2025 Service Area Assessment
DETAILED REPORT

Project Lead:
Reah Chiong, Ph.D., R.D.
Data Analyst: Research & Impact
Email: info@feedoc.org | Phone: 949-653-2900

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Executive Summary
of the 2025 Service Area Assessment

With funding support from Feeding America and the Orange County Hunger Alliance, Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County (SHFBOC) conducted its initial Service Area Assessment (SAA). The purpose of the SAA was to assess the needs of those impacted by food insecurity in Orange County and describe how the Food Bank meets those needs.

As part of the assessment, we reviewed literature and data sources and conducted empirical research to gather perspectives and experiences about the charitable food system among community members and partner representatives. This research employed community engagement strategies and was driven by the support and input of a Community Advisory Board (CAB) consisting of Food Bank staff, research interns, a community advocate, partner representatives, and academic partners.

In this assessment, we identified micro-level geographic areas and populations experiencing high food insecurity in Orange County and developed a tool to assess the proportionality and accessibility of our food distribution, fulfilling the first part of the new service requirements set by Feeding America as part of their Partner Food Bank Agreement. To expand our understanding of the needs of our communtiy, we collected survey and focus group data that centers the voices of key stakeholders, such as community members who receive food at our partner food distribution sites.

Primary and secondary data reviewed, collected, and analyzed from the SAA advances SHFBOC's mission and determines actionable ways to strategically serve Orange County community members who may have inconsistent access to nutritious food.

The full report describes our research plan, results, key learnings, and next steps.

Survey Insights
FROM OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Among those who reported an annual household income, **81% reported receiving less than $30,000 in 2024**.

Over half of respondents indicated they received food from the pantry site **over 5 times in the past year.**

A little over a third may have **limited capacity to respond to household-level financial shocks**.

Top items typically looked for at food pantries are **fresh produce, eggs, dairy, and red meat**.

Many expressed concern affording and accessing food at the **end of the month** and at certain seasons (specifically **summer and winter**).

Almost **60%** reported they often or always **get the variety and types of food they need or want** from the site.

35% reported **finding a site for free meals/groceries** that is open when they need it as **somewhat or very challenging.**

51% indicated that they **knew others who could benefit from receiving food from the food pantry site but currently do not.**

Four themes were identified from focus groups

1 To **meet needs and preferences**, the Food Bank can continue providing quality and variety of food and promoting choice and a sense of community and connection at food pantry sites.

2 To **reach others in need**, the Food Bank may address barriers such as inconvenient pantry hours and identifying solutions with partners to reach other community members

3 Changes in financial circumstances and household compositions, the political climate, and limited purchasing power may **affect the need for charitable food.**

4 To **better serve community members most impacted** by food insecurity, the Food Bank can consider the need for programs and wrap-around services, continued support for partner capacity and infrastructure, and setting up spaces for partner collaboration.

Conclusion

This assessment describes the community members we serve, the need for food in Orange County, and gaps and strengths in our service. The Food Bank will continue to share results with key stakeholders, conduct additional research, and use findings from both primary and secondary data sources to inform operational and strategic decisions that tackle root causes of food insecurity and prioritize the needs of populations and communities most impacted.

For more details, please visit feedoc.org/SAA-detailed-report or scan the QR code.

Acknowledgements

To all the community members and partners who took part in primary data collection: Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions and for sharing your perspectives. Findings from this assessment is intended to better serve you, and we appreciate your participation. We would also like to thank the 17 sites who coordinated and welcomed the research team to host survey data collection during one of their food distribution times.

This work would not be possible without the 13 Community Advisory Board members representing our Partner Network, academic partners, and Food Bank staff and advocate who met monthly to provide key input in the empirical research process. This includes:

- Julia Bautista (Mercado el Sol)
- Lauren Carich (Western Community Housing)
- Jaime Marquez (Delhi Center)
- Robin Rush (Recovery Road)
- Marlene Santiago (Boys and Girls Club of Garden Grove)
- Dr. Denise Payán (Wen School of Population & Public Health at UC Irvine)
- Dr. John Carroll (Department of Geography & the Environment at CSU Fullerton)
- Dr. Virginia Gray (Department of Family and Consumer Sciences at CSU Long Beach)
- Mia DiLalla (Community Champion at SHFBOC)
- Malia Cary (Director of Government Affairs and Community Relations at SHFBOC)
- Jazlyn Ortuño-Nuñez (Program Supervisor: Youth Hunger Programs at SHFBOC)
- Manuel Marroquin (Research Intern at SHFBOC)
- Stephanie Perez Martinez (Research intern at SHFBOC)

Thank you also to staff at SHFBOC who provided internal support and set up the necessary infrastructure for us to conduct research using best practices. We would also like to thank the Orange County Hunger Alliance for their ongoing support and partnership.

