourced from regional farms, including the [Black Butterfly Farm](#) in Baltimore.

Site Visit Observations

Throughout the program, ongoing surveys and feedback mechanisms allowed for continuous improvements. However, FPP recognized the importance of in-person site visits to strengthen relationships with partners, witness the program's impact firsthand, and express the City's appreciation for their efforts. FPP visited all of the distribution sites in 2023 and 2024. Yewande Akinkuowo, Food Access Planner, and Jessica Fink, Food Policy Fellow, conducted visits to all partnering produce box distribution locations during delivery and distribution times. At each location, FPP observed The Common Market delivering pallets of fresh produce boxes. Residents were often already waiting, some reportedly up to an hour in advance, reflecting the importance and high demand of the program. The deliveries were on time with staff receiving an "eta" from the driver when en route. It was great to see that there were open lines of communication between The Common Market and staff at the sites. The produce was fresh, plentiful, and vibrant across each visit.

The distribution process at all sites was consistently organized and orderly. Some sites implemented check-in systems, some sites used simple pen-and-paper sign-ins, while others had implemented electronic tracking, all of which were effective for the sites. Overall, the efficiency and professionalism displayed were impressive and contributed to a positive experience for residents. The staff clearly had trusted relationships within the community. They knew which residents needed multiple boxes for their households and took time to check in on their well-being. Boxes were also set aside for individuals with mobility challenges or those at work during distribution hours, highlighting the thoughtful and personalized care provided by the sites. This level of trust and familiarity is a major benefit of working with community-based partners, who often have deeper, more personal connections with residents than City agencies. Sites such as City of Refuge, The Door, and City of Haven showcased an impressive commitment to their communities by supplementing produce boxes with additional food items, personal hygiene supplies, diapers, and baby food.



Resident feedback was overwhelmingly positive and offered valuable insights into the program's impact. Many residents expressed deep appreciation for the consistency of the produce box distributions, highlighting how reassuring it was to know that they could come to a specific site, on a specific day and time, and reliably receive fresh produce. This predictability was especially important for families managing tight budgets, as several residents shared how the boxes helped stretch food at home and ease monthly grocery expenses. While a few residents suggested including more variety or culturally familiar items, the overall sentiment reflected gratitude for both the quality and dependability of the service. It was equally meaningful to hear directly from residents, many of whom described the program as a bright spot in their week and a vital support for their household. While our partners praised the quality of the produce boxes and the positive impact it continues to have on residents, several key needs arose in discussions with site representatives. Many requested a greater variety of produce to create more meal options at home, along with recipes and nutrition education to help residents incorporate unfamiliar foods into their diets. Additionally, sites frequently reported running out of produce boxes before all community members in line could receive one, highlighting a continued capacity challenge. Beyond food distribution, site representatives emphasized the need for additional services such as workforce development, mental health, transportation assistance, and programming for different age groups. Lastly, many sites expressed a critical need for volunteers and additional staff to assist with distribution and operations.

"WE'RE JUST SO GRATEFUL TO BE ABLE TO SERVE AS A HUB FOR THE COMMUNITY. EVEN DURING THANKSGIVING, WE MADE SURE THE BOXES WERE DISTRIBUTED."

-Koinonia Baptist Church

Grant Funding to Sites

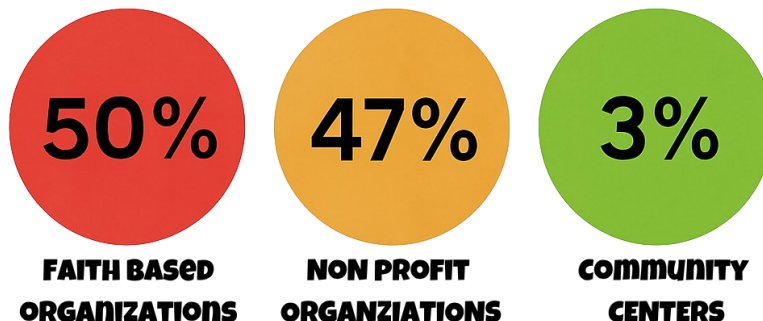
The Produce Box Distribution Program was awarded \$200,000 through the [Nutrition Access, Affordability, and Education Grant Program](#), sponsored by the African American Mayors Association and the American Beverage Foundation for a Healthy America. This grant program supports initiatives that improve community health. Recognizing the challenges identified during site visits, FPP combined this funding with \$190,000 in Healthy Food Priority Area Funds to create grants for distribution sites. Each site received \$13,000 to support nutrition education, operational expenses, volunteer stipends, food, and other activities that sustain and enhance the produce box distribution efforts at their location.

