

Realizing the Future of The Ohio Benefit Bank

In the coming biennium, partners will begin work to further expand the capacity and reach of The Ohio Benefit Bank through the following enhancements:

- > Improve efficiency by using document imaging and electronic submission of supporting documentation.
- > Assist dislocated workers by incorporating Unemployment Compensation and other worker trade adjustment benefits into The Ohio Benefit Bank.
- > Provide capacity-building grants to support staff, volunteer, and equipment needs at existing Benefit Bank sites, and support the expansion of The Ohio Benefit Bank through the establishment of new sites.
- > Increase access and usability of The Ohio Benefit Bank through a new Self-Serve edition, which will allow individuals to complete applications on their own, anywhere and at any time.
- > Expand the use of national service programs by assigning an Americorps*VISTA member to each Ohio county to train new and existing Benefit Bank volunteers.



FIGURE 2. The Ohio Benefit Bank Partners

(listed in alphabetical order)

Public Partners

Corporation for National and Community Service
Governor's Office of Faith-Based and
Community Initiatives
Office of Governor Ted Strickland
Ohio Department of Aging
Ohio Department of Development
Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
Ohio Department of Mental Health
Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
Ohio Department of Veterans Services
U.S. Department of Agriculture Food
and Nutrition Services

Private Partners

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Charter One Bank
Columbus Foundation
George Gund Foundation
Episcopal Community Services Foundation
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger
National Council of Churches
Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks
Osteopathic Heritage Foundation
Share Our Strength
Solutions for Progress
United Way of Greater Cincinnati
Universal Healthcare Action Network Ohio

More than 800 Ohio Benefit Bank sites sponsored by faith-based, community, and private sector organizations across Ohio.

The Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks THE OHIO BENEFIT BANK EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE OHIO BENEFIT BANK HELPS CITIZENS, THEIR COMMUNITIES, AND THE STATE

"Since its inception in 2006, The Ohio Benefit Bank has helped community-based organizations reach low-income Ohioans where they work, live, pray, and play."

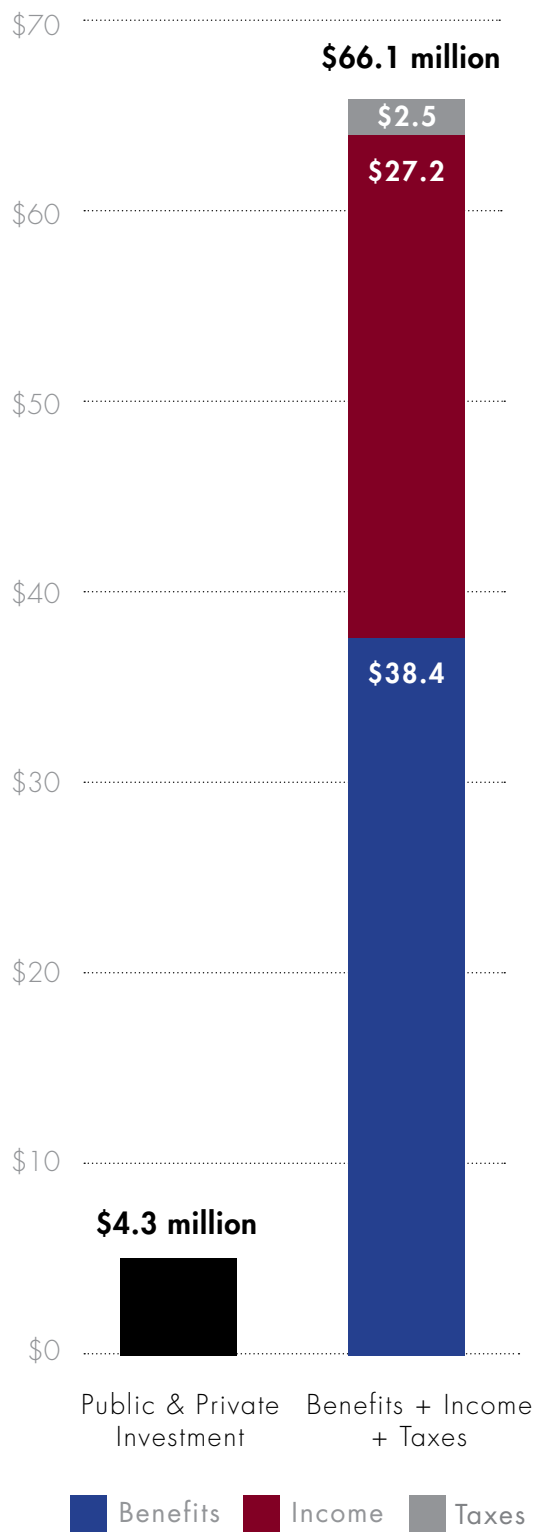
Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, Director, The Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks

The Ohio Benefit Bank is an Internet-based program offering counselor assistance to help Ohio's citizens and families access the resources they need to be healthy, remain stable, and retain employment. Located throughout Ohio in over 850 community, faith-based and government sites, **The Ohio Benefit Bank promotes economic empowerment** by helping low- and moderate-income Ohioans file their tax returns while simultaneously assessing their eligibility for a range of critical tax credits and work supports they need to be economically secure.

