



A Leadership Transition Playbook for the First 90 Days

Prepared for
Denis McDonough, President & CEO, Feeding America

*Leadership is
something experienced,
not announced.*

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Executive Summary

Feeding America enters this leadership transition with a strong foundation, a nationwide network, and a critical role in addressing hunger across the United States. The first 90 days of new leadership are not defined by major structural change. They are defined by how leadership is experienced across the organization, the food bank network, and among partners, policymakers, and the public.

During this period, the President and CEO establishes a clear leadership presence by defining how he leads, how priorities are set, and how the organization moves forward. This includes reinforcing a consistent leadership voice, aligning stakeholders around shared direction, and building confidence through visible engagement.

This playbook is intended as a practical, experience-based resource that can be used selectively to support leadership and the Feeding America team during the transition, reinforcing alignment, clarity, and coordinated execution. It is designed to:

- Strengthen trust across Feeding America's federated network
- Reinforce confidence among donors, partners, and policymakers
- Establish a clear and consistent leadership voice
- Align communications, engagement, and execution
- Translate early insight into actionable priorities

Early alignment with the Board of Directors is also critical to reinforcing confidence, clarifying priorities, and supporting effective governance during the transition.

The approach is organized across three phases:

- **Phase I: Listen, Learn, and Establish Presence**
Build credibility through structured listening, early engagement, and clear leadership tone
- **Phase II: Align, Engage, and Signal Direction**
Translate insight into alignment, deepen stakeholder engagement, and establish leadership presence nationally
- **Phase III: Define Direction and Build Momentum**
Communicate priorities, activate engagement, and position the organization for sustained progress

Throughout all phases, communications serves as a central leadership tool, reinforcing consistency, clarity, and confidence across audiences.

This playbook reflects experience supporting leadership transitions in complex corporate and nonprofit environments, including within the Department of Veterans Affairs, during periods of significant organizational change, and is intended as a practical resource that teams can use and adapt when helpful.

Leadership in this context is not defined by announcement, but by consistency, clarity, and engagement across the system. Leadership is something experienced, not announced.

How to Use This Playbook

This playbook is designed as a practical reference to support the first 90 days of leadership in a complex, distributed organization.

It is not intended to be followed sequentially or implemented in full. Feeding America already has strong leadership and experienced teams, and this document is intended to be used selectively in a way that complements ongoing work and priorities.

How it is most useful:

- **Use selectively**
Reference sections based on immediate needs or priorities, rather than reading or applying it end to end
- **Focus on moments that matter**
Early leadership impact is shaped by key moments, listening, alignment, stakeholder engagement, and visible signals of direction
- **Reinforce alignment across the system**
The playbook is structured to support consistency across the national office, food bank network, partners, and stakeholders
- **Support coordination across functions**
Communications, development, partnerships, and government relations are most effective when aligned early
- **Translate insight into action**
Use it to help convert what is heard into clear signals, priorities, and shared understanding

Above all, this playbook is grounded in a simple principle:

In a federated system, leadership is not established through a single announcement or plan. It is established through consistent signals, visible engagement, and shared understanding over time. Leadership is something experienced, not announced.

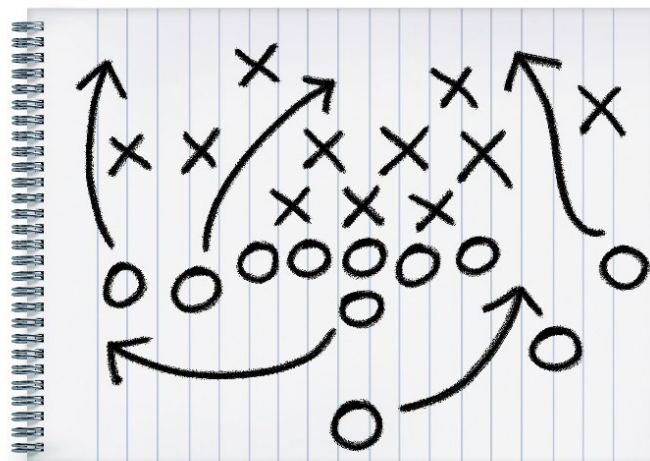


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Playbook Objective

Provide a structured framework that may be used to support early clarity, alignment, and momentum across Feeding America's national organization, food bank network, and stakeholder ecosystem, while reinforcing confidence in leadership and positioning the organization for sustained impact, visibility, and fundraising growth.

Context

Feeding America operates through a highly distributed national model that depends on trust, coordination, and shared purpose across independent food banks, a national office, and a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

In this environment, leadership is not asserted through structure alone. It is earned through clarity, consistency, and visible partnership with the network.

The first 90 days are not about making major changes. They are about **establishing how leadership will be experienced**. Early signals shape expectations, influence alignment, and determine how quickly the organization can move forward together.

Feeding America's effectiveness depends on alignment across a federated system of national leadership, food banks, partners, and policymakers. Success requires a leadership approach that is collaborative, consistent, and grounded in shared mission. In this environment, even well-coordinated organizations benefit from added clarity and coordination during leadership transition, particularly in moments where alignment, sequencing, or stakeholder engagement require focus.

Sector Dynamics

Feeding America operates within a broader national ecosystem of nonprofit organizations, advocacy groups, funders, and community-based partners working to address hunger and food access.

