Chief Research & Innovation Officer
Feeding America
Chicago, Illinois

About Feeding America

As the nation's largest nonprofit and domestic hunger-relief organization, Feeding America is at the forefront of the fight to end hunger. With an annual revenue of $5.15 billion (2023), which includes 4.7 billion pounds of donated food, Feeding America engages our country and communities in the fight to end hunger on an unprecedented scale, serving as a catalyst at both the national and local levels, reaching every county in the United States. The work is not just about providing meals. On the journey to achieving its mission, Feeding America addresses barriers so everyone can thrive.

Specifically, Feeding America’s work includes:

1. Addressing the immediate needs of people facing hunger through the sourcing and distribution of food.
2. Working to reduce rates of food insecurity through innovative programs that bundle food with other critical resources such as healthcare, housing, and economic mobility.
3. Catalyzing the movement to end hunger through policy advocacy and systems change.

A People-Centered Approach: Through it all, Feeding America keeps the neighbors it serves at the center of its vision of a hunger-free America. Feeding America is deeply committed to meeting the unique nutritional and health needs of individuals and their communities by leveraging an approach that is people-centered, responsive, and adaptive.

The Network: The organization is a nationwide network of over 200 food banks, which distribute food through 60,000 partner food pantries and meals programs. Together, the Feeding America network provides more than 5 billion meals to tens of millions of people across the United States and supports programs that improve food security for the families they serve.

Rising Demand: In a country that wastes billions of pounds of food each year, it is shocking that almost anyone in America goes hungry. Yet, there are 44 million people who don’t have enough to eat – that is 1 in 7 individuals, and 44 million too many. Each year, more than 13 million children (that is 1 in 5) and 5.5 million seniors struggle with hunger.
In 2020, the COVID crisis devastated individuals and families and food insecurity grew. The average increase in the number of clients reported by food banks grew by an astounding 60%. Since then – driven by record inflation, historically high food costs, reduced federal assistance, and more – demand has continued to grow. Through it all, Feeding America and its partners have continued the march to solve hunger, moving quickly and decisively to implement multi-prong strategies that include new systems, distribution, and supply chain, and leveraging and expanding partnerships.

**Looking Ahead and the Critical Role of Research & Innovation:** Feeding America has set the bold aspiration that by 2030 every community and person within it has access to the food and resources that they say they desire and need to thrive; that the food insecurity rate is 5% and disparities by race and place are cut in half. Key to achieving that goal is innovative research-and-evaluation-informed programs and partnerships.

**Research:** Feeding America believes that solving hunger requires a thorough understanding of the problem and is committed to exploring how food insecurity is influenced by drivers including poverty, unemployment, racism, structural oppression, and more. In support of that work, the Feeding America team has a unique opportunity to conduct research that both uncovers and helps to test or prove out innovative programmatic approaches to addressing food insecurity.

Released annually, Feeding America’s landmark study *Map the Meal Gap* looks at overall and child hunger down to the county level. New in 2022, it also includes estimates for select racial and ethnic groups. Another example of Feeding America’s work includes the *Elevating Voices: Insights Report*, which provides a firsthand snapshot of the experiences, concerns, and ideas of our neighbors who are facing hunger in the U.S.

Learn more about Feeding America’s Research [here](#).

**Innovation:** Recognizing that hunger is a complex problem, Feeding America is focused on co-creating – in partnership with people experiencing food insecurity and network partners – innovative initiatives and external partnerships that can be implemented at scale to improve access to the charitable food system, advancing health equity and outcomes, and increasing economic mobility to alleviate food insecurity.

One such example includes the ‘Food is Medicine’ program, launched in 2019, in which food banks collaborate with health care partners to conduct universal food insecurity screenings and interventions. The effort helps connect people facing hunger to food distribution programs to ensure they have access to healthy food options. In January 2024 it was announced that Feeding America will join the U.S. Department of Health and
Human Services in a partnership that will advance Food is Medicine work to ensure everyone has access to the nutritious food and resources needed to improve health. You can read more about this specific initiative here.

Additional examples of Feeding America’s innovation work include Stand By Me, a program that FANO helped support with the Food Bank of Delaware, and the Workforce Development Initiative, a program that helps low-income individuals gain expanded access to resources necessary to acquire new skills and connections that result in higher income employment.

