



IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY

2025 Health and Wellness Focus Area: Goodwill Northern Michigan Food Rescue

goodwillnmi.org

INITIATIVE: Healthy Produce Cooler: 100% Access

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Goodwill Northern Michigan's Food Rescue program is transforming food access across the region. Since 2008, the program has recovered and redistributed 2.2 million pounds of food annually—enough for 6,500 meals each day—to 78 pantries, meal sites, and baby pantries across five counties. In 2014, only 13% of partners could reliably offer fresh produce. Today, 80% can. With Impact100 Traverse City's support, we can achieve 100% by 2027.

The barrier is cold storage. Throughout the year, and in particular during harvest season, thousands of pounds of produce are lost due to limited capacity, restricting access for the 20% of pantries that cannot consistently provide fresh food. A new walk-in cooler at our Traverse City warehouse will more than double storage, extend shelf life, reduce waste, and ensure healthy food reaches families.

The initiative also strengthens our Healthy Harvest program, which rescues surplus produce from area farms. In 2024, 320,000 pounds were distributed, but over 100,000 pounds were left uncollected due to storage constraints. This lack of capacity continues to affect Food Rescue in 2025. Tomorrow, Food Rescue will pick up 2,400 pounds of peaches in Hart, Michigan, but they will have to pass up the opportunity to pick up another 7,200 pounds given the lack of cold storage. Expanded capacity will capture more of this food, feeding families instead of going to waste.

The initiative is shovel-ready and sustainable. With minimal operating costs, no new staffing needs, and Goodwill's overhead covered through stores and ecommerce, 100% of an Impact100 Traverse City grant will fund infrastructure that delivers lasting impact. Together, we can ensure every pantry opens its doors with fresh, healthy food—nourishing families and strengthening communities.

The following sections contain key information from the application, as written by the applicant. While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough review and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our eligibility requirements.

ORGANIZATION'S VISION STATEMENT

We envision communities where everyone can thrive with a safe and secure home, nutritious food, and empowering employment.

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

We bring food to neighbors, help vulnerable people find home, and provide empowering employment through our community-supported social enterprise and collaborative partnerships.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

Goodwill Northern Michigan is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1972 to serve the most vulnerable neighbors in our 19-county rural region. Our mission is sustained through a robust social enterprise that includes nine thrift stores, an ecommerce program, donation centers, and recycling operations. Revenue from our social enterprise — the business we run for a social purpose — covers all administrative costs and directly supports our food and housing programs, along with philanthropic donations, and, for our homelessness programs, government grants. Our diverse funding sources give us the flexibility and scope to pursue long-term, systems-based solutions to the complex issues of homelessness and hunger.

Headquartered in Traverse City, we serve the “knuckles up” counties of Northern Michigan. We are one of 153 autonomous Goodwill organizations in North America and one of ten in Michigan. As a locally governed nonprofit, we maintain full control over our operations while benefiting from the shared knowledge and national resources of the Goodwill network. Our executive leadership and board of directors live and work in the region we serve.

Since our founding, we have evolved from operating a sheltered workshop to becoming a vital community anchor working to address the interconnected challenges of homelessness, housing instability, and food insecurity. Today, we help over 250 households each year — including families, youth, seniors, and Veterans — transition from homelessness to stable housing. Our Food Rescue program provides nutritious food to 16,000 neighbors experiencing food insecurity, one-third of whom are children and another third seniors. We deliver 8,000 pounds of nutritious food every day to the 78 food pantries, community meal sites, and baby pantries that serve vulnerable, marginalized populations in our region. These housing and food programs serve Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, and Leelanau counties.

A Legacy of Serving the Most Vulnerable

1972: Founded as Asgard Industries, a sheltered workshop producing fishing lures in the former Parsons Building on Aero Park Drive, providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

1985: Joined the Goodwill network in response to a growing regional need to address homelessness. We purchased and repurposed the Land-O-Lakes Motel at 1329 South Division, creating the Good Samaritan Housing Center and launching what has become a decades-long commitment to housing and homelessness services.

2006: Opened the Goodwill Inn — the region's first year-round emergency shelter where families can stay together in suites, also serving individuals, youth, and Veterans.

