



IMPACT100 TRAVERSE CITY 2026 FINALIST

Focus Area

Health & Wellness

5Loaves2FishNMI

5loaves2fishnmi.org

INITIATIVE

Food is the Vehicle, Love is the Answer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(from Meet the Finalists)

WE FEED PEOPLE! 5Loaves2FishNMI Co-Founders Michelle and Bill White, with dedicated volunteers, came together in 2020 with a mission “to promote compassion by providing nourishing meals, infused with love, to those experiencing food insecurity and homelessness”. Leland Community United Methodist Church’s kitchen became the permanent location for planning, preparing, and packaging delicious homemade meals, transporting them directly to hungry guests in the Grand Traverse region, with no questions asked. To date, 100,000 meals have been served.

5Loaves2FishNMI proposes to purchase a Ford Van, with upgrades to improve food safety and volunteer experience. It would increase capacity, facilitate loading and unloading, assure safer, more reliable delivery of homemade meals to designated meal sites, and transport food and equipment to fundraisers and educational events. A well-equipped van would be transformational to all aspects of 5L2FNMI’s operation, resulting in more meals delivered to hungry people in the Grand Traverse region. WE FEED PEOPLE!

The following sections contain 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

By empowering communities through nourishment, the food outreach program envisions a future where every individual has access to wholesome meals, fostering health, dignity, and opportunity for all.

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

To promote compassion by providing nourishing meals, infused with love, to those experiencing food insecurity and homelessness. We feed people!

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

5Loaves2FishNMI (5L2F) began as a community outreach, in response to the suspension of many community resources available to the growing number of underserved individuals and families in the Grand Traverse region at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Co-Founders Michelle and Bill White, and a small number of dedicated volunteers, came together with a mission “to promote compassion by providing nourishing meals, infused with love, to those experiencing food insecurity and homelessness”, their motto being “We Feed People”. Since 2020, the commercial kitchen of the Leland Community United Methodist Church (LCUMC) became the permanent location for planning, preparing, and packaging delicious homemade meals. From there all food has been transported directly to hungry individuals in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Benzie Counties, meeting people where they are with no questions asked. As trust in 5Loaves2FishNMI grew, meals were delivered and served cafeteria style at Traverse City Veterans Memorial Park and Safe Harbor Emergency Shelter (from October to April) every Monday. On Wednesdays, Leelanau County families received meals delivered to their homes by volunteers. Since 2021, the donation of a 2014 Dodge Van has facilitated food delivery and meal site expansion. Year-round community meals are provided as follows: On Mondays, meals are served cafeteria style at Traverse City Veterans Memorial Park and Safe Harbor Emergency Shelter in Traverse City; and pre-packaged prepared meals are provided to food pantries in Lake Leelanau (Leelanau Christian Neighbors), Empire (Empire Area Food Pantry), and Lake Ann (Lake Ann United Methodist Church), and, lastly, at the Leelanau Montessori Public Academy. On Wednesdays, pre-packaged prepared meals are provided to the Friendship Community Center in Suttons Bay; and Thursdays, to Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Church in Peshawesbetown and Bethany Lutheran Church in Northport. Since March, 2024, every Tuesday 5L2F assists LCUMC volunteers in the preparation and serving of a community meal in the church fellowship hall. As defined by the USDA, “food insecurity is the lack of access, at times, to

enough food for an active, healthy lifestyle for all household members, and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods. 5L2F aims to transport these meals directly to those who need them in a safe, reliable vehicle. In 2025, dedicated volunteers spent 5,408 hours preparing, packaging, and serving approximately 23,000 homemade meals. Menus are developed weekly based on food donated through the Northwest Michigan Food Coalition, then supplemented with purchased ingredients. To date, all meals have successfully reached their designated meal sites, thanks to the outreach's declining 2014 Dodge Van. In order to ensure their mission to feed the region's food insecure and homeless population continues, 5Loaves2FishNMI needs a safer, more reliable vehicle.

