



Expanding Our Understanding of the Implications of *Map the Meal Gap*

2016 Request for Proposals

Date of RFP Announcement: April 26, 2016

Due Date for Requested Letter of Intent: May 25, 2016

Due Date for Applications: June 30, 2016

Executive Summary: Feeding America, in cooperation with The University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research (UKCPR), will competitively award grants to qualified individuals to provide rigorous research that utilizes *Map the Meal Gap* (MMG) to expand our understanding of (a) the geographic distribution of food insecurity and its consequences and (b) locally-focused policy interventions that can be used to alleviate food insecurity. All projects must use one or more years of data from MMG. This may be supplemented with data from other sources, including the county-level price indices compiled by Nielsen and other data available at the county or congressional-district level. We anticipate awarding up to three grants at a maximum award ceiling of \$30,000 each. This opportunity is generously underwritten by The Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

I. **Background and Purpose**

A. *Map the Meal Gap* Data

Background: Feeding America serves over 3.3 billion meals per year. In addition to meeting these nutritional needs directly, Feeding America also is interested in addressing the underlying issues associated with food insecurity, the ways people cope with hunger and the effectiveness of the charitable response in reducing food insecurity. Central to this task is having information on all counties in the U.S. to accurately reflect the scope of the Feeding America network of member food banks. Although some county information is available in the Current Population Survey (CPS), the sample sizes in most counties are far too small to yield accurate estimates.

In response to the dearth of local-level measures of need, Feeding America began releasing estimates of food insecurity at the county level for all counties in the U.S. in 2010 via a large-scale effort titled *Map the Meal Gap*. Briefly, these estimates are derived using a two-step process. First, the relationship between various factors (e.g., the unemployment rate) and food insecurity were estimated at the state level using data primarily from post-2001 December Supplements of the CPS. Second, using the coefficients estimated in the first step and the same variables defined at the county level, estimates of the extent of food insecurity for all counties were established. This imputation method primarily used county-level information from the American Community Survey (ACS). A similar approach was used to define food insecurity in households with children. Third, estimates were sorted by income categories associated with income thresholds for food assistance programs. For the full population, the cutoffs were based on state thresholds for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and for our child estimates, these were based on eligibility for child nutrition programs such as the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program (SBP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC).

Because the data provided by *Map the Meal Gap* are so localized—including the cost of food in different places and food budget shortfalls—policy makers, food pantries, meal programs, partners, media and individual advocates are able to better understand hunger in their communities. Additionally, *Map the Meal Gap* is being utilized on the ground by food banks and other community practitioners to target and prioritize programmatic interventions (e.g., tailoring food distribution programs or benefit outreach programs) and to frame strategic planning and goals. (For more on MMG, see Gundersen et al. 2014 and <http://map.feedingamerica.org> .)

Data access: Data in Excel spreadsheets taken from MMG for 2011-2014 will be available, including county and congressional district-level food insecurity estimates for the overall and child populations, program eligibility income categories, and county-level food price indices. This will be provided free of charge to all funded recipients. Other local-level information can be used but will not be provided by Feeding America. Charges for any additional data can be included in the proposal budget.

B. Topics

An extensive literature has emerged regarding the causes and consequences of food insecurity and the effectiveness of various policies to alleviate food insecurity. (For reviews see Gundersen and Ziliak, 2014, 2015; Gundersen et al., 2011.) While this literature has greatly expanded our understanding, there remain multiple research gaps and, in particular, with respect to food insecurity in a local context. In this RFP we ask researchers to use *Map the Meal Gap* to further our understanding of this distribution.

Topics of interest include, but are not restricted to:

- How do the results from MMG intersect with other geographic identifiers of well-being? Of particular interest are factors that are closely related to determinants of food insecurity (e.g., disability status) and consequences of food insecurity (e.g., general health).
- What are some potentially useful ways that aggregations across counties can be done?
- How can MMG be used to inform policy interventions?
- What are the patterns of county-level changes from 2011 to 2014?
- At the county level, how do food prices intersect with food insecurity?
- At the county level, how do SNAP participation rates (and participation in other assistance programs) intersect with food insecurity?
- How does the distribution of charitable food assistance through Feeding America relate to food insecurity rates in an area?
- How can Feeding America better serve individuals in economically depressed and/or isolated communities?

Each proposal is required to use at least one year of data from MMG. In addition, a central component of any successful proposal must include a discussion of how the proposed analyses can only be done through the use of MMG.

Additionally, at this time we are *not* considering proposals to reexamine the underlying MMG methodology. Although we review and reevaluate regularly before embarking on future work, at this time our primary interest is in identifying new ways to use the existing datasets.

II. Award Information

A. *Award Summary*

Up to three grants will be awarded at a maximum ceiling of \$30,000 per award, inclusive of a maximum indirect cost recovery rate of 10%. Cost reimbursable contracts will be established between Feeding America and the grantee institution, organization, or individual. This opportunity is generously underwritten by The Howard G. Buffett Foundation.

For the purposes of this award the budget period will commence on October 1, 2016 and conclude on December 31, 2017. Grant awards do not allow for reimbursement of pre-award costs.