Lastly, thank you to Feeding America for providing us with a grant through the Service Requirements Development Cohort to complete this work.

Initial Stages

In the initial stages of the SAA, key staff members reviewed the Service Target & Assessment Tool dashboard from Feeding America to identify areas of disproportionate distribution, met to develop questions to guide the SAA, and identified key stakeholders to engage with at various capacities in the SAA planning and implementation.

REVIEW THE SERVICE TARGET & ASSESSMENT TOOL

According to the Service Target & Assessment Tool (STAT) dashboard from Feeding America, the annual service target for Orange County, CA from CY2025 – CY2027 is ~51 meals per food insecure person. When this data was reviewed, SHFBOC had distributed ~98 meals per food insecure person in the past 4 quarters ending in 2024Q3. This indicated that SHFBOC exceeded the annual service target and provided a proportionate number of meals per person experiencing food insecurity in the overall service area.

Although this tool describes our distribution as effective, we made the collective decision to further examine sub-county level data through additional sources and review our food distribution data to identify populations and communities with unmet need.

DEVELOP GUIDING QUESTIONS

Furthermore, key staff members met weekly to discuss and develop questions to guide the research plan. These discussions were facilitated to understand Food Bank research interests and priorities. They were organized according to topics of interest (need, equity, proportionality, impact, and access and barriers) and preliminary plans on how to answer questions were discussed (refer to Figure 1 for more details).

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The team also identified internal and external stakeholders to engage with at various capacities in the planning and implementation of the SAA. This includes:

- **SHFBOC leadership and staff**

- **University partners:** existing and new partners at local academic institutions who can provide expertise and support on SHFBOC's research and data-related initiatives

- **Partners:** individuals who represent partners, agencies, and organizations (which includes leadership, staff, and volunteers) that receive and distribute food from SHFBOC out to the community

- **Community members:** individuals who receive food from SHFBOC at partner distribution sites

- **Non-participating residents:** individuals who reside in our service area and are experiencing food insecurity but are not receiving food from SHFBOC partner distribution sites

In addition, as part of the SAA, we will depend on internal research outputs and data as well as those from local government agencies and community alliances. From these, we developed a research plan.