Feeding America will be strategically focused on advancing and elevating bodies of work with the potential for the greatest impact, in an unwavering pursuit to end hunger in America. Through those efforts, Feeding America will continue to serve as a thought leader and pioneer, filling the gap left by federal nutrition programs unable to meet the needs of people facing hunger each day.

For more information, please visit Feeding America’s website.

The Opportunity

At this moment of tremendous opportunity, Feeding America is seeking an inspirational, transformational, dynamic, and deeply committed leader to serve as the Chief Research & Innovation Officer. Recognizing the synergies that exist between Research and Innovation, this is a newly scoped role for the organization and represents a unique opportunity with the potential to positively impact tens of millions of lives each year.

The Chief Research & Innovation Officer leads the development of Feeding America’s research and innovation strategy; focusing on developing a deeper understanding of hunger, how to design effective solutions for ending hunger in America, and how to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of Feeding America’s work. They lead, inspire, and coach the research and innovation department which works cross-functionally to translate and evaluate research, providing insights for the public, policy makers, donors, Feeding America National Office teams, and Network members to foster awareness and support the work to build a movement to end hunger.

The Chief Research & Innovation Officer is responsible for ensuring that Feeding America’s research strategy, program innovation, and systems change work is guided by the engagement and/or input of people facing hunger and partners including other social service organizations, charitable foundations, and network food banks. They will work to ensure that the overall Network approach to research and innovation is coordinated and leverages the best available insights and methodologies.
They serve as a member of the Feeding America Executive Team providing enterprise leadership to ensure Feeding America lives into its mission, fulfills its commitment to embracing equity, diversity and inclusion and centers neighbors facing hunger in all Feeding America does. As a member of the Executive Team, this leader will be responsible for surfacing promising programmatic opportunities, and laying a strong, enterprise-wide foundation for testing, piloting, implementing, and expanding these programs and approaches.

The role reports to the President & Chief Operating Officer and leads the Research & Innovation team of 25 professionals (four direct reports include: Director, Initiative Evaluation & Impact; Vice President, Neighbor & Service Insights & Analytics; VP, Food Security & Wellbeing Research & Insights; and VP, Innovative Initiatives & Partnerships).

Key responsibilities of the Chief Research & Innovation Officer include:

- Lead the design, development, and implementation of the organization’s research strategy related to food insecurity, health, nutrition, and related social and economic issues and policies with a focus on sharing insights and developing evaluation and measurement methodology that support the work of network food banks. This includes oversight for the development and execution of various research projects to enhance the collection and application of data to inform the work of the national organization and network food banks.

- Work with internal partners including Communication and Community Engagement, Government Relations, Development, and network food banks to translate research and evaluation to external audiences to aid in strategy, advocacy, and decision-making. Establish and nurture a network of key academic researchers/institutions, donors, government agencies, and relevant non-profit partners to promote visibility of food insecurity, the charitable response, and related hunger and nutrition issues in the public dialogue.

- Lead strategies which enable the collection of data and insights from individuals engaging with network services. Work cross functionally to sponsor associated technology solutions as part of the Technology Planning Executive Sub-Committee (TPES). Determine data needs of the national organization and Network and prioritize technology and visualization tools, insights, data and analytics that will help increase access, improve quality of service, remove barriers – reducing disparities – and, in the future, be able to connect people directly with additional social services.

- Ensure that the innovation and neighbor insights approach at Feeding America is grounded in human centered design and engages people experiencing food insecurity and network partners in defining, designing, developing, deploying, and scaling new capabilities, programs, and services. Assemble and host “neighbor” panels consisting of people engaging with network services to be in deeper relationship and ensure a safe environment for individuals to share their needs and desires. Insist that the highest
standards are in place to ensure agency and compensation for individuals, data privacy, integrity, and transparency of data methods used.

- With an understanding of innovation and research work happening across the Feeding America Network, identify and develop innovative initiatives and external partnerships which have the potential to sustainably scale in the areas of improving access to the charitable food system, advancing health equity and outcomes, and increasing economic mobility to alleviate food insecurity. Lead a process for surfacing and sharing network innovation and co-create, evaluate, and prioritize new, innovative solutions which can transform how individuals experience the charitable food system. Ensure the process includes broad project management principles including identifying roles/solution owners, key success metrics (gates) to move the innovation project forward, timelines, budget management, etc.