B. *Eligibility*

Proposed principal investigator(s) for grants must hold a Ph.D. or equivalent academic degree, and be employed at a college, university, or research organization. Members of minority and underrepresented groups are strongly encouraged to apply.

C. *Disqualification Factors*

Applications that exceed the budget ceiling amount, that do not utilize the MMG data, that do not address the topical domains, or that otherwise disregard RFP application guidelines will be considered non-responsive and not eligible for funding under this mechanism.

III. Application Submission Information

A. *Letter of Intent to Submit an Application*

If you plan to submit an application, we request, but do not require, a letter of intent to be submitted via email by May 25, 2016. The letter should only contain the names and contact information of any principal investigator and co-investigators, the title of the planned project, and the name of the college/university/organization that will serve as the point of contact for award administration. This letter is not mandatory and is only to be used for planning purposes for grant reviews. Please submit the letter of intent as a Word or PDF document to Program Manager, ukcpr@uky.edu.

B. *Submission of Full Proposals*

The completed application (in a PDF file) must be received by 5:00pm EST on June 30, 2016. Submit applications to via email to ukcpr@uky.edu. Email acknowledgement of receipt of all application materials will be provided on or about the close of business on July 6, 2016.

C. *Content and Format of Grant Applications*

Applicants must limit their project narrative to no more than 5 pages. For the purposes of this announcement the narrative begins with the Research Question and Policy Relevance section and ends with the Key Staff, Budget Narrative, and Timeline. This page limit excludes appendices and front matter such as cover page, table of contents, and project summary. The narrative must be double spaced, 1 inch margins on all sides, and standard 12 point font. Front matter and appendices may be single spaced but must adhere to other requirements on font size and margins.

Feeding America seeks applications from institutions who can demonstrate the capacity to undertake rigorous research projects, both administratively and technically. Applicants should specify in the project narrative how they will be able to fulfill the project goals described in the

RFP. In addition applicants must specify administrative arrangements that will minimize start-up costs. If funding under this mechanism is to be used in conjunction with funds from other sources then the applicant must specify the sources and duration of those other funds and how the additional resources in this competition will be leveraged to accomplish project goals.

Each application must contain the following components in order

1. **Cover Page**
Each application must contain a cover page with the title of the proposed research; applicant's name and institutional affiliation (if multiple investigators, a PI must be identified); and contact information including full mailing address, email address, phone and fax numbers. The name and contact information of the institutional research representative should also be identified.
2. **Table of Contents**
The table of contents must identify the page location of each major section and subsection, beginning with the Research Question and Policy Relevance.
3. **Project Summary**
A key component of the successful application will be a non-technical one page summary that in parenthetical format contains the objectives, methods, data (MMG), policy implications, budget request, and timeline of the proposed project. The Project Summaries of each awardee will be posted on the Feeding America web page. The header of each page should contain the title of the project and names of the PI(s).
4. **Research Question and Policy Relevance**
The application shall present an analysis of key trends and past research on the focal area of interest in the proposed project. The background motivation should demonstrate the applicant's command over the policy and research significance of trends in the question of interest, as well as the past research on the issue. The section should also demonstrate knowledge of MMG and how the proposed research expands upon the corpus of food insecurity research.
5. **Research Design**
The application shall present a research design for the 15-month performance period. This prospectus should identify key research questions, conceptual and theoretical foundations of the focal hypotheses to be tested, and statistical methods of analysis. The research design shall also contain a detailed timeline of project goals and deliverables.

If non-publicly available data is being used, the proposal must contain a timely plan for obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval or exemption from human subjects research. Typically secondary data analysis is eligible for exemption approval.
6. **Expected Results and Impact**
The applicant shall describe the type of information expected to result from the effort and link it to potential policy and scientific relevance in advancing our understanding of food insecurity.

7. **Key Staff, Budget Narrative, and Timeline**
The application shall identify all key personnel involved in the project, including principal investigators(s), co-investigators, and senior staff. The applicant's budget and budget narrative must link the research to the funding requested, including the appropriateness of the level and distribution of funds to the successful execution of the project. This narrative includes identifying the distribution of effort of all key personnel to the project. Indirect cost recovery is limited to no more than 10 percent of direct costs, and tuition is an allowable expense. Any cost normally treated as an indirect cost being budgeted as a direct cost, will require budget narrative justification. The availability, or potential availability, of additional funds to be used in conjunction with those requested in this announcement should be made clear here, and the uses of those additional funds identified. The PI or a pre-approved alternative is required to attend and should budget for one trip to Washington, DC for a one-day workshop anticipated in November, 2017.
8. **Curriculum Vitae**
Curriculum Vitae of principal investigators(s) and co-investigators shall be included in the appendices. The CV should include highest educational degree and institution, current and past employment and professional appointments, concurrent and prior funded grants, and a listing of reports and publications in the past 5 years that are pertinent to the research proposed herein.