2008: With founders Homer Nye, Becky Mang, George Powell, Bruce Byl, and Cecil McNally, launched Food Rescue to rescue excess food and deliver it members of the Northwest Food Coalition while reducing food waste.

2011: Opened Patriot Place, a transitional housing community in Gaylord designed specifically for Veterans experiencing homelessness.

2015: Launched the Healthy Harvest initiative, focused on gleaning and distributing excess fruits and vegetables from local farms.

2021: Received a \$5 million unrestricted gift from philanthropist MacKenzie Scott, allowing for transformational investment in ending chronic homelessness and ensuring long-term sustainability for Food Rescue and launching our Bringing It Home comprehensive campaign for housing and food security.

2022: Food Rescue received the Humanitarian Award from the Traverse City Human Rights Commission.

2023: Purchased East Bay Flats, creating new units of housing with wraparound supports for people exiting homelessness into housing — badly needed by our community — while preserving 64 affordable units for the broader community.

Goodwill Northern Michigan is uniquely positioned as both a service provider and a trusted community partner. By leveraging our social enterprise model, we ensure long-term sustainability while providing critical supports to those most in need. Our approach combines immediate assistance with long-term solutions, creating pathways to stability, dignity, and opportunity for thousands of Northern Michigan residents each year.

SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

By 2027, Goodwill Northern Michigan's Food Rescue program aims to ensure that 100% of food pantries across our five-county region consistently offer fresh, nutritious food when they open to the public—a major leap from just 13% in 2014 and our current 80%. With support from Impact100, we will close this final gap, bringing health and dignity to every family and individual in our community experiencing food insecurity.

To achieve this goal, we seek funding to install a walk-in cooler at our Traverse City warehouse—a capital investment that will transform our ability to store and distribute perishable food, especially fresh produce. This initiative directly supports Impact100's focus areas of Health & Wellness and Family, ensuring that 16,000 neighbors, including over 5,000 children, have reliable access to nutritious produce.

This project goes beyond food access—it's about health and wellness. Nearly 80% of the food we recover and distribute consists of nutrient-dense staples like fresh produce, dairy, meat, and whole grains—items often missing in food-insecure households. Their absence leads to serious, lifelong health impacts.

Children without consistent access to healthy food are more prone to obesity, type 2 diabetes, behavioral issues, and developmental delays. Food-insecure seniors are significantly more likely to suffer from depression, asthma, and congestive heart failure. In Northwest Michigan, 1 in 4 children and 15% of seniors are at high risk of food insecurity. They are more likely to suffer from high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, and heart disease: 58 percent have a household member with high blood pressure, and 33 percent have one with diabetes.

People who are food insecure are often living with chaos, crisis, and prolonged stress. The worry, anxiety, stress, and depression that coexist with food insecurity hinder stability and a family's ability to thrive. Families experiencing food insecurity have to make difficult trade-offs, choosing between paying for food and covering utilities (69%), transportation (67%), medical care (66%), or housing (57%) at some point in the year.

In our rural areas, where medical care is limited, nutritious food is a critical first line of defense. This initiative ensures all families, regardless of income or ZIP code, can access the fresh food they need to thrive.

Food Rescue has served our region since 2008, operating across five counties—an area twice the size of Rhode Island. We recover and redistribute 2.2 million pounds of food annually, valued at \$3.34 million. This food is delivered at no cost to 78 food pantries, community meal sites, and baby pantries—8,000 pounds a day, enough for 6,500 meals.

However, we face a critical bottleneck: cold storage. During peak growing season, we're forced to turn away thousands of pounds of fresh produce due to insufficient space. This directly impacts which pantries can offer fresh food. While 80% of our partners distribute produce, the remaining 20% experience inconsistent access to nutritious options. This affects approximately 3,200 individuals, including over 1,000 children, who lack reliable access to fresh food. Bridging this 20% gap is the transformative next step in our work.

The new walk-in cooler will more than double our current cold storage capacity, allowing us to accept larger donations, extend shelf life, and reduce waste. It will also eliminate the need to divert food outside our region, keeping more of our harvest here, where it's needed most.