When Ohio's families receive the work supports and benefits they are eligible for, Ohio families, communities, and the State are better off. Each year, more than \$1.6 billion in tax credits and other work supports go unclaimed by eligible Ohioans who do not apply for them. **More than 95 percent of these "lost" benefits are federal dollars. Infusion of these resources into the State economy translates into economic stimulus for Ohio and its communities.**

NEIGHBORS HELPING NEIGHBORS WHERE THEY LIVE, WORK, PLAY, AND PRAY

FIGURE 1. Overall Economic Impact of Key Ohio Benefit Bank Programs



¹ The Ohio Benefit Bank helps individuals learn about programs and services for which they may be eligible. All numbers and figures in this report are based on the estimated value of benefits for which Ohio Benefit Bank clients were deemed to be potentially eligible.

² Estimated economic impacts of The Ohio Benefit Bank are based on a state-wide economic impact analysis conducted by Ohio University's Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs. For additional information, see "The Economic Impact of Ohio's Benefit Bank on the State Economy" (<http://www.oashf.org>).

The Ohio Benefit Bank Stabilizes Families

By helping Ohioans access the over \$1.6 billion in tax credits and other work supports that go unclaimed by eligible Ohioans each year, The Ohio Benefit Bank plays a critical role in:

Linking Ohioans with a broad range of work supports and services.

Between 2006 and 2008, the Ohio Benefit Bank served over 35,000 individuals, helping Ohioans access critical tax credits, work supports, and social services they need to achieve self-sufficiency and move toward economic security.

Empowering those in greatest need to move toward economic security.

The Ohio Benefit Bank helps link individuals and families who most need help with resources and supports. Almost 80 percent of the households The Ohio Benefit Bank assisted had an annual income less than \$25,000, and approximately one-third had children.

Boosting local and state economies.

The Ohio Benefit Bank has potentially helped Ohioans access nearly \$45.6 million in benefits through over 20 programs.¹ These benefits help hard-working citizens feed their families, retain their jobs, and deal with obstacles that threaten their ability to survive. In addition, when families spend these benefits in their communities, those dollars boost local and state economies by creating jobs, increasing income, and generating taxes. For example, when a family spends \$100 of **benefits** to purchase food at their local grocer, those dollars not only help place food on that family's table, those dollars also support jobs and wages of store employees and the farmers and producers who supply food to that grocer. When these store employees, farmers, and producers spend this **income**, additional jobs, wages, and **tax revenues** are generated.

<- - More than \$38 million in benefits has been accessed through OBB's efforts in four program areas: Medical Benefits, Food Assistance, Earned Income Tax Credits, and economic stimulus payments.

<- - Accessing these benefits is estimated to have generated up to \$27.7 million in additional income and tax revenues.²

<- - In total, access to Food Assistance, Medical Benefits, Earned Income Tax Credits, and economic stimulus payments through The Ohio Benefit Bank injected up to \$66.1 million into Ohio's economy.

The Ohio Benefit Bank Builds Public-Private Partnerships

Since the inception of The Ohio Benefit Bank, the program has served more than 35,000 people – more than any other Benefit Bank program in the United States. Recognized nationally as a premiere model, other states look to The Ohio Benefit Bank program as they aim to improve access to work supports and other assistance in their own states. Through a unique network of public-private partnerships, listed on the back page, The Ohio Benefit Bank:

- > Reaches out to more communities & neighborhoods.
- > Delivers more services to respond to the needs of Ohio's families.
- > Leverages private resources to expand critical services.
- > Utilizes a strong network of volunteers.
- > Mobilizes community groups to alleviate poverty.

Benefit Bank Promotes Modernization of Ohio's Social Service System

The Ohio Benefit Bank has built upon partnerships to improve access to public benefits in the State. These partnerships have collectively reduced agency administrative costs and have led to important policy improvements in the delivery of social services by:

Increasing access and efficiency through the Eligibility Gateway (E-Gateway).

This tool will allow Ohioans to submit electronic applications for cash and food assistance, as well as Medicaid, directly from Ohio Benefit Bank sites to County Departments of Job and Family Services (CDJFS).

Expanding categorical eligibility to include food assistance.

This policy change was implemented to make the program simpler for both applicants and caseworkers, as it eliminates the cumbersome documentation previously needed for applications to go forward. In addition, implementing this policy change eliminates the "resource test" for food assistance applicants.

"The Ohio Benefit Bank program has married the resources the government has and the grassroots outreach that faith-based and community organizations are able to provide. These community organizations are uniquely capable of reaching out and connecting with the people living in their region better than any other entity could hope to."

Greg Landsman, Director, Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

CASE STORY: Benefit Bank Site Uses Technology to Link Services to Older Adults.

A new professional version of The Ohio Benefit Bank software will allow organizations like Ohio's Area Agency on Aging District Eight to provide greater access to Ohioans who need services. Over 700 of the agency's current clients are homebound and cannot get to Ohio Benefit Bank sites. With the new software, case-workers will be able to take The Ohio Benefit Bank program to homebound clients to check eligibility for a wide range of supports like Medicaid, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), food assistance, and Ohio's Best Rx. By increasing the services available to their clients and making The Ohio Benefit Bank available to the homebound, the new software will significantly expand the agency's ability to provide care and support for Ohio's 60-plus population.

