



# FY26 crisis communications strategy: Government shutdown and food assistance programs

## Summary

### About Greater Lansing Food Bank

Greater Lansing Food Bank (GLFB) has led mid-Michigan's fight against hunger since 1981 to ensure families and neighbors in need have access to the nutritious food they need to support their health and well-being. GLFB's 4,000 square mile, seven-county service area encompasses Clare, Clinton, Eaton, Gratiot, Ingham, Isabella and Shiawassee Counties.

### About this strategy

At GLFB, we strive for strategic, intentional communication, especially with sensitive topics such as changes in government programs or funding and during times of immediate crisis. **We may choose to refrain from commenting to align with the strategy of our state or national associations (Food Bank Council of Michigan and Feeding America).**

This strategy details our primary audience segments, base messaging points and communications methods as we navigate the FY26 political landscape and food assistance programming uncertainty.

## Audiences & considerations

Messaging to all audiences should emphasize stability, calm and responsiveness. It is GLFB's priority to be intentional and informative. We will never withhold information that is critical for the public to know about food programs — **but we also aim to never contribute to unnecessary panic for the sake of a media soundbite.**

### Neighbors

People who use GLFB's programs or partner services. We will provide information about government changes and programs when it has a direct impact on neighbors, but always pair this with details on how GLFB is responding/meeting any need that is anticipated to arise due to program changes/cuts/etc.

### Donors

People who make monetary donations to GLFB. Messaging should provide actionable information, pairing updates on GLFB's planned response to government changes and programs with appropriate calls to action.

Some donor messaging will include information hyper-focused specifically to this segment and require additional consideration of communications methods used to ensure a level of insulation. For example, information potential TEFAP food shortages due to shutdown-related bidding delays is critical to core fundraising messaging during this time period, however this is a message we do not want to reach neighbors because of the risk of causing panic that GLFB may not have enough food for those in need.

## **Volunteers**

People who donate their time to sort, pack and distribute food for GLFB programs and partner agencies. Similar to donors, messaging should provide actionable information, pairing updates on GLFB's planned response to government changes and programs with appropriate calls to action.

## **GLFB internal**

People "in" the work. Messaging should reinforce the essential nature of each subgroup's role in getting food to neighbors and, similar to neighbors, provide information about government changes and programs when it has a direct impact on neighbors paired with GLFB's planned response.

- Staff: All staff will receive talking points for interactions with agency partners, volunteers and neighbors, and will continue to direct media and questions beyond the scope of provided talking points to the communications and/or leadership teams.
- Agency partners: GLFB will provide guidance for our partners on navigating their own communications with neighbors and coaching on media preparedness — particularly in times of urgency or crisis — to ensure consistent messaging across our network.
- Board of directors: GLFB's CEO will coordinate opportunities to engage board members in fundraising and advocacy as appropriate.

## **State & federal legislators**

Policymakers in Washington, D.C. and Lansing. Messaging to legislators should primarily be led via direction from Food Bank Council of Michigan (FBCM) and emphasize neighbor stories and the importance of strong food assistance programs.

## **Core messaging**

- GLFB's commitment to ensure all mid-Michigan neighbors have access to the food they and their families need to thrive remains steadfast.
- GLFB has been in the mid-Michigan community for 40+ years and weathered many times of increased need or federal change. We will continue to be here long-term.

- Food banks like GLFB have continued to respond to sustained high need throughout this year. The impact of the government shutdown is making this challenge even greater, especially as more families seek help right now.
- SNAP disruptions have serious consequences for mid-Michigan, particularly rural communities where small, locally-owned stores are the primary source for fresh food and groceries.
  - As grocery prices remain high, many working families rely on SNAP to help make ends meet. Beyond working families, it's children, seniors and veterans who need these SNAP benefits.
  - SNAP benefits are often spent at local grocery stores and markets, keeping small businesses open and supporting local jobs. Benefit delays don't just affect families — they impact store owners, farmers and local economies.
  - Each \$1 in SNAP benefits generates approximately \$1.50 in economic activity. Ensuring SNAP continues without interruption helps maintain economic stability in our communities and protects the livelihoods of the people who keep those communities strong.
  - In GLFB's seven-county service area, 89,044 neighbors —including 34,185 children — rely on SNAP to stretch their budgets to keep food on the table each month.