INITIATIVE SUMMARY:

Food is the Vehicle, Love is the Answer

5Loaves2FishNMI proposes to purchase a 2026 Ford F59 P700 14 foot Step Van to be retrofitted with an upgraded electrical system and two solar panels, two hot boxes, a refrigeration unit, custom cabinet storage, van shelving, two folding tables, an exterior wrap, and two rear racks. This vehicle would replace the current 2014 Dodge Van to provide a much needed increase in capacity, easier loading and unloading, as well as overall safer, more reliable delivery of homemade meals to designated meals sites in the Grand Traverse region. The van would also serve to transport food and equipment to fundraisers and educational events. Co-Founders Bill and Michelle White, along with significant input and guidance from Kitchen Manager Josh Miller, would oversee the van's purchase along with its upgrades. The new vehicle would be stored at LCUMC. This initiative would be transformative on many levels. The addition of refrigeration and hot boxes would ensure that nutritious food would be delivered in compliance with health and safety standards. Additional spacious storage areas for meals and supplies, combined with the ease of loading and unloading, would enhance the energy efficiency of 5L2F staff and volunteers. Also, this new retrofitted vehicle would improve driver and passenger safety, liability, and sustainability. Built to withstand unpredictable Northern Michigan weather, this van would allow nutritious meals to safely reach hungry guests in a timely manner. The attached exterior racks would accommodate extra equipment for transport as well. 5L2F's expanded independence and geographical outreach would be an additional beneficial result. As the number of hungry guests expand, the current van poses safety concerns as it ages. Its diminished capacity and frequent repair needs cost 5L2F precious dollars that could otherwise be spent on food. This van is difficult to handle, especially in windy, rainy, and/or snowy weather, and threatens driver and passenger safety. It also lacks adequate storage space and is ergonomically inefficient for loading and unloading food and supplies. Should 5L2F continue at LCUMC or change locations in the future, the proposed van would be sustainable by following the organization to its new venue.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

5Loaves2FishNMI provides nourishing homemade meals primarily to vulnerable individuals and families in Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Benzie Counties. At Traverse City Veterans Memorial Park and Safe Harbor Emergency Shelter in Traverse City, guests are generally unsheltered, facing mental health challenges, and/or struggling with substance abuse or other issues. These are the folks that need the dignity offered from a meal made with love and served with no questions asked. Those guests who visit food pantries and meal sites in Lake Leelanau, Leland, Empire, Lake Ann, Suttons Bay, Peshawbestown, and Northport gratefully receive this food for themselves or a struggling friend or neighbor. 5L2F believes every person to be worthy of a nutritious meal. As this basic need is met, energy and dignity can be restored, allowing each guest to focus on other important life matters. Each time the 5L2F van arrives filled with delicious food, guests often appear to lend a hand unloading and setting up the meal site.

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

According to United Way, economic disparity reveals growth in the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) population of the Grand Traverse region. These individuals are hovering above the Federal Poverty Line, often unable to afford life's basic necessities such as food and healthcare. ALICE households numbered 23% in Grand Traverse County (5% in poverty); 38% in Leelanau County (7% in poverty); and 27% in Benzie County (11% in poverty). According to Ashley Halliday-Schmandt, Director of the Northwest Michigan Coalition to End Homelessness, there are approximately 260 individuals in the area. In addition, Traverse City Area Public Schools reported 500 students as being homeless. Based on the per capita income of Michigan's 83 counties, the Grand Traverse region ranked as follows: Leelanau County 2nd, Grand Traverse County 9th, and Benzie County 19th. As wealth increases in this area with financially comfortable individuals relocating or retiring here and a thriving tourist economy, there has been simultaneous growth of struggling young families, the elderly, and other vulnerable individuals. The community being served by 5Loaves2FishNMI generally lacks resources for basic human needs, such as food, shelter, clothing, and household goods. With its aging van, the outreach delivers food directly to hungry individuals at area food pantries and meal sites. In addition, a community meal is offered weekly in the Leland Community Methodist Church fellowship hall, serving up to 100 individuals and families. This meals allows busy families, isolated individuals, and those struggling an opportunity to reach out to one another and strengthen their community. There is also a food pantry located at LCUMC for anyone needing extra food. The purchase a safer, more reliable vehicle, will greatly enhance 5L2F's mission to feed people. Since its inception, the outreach has witnessed extensive growth in the number of meals served and with it a need for improved means of transporting those meals. The proposed 2026 Ford F59 P700 14 foot Step Van would allow more meals to safely reach food insecure guests and support the region's food pantries and meal sites that serve them. The current van is inefficient and at times unsafe. Besides rising food costs, recent changes to Safe Harbor as a year around shelter and the closing of the Pines Campground have