As the largest organization in this space, its scale and visibility create both opportunity and complexity. Across the field, there are a range of perspectives and expectations regarding:

- The role of national organizations relative to local and community-based efforts
- The distribution and influence of large-scale philanthropic and corporate funding
- The balance between food distribution, policy, and longer-term solutions
- The visibility of different organizations and approaches within the national narrative

These dynamics are common in large, federated, and resource-concentrated nonprofit systems. They can influence alignment, collaboration, and how leadership actions are interpreted across the broader field. For leadership, this underscores the importance of:

- Consistently reinforcing partnership and shared mission
- Demonstrating awareness of the broader ecosystem and its perspectives
- Creating space for collaboration and alignment across organizations
- Positioning Feeding America not only as a leader, but as a convener within the field

Guiding Principles

- 1. Center the people we serve**
Leadership decisions, communications, and priorities should consistently reflect the needs of individuals and families facing hunger and limited access to nutritious food. Lived experience should inform understanding, reinforce purpose, and connect strategy to real-world impact.
- 2. Listen first, act with intention**
Early credibility is built by demonstrating understanding before direction. Listening should be structured, inclusive, and clearly reflected in leadership actions and communications.
- 3. Lead through partnership**
Effectiveness depends on alignment across Feeding America's national organization, food bank network, and partners. Leadership should reinforce shared ownership of mission rather than centralized direction.
- 4. Operate with awareness of the broader ecosystem**
Feeding America's role unique within the national hunger landscape requires awareness of diverse perspectives among peer organizations, advocates, funders, and communities. Leadership should reflect this awareness through inclusive engagement and a posture of collaboration.
- 5. Communicate early and consistently**
Clarity reduces uncertainty, reinforces confidence, and supports alignment across audiences. Consistent communication establishes leadership presence and direction.
- 6. Align words and action**
Consistency across internal and external communications builds trust and credibility. Leadership signals are interpreted quickly across a distributed system.
- 7. Strengthen and build on existing capability**
Momentum comes from supporting and enabling teams and the network, not replacing them. Early leadership should reinforce confidence in current expertise and infrastructure, while creating space for refinement and growth over time.
- 8. Move with urgency, grounded in reality**
Progress requires both pace and awareness of operational complexity. Leadership should balance ambition with practical execution.

Strategic Communications Plan

First 90 Days Communications Framework

Objective

Establish a clear, consistent, and credible leadership voice that reinforces confidence across Feeding America's internal teams, food bank network, partners, policymakers, and the public, while strengthening alignment and supporting fundraising and engagement goals. All work is designed to support and strengthen internal teams, not replace them.

Strategic Role of Communications in the First 90 Days

In a federated organization, communications is not a support function. It is a primary leadership tool for alignment, coordination, and execution.

It shapes how leadership is understood, how priorities are received, and how quickly alignment is achieved across a distributed system.

For Feeding America, communications is most effective when it:

- Reinforces partnership with the food bank network
 - Maintains confidence among corporate and foundation partners
 - Positions Denis as a credible national voice on hunger
 - Connects operational impact with a broader public narrative
-

Core Message Platform

This core message platform serves as the foundation for all communications and is activated through leadership narrative, stakeholder engagement, and channel strategy. All communications should consistently reinforce a small set of themes:

1. **Partnership and Shared Leadership**
Feeding America's strength comes from its network. Leadership is grounded in partnership with food banks and communities.
2. **Urgency with Clarity**
Hunger remains a significant and immediate challenge, but it is not intractable.
3. **Hunger Is Solvable**
With coordinated effort, sustained commitment, and public support, ending hunger in the United States is achievable.
4. **Impact and Accountability**
Feeding America delivers measurable results through its national network and partnerships.
5. **Communicate with Truth and Impact**
Elevate the voices of neighbors and communities served as a central part of how Feeding America communicates impact and informs public understanding.
6. **Building the Future**
The organization is strengthening its ability to meet growing need while advancing long-term solutions.

Audience-Specific Messaging and Channels

Audiences are prioritized based on their influence on organizational stability, network alignment, and fundraising continuity during leadership transition. Each audience requires a distinct balance of reassurance, alignment, and forward direction during the transition.

1. **Internal Staff** (National Office and DC Teams)

Objective: Build confidence, clarity, and alignment

Context: Internal teams are the first to interpret leadership. Their understanding of priorities, tone, and direction will shape how the organization functions day to day. In a transition, uncertainty can quickly lead to misalignment unless there is clear and consistent communication.

Key Messages:

- Clear direction and leadership tone
- Appreciation for expertise and commitment
- Stability and continuity with forward momentum

Channels:

- CEO's all-staff messages
- Regular internal updates (weekly or biweekly)
- Leadership meetings and town halls

Tone: Direct, transparent, steady

2. **Food Bank Network**

Objective: Reinforce trust, partnership, and shared mission

Context: Feeding America's strength depends on its federated network. Food banks operate independently and expect to be treated as partners, not recipients of direction. Leadership transitions can raise questions about alignment, autonomy, and support.

Key Messages:

- Commitment to listening and partnership
- Recognition of local leadership and expertise
- Alignment around shared priorities

Channels:

- CEO messages to network
- Listening tour engagements
- Network calls and convenings

Tone: Respectful, collaborative, inclusive

3. **Board of Directors**

Objective: Reinforce confidence in leadership, ensure alignment on priorities, and support effective governance during the transition.

Context: The Board selected Denis and is invested in his early success. In the first 90 days, they assess leadership through clarity of direction, engagement, and the ability to align the organization and network. Board members also serve as important ambassadors to donors, partners, and the broader community.

Key Messages:

- Clear leadership approach and early priorities
- Alignment with Feeding America’s mission and strategic direction
- Commitment to partnership with the network and stakeholders
- Early signals of progress, alignment, and momentum

Channels:

- Regular Board updates and briefings
- Committee meetings and leadership check-ins
- One-on-one engagement with Board leadership
- Integration with Board meetings and materials

Tone: Transparent, confident, accountable

4. **Major Donors and High-Value Philanthropic Partners**

Objective: Reinforce confidence, protect relationships, and position for continued and expanded investment

Context: Major donors are highly sensitive to leadership transitions. They look for signals of stability, access, and continued impact. Early engagement is critical to maintaining momentum and even subtle uncertainty can delay or reduce giving if not addressed early and directly.