Sites that were unable to receive direct funding due to capacity challenges, such as lack of insurance, fiscal sponsorship, or administrative infrastructure, were instead provided with additional produce boxes. These challenges highlighted the need for ongoing investment in building organizational capacity among grassroots partners that are eager to serve, but currently lack the resources to formally manage grant funding. Many sites strategically invested their grant funding in resources such as refrigerators, cabinets, shelving, tents, tables, tablets for intake, and reusable grocery bags to enhance efficiency and streamline operations. Additionally, some sites allocated funds to provide meals for staff and volunteers, recognizing their efforts and fostering a supportive work environment. These improvements not only strengthened day-to-day operations but also contributed to the long-term sustainability of each partner site. By alleviating logistical challenges and enhancing infrastructure, these funds empowered community organizations to sustain and grow their initiatives, ultimately making fresh, healthy food more accessible to those in need.

Site Types

Produce box distribution sites include faith based organizations, community centers, and nonprofits that are long standing pillars of the community and trusted by the neighborhoods they serve. Some have provided food assistance for years, while others started during the COVID-19 pandemic. These locations were chosen because they either had existing infrastructure and experience with food distribution, had a desire to help increase access to healthy food, were trusted community partners, and were located in or near a Healthy

Food Priority Area. HFPAs are neighborhoods where residents face multiple barriers to accessing healthy food. Specifically, these areas meet four criteria: They are more than ¼ mile from a supermarket, have a median household income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level, over 30% of households lack access to a vehicle, and local stores score low on the Healthy Food Availability Index. Many HFPAs overlap with the “[Black Butterfly](#),” a term describing the east and west sides of Baltimore which, when mapped, resemble the wings of a butterfly, and were historically redlined and disinvested in. As a result, FPP has focused on distributing produce boxes within these areas of Baltimore.