Figure 1. SHFBOC Preliminary Plans to Answer Guiding Questions
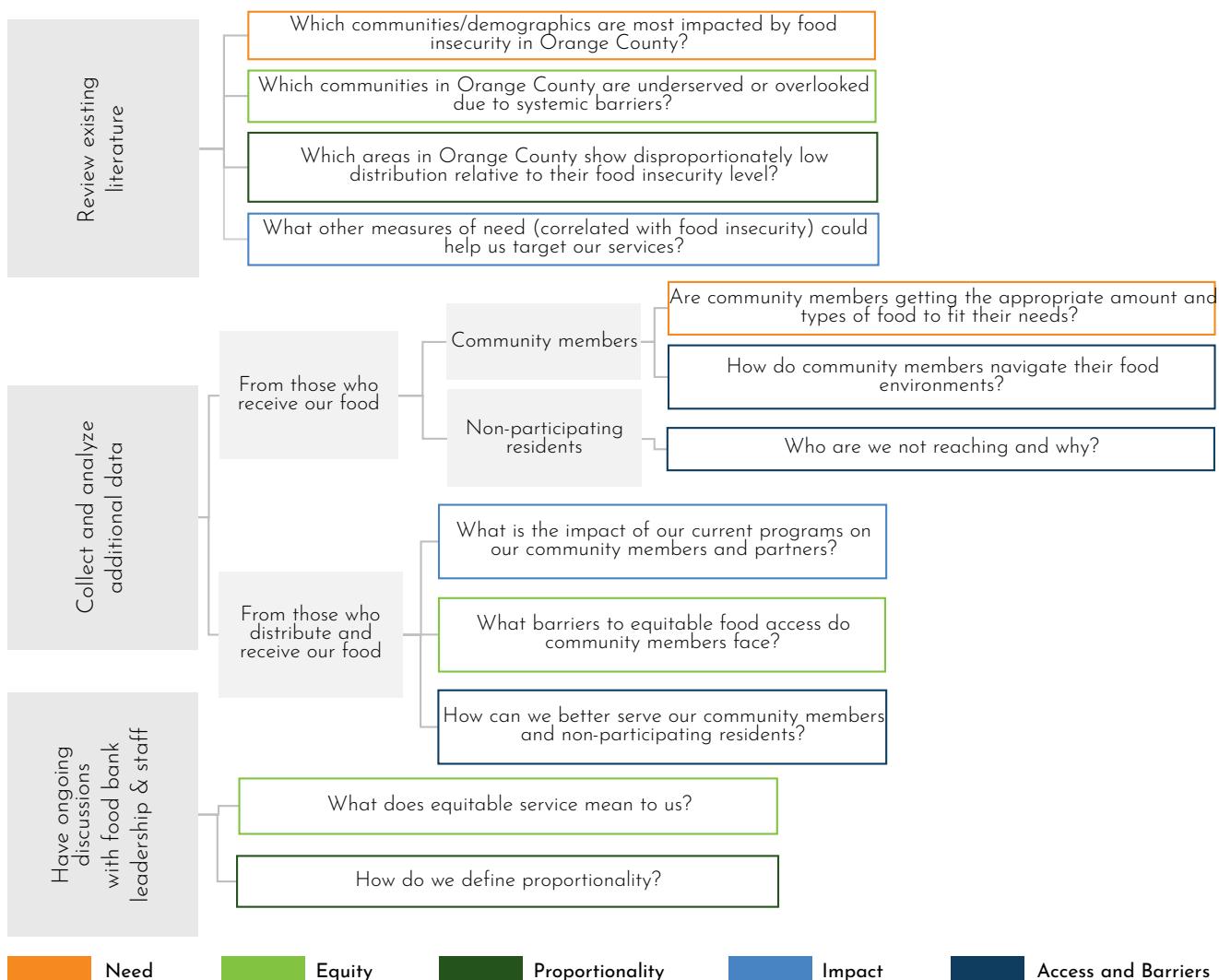
Research Plan

RESEARCH AIMS

From these initial discussions, we developed a plan with two research aims to drive this assessment. These aims will not only help SHFBOC understand the needs of the communities we serve, but the gaps and strengths in our service.

> **AIM 1:** Describe the populations and communities in Orange County who are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and limited food access

> **AIM 2:** Examine perceptions and experiences with charitable food and services among community members and staff at SHFBOC partner distribution sites using mixed methods

Community Engagement & Asset-Based Principles

In this assessment, we leveraged community-engaged strategies and asset-based principles throughout the planning, data collection, analysis, and dissemination stages. This includes:

> **1) Emphasizing both community needs and assets**

> Throughout the research process, we focused not only community needs but also community assets. Rather than focusing solely on deficits, recognizing community strengths alongside needs could enable communities to leverage and mobilize existing resources and determine long-term, sustainable solutions to challenges accessing charitable food. This approach is reflected in how the project team engages with community members and partners, the types of questions we ask in our empirical data collection, and our operational decisions post-assessment.

> **2) Centering community and neighbor voices**

> The intention of the Service Area Assessment is to gather information about and from our community members to inform SHFBOC's operational and strategic decisions. As a result, we are deeply committed to prioritizing the lived experience and perceptions of community members who receive food at our partner food distribution sites alongside key stakeholders. This includes collecting data directly from the community to ensure the food we provide and future programs we develop adequately meet their needs and preferences.

In addition, we will create and sustain a community advisory board (CAB) to ensure the research plan is informed by a range of perspectives.[1,2] We will also center the community in our work by integrating research best practices in our procedures. For example, we will reiterate with partners and community members that participation in the assessment is voluntary and will not affect access to food and services and compensating all participants, including partners, for their time and input. We will also develop data management and storage protocols to protect identifiable information, if collected, such as names and emails, in SHFBOC's remote desktop.