Key Messages:

- Continuity of mission, performance, and impact
- Confidence in leadership and clarity of direction
- Appreciation for their role as essential partners
- Opportunities for deeper engagement and long-term impact

Channels:

- Direct outreach from the CEO (calls, small-group meetings)
- Targeted briefings and updates
- Participation in partner convenings or roundtables
- Coordination with development team for individualized engagement

Tone: Personal, confident, relationship-driven

5. **Corporate and Foundation Partners**

Objective: Maintain and strengthen confidence and investment

Context: Institutional partners evaluate leadership transitions through the lens of risk, alignment, and long-term value. They look for continuity in execution, clarity of strategy, and opportunities for deeper engagement.

Key Messages:

- Stability and continuity of impact
- Clear leadership and forward direction
- Alignment with shared goals and priorities
- Opportunities for expanded partnership

Channels:

- Direct CEO outreach
- Partner briefings and roundtables
- Targeted communications aligned with development

Tone: Confident, strategic, impact-focused

6. **Policymakers and Government Stakeholders**

Objective: Reinforce Feeding America's role as a trusted partner in addressing hunger

Context: Government stakeholders value consistency, credibility, and reliability. Leadership transitions can raise questions about continuity of engagement and alignment with policy priorities, particularly around federal nutrition programs.

Key Messages:

- National scale and local impact of the network
- Importance of federal nutrition programs and partnerships
- Commitment to constructive, solutions-oriented engagement

Channels:

- Direct meetings and briefings
- Congressional outreach (committees and staff)
- Washington-based engagement

Tone: Credible, informed, solutions-oriented

7. **Monthly Donors and Broad Individual Supporters**

Objective: Maintain trust, reinforce emotional connection, and sustain ongoing support

Context: Monthly donors provide stability and scale. They are less focused on leadership changes, but shifts in tone or messaging can influence retention and engagement. Consistency and emotional connection are key.

Key Messages:

- Gratitude for continued support
- Clear connection between contributions and impact
- Reinforcement of mission and momentum

Channels:

- Email communications and newsletters
- Digital storytelling and social media
- Website and campaign messaging

Tone: Warm, appreciative, mission-centered

8. Media and Public Audience

Objective: Establish Denis as a national voice on hunger and elevate the issue

Context: Media and public audiences help shape the broader narrative around hunger. Early visibility should be intentional and aligned with internal and stakeholder messaging, not precede it.

Key Messages:

- Hunger in America is real and urgent
- It is solvable with sustained effort
- Feeding America is leading coordinated national action

Channels:

- National media interviews
- Thought leadership and op-eds
- Press briefings and major speaking engagements

Tone: Clear, authoritative, accessible

9. Broader Hunger Movement and Advocates

Objective: Strengthen alignment and shared narrative across the field

Context: The broader hunger movement includes national and local organizations, advocates, and coalitions. While not immediately sensitive to leadership transitions, alignment across the field strengthens long-term impact and public understanding.

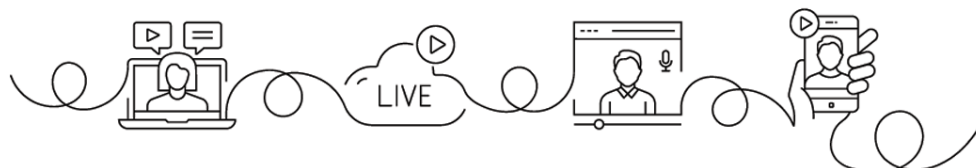
Key Messages:

- Shared mission and collective impact
- Importance of sustained visibility and engagement
- Importance of public understanding and belief
- Reinforcement of hunger as a solvable issue

Channels:

- Sector convenings and collaborations
- Thought leadership platforms
- Joint communications opportunities

Tone: Collaborative, unifying, forward-looking



Social media can bring out the ~~worst~~ in people.
BEST

Channel Strategy and Cadence

A disciplined channel strategy ensures that leadership communication is coordinated and purposeful across audiences.

Each channel serves a distinct role. Effectiveness depends not on volume, but on clarity of purpose, consistency of message, and coordination across platforms.

1. CEO Direct Communications

Role: Establish a consistent leadership voice and reinforce priorities across internal and network audiences

Context: In a distributed organization, the CEO's direct voice is one of the most powerful tools for alignment. Regular communication reduces uncertainty, reinforces direction, and creates a sense of shared momentum.

Approach:

- Establish a predictable cadence (weekly or biweekly)
- Keep messages focused, concise, and consistent with core themes
- Use communications to:
 - Reinforce priorities
 - Reflect on what is being heard across the network
- Recognize contributions and impact
- Maintain regular communications with the Board and Board leadership to reinforce alignment and provide visibility into priorities and progress.

Channels:

- Email messages to staff and food bank network
- Short video messages when appropriate
- Internal platforms and leadership updates

Cadence: Weekly or biweekly, with additional messages tied to key moments

Design principles:

- Clarity over volume
- Consistency over variation
- Leadership voice that is steady, accessible, and grounded

2. Internal Communications Infrastructure

Role: Ensure alignment, clarity, and coordination across teams and functions

Context: Internal communications is the mechanism through which strategy becomes execution. Without coordination, messages fragment and priorities lose clarity.

Approach:

- Align communications across:
 - Executive leadership
 - Communications team
 - Development and partnerships

- Government relations
- Establish clear internal messaging guidance tied to leadership themes

Channels:

- Leadership meetings and briefings
- Internal newsletters and updates
- Cross-functional coordination channels

Cadence:

- Weekly leadership alignment
- Regular internal updates tied to CEO messaging

Design principles:

- Alignment before amplification
- Shared language across teams
- Clear connection between strategy and execution

3. Donor and Partner Communications

Role: Reinforce confidence, maintain engagement, and support fundraising continuity

Context: During leadership transition, donor communication must balance reassurance with forward momentum. Messages should reinforce stability while creating opportunities for deeper engagement.

