

Re: Fiscal Year 2023/34 Budget

March 24, 2023

Dear Members of the UBC Board of Governors,

This letter is written on behalf of the Alma Mater Society regarding the fiscal year 2023/24 budget. We are pleased to see several recommendations funded but are concerned about the lack of specificity in budgetary allocations related to both food security and health and well-being. We are writing this submission to implore **the Board to secure a clear commitment from the Executives at the March Board meeting that they will allocate at least \$350,000 to the AMS Food Bank to prevent further reduction of services and the partial closure of the service.** If there is no clear commitment from the Executives to provide this minimum funding to the AMS Food Bank, we implore governors to amend the budget motion to include this funding.

It is heartening to see the university follow through on its commitment to addressing food insecurity at UBC by allocating \$800,000 to food security initiatives on campus. While this is a good start, it is critical that the impacts of this funding be tangibly seen through a set strategic allocation breakdown. With this in mind, the AMS requests that at least \$350,000 be allocated to the AMS Food Bank in order to ensure that this service remains operational and able to serve students. Without this funding, significant harm will be caused by the reduction of service and the close of the service.

As the AMS Food Bank continues to see exponential growth in usership, the projected budget for next year is \$575,495. Food costs alone are projected to cost \$448,999. This number is based on our current costs per open day, the growth we expect to see based on the trends we've seen, consultation with the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, and forecasted food inflation of 7%. **There is no ability for the AMS to reduce these costs further.** For context, we offer minimal food options due to funding struggles that prevent us from providing halal, vegan, kosher, or gluten-free offerings.

Over the past year, the AMS has taken considerable steps to reduce costs in the Food Bank, including giving the service direct oversight by a permanent professional staff member and **cutting per-interaction costs from \$41.89 in 2021/22 to a projected \$20.33 this year** (see appendix). Despite the efficiencies, the AMS is no longer able to fund the entirety of the costs needed to keep the Food Bank operational - **since 2019/20, the required expenditures for the service to meet demand have risen from 1.5% to 11.5% of the AMS's operating budget.** For context, **the cost of the funding we are requesting from UBC (\$350,000) only represents 0.01% of the UBC operational budget.**

The AMS Food Bank has proven to be an incredibly popular support with students (demand has doubled or tripled annually since 2019/20, and we have had 1,754 unique users since September). Our user demographics for the year clearly illustrate that the most vulnerable

students (international students and graduate students) are the most frequent student users. **Next year, we will take additional steps to target students in need by ending our Food Bank support for UBC Staff.**

We understand there will need to be long-term planning about how to fund these services sustainably. We look forward to working with the University to address affordability support for students in an effort to reduce the demand seen at Food Banks. However, all the efforts of the University to address affordability will take a significantly long time to make any real dent in the demand we see at Food Banks. So, though we agree with the Executives that we want to reduce the reliance members of our community have to use Food Banks, we are also realistic that this will not happen overnight but will rather take years. **In summary, not fully funding the Food Banks for next year will cause harm to students and should not be an approach the Executives or Board supports.**

Additionally, we must express our disappointment with the budget process this year. The AMS requested over \$2,000,000 to help fund our massive deficit in funding students' counseling benefits. **The administration provided \$0 in funding to the AMS to support our efforts to fill the massive gap the University has in providing mental health support to students.** When the University failed to fund any of our efforts we had to go to students in a referendum to seek this funding.

Also, though we appreciate that the Executives have said that \$800,000 of funding will be provided for food security issues, we are again disappointed we don't know where this funding will go yet. The AMS, just like UBC, has to prepare our budget for next year, and not letting us know what your contribution will be to the AMS Food Bank creates significant financial instability for our organization. Though \$350,000 of funding from UBC to help us operate, **the AMS Foodbank is only 0.01% of UBC's operating budget; it is 7% of the AMS operating budget.** Still, not knowing if we will receive this funding creates significant instability for our organization and our ability to create an accurate budget for our next fiscal year. We'd ask governors how might you feel if the Board didn't know if the University was going to receive funding to operate 7% of its operational expenses when you had to approve the UBC budget. We understand it is not UBC's intention to create this instability, but nonetheless, the budgeting process UBC uses for Food Security issues has created this problem.

In conclusion, **we are asking the Board to secure a public commitment from the UBC Executives at the March Board Meeting that they will fully fund our request of \$350,000**

for the AMS Food Bank. Without this funding, there will have to be at least a partial closure of the AMS Food Bank that will directly result from your decision on the University Budget. Any partial closure will directly harm UBC community members by worsening current food insecurity issues amongst our most vulnerable students. We ask that the University have the compassion to see that allocating 0.01% of the UBC Operating Budget to keep a Food Bank open is a reasonable ask that this University can afford.