## Neighbors

- No matter what, GLFB is here to help. If you need immediate food assistance, visit [GLFoodBank.org/GetHelp](http://GLFoodBank.org/GetHelp) to find your local pantry or an upcoming mobile distribution and to see other food assistance resources available to you.
- There is no risk that GLFB will run out of food.

## Donors

- This moment calls for all of us to join together. Your compassion ensures mid-Michigan families, children, farmers and seniors have food on the table, no matter what happens in Washington, D.C.
- The best way to make an impact today for neighbors is with an additional or increased gift. While the immediate response from our community and local and state governments has been inspiring, GLFB will need to sustain the long-term response needed for this crisis, even after the government reopens. We need your continued partnership to ensure continued stability for neighbors who need us.

- GLFB is here when key pillars of food assistance are threatened — but it requires the support of our community to help us respond now and into the coming months as neighbors affected by these disruptions get back on their feet.
- The impacts of this lengthy shutdown will continue long after the government reopens, and we need your continued and increased support to continue to meet the emergent need in our communities.
  - Neighbors who have experienced delays in SNAP benefits will require time to get back on their feet — even after benefits are repaid — and will need support from resources like GLFB and our partners.
  - The shutdown's unprecedented effect on food assistance programs, and the resulting uncertainty around if, when and how much benefits would be issued, has caused not only disruptions to budgets but also significant anxiety and stress for our neighbors.

## **Volunteers**

- This moment calls for all of us to join together. Your compassion ensures mid-Michigan families, children, farmers and seniors have food on the table, no matter what happens in Washington, D.C.
- Every action, big and small, makes a real difference in the lives of our neighbors. Your commitment to help GLFB meet this moment is seen and appreciated.

## **State & federal legislators**

- Food banks like GLFB will always be here to rise to the occasion when neighbors need help — but we are meant to support a larger food access system, not act as a long-term replacement to foundational programs like SNAP.
  - In mid-Michigan, SNAP helps 89,044 neighbors like these — including 34,185 children — keep food on the table. For every meal Feeding America food banks provide nationally, SNAP provides nine.
- The shutdown's unprecedented effect on food assistance programs, and the resulting uncertainty around if, when and how much benefits would be issued, has caused not only disruptions to budgets but also significant anxiety and stress for our neighbors.

## Communication modes & channels

Below is a list of the primary ways in which GLFB communicates externally, along with the external audiences each channel reaches.

### Social media

Social media is the most effective way to disseminate quick and wide-reaching information. GLFB maintains a presence on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn.

- Neighbors: Facebook is used for most immediate informational updates, with occasional cross-posting to Instagram and/or stories. Messages focus on communicating availability of help and updates on the shutdown/status of federal food programs.
- Donors: Social media will supplement omni-channel efforts across email and direct mail, aiming to drive increased donations by communicating GLFB's response to increased community need and the impact donors have for neighbors. Donors are the focus of all paid ad spend in correlation with the current direct mail campaign.
- Volunteers: Social media will encourage volunteer engagement by providing information about the many ways to volunteer and will communicate volunteer impact for neighbors.
- State & federal legislators: While GLFB does not typically develop legislator-specific social media communications, this audience will likely have some crossover with other audiences and be exposed to our broader messaging.

### Email

GLFB maintains email marketing campaigns for donors, volunteers and neighbors.

- Neighbors: In addition to the weekly "Get Help" newsletter already distributed every Monday, GLFB will distribute a Thursday email focused on shutdown-related updates for the duration of the shutdown and until its impacts have stabilized after the government reopens.
- Donors: Continued cross-integration of shutdown messaging with Give Joy holiday campaign to marry timeliness of current crisis with traditional holiday campaign season. Donor email messaging is driven by the development team.
- Volunteers: Continued monthly email newsletter promoting volunteer opportunities. The volunteer email newsletter should also integrate some shutdown-related messaging to emphasize timeliness of volunteering now.