Approach:

- Align CEO messaging with development outreach
- Segment communications by donor type:
 - Major donors
 - Corporate and foundation partners
 - Broad individual supporters
- Integrate leadership voice into key fundraising moments

Channels:

- Direct CEO outreach (calls, meetings)
- Targeted email communications and updates
- Donor briefings and convenings
- Campaign communications

Cadence:

- Immediate outreach in first 30 days
- Ongoing updates tied to milestones and campaigns
- Monthly or milestone-based donor communications

Design principles:

- Personalization for top-tier donors
- Consistency across development messaging
- Clear linkage between impact and support

4. **Earned Media and Thought Leadership**

Role: Establish national visibility, shape the narrative on hunger, and position Denis as a credible voice

Context: Media engagement amplifies leadership but must be timed carefully. Visibility should follow internal alignment and stakeholder stabilization, not precede it.

Approach:

- Develop a targeted media introduction strategy
- Prioritize quality over quantity of engagements
- Focus on platforms that reinforce credibility and reach key audiences

Leadership engagement with media should reflect a posture of openness, responsiveness, and confidence. Early and direct engagement, including in complex or evolving situations, reinforces credibility and trust.

This approach prioritizes engaging proactively, providing clarity where possible, and addressing questions directly, rather than delaying engagement or allowing uncertainty to shape the narrative.

Channels:

- National and sector media interviews
- Op-eds and authored pieces
- Broadcast and digital media appearances

Cadence:

- Initial introduction in first 60 days
- Ongoing engagement tied to milestones, events, and priorities

Design principles:

- Message discipline across all appearances
- Alignment with organizational priorities
- Balance between visibility and substance
- Transparent and responsive, even in complex or evolving situations
- Proactive rather than reactive in media engagement
- Grounded in clarity, accuracy and credibility

5. **Digital and Owned Platforms**

Role: Provide a consistent, accessible platform for leadership communication, storytelling, and engagement across audiences.

Context: Owned platforms, including website, email, social media, and emerging audio formats, provide continuity and control during a leadership transition. They are essential for reinforcing leadership voice, maintaining alignment, and reaching broad audiences, including donors, supporters, and the food bank network.

These channels also allow leadership to be experienced in a more direct and human way, complementing formal communications and stakeholder engagement.

Approach:

- Align all digital channels with core leadership themes and priorities
- Use owned platforms to reinforce:
 - Organizational impact
 - Stories from food banks, communities, and neighbors
 - Leadership voice and perspective
 - Introduce leadership voice in formats that are accessible, conversational and aligned with mission and tone.

Channels:

- Website updates and CEO messaging
- Email newsletters and campaign communications
- Social media platforms (organizational and CEO-supported presence)
- Short-form video and storytelling content
- Periodic audio or podcast series (e.g., “At the Table”) featuring conversations with food bank leaders, neighbors, partners, stakeholders, and inspiring innovators.
- Story-driven content featuring “Voices of Our Neighbors” across digital, video, and audio formats.

Cadence:

- Regular updates aligned with communications calendar (e.g., Hunger Action Month)
- Increased activity around key milestones, engagements, and campaigns
- Select, intentional use of audio or conversational formats tied to leadership priorities

Design principles:

- Consistency of tone and message across platforms
- Authentic and conversational, but disciplined
- Mission-centered, not personality-driven
- Amplifies voices from across the network
- Fully integrated with fundraising, partnerships, and communications strategy
- Centers lived experience with dignity and authenticity
- Avoids transactional and episodic storytelling
- Connects individual stories to broader system impact

6. Convenings and Strategic Engagement

Role: Create opportunities to align stakeholders, reinforce leadership presence, and elevate Feeding America’s role as a national convener

Context: Convenings are high-impact moments that bring together multiple audiences. When designed intentionally, they reinforce relationships and create shared understanding.

Approach:

- Use convenings to:
 - Listen and gather insight
 - Align stakeholders
 - Reinforce leadership priorities

Examples include:

- Food bank listening tour engagements
- Corporate and foundation partner summits
- National speaking platforms and sector convenings
- Congressional briefings or receptions with committee members and staff

Cadence:

- Scheduled strategically across the 90-day period
- Aligned with phases of listening, engagement, and momentum

Design principles:

- Purpose-driven, not event-driven
- Inclusive and representative of the network
- Integrated with broader communications and engagement strategy

7. **Government and Policy Communications**

Role: Support engagement with policymakers and reinforce Feeding America's role as a trusted partner

Context: Policy communication must be coordinated, consistent, and aligned with government relations strategy. It reinforces credibility and supports long-term impact.

Approach:

- Align all messaging with government relations team
- Ensure consistency across:
 - CEO messaging
 - Policy communications
 - Stakeholder engagement

Channels:

- Direct briefings and meetings
- Policy communications and materials
- Participation in Congressional and policy convenings

Cadence:

- Ongoing engagement aligned with legislative and policy calendar

Design principles:

- Nonpartisan, solutions-oriented tone
- Clarity and credibility
- Alignment with broader organizational messaging

This channel strategy ensures that leadership communication is coordinated, consistent, and aligned across all audiences, reinforcing clarity, confidence, and momentum throughout the first 90 days.

