

Fortify Wisconsin Initiative Addresses Food Insecurity Through State Budget Investment

WayForward Resources joins statewide effort to advocate for \$30 million in state funding to strengthen food security and support Wisconsin farmers

By Anne Shlimovitz
WayForward Resources

Did you know that Wisconsin is one of only a few states in the nation that does not include support for food in their state budget? On April 2, staff from WayForward Resources participated in two events to advocate for changing this through the “Fortify Wisconsin” Initiative. This initiative is one of several that Feeding Wisconsin, the state association of the six regional Feeding America partner food banks that provide emergency food to local food pantries and meal programs, is advocating to be included in the 2025-2027 biennium state budget. Its \$30 million investment is an addition through the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection’s budget that would provide grants to Wisconsin nonprofit food assistance organizations to allow them to purchase Wisconsin-grown farm and food products. To support this initiative,

Senior Director of Programming Meghan Sohns, Senior Director of Finance and Operations Erica Hendricks, and Communications Director Anne Shlimovitz joined dozens of food pantry leaders, volunteers, and community members from across the state in the inaugural Advocacy Day hosted by Feeding Wisconsin. Participants broke off into smaller groups to meet with state representatives and their staff at the Wisconsin State Capitol, collectively having 72 bipartisan conversations to educate and build vital relationships on behalf of food insecurity in our communities. That same day, Senior Director of Development and Community Engagement Leslie Albrecht Huber and Executive Director Ellen Carlson testified before the Joint Finance Committee about the increased needs we are experiencing in our community and the opportunity the “Fortify Wisconsin” Initiative is to not only support individuals and fami-

lies struggling with food insecurity but also to invest in our Wisconsin farmers. According to Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap data, 1 in 10 adults and 1 in 6 children in Wisconsin are food insecure. These rates, coupled with the fact that the cost per meal has increased by more than \$1 in recent years, result in a budget shortfall of more than \$450 million throughout the state and an annual meal gap of more than 116 million meals. Over the last few years, we’ve watched as the number of people using our emergency food pantry at WayForward has drastically increased. We now see three times as many visits as we did two years ago. Last year, about 75% of households receiving food from our food pantry had children. These are the highest needs we have seen in our organization’s 40-year history. While the need has greatly increased, the percentage of food we can count on through our food bank and food rescue partners has significantly decreased. Just two years ago, half of our food came from our food bank partner, and now it’s barely 25%. As grocery stores become more efficient with their inventory systems, they have less close to their sell-by date food to distribute. And food that is purchased to fill

the gaps is at a much higher price. With food pantries, including ours, already struggling to meet the demand, these supply reductions and food cost increases require exploring new food sources and funding opportunities to keep up and be sustainable. The “Fortify Wisconsin” Initiative is one way our state government can partner with nonprofits providing emergency food to address these supply and budget challenges and ensure everyone in our community has enough nutritious food to thrive.



Participants in Feeding Wisconsin’s 2025 Advocacy Day gather at the Wisconsin State Capitol to meet with lawmakers and advocate for increased state investment in food security through the Fortify Wisconsin Initiative.

Middleton Optimist Club: “A Cardinal’s Journey”



Left to right: Curt Fuszard, Lynn Sweeney, Kristi Warriner, Mark Opitz, Bartlett Durand (seated), Jesse Stertz, Steve Britt and club president Carol Maki. Not pictured is Dr. Dana Monogue.

By Curtis Fuszard
Middleton Optimist Club

The Middleton Optimist Club recently welcomed Dr. Dana Monogue and School Board member Bartlett Durand as they shared a summary of the new “A Cardinal’s Journey”: **About A Cardinal’s Journey** A *Cardinal’s Journey* is Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District’s Future-Preparedness Framework. It defines the

skills, habits, and mindsets we want every student to develop during their time with us—preparing them not just for graduation, but for life beyond school. The framework is built around two key elements:

- **Cardinal Mind-set** guides how students learn and grow. It helps them stay curious, build strong relationships, understand themselves, and take ownership of their actions. Through

this mindset, students become: **Curious, Community-Oriented, Self-Aware, and Accountable**

- **Cardinal Foundations** focus on the core skills needed to navigate learning and life. These are the building blocks that help students share ideas, work together, think critically, and adjust to change. The foundations include: **Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, and Adaptability**

These elements are not additional curriculum—they’re embedded into what we already do, helping to align learning experiences across all grade levels and schools in the district. A *Cardinal’s Journey* was developed in partnership with students, families, staff, and community members. It’s a living framework that will evolve as the needs of our learners and world change. It also ensures that no matter which school a student attends in MCPASD, they are consistently developing the competencies that matter most for their future.

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