- State & federal legislators: Similar to social media, GLFB does not typically develop legislator-specific social media communications, this audience will likely have some crossover with other audiences and be exposed to our broader messaging.

## Website

The website is most people's first point of contact with GLFB and serves as a "single source of truth" for all resources audiences need.

- Neighbors: Get Help section details resources available to neighbors including pantry locator and mobile distribution calendar; Neighbor Shutdown Resource Center curates shutdown-related food assistance program updates and information on additional resources available to SNAP recipients during benefits pause.
- Donors: Give section provides easy-to-locate information about ways to give including making a monetary donation, hosting a food and fund drive, volunteering and attending events.
- Volunteers: Volunteer section maintains accurate listing of volunteer shift descriptions and VolunteerHub calendar and signup portal.
- State & federal legislators: Again, this audience is primarily reached via crossover with other audiences. No section of our website explicitly targets only legislators.

## Direct mail

Direct mail is a donor-facing only method of communication and should integrate appropriate timely messaging with holiday campaign messaging.

Direct mail includes appeal letters and newsletters, and campaigns will take an omni-channel approach with messaging integration across email, paid and organic social media and the donation landing page on GLFB's website.

## Traditional media

Traditional media encompasses TV/video, print and radio channels. Engagement with the media is done in a combination of reactive (response to reporter inquiries) and proactive methods (issued press releases and statements).

Our core message that "GLFB's commitment to ensure all mid-Michigan neighbors have access to the food they and their families need to thrive remains steadfast" must always be at the forefront of all media engagement, and all engagement should provide both neighbor- and donor-facing messages whenever possible.

- Neighbors: Messaging should emphasize stability and the availability of help for those who need it. It should also provide actionable information on how to get help if

you are in need and where to go for the most updated information on the shutdown's impact on food assistance programs.

- **Donors:** Messaging should emphasize the importance of individual action to sustain our network's long-term response to this crisis — every action, big or small, makes a real difference. It should also provide actionable information on ways to give and where to go to donate or explore other giving options.
- **Volunteers:** Messaging should integrate with other donor messaging and emphasize the importance of individual action to sustain our network's long-term response to this crisis — every action, big or small, makes a real difference. It should also provide actionable information on how to sign up for a volunteer shift and encourage exploration of other ways to engage with GLFB's mission, like making a donation.

## Media engagement

GLFB will prioritize a non-speculative, informative approach when responding to media inquiries to contribute to a sense of stability and calm whenever possible. Before developing responses to new information and/or accepting requests for comment or interview, we ask ourselves the following questions:

### **Will anything change significantly in our work because of this change?**

Many updates to programs have minimal impact on our work and are instead meant to grab attention or cause a reaction.

**Example:** A recent announcement by USDA that it will no longer release the annual food insecurity study is certainly disappointing, since we use that information to inform our work, but this will not change how we do our work. Therefore, we opt not to comment on this topic.

### **Who does this information affect, and when will it take effect?**

When changes have an impact on neighbors and partners, we will identify who the information affects and when it will take effect.

**Example:** Changes to SNAP eligibility requirements will certainly impact neighbors enrolled in SNAP, however, the changes do not take effect immediately. To avoid unnecessary confusion, we will limit statements to the current (or soon-to-take-affect) impact on neighbors so they can prepare. This also allows GLFB and our partners time to understand the new regulations and prepare for the changes.

### **How are we responding?**

**This is the most important question to ask and the most important point to emphasize in media interactions.**

Too many updates can cause a sense of unease for neighbors and for the nonprofits working to help. When it is appropriate for GLFB to share information, **we will aim to**

**communicate how we are rising to make an impact; not just sharing the news itself.** This will allow partners time to adjust their work as well.