Communications Cadence (First 90 Days)

The following cadence provides a consistent rhythm for leadership communication, ensuring alignment across audiences while reinforcing visibility, confidence, and momentum:

- Weekly or biweekly CEO message to staff and food bank network
- Ongoing stakeholder outreach across all phases
- Initial national media introduction within the first 60 days
- Regular visibility moments tied to milestones and priorities
- Consistent alignment across all channels and audiences

Integration with Fundraising and Partnerships

Communications should directly support development efforts by:

- Reinforcing impact and urgency
- Strengthening donor confidence during transition
- Aligning messaging with partnership priorities
- Supporting engagement with top-tier funders

Alignment with Broader National Narrative

Feeding America's communications should connect:

- Operational impact at the local level
- National scale and coordination
- A broader public understanding that hunger is solvable

This creates the conditions for sustained public support, policy alignment, and long-term funding.

Measures of Effectiveness

Success in the first 90 days is reflected not only in activity, but in visible alignment, stakeholder confidence, and consistency of leadership voice across the system.

- Internal alignment and clarity of messaging
- Positive feedback from food bank network following listening phase
- Partner confidence and engagement levels
- Media coverage and visibility
- Consistency of messaging across channels
- No material donor attrition during transition

Role of Advisory Support

Advisory support, if helpful, can be applied selectively during periods where additional coordination, alignment, or messaging clarity would benefit leadership and the organization, while keeping Feeding America's internal teams fully in the lead.

Engagement can be scaled based on leadership and team needs, from targeted support during key moments to limited-term coordination across the transition period.

The objective is to provide additional capacity and strategic alignment where helpful, while ensuring that internal teams remain fully empowered and in the lead.

Support may include:

- Developing and refining messaging in alignment with leadership priorities
- Supporting alignment of communications across audiences and functions
- Assisting with coordination of stakeholder engagement during key moments
- Reinforcing consistency and clarity across channels and communications

The focus is on enabling execution, reinforcing alignment, and supporting leadership and teams during a period where clarity and coordination are critical.



Phase I: First 30 Days

Listen, Learn, and Establish Leadership Presence

Primary Goal

Build credibility, gather insight, and establish a clear and trusted leadership presence across the organization and network.

Early Leadership Discipline

During the first 30 days, avoid:

- Announcing major structural or strategic changes
- Over-indexing on external visibility before internal alignment
- Introducing new initiatives before completing listening and synthesis

This reinforces credibility and prevents misalignment during transition.

1. Structured Listening and Discovery

A well-designed listening effort is one of the most important signals a new CEO can send. It demonstrates respect for the network, creates space for honest input, and provides a grounded understanding of current realities.

Particular attention should be given to hearing directly from individuals and families served, reinforcing the role of lived experience in shaping leadership understanding.

In a federated system like Feeding America, listening is not symbolic. It is operational. It reveals where alignment exists, where friction is building, and where opportunities are emerging.

Actions:

- Conduct a structured listening tour with a representative cross-section of food banks
- Prioritize diversity in geography, scale, and operating conditions
- Engage in small-group and one-on-one conversations to encourage candor
- Include national office leadership, Washington-based teams, and key functional leads
- Where possible, incorporate perspectives from frontline staff and community partners

Focus areas:

- Current operating pressures and constraints
- Relationship between food banks and the national office
- Fundraising dynamics and partner expectations
- Perceptions of alignment and shared priorities
- Opportunities for innovation and growth

Outputs:

- A clear and concise “What We Heard” synthesis distributed internally and shared in summary form with the network
- Identification of recurring themes, risks, and opportunities
- Early insight into where alignment is strong and where it needs reinforcement

2. Leadership Narrative and Core Messaging Platform

In the early days, stakeholders are not just listening to what is said. They are interpreting how leadership thinks, what it values, and how it intends to lead. A clear leadership narrative, supported by a defined core message platform, provides stability during transition. It ensures that communication is not reactive or fragmented, and that all audiences hear a consistent and intentional message.

Actions:

- Define a small number of core leadership themes that will anchor all communications
- Develop and operationalize a core message platform that can be used across internal, network, and external audiences
- Prepare initial communications, including CEO introduction, internal messages, and stakeholder talking points

Key considerations:

- Position leadership as being in service to the network
- Reinforce continuity while signaling forward momentum
- Establish tone as clear, steady, and inclusive

Outputs:

- Established core message platform and leadership narrative for the first 90 days
- Consistent language and tone across communications

3. Early Stakeholder Stabilization

Leadership transitions create natural uncertainty among partners and funders. Early, direct engagement helps prevent hesitation and reinforces confidence. This is less about delivering new strategy and more about reinforcing trust and continuity.

Actions:

- Personally reach out to top corporate and foundation partners
- Engage key policymakers and national influencers
- Coordinate closely with development leadership to ensure alignment
- Engage Board of Directors leadership early to reinforce alignment, expectations, and communication approach

Messaging priorities:

- Continuity of mission and execution
- Confidence in leadership and direction
- Commitment to partnership and shared outcomes

Outputs:

- Updated stakeholder engagement map
- Reinforced confidence among key external audiences

4. Internal Alignment and Communication Rhythm

Internal alignment is the foundation for everything that follows. Without it, messaging fragments and confidence erodes. A predictable communication rhythm helps stabilize the organization and signals leadership accessibility and transparency.