- Develop strategic partnerships in project development and cultivate broad enterprise and Network understanding and support for scaling innovations that have demonstrated pilot success.

- Develop effective processes and approaches for the Research & Innovation team to successfully “hand off” initiatives to other business owner organizations – both inside and outside of FANO – to advance ultimate scaling efforts. In support of this work, this leader must have the ability to ensure early stakeholder alignment, demonstrate strong project management skills (stage-gating), and have the ability to leverage shared goals, budgets, and resources.

- In partnership with the Chief Development Officer and other Executive Team members, identify and cultivate relationships with public and private sector organizations for potential funding and partnership opportunities. Ensure the Research & Innovation team actively collaborates with the Development Team on donor cultivation conversations, funding proposal development and impact/progress reporting on funded projects related to donor expectations and grant requirements.

- Act as a strong steward of financial and people resources, in both expense management as well as exploring and leveraging fundraising potential; serve as a key partner to The Development team.

- Coach, mentor and guide a team that includes deep experts across a variety of disciplines fostering a healthy and inclusive team culture and relationships. Ensure this team shares a common vision and purpose and clearly understands their role in providing expertise, guidance and support to the Feeding America National Organization, Network partners and other key stakeholders.
Foundational Principals

Candidates must meet the following foundational requirements:

**A Passion for the Mission**

This leader will:

- Demonstrate a commitment to Feeding America’s mission through word and action.
- Have a deep commitment to keeping people facing hunger at the center of their work and strive to translate this commitment into action on a daily basis.
- Bring a demonstrated understanding of hunger, nutrition, food insecurity, the social determinants of health, and related economic and policy issues in the United States combined with a foundational knowledge of human centered design principles and methods.
- Be willing to advocate for people facing hunger and serve as an ambassador for Feeding America inside and outside of work.
- Be driven by the profound opportunity to join the largest nonprofit in the country and move the needle for millions of people experiencing food insecurity by playing a key role in defining how Feeding America reaches its bold goals.
- Be an individual of unquestioned integrity, ethics, and values; someone who can be trusted without reservation.

**A Commitment to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion**

This leader will:

- Demonstrate a personal commitment to valuing different backgrounds and life experiences through word and action.
- Take personal actions to build an inclusive culture that ensures everyone can fully contribute based on their unique talents, skills, and perspectives and feels welcomed and valued.
- Commit to driving equitable solutions to address root cause issues by incorporating an equity framework in their daily work.
- Be committed to continuous personal EDI development.
- Bring a commitment to ensuring that research activities help identify and close food access and food insecurity disparities experienced by historically marginalized communities.
• Bring a commitment to ensuring that the programmatic approaches the Research &
Innovation team ideates, tests, pilots, implements, and expands prioritize resources to
the people and places most disparately impacted by food insecurity and hunger.

Candidate Profile

While it is understood that no candidate will offer every desired skill, quality, and characteristic,
the following offers a detailed, aspirational view of the ideal candidate profile:

A Systems Thinker and Expert in Research, Initiative Management, and Innovation

This leader will:
• Be energized by ambiguity, and ‘thinking big and outside the box’ to develop effective
strategies for tackling complex issues.
• Have a track record of leading research organizations/centers overseeing research
designs (quantitative and qualitative, primary and secondary analysis, policy evaluation,
etc.), complex-large scale research projects, data collection-analysis and program
evaluation and assessment. Must include experience with large, complex, organizations
ideally with experience in social services, poverty relief and/or social determinants of
health and other life outcomes.
• Have meaningful experience leading or working closely with innovation and/or program
or solution development for large, complex, organizations to shape expansive thinking
that is also practical and executable. Ideally this experience includes innovation in a not-
for-profit social services/poverty relief context.
• Be a data-informed and impact-driven, creative thinker, effectively and constructively
leading Feeding America to consider new and innovative approaches to targeting and
engaging new constituents and partners.
• Have a solid grasp on how technology can advance research and innovation and enable
implementation of key strategies, with a working knowledge of and experience with
mobile and digital platform development.
• Be an exceptional advocate and influencer, able to communicate and amplify the
importance and transformational possibilities resulting from the work of the Research &
Innovation team – both internally and externally.
A Humble Leader Committed to Co-Creation