The cooler will also power the expansion of Healthy Harvest, our initiative to increase distribution of local, healthy produce. Healthy Harvest mobilizes staff and volunteers to rescue surplus fruits and vegetables directly from local farms. In 2023, it rescued and distributed 320,000 pounds of produce, yet over 100,000 pounds were left behind due to limited cold storage. For example, last summer, 22 volunteers picked 648 pounds of strawberries in one

afternoon—less than 5% of what was available. With the new cooler, we can dramatically scale Healthy Harvest and keep more local food feeding local people.

This project is sustainable, cost-effective, and shovel-ready. The cooler will be installed at our existing warehouse, the central hub of our distribution network. Contractor estimates and architectural plans are in place. Annual operating costs are just \$4,000, with no additional staffing required. Since Goodwill's administrative and overhead costs are fully funded by our thrift stores and ecommerce, 100% of Impact100 funds will go directly to building the cooler—not overhead. Naming recognition is available to honor this transformative investment.

With 100 women and one walk-in cooler, we can achieve 100% fresh access—ensuring that every food pantry in our region has fresh, nutritious food available whenever they open their doors.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

Food Rescue serves a five-county region in Northwest Michigan: Antrim, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Kalkaska. In that region, more than 16,000 people rely on food assistance, and 5,000 of them are children. Our initiative focuses on bridging that gap by ensuring that fresh, nutritious food reaches our most vulnerable neighbors through a network of more than 210 food donors and 78 local partners, including food pantries, baby pantries, community meal sites, and school-based programs.

We are proud to serve and strengthen this regional network, which includes:

- Father Fred Foundation, Traverse City
- Leelanau Christian Neighbors Food Pantry, Lake Leelanau
- Bellaire Community Food Pantry, Bellaire
- KAIR Food Pantry & Ladles of Love, Kalkaska
- Mancelona Food Pantry, Mancelona
- Benzie Area Christian Neighbors (BACN), Benzonia
- Step Up Northern Michigan, Traverse City
- Women's Resource Center, Traverse City
- New Horizons Clubhouse, Rapid City
- Benzie Food Partners Food Pantry, Honor

Local partners speak powerfully about the impact of Food Rescue's support. At Front Porch Café in Ellsworth, a nonprofit "pay-what-you-can" restaurant, fresh food from our deliveries keeps the doors open and meals on the table. As they shared:

"Without Food Rescue, we would have had to close. Instead, we continue to provide a gathering space and nourishment for people in need in our community."

Pastor Dave Kroon of Good Samaritan Family Services in Ellsworth describes the broader ripple effect:

“We serve about 2,000 people a month across a wide swath of Northern Michigan. Without Food Rescue, we couldn’t do what we do at the scale we do. Their deliveries allow us to tell families, ‘Take as much as you need.’ That kind of abundance makes a real difference... Families can build a little cushion — stocking up on apples, carrots, or meat so they’re secure for weeks to come.”

And it’s personal, as John, a father of four, shared in a letter of thanks:

“Today I went to a food pantry. They wheeled out a whole wagon of food for us. ... I got home and was unpacking the food when I saw two bags of beautiful cherries. That’s when I broke. My kids saw their dad cry really hard. We grabbed a bag and went to the park across the street. It felt normal. It felt ‘before crisis.’”

Food Rescue is the regional connector that links 82 local farms and hundreds of food donors to grassroots organizations on the front lines of hunger relief. By supporting Food Rescue, Impact100 TC is supporting 78 food pantries, community meal sites, and baby pantries, and all of the vulnerable families and neighbors they serve. With Impact100’s support, we can deepen this work and ensure that no matter where a person lives in our region, they have access to healthy food that supports their physical and emotional well-being — delivered with dignity, at the moment they need it most.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED AND GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES

Across Northwest Michigan, the need for fresh, nutritious food is both urgent and growing. More than 16,000 people in our five-county region rely on the emergency food system — a network of pantries, meal sites, and shelters that often represents their only source of healthy, affordable food. But the system is under pressure. Food pantry use has surged by 41% in the past year alone, driven by rising food prices, inflation, and the expiration of critical pandemic-era benefits like expanded SNAP, Medicaid auto-enrollment, and universal school meals. These financial stressors have hit our most vulnerable neighbors hardest.