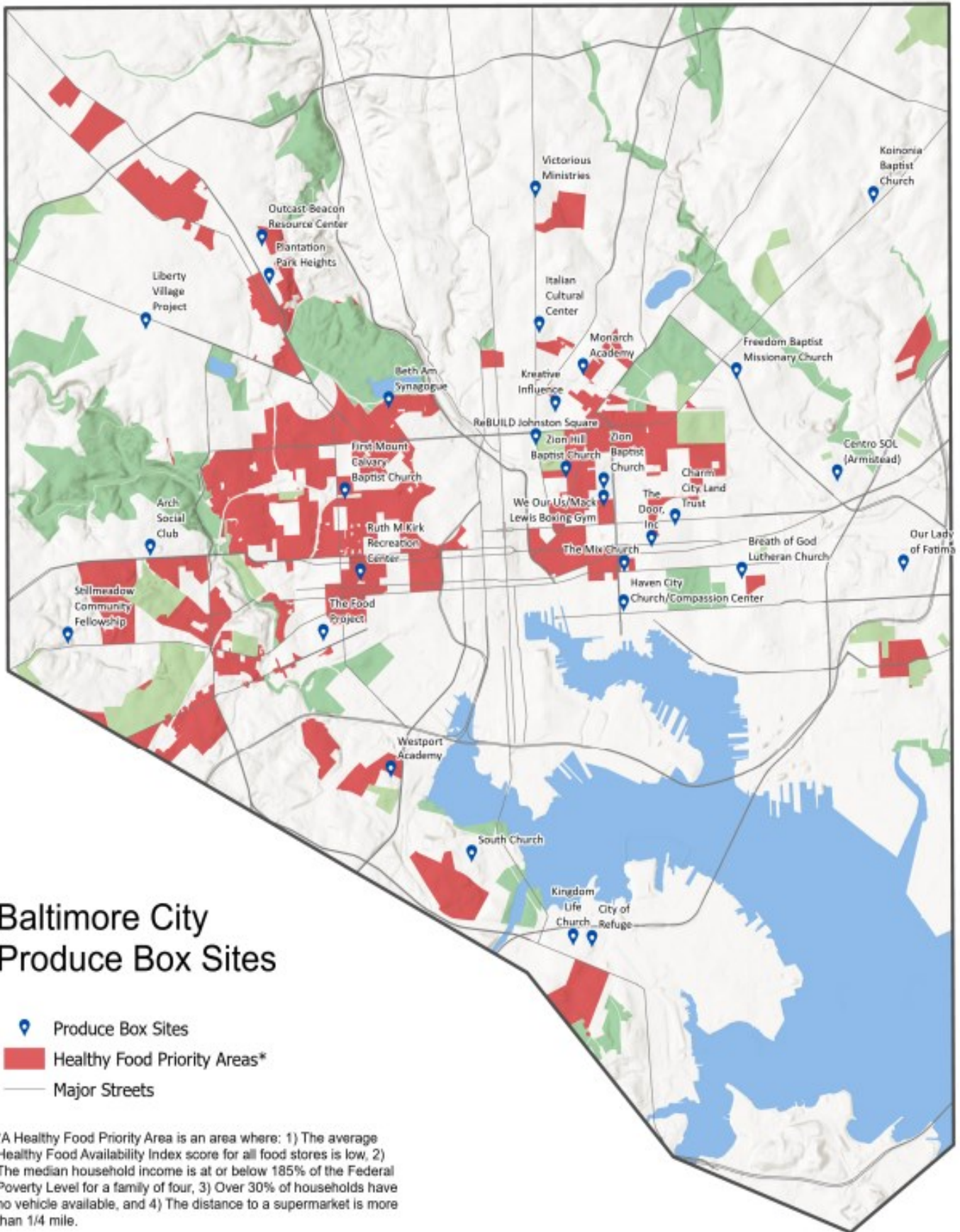


"WE REALLY WANT TO EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY ON HOW TO COOK WITH LEGUMES AND VEGETABLES AS HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVE TO PROCESSED MEATS. MANY PEOPLE DON'T KNOW HOW TO PREPARE THEM, SO WE'RE PLANNING TO CREATE RECIPE VIDEOS. IT'S IMPORTANT THAT THE NEXT GENERATION LEARNS TO EAT HEALTHY."

-Italian Cultural Center

Key Takeaways from Site Visits

Visits to Produce Box Distribution sites revealed several key insights. First, every site expressed deep gratitude for FPP's continued partnership and access to fresh produce. Although the program was originally expected to end in 2022, with the expiration of FEMA reimbursement, ARPA funding has allowed it to continue in response to ongoing community need and the lingering effects of COVID-19. Even with this extension, demand remains high, and many sites have requested additional boxes to better serve residents. A strong sense of community was evident, with many participants taking boxes to share with neighbors who could not attend distributions, demonstrating a powerful spirit of mutual aid. Looking ahead, the program is slated to end in December 2026 with the conclusion of ARPA funding, making it critical to secure new funding to ensure its longevity. In parallel, FPP is supporting sustainable healthy food access strategies such as the [Black Butterfly Teaching Farm](#) that empower residents to grow their own food and provides The Common Market with locally-grown produce for the boxes. Based on site visit findings, several recommendations were identified to improve the program's effectiveness and sustainability. These include offering printed recipes with QR codes to help residents more effectively utilize the produce, creating a communication network to better coordinate distributions with other community resource events, and encouraging the recruitment of volunteers. FPP continues to build strategic partnerships to strengthen produce box distribution efforts, such as Heart Smiles' Granny Project, which developed cooking demonstration videos using produce box ingredients. Additionally, FPP leverages [Food PAC](#) to share grant opportunities and valuable resources with partner sites that can be passed on to the communities they serve.