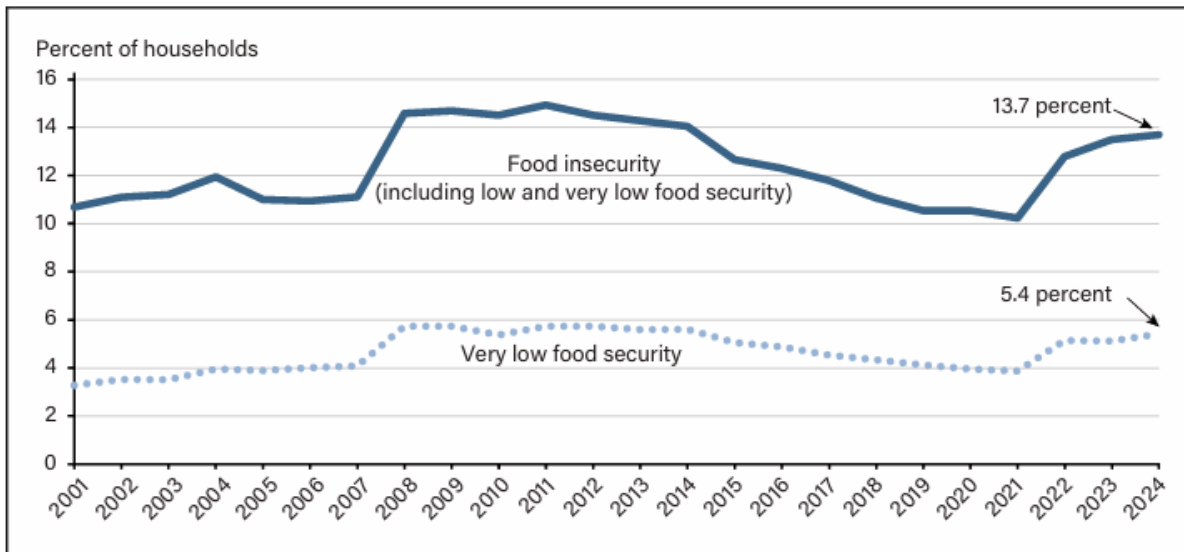
Actions:

- Deliver an initial all-staff message that sets tone and expectations
- Establish a regular cadence of CEO communication (“Topline Messages”)
- Engage directly with senior leadership and functional teams

Outputs:

- Clear and consistent internal communication rhythm
- Early alignment around leadership tone, priorities, and expectations

Prevalence of food insecurity in 2024 similar to 2023 prevalence



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey Food Security Supplements data.

**Public agreement is strong.
Public demand is not.**



86%

86% of Americans agree:

“In the United States of America, no one should go hungry.”

Source: *National Survey on Hunger*, Food Research & Action Center, 2014

Phase II: Days 30–60

Align, Engage, and Signal Direction

Primary Goal

Translate insight into direction and reinforce alignment across the network and stakeholders.

This phase often benefits from clear coordination and consistent signaling across the system to ensure alignment is visible and sustained.

1. Network Engagement and Feedback Integration

The transition from listening to action must be visible. Sharing what has been heard, and how it is being interpreted, reinforces credibility and signals that leadership is responsive and grounded in the realities of the network.

This is the point where food banks begin to see their input reflected in leadership direction.

Actions:

- Share “What We Heard” findings with the network
- Validate and refine themes through continued engagement
- Identify areas of strong alignment and areas requiring attention

Outputs:

- Shared understanding of priorities across the network
- Increased trust in leadership responsiveness
- Clear signal that listening is informing action

2. Leadership Communication Cadence

Consistency in communication becomes a primary driver of alignment in this phase. A predictable cadence reinforces priorities, reduces uncertainty, and ensures that all audiences are moving in the same direction.

This is where leadership voice becomes a stabilizing force across the system. At VA, the weekly Topline Messages was effective during the COVID pandemic for clear, consistent, and confident messaging.

Actions:

- Launch weekly or biweekly CEO messages to staff and the food bank network
- Align messaging across internal, network, and external channels
- Reinforce priorities, highlight impact, and recognize contributions

Outputs:

- A visible and consistent leadership presence
- Stronger alignment across internal and external audiences
- Reduced fragmentation of messaging across the organization

3. Establish Leadership Voice Across Platforms

By this stage, leadership presence should extend beyond internal and stakeholder communications into more visible and accessible formats. Leadership voice should now be experienced consistently across the organization, the food bank network, and external audiences. The objective is not increased volume, but greater connection, clarity, and visibility.

Approach

- Extend leadership voice across digital and owned platforms in a way that is:
 - Consistent with core messaging
 - Aligned with organizational tone
 - Reflective of partnership and listening
- Use accessible, conversational formats to:
 - Reflect insights from the listening tour
 - Elevate voices from food banks and communities
 - Reinforce leadership priorities
- Execute through a simple, disciplined content calendar managed by the communications team to ensure consistency, timing, and alignment across platforms

Key Applications

- Short-form video or written reflections tied to key themes
- Select, disciplined use of social media to reinforce visibility during key moments
- Periodic audio or podcast content (e.g., “At the Table”) featuring:
 - Food bank leaders
 - Frontline staff
 - Corporate and community partners
- Integration of leadership voice into existing digital and communications channels

Social Media (Leadership Use)

Social media is most effective as a selective visibility tool, not a high-volume channel. It should:

- Reinforce leadership presence during key moments (site visits, convenings, announcements)
- Amplify voices across the network rather than focus on the CEO
- Reflect leadership tone in a concise and accessible way

Execution should be coordinated closely with the communications team to ensure alignment with messaging and priorities.

Design Principles

- Authentic, grounded, and mission-focused
- Consistent with organizational voice, not personality-driven
- Reflects listening and shared perspective
- Fully aligned with broader communications strategy

Outputs

- Visible and consistent leadership presence across platforms
- Stronger connection with stakeholders, supporters, and the public
- Clear alignment between leadership voice and organizational priorities

4. Elevating Voices of Our Neighbors

A critical component of leadership voice is ensuring that the experiences of individuals and communities served are visible, respected, and integrated into how the organization communicates and leads.

This builds on Feeding America's existing "Voices of Our Neighbors" approach and reinforces it as a central element of leadership presence.