We greatly appreciate the University's efforts thus far to engage student leaders in conversations about the operating budget. While we understand that the University is facing various cost pressures related to inflation and COVID-19, we will point out the irony that student services are facing annual budget cuts when students need them the most. We hope that the Board takes this request into serious consideration.

Sincerely,

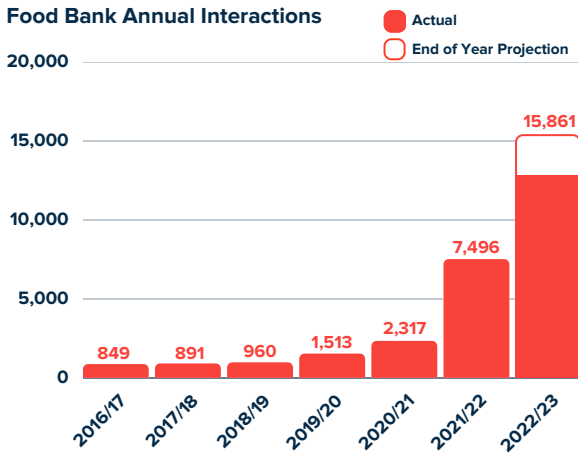


Eshana Bhangu
President
Alma Mater Society

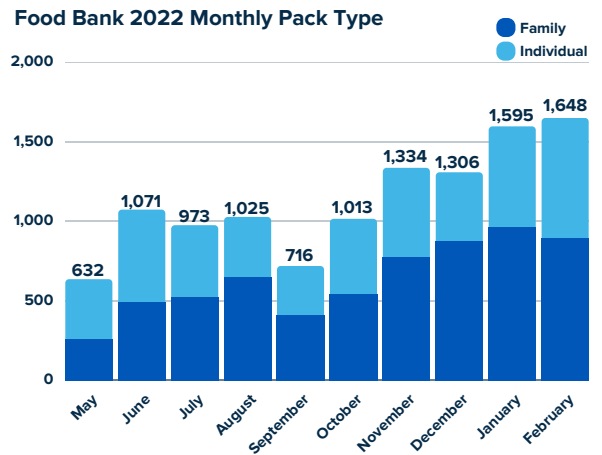


Anisha Sandhu
Interim VP Academic and University Affairs
Alma Mater Society

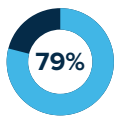
Appendix



End of year projections are based on the number of remaining Food Bank open days, along with current usage rates



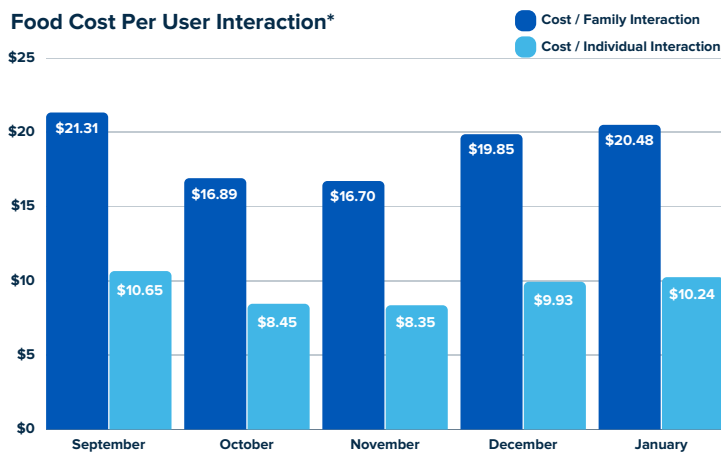
Family packs offer approximately twice as much food as an Individual pack. To qualify for a Family pack, the user must declare that they are supporting one or more non-student or staff dependent.



of student Food Bank visits were made by International Students, despite making up only 30% of the student population.

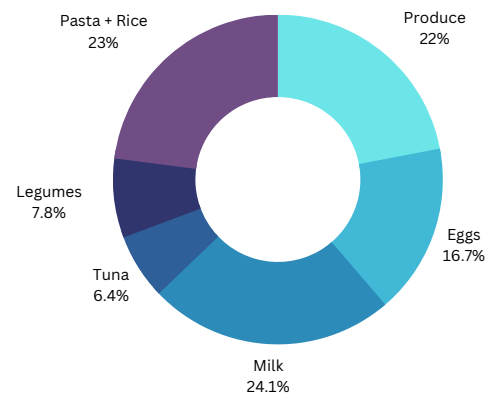


of student Food Bank visits were made by Graduate Students, despite making up only 22% of the student population.



