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## **2025 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE**

### **Food Security Initiatives**

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#### **Issue/Background:**

- At its meeting on January 17, 2025, Budget Committee requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration in collaboration with the General Manager, Parks and Recreation, to provide a briefing note on the programs, funding and full-time equivalents allocated towards food security initiatives, including but not limited to food banks and community gardens.
- The City of Toronto has a long history supporting individual and community food security dating back to City Council's adoption of [Toronto's Food Charter in 2001](#) and earlier.
- Multiple City divisions and agencies are involved in food-related initiatives. This briefing note details the food security initiatives led by the Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) and Parks and Recreation (PR) divisions. The investments the City is making into Student Nutrition led by Toronto Public Health is not within the scope of this briefing note.

#### **Key Points:**

##### **Food Insecurity in Toronto**

- Access to food is a human right. All people deserve dignified access to safe, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food.
- [Food insecurity](#) is a serious social risk factor, linked to many physical and mental health problems.
- One in four (24.9%) Toronto households are food insecure because they don't have enough money to buy food ([Public Health Ontario, 2024](#)).
- Toronto food banks served 3.49 million client visits between April 2023 and March 2024, an increase of 273% since before the COVID-19 pandemic ([Daily Bread Food Bank, 2024](#)).
- More than half of food insecure households in Ontario are working and rely on income from wages, salaries or self-employment ([PROOF, 2023](#)).

- Risk of food insecurity is disproportionately higher for individuals and families that,
  - Are racialized, especially Black people
  - Are Indigenous
  - Have a low income
  - Receive social assistance as their main source of income
  - Are living with a disability
  - Rent, as opposed to own, their home
  - Are led by lone parents, especially female lone parents

### Food Security Initiatives

- Social Development, Finance and Administration leads the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism, both of which contribute significant advancements in supporting food security for residents.
- Parks and Recreation supports urban agriculture activities in Toronto neighborhoods such as community and allotment gardens and other educational, food-based programs. Parks and Recreation also provides free use of recreation space for community food security programming and hosts snack programs through its Afterschool Recreation Care programs across the city.
- These initiatives are described in **Table 1**, alongside staffing and budget allotments.

**Table 1. Food Security Initiatives, Staffing and Operating Budget**

Initiative	Description	FTE	2025 Operating budget (\$000)
<a href="#">Poverty Reduction Strategy</a> (SDFA)	<p>The Poverty Reduction Strategy includes Food Access as one of its six areas of intervention. Priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a strategy to build a universal school food program in Toronto, in collaboration with other divisions</li> <li>• Updating Toronto's Food Charter</li> <li>• Increasing investments in community food programming</li> <li>• Promoting healthy and less carbon-intensive foods to support climate-resilient food systems</li> <li>• Monitoring food affordability to identify policy gaps</li> <li>• Enabling City policy and processes to facilitate more food initiatives in City facilities and on City-owned land</li> <li>• Supporting Community Engagement and Entrepreneurial Development (CEED) gardens, currently operating in <a href="#">Malvern</a> and <a href="#">Flemingdon</a> in</li> </ul>	2.0	<p>\$325.5*</p> <p>*Awaiting approval of \$20.0 from 2025 City budget + \$75.1 from Public Health Agency of Canada grant proposal.</p>

Initiative	Description	FTE	2025 Operating budget (\$000)
	Hydro One corridors		
<b>Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Plan (SDFA)</b>	<p>The Black Food Sovereignty Action Plan provides an immediate and long-term response to address gaps, barriers, and systemic inequities in Toronto's food system. In the past year, priority initiatives included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering the fourth annual Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Conference. The event supported community organizing and planning to share updates on the Plan, connection with City initiatives and community-led planning for local food security projects.</li> <li>• Improving access to culturally appropriate foods for Black and racialized communities by opening and expanding farmers' markets and establishing a Market Bucks program.</li> <li>• Supporting Black businesses and business opportunities to promote Black farmers, job creation supports, and a networking session.</li> </ul>	0.5	\$78.5
<b>After-school Recreation Care snack program and other locally organized snack programs (PR)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A snack program is delivered through the City's After School Recreation Care Program (ARC), a care-based program under the Child Care and Early Years Act. ARC is delivered by the City of Toronto with a portion funded by the Provincial Government of Ontario's Ministry of Sport, and in partnership with the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board.</li> <li>• This snack program provides a daily nutritious snack for all program participants, in accordance with Canada's Food Guide, serving 1,800 participants daily. There are currently 44 programs delivered at 42 community centre and school locations across the city.</li> <li>• Additionally, the division oversees various snack and food programs organized with the local community and delivered at various community centres.</li> </ul>	1.9	\$673.0
<b>Camp Nutrition Breakfast Program (PR)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Camp Nutrition Program is a new initiative included in the City's proposed 2025 Budget.</li> <li>• If approved, this program will provide a morning snack to camp participants at 45 CampTO locations, primarily located in Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA) communities reaching up to 31,085 participants based on 2024 registered participants. This includes 35</li> </ul>	10.5	\$1,017.0