Approach:

- Incorporate voices of neighbors into leadership communications and engagements
- Elevate these perspectives across digital, media, and convening platforms
- Ensure stories reflect dignity, context, and broader systemic realities

Strategies to consider:

- Include community voices in:
 - Digital storytelling and social media
 - Podcast or audio conversations (e.g., "*At the Table*")
 - National media and speaking opportunities
- Highlight stories during food bank visits and listening tour reflections
- Connect individual experiences to broader themes of access, partnership, and solvability

Design considerations:

- Center dignity, not need
- Avoid performative or episodic storytelling
- Ensure representation reflects the diversity of communities served
- Align stories with broader narrative and policy context

Outputs:

- Stronger connection between leadership and lived experience
- More authentic and credible public narrative
- Reinforced alignment between mission, messaging, and impact

5. Corporate and Foundation Engagement

With initial stability established, this phase shifts toward deeper engagement with institutional partners. These stakeholders are looking for clarity of direction, continued confidence, and signals of forward momentum. Engagement should move from reassurance to alignment.

Actions:

- Convene a national corporate and foundation partner roundtable or summit
- Conduct targeted follow-up with major funders
- Align messaging to connect impact with emerging leadership priorities

Outputs:

- Strengthened partner confidence and engagement
- Reinforced alignment between leadership direction and funding priorities
- Increased readiness for continued or expanded investment

6. National Visibility and Public Positioning

This phase establishes Denis as a national voice on hunger, while reinforcing Feeding America's leadership role. Visibility should be deliberate and aligned with internal and stakeholder messaging, not reactive.

External presence should reflect clarity, credibility, and purpose.

Actions:

- Execute a targeted national media introduction strategy
- Participate in a National Press Club appearance or equivalent platform
- Engage selectively with national and sector media

Messaging focus:

- Hunger is solvable
- Importance of national and local partnership
- Feeding America's role in leading coordinated, national impact

Outputs:

- Established public leadership presence
- Clear and consistent national narrative
- Increased visibility aligned with organizational priorities

7. Alignment with the Broader Hunger Narrative

Feeding America's operational effectiveness is strengthened when supported by a clear and consistent public understanding of hunger. This phase ensures that Feeding America's day-to-day impact is consistently connected to a clear national narrative on hunger.

This is where operational impact begins to connect to national understanding.

Actions:

- Align messaging to reinforce public understanding of hunger as solvable
- Connect network impact with broader visibility and engagement efforts
- Ensure consistency across communications, partnerships, and public positioning

Outputs:

- Stronger connection between operations and public narrative
- Increased coherence across messaging and engagement efforts
- Reinforced positioning of hunger as a shared national issue

8. Congressional Engagement and Convening

As initial Congressional relationships are established, a structured convening can reinforce Feeding America's role as a trusted national partner and create a shared space for engagement across offices and committees.

This is not simply an event, but a strategic moment to align policymakers, reinforce credibility, and position Feeding America as a convener on hunger at a national level.

Strategies to consider:

- Host a **Congressional briefing and reception in Washington** for relevant committee members and senior staff
- Coordinate closely with the government relations team to ensure alignment with ongoing engagement
- Invite a curated group including:
 - House and Senate Agriculture Committee members and staff
 - Appropriations Committee staff (nutrition and human services)
 - Key bipartisan champions of hunger and nutrition programs
 - Select partners to reinforce cross-sector collaboration

Messaging focus:

- Feeding America's national scale and local impact
- The role of federal programs in supporting food access
- Partnership with communities and food banks nationwide
- Hunger as a solvable issue with coordinated effort

Design considerations:

- Maintain a nonpartisan, mission-focused, and solutions-oriented tone
- Emphasize voices from the food bank network, not just national leadership
- Position Denis as a convener and listener

Critical sequencing guidance:

- Do not host in the first 30 days
- Ensure:
 - Initial meetings with key committee leaders and staff have occurred
 - Messaging is aligned internally and with the network
 - Government relations team is fully synchronized

Execution principles:

- Structure as a **working convening, not a social reception**
- Include:
 - Brief framing remarks
 - Clear takeaway message
 - Intentional guest list
 - Defined follow-up plan

Strengthen impact by tying to:

- A "What We Heard" summary from the listening tour
- A relevant policy or legislative moment
- A broader national narrative on hunger

Outputs:

- Strengthened bipartisan relationships
- Increased visibility with Congressional members and staff
- Reinforced positioning as a trusted partner in policy and implementation

Phase III: Days 60–90

Define Direction and Build Momentum

Primary Goal

Convert alignment into forward momentum, clearly define direction, and establish visible progress across the organization, network, and stakeholder ecosystem. At this stage, disciplined execution and alignment across teams and stakeholders become critical to sustaining momentum.

1. Define and Communicate Near-Term Priorities

By this stage, stakeholders expect clarity on direction. Priorities should reflect what has been learned, signal focus, and demonstrate that leadership is translating insight into action. This is not about launching a full strategy. It is about defining a clear, credible near-term agenda.

Actions:

- Identify a focused set of near-term organizational priorities
- Align senior leadership team and Board of Directors around these priorities prior to broader communication
- Translate priorities into clear messaging for:
 - Staff
 - Food bank network
 - Donors and partners
- Integrate priorities into communications, fundraising, and external engagement

Outputs:

- Clearly articulated leadership agenda
- Shared understanding of direction across audiences
- Alignment between strategy, messaging, and execution

2. Strengthen System-Wide Alignment

As priorities become clear, consistency across the system becomes critical. Misalignment at this stage can dilute momentum and create confusion.

This phase ensures that the organization, network, and partners are moving forward together.