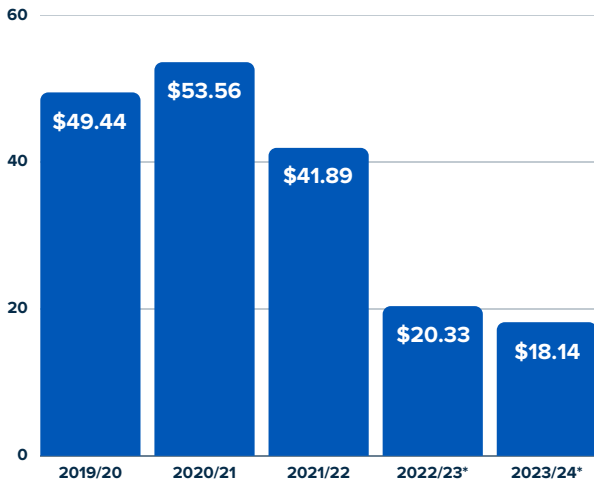
In the fall, the Food Bank struggled with shortages in major items at the end of each day, which artificially reduced the cost per user interaction.

January Daily Food Purchasing



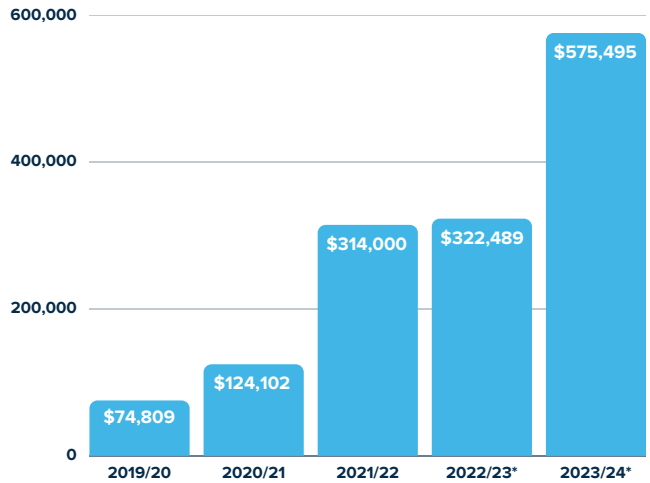
*Does not include overhead costs (see annual cost per user on next page).

Annual Cost per Interaction



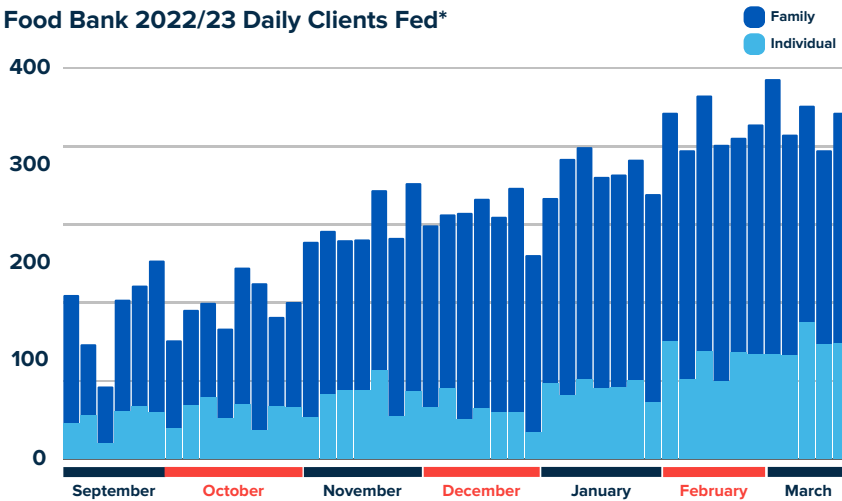
*2022/23 and 2023/24 are projected.

Annual Food Bank Budgets



*2022/23 and 2023/24 are projected.

Food Bank 2022/23 Daily Clients Fed*



*Calculated by food portions given out (1 per individual visit, and 2 per family visit).

Context for Food Security in BC

"At the GVFB we continue to see unprecedented need in our communities, new client registrations and lives supported each month. In combination with a record need on the community agency side of our operations (we now support a record 141 agencies each with food for their programs, including Origin Church at UBC which is our #2 agency ytd), we have exceeded our food purchasing budget this fiscal year by almost 50%. YOY we are doubling our food purchasing budget in anticipation of continued accelerating need in our communities, combined with the increased cost of food. Many of our food vendors have submitted price increases to us since the start of the pandemic of 10 – 15%; as a food bank we are not exempt from increased costs across the board, including fuel, warehouse supplies and many other items in addition to food."

Cynthia Boulter,
Chief Operating Officer,
Greater Vancouver Food Bank