This leader will:

- Have a low-ego and deep belief that the best ideas result from engaging others and co-creating solutions.
- Serve as a natural galvanizer, able to thoughtfully engage diverse groups – both internally and externally – to create shared strategies.
- Be an exceptional relationship builder and persuasive communicator and listener, with the ability to foster an atmosphere of collaboration, partnership, and trust.
- Be confident yet humble; comfortable interacting and collaborating with a diverse range of constituents across a broad range of sectors and spaces including academia, nonprofit organizations, donors, and government agencies.
- Have the ability to work at the national and local level, with an understanding and deep respect for the nuances of the individual communities and people Feeding America and its network of food banks serve.
- Be energized by developing and implementing solutions, while understanding and embracing the fundamental need to earn the buy in from those who will be impacted.
- Ideally be experienced with fundraising and partnership development, with a track record of cultivating successful relationships. Experience competing for and securing external grant funding, re-granting to research/academic institutions is preferred.

A Respectful, Inclusive, and Inspirational Team Leader

This leader will:

- Be an inspiring, empathetic, approachable, and inclusive leader with an infectious optimism and adept ability to lead through periods of change.
- Be energized by the opportunity to unify the research and innovation functions; able to develop a powerful sense of shared purpose and engagement in the future of Feeding America’s work and the possibilities ahead.
- Celebrate a diverse range of skillsets, and an ability to bring out the best of a talented, passionate, and deeply committed team. Have a strong willingness to leverage the existing expertise, uplifting others’ voices and knowledge.
- Be energized by the opportunity to build on and refine the vision for the Research & Innovation function, with an ability to prioritize goals in pursuit of maximizing impact.
- Foster a unified culture of curiosity, bold thought, continuous learning, appreciation, and accountability.
- Inspire trust at all levels of the organization, modeling respectful leadership in every interaction and setting.
Location & Travel

The successful candidate must be based in or willing to relocate to Chicago, Illinois, and will be expected to be in the Feeding America office 2-3 days per week.

Additionally, the successful candidate will be willing and able to do a significant amount of domestic travel (~20-40%).

Compensation & Benefits

The salary range for the Chief Research & Innovation Officer is $215,000-$265,000 and will be based on the successful candidate’s skills and experience. In addition, there is a target bonus of 15%.

This is a permanent, full-time, exempt position and is eligible for Feeding America’s comprehensive benefit package.

Contact

Koya Partners has been exclusively retained for this engagement, which is being led by Cheryl Stevens and Claire Hunt. Express interest in this role by filling out our Talent Profile or emailing the search team directly at feedingamerica_CRIO@koyapartners.com. All inquiries and discussions are strictly confidential.

Koya Partners | Diversified Search Group is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to individuals living with disabilities. If you are a qualified individual living with a disability and need assistance expressing interest online, please email NonprofitSearchOps@divsearch.com. If you are selected for an interview, you will receive additional information regarding how to request an accommodation for the interview process.

*Feeding America recognizes and values diversity. Our goal is to attract, develop, retain, and promote a talented diverse workforce where all employees feel a sense of belonging and contribute to a culture that values differences, ideas, and experiences. We intentionally seek out diverse perspectives and skills on our teams, knowing that it makes us stronger as an organization and better equipped to serve our neighbors in need. We encourage individuals from historically under-represented communities and individuals with lived experience of hunger to apply.*
About Koya Partners | Diversified Search Group

Koya Partners, a Diversified Search Group company, is the nation’s premier search firm dedicated to mission-driven leadership. Since its founding in 2004, Koya has had an exclusive focus on mission-driven clients and was founded on the belief that the right leader can transform an organization and have a deep and measurable impact on our world. Koya works with nonprofits & NGOs, responsible businesses, and social enterprises in local communities and around the world.

Diversified Search Group is consistently recognized by Forbes on its top 10 list of “America’s Best Executive Recruiting Firms” and is an industry leader in recruiting transformational leaders for a changing world. The firm is deliberately different in its approach, with best-in-class teams who have decades of experience in cultivating inclusive leaders, understanding the dimensions of diversity, and building equitable teams.

Learn more about Koya Partners | Diversified Search Group via the firm's website.