Food Rescue is the only organization in the region solely dedicated to recovering good food that would otherwise go to waste and delivering it — at no cost — to 78 food pantries. We specialize in rescuing healthy perishable items that are often the most difficult to source: fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat, and whole grains. These nutrient-dense foods are essential to health but remain out of reach for many families. More than two-thirds of pantry users are children, seniors, or people with disabilities who depend on pantries for fresh food they cannot afford elsewhere.

In 2014, only 13% of our partner pantries could consistently offer fresh produce. Today, thanks to community collaboration and infrastructure improvements, that number has risen to 80%. Yet thousands of families still lack reliable access to fresh food — including over 1,000 children. Poor nutrition contributes to obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and developmental delays, especially in children. Among seniors, it increases the risk of chronic illness, depression, and hospitalization.

A critical barrier remains: cold storage. During peak donation seasons, our current facility cannot accommodate the volume of perishable food available. Each year, we are forced to turn away thousands of pounds of high-quality produce simply because we don't have space to store it safely.

This project will directly address that gap. A new walk-in cooler at our Traverse City warehouse will eliminate this bottleneck, increase equitable access to healthy food, and enable us to reach the final 20% of pantries without consistent fresh options.

Community partnerships underscore the urgency and opportunity. When a canceled contract left Wunsch Farm with a surplus, they turned adversity into action. The sixth-generation farm donated a half-bushel of apples for every half-bushel sold. Over 1,000 customers joined in, sending more than 140,000 apples to food pantries and community meal sites across the region.

Barbara Wunsch said, "This effort mattered to everyone working on our farm. Our team is proud of pruning the trees, fertilizing the soil, and caring for our customers. This was an opportunity for everyone to give back."

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

We are a financially stable organization with over 50 years experience addressing complex community needs through sustainable, systems-based solutions. That stability is what makes your investment in this project so powerful. Because our operations and administrative costs are already covered through our diversified revenue model — including nine thrift stores, an ecommerce platform, philanthropy, and grants — 100% of Impact100 grant dollars will go directly to building the walk-in cooler. Your gift won't fund overhead, it will build infrastructure that immediately expands fresh food access for thousands of families.

Food Rescue has been rescuing and delivering nutritious food at no cost to local pantries and meal sites for over 17 years. Today, we serve 78 partner sites across five counties—many of them small, rural, and unable to store or transport perishable food on their own. In 2024 alone, we rescued and redistributed 2.2 million pounds of food, much of it fresh produce, dairy, meat, and whole grains. These nutrient-dense foods are often the hardest for low-income households to access—yet they are essential for health.

The proposed walk-in cooler is a one-time capital investment with minimal recurring costs. These costs will be absorbed into existing warehouse operations and will not require new staff. The cooler will eliminate a long-standing storage bottleneck that currently forces us to turn away donations of fresh food—especially during peak growing season.

This project is a key piece of our regional strategy. In 2014, only 13% of our partner pantries could consistently offer fresh produce. Thanks to community investment and

infrastructure improvements, that number has grown to 80% today. This cooler will help us close the final gap and reach our goal: that by 2027, 100% of pantries can offer fresh, nutritious food every time they open.

GWNMI is equipped to ensure this investment creates lasting impact. We use robust financial systems including NetSuite and Ramp for budgeting, internal controls, and real-time reporting. Our preliminary 2024 metrics show an operating reserve ratio of 1.27, 287 days of cash on hand, and a current ratio of 3.85. With a staff of over 250 and deep community roots, we manage a range of food, housing, veteran, and clothing voucher programs across Northwest Michigan.

We've already raised over \$3 million toward a \$4.6 million goal to strengthen food systems infrastructure, and this cooler is one of the final missing pieces. We work hard to raise funds for our organization — every dollar we raise is a challenge, just as it is for smaller nonprofits. We are in the middle of a large campaign, and we have maxed out our plans for potential donors. Looking forward on the horizon, we see only one option for funding this particular need: Impact100 TC.

Impact100 won't just support our organization — it will uplift the entire emergency food network across northwest Michigan. This is a chance to fund a project that is sustainable, scalable, and built to last — ensuring healthier food reaches more people, right when they need it most.