IV. **Application Review Information**

Applications will be initially screened for relevance to the subject areas described above, academic qualifications of the principal investigator, the ability of the applicant institution to administer a grant, inclusion of requested proposal sections, and adherence to RFP guidelines, such as the budget ceiling and page limits. Those proposals not passing the initial screen will be notified to that effect in writing. Those proposals passing the initial screen will undergo a full review by a Technical Review Panel consisting of nationally recognized experts. Technical Review Panel members are not eligible for funding under this mechanism, and extreme care will be taken to avoid potential conflicts of interest.

Proposals will be evaluated based upon a 100 point scale across several factors, including:

- **Research Merit** (40 points): Among other criteria, proposals will be scored based on the importance and relevance of the proposed project to research foci identified in this announcement, the clarity of the questions posed, how the research expands on the existing literature, and, most critically, how it assists Feeding America in meeting its strategic goal of reducing food insecurity.
- **Methodology** (30 points): Proposals will be judged based upon the appropriateness of the proposed research design for the questions being posed, the feasibility of the methodology given the MMG data, and the applicant's grasp of the significance of past research and the extent to which the proposed methods expand upon prior studies.
- **Personnel** (20 points): Reviewers will judge the proposed key personnel for the necessary skills, experience, and track record to produce an excellent product. Included in this will be the time commitment of senior personnel to the project in relation to the proposed budget and other funded projects.
- **Budget and Workplan** (10 points): Among other criteria, proposals will be judged based on the feasibility of the timeline proposed, the reasonableness of the budget, and the quality of infrastructure at the PI's institution to successfully execute the proposed project.

In addition to the points awarded above, reviewers will weigh proposals based on overlap with ongoing and completed projects, the extent to which the proposal integrates with the other highly scored proposals to form a more cohesive portrait, and potential future research and policy benefits.

V. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Applicants will be notified of grant award on or about August 30, 2016. Due to the anticipated volume of proposals we cannot guarantee the provision of detailed written comments to applicants who are not funded.

B. Contact Information

Questions relating to this announcement should be directed to the UKCPR Program Manager via E-mail at ukcpr@uky.edu.

C. Reporting requirements

The awardee shall submit no fewer than three reports during the duration of the grant:

(i) a brief progress report no later than May 15, 2017 summarizing progress toward completion, especially highlighting the achievement of key milestones set out in the Workplan. Changes in personnel and in budget allocation across categories, and challenges and how they were overcome should be included in the progress report.

(ii) a draft final report two weeks prior to the conference on or about held in Washington, DC.

(iii) a final report due no later than December 31, 2017. The report shall include the following components: Title Page, Acknowledgement, 250-word Abstract, a 3-5 page Executive Summary, Introduction, Research Methods, Data, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion.

Submit progress and final reports as a Word document to Adam Dewey at adewey@feedingamerica.org.

D. Invoicing

The Awardee shall submit quarterly invoices to Adam Dewey at Feeding America at adewey@feedingamerica.org. The invoice shall include a brief description of work and expenses incurred, and include the contract number. Final invoices will not be paid until final reports are received.

E. Terms and Conditions

1. Award Terms

Feeding America reserves the right to negotiate with the project investigators and/or their institutional representatives regarding the scope of work proposed, including funding level and project duration.

2. Publication

(i) The report and any attendant work products produced as a result of this award shall contain the following

“This project was supported by a grant from Feeding America with underwriting from The Howard G. Buffett Foundation. The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are solely those of the author(s) and should not be construed as representing the opinions or policies of the sponsoring agencies.”

- (ii) Feeding America reserves the right to self-publish edited versions of the reports in a collected volume available free of charge to the public at www.feedingamerica.org. Grantees retain publication rights to their projects for peer-reviewed outlets.

F. Disclaimer

Nothing in this announcement should be construed as to obligate the University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research or Feeding America to make any awards whatsoever. Awards are contingent upon funding availability and research needs.

Feeding America is an equal opportunity organization. We embrace a philosophy that recognizes and values diversity.

References

Gundersen, C. and J. Ziliak. “Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes.” *Health Affairs* 34(11), 1830-1839. 2015.

Gundersen, C. and J. Ziliak. “Childhood Food Insecurity in the U.S.: Trends, Causes, and Policy Options”. *The Future of Children*. Fall, 2014.

Gundersen, C., E. Engelhard, and E. Waxman. “Map the Meal Gap: Exploring Food Insecurity at the Local Level.” *Applied Economics Policy and Perspectives*, 36(3), 373-386. 2014.

Gundersen, C., B. Kreider, and J. Pepper. “The Economics of Food Insecurity in the United States.” *Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*, 33(3), 281-303. 2011.



Applicant Checklist

Full Proposals should include:

1. Cover Page
 - a. Title of proposed research
 - b. PI name, Organization, & contact information
 - c. Topical domain of the proposed research
 - d. Authorized representative & contact information
2. Table of Contents
3. Project Summary (1 page, single spaced)
(Note: Sections 4-7 are to be double spaced; 5 pages max)
4. Research Question and Policy Relevance
5. Research Design
- 6 Expected Results and Impact
7. Key Staff, Budget Narrative, and Timeline
8. Curriculum Vitae
9. Appendices (e.g. bibliography, letters of support)