impacted the number of those struggling. At Traverse City Veterans Memorial Park hungry guests continue to arrive on foot, by bicycle, or in their cars (some of which double as shelter!), as they pick up meals for themselves and struggling friends and neighbors.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

Food is the Vehicle, Love is the Answer will be sustainable as long as food insecurity exists in the Grand Traverse region. 5Loaves2FishNMI's Board of Directors oversees organizational management and tasks the management team to ensure optimal performance per the Strategic Plan. Co-Founders Bill and Michelle White, Josh Miller, and Kate Saffell, assisted by former Management Director Emily Kanitz, regularly meet to address concerns as they arise and report their recommendations to the Board. Adapting to change is critical to the outreach's survival. From its humble beginnings, 5L2F has responded extremely well to unexpected occurrences. The year ago loss of two paid 5L2F kitchen managers fortunately led to a surprisingly smooth transition. Thanks to Michelle and Bill White, Emily Kanitz, and other volunteers who stepped in to pick up the slack and oversee efficient work flow, trained chef Josh Miller was hired as full time Kitchen Manager, Michelle White as part time Kitchen Manager, and Kate Saffell as full time Operations Manager. The organization has also expanded its mission since its inception, despite the ongoing challenges it encounters regularly. Managing meal preparation every week is based on the food delivered weekly by the Northwest Michigan Food Coalition. This monumental task entails precise organization, creativity, and teamwork. For example, last fall the outreach received 200 pounds of sweet potatoes. The array of dishes prepared with these vegetables was supplemented with purchased ingredients. The varied meal creations included baked sweet potatoes, sweet potato black bean enchiladas, sweet potato ravioli, roasted sweet potatoes, and sweet potato soup to name a few. Relationships between staff and volunteers continue to grow in 5L2F's very welcoming atmosphere. Participants work closely together during meal planning, preparation, and packaging, resulting in many new friendships and volunteer recruitment. A strong sense of community has developed among the volunteers and staff. On Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday volunteers and staff take a lunch break together, sharing conversation over a delicious meal. 5Loaves2FishNMI celebrates its dedicated volunteers by annually hosting a meal in their honor! 5Loaves2FishNMI meets guests where they are in life. Connecting vulnerable individuals with collaborative human service organizations (such as Safe Harbor Emergency Shelter , Goodwill Inn, Traverse City Central United Methodist Church, and the Northwest Michigan Coalition to end Homelessness) for shelter, financial assistance, medical, and/or psychological needs does happen on occasion. This is the result of the outreach building relationships with the people they serve and discovering their needs. One of 5L2F's guests at Traverse City Veterans Memorial Park willingly sought help for drug abuse, then was finally able to find housing and a job. He currently assists 5L2F as a volunteer and mentor to other guests during the park's meal service. A new van would support 5Loaves2FishNMI's sustainability goals for the next decade. As it continues to grow addressing food insecurity in the Grand Traverse Region, it envisions possible partnering with another likeminded organization for

additional support and expanded meal service. Should 5L2F relocate to a larger commercial kitchen, the van would come along.