Initiative	Description	FTE	2025 Operating budget (\$000)
	locations (24 free and 11 paid centres) within NIAs, and 10 free centres located outside of NIAs.		
<b>Urban Agricultural Programming (PR)</b>	<p>Parks and Recreation supports food and urban agriculture initiatives through a variety of programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Community Garden Program provides free parkland access to organized groups to grow and harvest their own plants to feed their members, local community organizations and food banks. This program includes 75 gardens with one additional garden added annually. Priority access to the program is given to equity-deserving groups.</li> <li>• The Allotment Garden Program offers 13 <a href="#">allotment gardens</a>, issued through low-cost annual permits, to individuals. The program provides land and water in high-density residential areas, allowing participants to plant vegetables and flowers on lands managed by the City of Toronto, primarily within Hydro Corridors.</li> <li>• The Demonstration and Teaching Garden Program teaches participants how to grow food. The program supports food banks and provides training and employment in horticulture and landscape management for BIPOC youth.</li> <li>• The Children's Teaching Garden and Kitchen Program teaches children and families how to grow, harvest and cook organically grown food at High Park. It also provides training and support to teaching garden programs located in recreation centers city-wide.</li> </ul>	10.2	\$1,001.0
<b>Total</b>		<b>25.1</b>	<b>\$3,095.0</b>

### Food Security Grants

- The City does not have a dedicated food security grant program. It distributes grant funding through many programs to support community food initiatives.
- Most funded programs, food-focused or not, include the provision of food in some way, e.g., organizations will offer food to participants while they take part in a skill building workshop series or participants may receive a grocery gift card as an incentive for attending a community-based program.

- **Tables 2 and 3** describe SDFA and PR grants and provision of space that support community food security programming. The tables include the most recent data available for each grant - 2024 in most cases, unless otherwise indicated.

**Table 2. Food Security Grants**

Grant	Description	Number of Recipients (organizations)	Total funds allocated in 2023/2024 (\$000s)
<b>African Refugee Response Fund Grant</b> (SDFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The African Refugee Respond Fund Grant issued a total of \$240,000 in 2023. Of this amount, 55% was allocated towards "Food Access &amp; Food Security" initiatives specifically.</li> <li>• The Food Distribution Initiative focused on purchasing wholesale fresh food, including meat, vegetables and dry goods such as rice, and distributing food and meals to meal programs and refugees across the city.</li> </ul>	35 (2023)	\$132.0 (2023)
<b><u>Black Mandated Funding Framework</u></b> (SDFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Black-Mandated Funding Framework aims to address funding gaps and historical underinvestment in community organizations and groups that serve Toronto's Black communities. Self-determination of funding priorities is central to this Framework.</li> </ul>	4	\$120.0
<b><u>Community Service Partnerships</u></b> (SDFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Service Partnerships fund a number of food security programs, including community food hubs and spaces, Meals on Wheels programs, congregate dining programs, and community kitchen programs.</li> <li>• Most funded programs that are not food security focused offer food to improve food access and support residents while they participate in community programming.</li> <li>• Third Term Actions have been developed for the Poverty Reduction Strategy that seek to increase funding to community-led food access and food justice initiatives.</li> </ul>	24	\$1,144.3