Actions:

- Identify and address gaps in messaging and coordination across teams
- Reinforce integration across communications, development and partnerships, and government relations
- Ensure consistent messaging between national office and food banks
- Provide guidance and tools to support alignment across the network

Outputs:

- Improved coordination across functions and teams
- Consistent messaging across national and local levels
- Stronger alignment between strategy and execution

3. Sustain Communications and Visibility

Momentum must be reinforced through continued visibility and consistent communication. This phase ensures that leadership presence remains steady and aligned with priorities.

Visibility should now reflect confidence, clarity, and forward direction.

Actions:

- Maintain CEO communication cadence across staff and network
- Establish a rhythm of media engagement tied to milestones and priorities
- Continue stakeholder outreach across:
 - Donors
 - Corporate and foundation partners
 - Policymakers
- Align communications with fundraising and policy priorities

Outputs:

- Sustained leadership visibility and presence
- Reinforced confidence among stakeholders
- Continued alignment across audiences and channels

4. Activate Donor and Partner Momentum

With stability established and direction defined, this phase shifts toward activation. Donors and partners should now see clear opportunities to engage and invest in what comes next.

This is where communication and fundraising fully converge.

Actions:

- Integrate CEO voice into fundraising campaigns and donor communications
- Re-engage top donors with updated priorities and opportunities
- Expand communication to broader donor base, including monthly supporters
- Align development strategy with emerging organizational direction

Outputs:

- Increased donor engagement and responsiveness
- Strengthened alignment between leadership priorities and fundraising efforts
- Positioning for sustained or expanded investment

5. Advance Policy and Stakeholder Engagement

Building on earlier outreach and convening, this phase reinforces Feeding America's role as a trusted partner in policy and implementation.

Engagement should now reflect continuity, credibility, and forward direction.

Actions:

- Continue structured engagement with Congressional committees and staff
- Follow up on initial meetings and convenings, including any Congressional briefing or reception

- Align policy messaging with organizational priorities and communications strategy
- Coordinate closely with government relations to ensure consistency

Outputs:

- Strengthened relationships with policymakers and staff
- Reinforced credibility and trust in Feeding America’s role
- Alignment between policy engagement and broader organizational direction

6. Prepare for Long-Term Strategy

The final phase of the first 90 days transitions from onboarding to forward planning. Insights gathered throughout the process should now inform longer-term strategic direction.

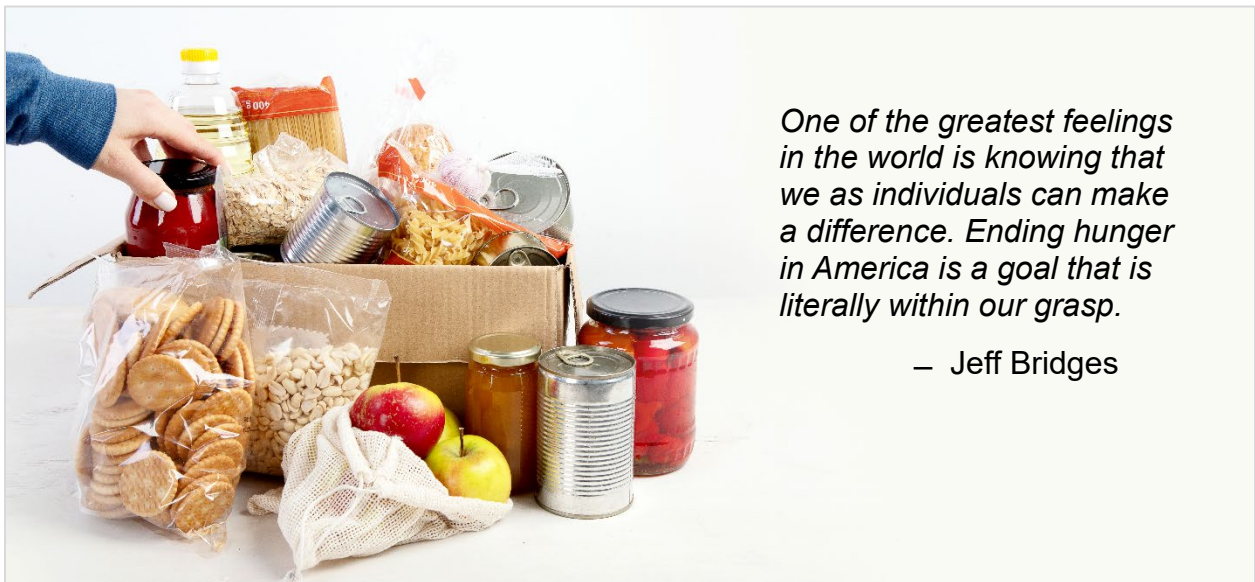
This ensures continuity between early leadership actions and future strategy.

Actions:

- Identify areas requiring deeper strategic development
- Engage Board and senior leadership in forward-looking discussions
- Integrate insights from:
 - Listening tour
 - Stakeholder engagement
 - Network feedback
- Begin shaping longer-term strategic priorities

Outputs:

- Clear transition from onboarding to strategic planning
- Shared understanding of next-phase priorities
- Strong foundation for long-term growth and impact



Positioning After 90 Days

At the conclusion of the first 90 days, leadership is clearly established, alignment is strengthened across the system, and the organization is positioned to move forward with clarity and momentum.

Feeding America is operating with shared priorities, reinforced confidence among stakeholders, and a visible, consistent leadership presence.

Leadership Foundation Established

- A clear and credible leadership narrative is understood across staff, the food bank network, and external stakeholders
- Strong alignment is established across Feeding America's national organization and distributed network
- Confidence is reinforced among corporate partners, foundations, and major donors
- A visible and credible national leadership presence is established across media, policy, and public engagement
- Near-term priorities are clearly defined, communicated, and integrated into execution
- A strong foundation is in place for long-term strategic direction and growth

The first 90 days establish not only direction, but how leadership is experienced across the organization, the network, and the nation.



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. – Margaret Mead