March 2025

Produce Box Distribution Site Directory

Name of Site	Point of Contact	Site Address	Site Type	Website
Liberty Village Project	Kim Truehart; Tiara Legge	3901 Maine Ave	Non Profit Organization	https://libertyvillageproject.org/
Italian Cultural Center	Monica Lapenta / Jamera Hawkins	3009 Greenmount Avenue	Non Profit Organization	https://thebitcenter.org/home
The Door, Inc	Tehma Smith Wilson	219 N Chester St	Non Profit Organization	https://thedorinc.org/
We Our Us/Mack Lewis Boxing Gym	Ken Parker	5011 Arbutus Avenue	Non Profit Organization	https://www.macklewisfoundation.org/boxing
Haven City Church/ Compassion Center	Josh Turansky / Derek Hogg	1706 Eastern Ave	Faith Based Organization	https://www.baltimorechurch.com/the-compassion-center
Beth Am Synagogue	Evan Serpick	2501 Eutaw Place	Faith Based Organization	https://bethambaltimore.org/
Our Lady of Fatima	Billy Jo / Janet Ace/ Joyce	6400 E Pratt St	Faith Based Organization	https://olfmd.org/
Outcast-Beacon Resource Center	Lawrence Sanders / Edwin Waters	2620 Quantico Ave	Non Profit Organization	https://www.charmcare.org/locations/community-meal-site/outcast-beacon-resource-center
City of Refuge	Billy Humphrey	3501 7th Street	Faith Based Organization	https://www.cityofrefugebaltimore.org/
Victorious Ministries	Cathy Kay	4609 York Rd	Faith Based Organization	https://www.charmcare.org/locations/victorious-ministries
First Mount Calvary Baptist Church	Roxane Prettyman	1142 N Fulton Ave	Faith Based Organization	https://www.charmcare.org/locations/first-mount-calvary-baptist-church
Freedom Baptist Missionary Church	Cheryl Bryant/Deacon Henry Taylor	3455 Erdman Ave	Faith Based Organization	https://www.fbmcmd.org/fbtw-outreach-ministry
The Mix Church	Michael Preston / Danielle Darby	1725 E Baltimore Street	Faith Based Organization	https://themixchurch.com/outreach/
Ruth M Kirk Recreation Center	Arthur Kirk	122 N Vincent Street	Community Center	https://ruthmirkrecreationcentercom.wordpress.com/
Kingdom Life Church	Pastor John Watts/ Nanel Denton/ John Miller (ETA only)	504 Annabel Avenue	Faith Based Organization	https://www.kingdomlifecc.com/content.cfm?id=148&ministry_id=5

Name of Site	Point of Contact	Site Address	Site Type	Website
Kreative Influence	David McNair	909 E 22nd Street	Non Profit Organization	https://www.kreativeinf.com/
Centro SOL (Armistead)	Monica Guerrero Vazquez	5215 Wright Ave	Non Profit Organization	https://jhcentrosol.org/
Zion Baptist Church	Michele Ward	1100 Bond Street	Faith Based Organization	
ReBUILD Johnston Square	Quentin Gibeau/ Sean Closkey	700 E Chase St, Baltimore, MD 21202	Community Center	https://rebuildjohnstonsquare.com/
Westport Academy	Pamela Bishop / Lisa Hodges	2401 Nevada St	Non Profit Organization	https://www.baltimorecityschools.org/o/bcps/page/225
Plantation Park Heights	Farmer Chippy	3811 Park Heights Ave	Non Profit Organization	https://plantationparkheights.org/
The Food Project	Michelle Suazo	424 S Pulaski St	Non Profit Organization	https://uempowerofmd.org/the-food-project
Monarch Academy	Mark Washington	2525 Kirk Ave	Non Profit Organization	https://monarchacademy.org/
Zion Hill Baptist Church	Bishop Logan / Mike Daley / Lena Williams	931 E Preston St	Faith Based Organization	
Charm City Land Trust	Gary Dittman	2424 McElderry St	Non Profit Organization	https://charmcitylandtrusts.org/
Stillmeadow Community Fellowship	Kim Cruise	5110 Frederick Ave	Faith Based Organization	https://www.stillmeadowcommunity/
Arch Social Club	John Harris / Jung Kang	4022 Edmondson Ave - Hesus Community Church	Community Center	
South Church	Aaron Hannah	604 Cherry Hill Rd	Faith Based Organization	
Koinonia Baptist Church	Pastor Dante Miles / Genell Collins	5738 Belair Road	Faith Based Organization	https://www.charmcare.org/locations/community-meal-site/koinonia-baptist-church
Breath of God Lutheran Church	Mark Parker	141 S Clinton St	Faith Based Organization	https://www.foodhelpline.org/directory/resources/clg4s6lbk0006ky0fa25r2d9c

Thank You!

The Food Policy and Planning Division would like to offer its sincerest gratitude to all Produce Box Distribution sites for their continued dedication and service to Baltimore's residents. From the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic to the present, their commitment to supporting food access in our neighborhoods has been invaluable. Thank you for your partnership and for playing a vital role in advancing healthy food access across Baltimore!

For More Information

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Food Policy and Planning Division Website:

<https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/baltimore-food-policy-initiative>