Grant	Description	Number of Recipients (organizations)	Total funds allocated in 2023/2024 (\$000s)
<a href="#"><u>Identify 'N Impact Grant Program</u></a> (SDFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This program provides funding supports for youth-led initiatives in Toronto.</li> <li>The purpose is to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help promote youth engagement and community safety in the City of Toronto</li> <li>Support youth to turn ideas into action</li> <li>Support emerging (new, small, grassroots) youth-led groups and collaborative youth-led networks</li> <li>Motivate and encourage Most Vulnerable People (MVP) youth to become involved in their communities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	3	\$48.0
<a href="#"><u>Indigenous Funding Framework</u></a> (SDFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Indigenous Funding Framework is the City's commitment to equitable funding investments and processes that reflect the self-determined needs and supports identified by Indigenous organizations and communities.</li> <li>In the pilot granting for both the Indigenous and Black-Mandated Funding Frameworks, many groups identified food supports/programming as a key priority. Self-determination of funding priorities is central to this Framework.</li> </ul>	12 of 23 organizations used funding for food security initiatives (2023)	\$429.3* (2023)  *23% of this total funding was used to support food security needs
<a href="#"><u>Strengthening Community Crisis System Grant</u></a> (SDFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This funding opportunity is intended to strengthen and increase capacity of the current mental health and substance use crisis infrastructure.</li> <li>One of the four successful applicants seeks to increase access to food for Torontonians who are food insecure, as access to nutritious, culturally relevant food is an integral pillar of mental health. The organization will extend its operating hours, hire more food bank coordinators, and enhance its culturally appropriate food options for its diverse client base.</li> </ul>	1	\$134.4 (Oct 2023 – Oct 2024)  \$209.4 (Nov 2024 – Nov 2025)

Grant	Description	Number of Recipients (organizations)	Total funds allocated in 2023/2024 (\$000s)
<b>Toronto Black Food Sovereignty grants (SDFA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Through Toronto's Black Food Sovereignty Plan, the City funded three initiatives supporting Black communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Afro-Caribbean Farmers Market</li> <li>Toronto Black Food Sovereignty Conference</li> <li>Black Experience Pavilion at Restaurants Canada</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	3	\$75.0

**Table 3: Provision of Space for Community Food Security Programming**

Initiative	Description	Number of Recipients (organizations)	Estimated benefit in 2024 (\$000s)
<b>Activating City-Owned Community Space for Food Security and Community Resilience (SDFA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Community Space Tenancy (CST) <a href="#">policy</a> leases City-owned or City-managed spaces for below-market rent to eligible non-profit organizations. Partner organizations enter into short-term agreements with the City to deliver programs in social, health, recreation, and culture, to meet the needs of local communities.</li> <li>The CST policy plays a key role in enabling non-profits to deliver vital food security services, with over 13 organizations in the portfolio offering services like culturally relevant meals, food banks, cooking classes, food distribution for vulnerable individuals, nutrition education, and hydroponic farming initiatives.</li> <li>Two organizations are dedicated exclusively to food security, while 11 others provide food and nutrition services as part of their regular programming.</li> </ul>	2	<p>\$109.4*</p> <p>*Estimated annual savings for organizations (difference between Below Market Rent Operating Cost and Annual Market-based Operating Cost)</p>

Initiative	Description	Number of Recipients (organizations)	Estimated benefit in 2024 (\$000s)
<b>Allocation of space for food security programming (PR)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City began providing space in community recreation centres and parks to organizations delivering social services. The City now provides space to four food security organizations at six locations.</li> <li>The services are primarily focused on the distribution and storage of non-perishable and fresh food items, including produce from community gardens.</li> </ul>	4	\$13.0*  *Estimated annual savings for organizations, and forgone permit revenue for City

### Rising demand for food security supports

- The City experienced a significant rise in emergency food support needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the demand has continued to grow.
- During the pandemic, the City launched a new City-wide emergency food response to support food banks and agencies navigate new logistical challenges, find supplies and space to conduct their work, and produce and deliver meals to residents.
- The City distributed \$5.1 million received from the Province of Ontario through the Social Services Relief Fund to 38 organizations through the TO Supports Investment Fund in 2020 and 2021. These funds provided community-driven and informed food security initiatives in underserved neighbourhoods across the City.
- Other orders of government offered relief programs to assist community organizations with the unanticipated demands.
- While these temporary initiatives have ended, household food insecurity and demand for community food programs have risen.
  - Many food programs that emerged during the pandemic have become permanent fixtures.
  - [Toronto food banks](#) continue to voice the extreme stress they experience as more residents turn to emergency food programs.
  - City staff continue to receive frequent inquiries from community agencies requesting financial support as they struggle to keep up with the increasing needs of their clients.



- Most recently, these concerns have resulted in Mayor Chow and City Council declaring food insecurity an emergency in Toronto ([Agenda Item History - 2024.MM24.42](#)).

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