



## CASE STUDY

# PEX Provides the Tools to Quickly Distribute Funds

Organization



# FOOD FOR FREE

## ORGANIZATION TYPE

Non-profit

## Background

Food For Free is the leading food rescue and distribution nonprofit dedicated to providing reliable access to fresh and nutritious food to Eastern Massachusetts communities. The organization rescues food that would otherwise go to waste and creates new distribution channels to reach underserved populations in 29 communities across the region through partnerships with 147 food access organizations. As part of their mission to ensure that everyone in the community—regardless of age, income, or ability—has consistent access to nutrition, the nonprofit provides critical resources to families faced with food insecurity in Cambridge and Somerville school districts through their Weekend Eats Carrot Cards program.

## CHALLENGE

Prior to joining PEX, Food For Free did not have an expense management system in place to provide funds to families in need. Instead they offered a weekend backpack program, which involved several steps to go through operationally to acquire the food, get volunteers, communicate with the schools to pick up the food before it went bad, and distribute.

Employees coordinated with volunteers to pack bags of fresh and non-perishable foods each week before sending bags to schools across the city to be distributed to students. This required several hours of labor and burdened participating students, who were visually marked to peers as food-insecure by the backpacks. There was also an inconvenience in the event that a student missed school and was not able to collect their free breakfast and lunch.

Amongst other challenges, children were not using the food for its intended use (to have food over the weekend when school was not in session). They were seen eating it as a snack and sharing it with friends, therefore they often had nothing to take home. Placing the responsibility on a child to get the food home versus the adult or guardian became a concern for the program.

## IMPLEMENTATION

Food For Free receives funds through ARPA funding from the Somerville and Cambridge school districts of Massachusetts. To seamlessly bridge the gap between hardship and success, Food For Free partnered with PEX in 2021. Instead of physical food, families now receive a PEX Prepaid Expense card that is funded with \$25 a month for each student enrolled within the school district. Each card has a unique PEX ID that is used to identify families, creating a more discreet and private process between Food For Free staff and school liaisons.

The access to funds ends once a student graduates, leaves the district, or opts out. On holiday breaks, families receive \$10 extra per child. It is important to note that there is no cap however the funds do not roll over each month.

M. Lennox stated that the onboarding and implementation was seamless, allowing her team to save time and efforts.



*"[PEX] has made this process significantly easier because the steps that we had to go through as an organization to distribute the food prevented us from being able to service all of the people we deal with in a more inclusive manner with regards to dietary restrictions, personal preferences, and cultural familiarity. Having PEX gives families the option to buy whatever food they want."*

*M. Lennox, Manager of School Programs*

## THE BENEFITS OF USING PEX



### INCREASED UTILIZATION

Since implementation, Food For Free has funded over 2,500 PEX Prepaid Expense cards with over 80% utilization rates, proving that families are using the funds they are given.



### TIME SAVING

It takes the team less than 1 hour each month to fund cards.



### IMMEDIATE ACCESS TO FUNDS

Switching to PEX has allowed for a more COVID-friendly option to get benefits to families faster.

## CLOSING REMARKS

"Without having direct contact to schools within the 30 schools we work with, to be able to communicate with schools and identify families that are in need by PEX IDs is great."

"The ability to use Batch Funding to fund cards in less than one hour per month saves us so much time. When we were getting physical food, there was no way that we could accomplish such a task in one hour."

"Since we are providing funds with the hope that it is being used for food for children in need, being able to restrict where cards can be used is a plus! We would not have been able to justify keeping this program running if families were able to spend the money on other things besides the intended use. We know where they spend it so it makes the program work as it is designed."

"PEX is super friendly and always there to answer any of my questions."