

# ACCELERATING CHANGE

## THE IMPACT OF PRO BONO ON THE FIGHT TO END HUNGER

### Manna Food Center

**Manna Food Center is the largest food resource in Maryland's Montgomery County, a region emblematic of the increasing suburbanization of poverty in the United States.** Montgomery County has many of the demographics of an urban area, but also significant swaths of agricultural land by design. The county supports the local farming community, new immigrants, an aging population, and, alongside all this, pockets of affluence. Increasingly, the residents of Montgomery County are becoming aware of income inequality within the community. Manna Food Center, which has been working in regional food distribution, education, and advocacy for 35 years, is often approached by locals eager to volunteer. Sometimes, Manna's prospective volunteers say they want to help, but aren't sure what they can offer the organization beyond a raised hand. Other times, companies have approached Manna with plans to scope a project, but subsequently struggle to follow through with the commitment. Mitchell, however, was a different case.

#### THE PRO BONO CONSULTANT

With a consulting background from a career at Deloitte, Mitchell set up his own private consulting practice and deliberately incorporated pro bono service into his business structure. When Mitchell approached the Manna staff with an offer to provide skills-based volunteer consulting work, his nuanced approach set him apart from the outset. Mitchell was clear on the parameters both of his time commitment and expertise so as to find his niche within Manna.

#### THE CHALLENGE

Mitchell came into the organization for an informational interview before scoping a project with Manna. He was highly professional and described his work as a skills-based volunteer as a new phase in his life. Mitchell was prepared for the time and dedication his project with Manna demanded, determined to be a force for positive change in the Montgomery County community. Finding him a good fit for the organization, Jackie DeCarlo, Manna's Executive Director, and Mitchell worked together to map out a new strategic plan. Jackie knew she wanted the strategic plan to be integrated into every aspect of the organization rather than a performative management exercise. After intensive consultative sessions with Mitchell on how to approach the strategic plan, he took on a mentorship role, strengthening and extending Jackie's executive talent. This relationship was fostered through close communication, trust building, and intentional organizational onboarding.

*This case study was made possible by the support of the Hunger Volunteer Connection, a program of the Alliance to End Hunger.*



*Image courtesy of Manna Food Center*

#### THE RESULT

Once complete, the strategic plan was so successful that Mitchell became an integral part of Manna Food Center's staff – even getting his own business cards and a strategic advisor title. Within the strategic plan, Mitchell and Jackie developed three priorities for the organization's future: community, leadership, and advocacy. Mitchell directed the development of a sustainable values-based business model, and helped identify a new auditor for the organization. Following the project's conclusion, Mitchell has continued his work with Manna to help the organization transition toward determining the terrain around community, leadership, and advocacy. Because he was so carefully onboarded in his role as a skilled volunteer, Mitchell has also helped Manna build new relationships with local policy makers around Montgomery County – a task that Jackie simply didn't have the bandwidth for previously.

As a professional mentor, Mitchell continues to meet with Jackie every month. His guidance has shaped Manna Food Center as an organization and developed Jackie's potential as a leader. With clear guidelines, skills-based volunteering can forge personal connections that breathe new life into nonprofits that often find their ideals at odds with the day-to-day grind brought on by limited resources.

*You can find other case studies in this series [here](#) and learn more about Taproot's commitment to using pro bono in the fight to end hunger [here](#).*