3) Incorporating feedback mechanisms with partners and community members

At the conclusion of the Service Area Assessment, we will communicate de-identified research findings back to the community through different ways (e.g. newsletters, informational sessions) so they will understand how their input was used or not used in addressing service gaps. Partners who assist with data collection will also have access to research findings pertaining to their respective sites.

Theory: Socio-ecological Model

To guide SHFBOC's research and the development of data collection and analysis tools for the service area assessment, we rely on an adaptation of the socio-ecological model. This model illustrates that factors at and across four levels (individual, interpersonal, community, and policy/societal) that influence food and nutrition security attainment. We will use this model as a baseline in our literature review and development of data collection materials.

Figure 2. Socio-ecological Model
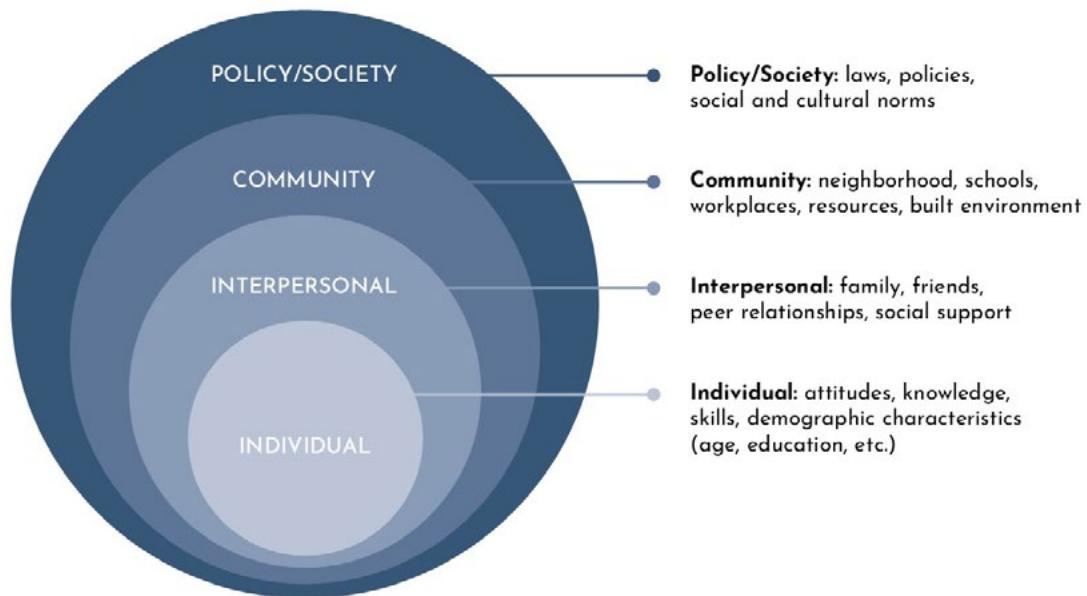
Details on both aims are described in the next sections.

AIM 1

Study Design

For Aim 1, we conducted a literature and data review to describe populations and communities in Orange County who are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and limited food access.

Literature included both academic publications and publicly available data, reports, and maps that would provide a greater understanding of OC populations and communities. This review considered physical, social, and economic factors of food and nutrition security based on the socio-ecological model (Figure 2) and the historical and societal contexts that perpetuate inequities in food access.

Methods

Aim 1. Literature and Data Review

Data Collection

We reviewed and synthesized academic literature, government and agency reports, as well as publicly available data sets, dashboards, and maps related to food and nutrition security in the United States. We then narrowed our focus to research and data relevant to Orange County. Table 1 below provides examples of external and internal data sources we included in our review:

Table 1. Example Data Sources reviewed in Aim

External	Internal
Feeding America: Map the Meal Gap	Food distribution data in Ceres (food pounds distributed to partners and number of people served)
California Association of Food Banks: Economic Indicator Dashboard	Community member data in Service Insights and Link2Feed
United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service: Annual Household Food Security Report	Partner/agency application forms
United Ways of California: Real Cost Measure Dashboard	Partner/agency locations and hours of operations
Report on Aging in Orange County 2024	Previous feedback surveys from community members

This information was stored in a running Excel spreadsheet and included the title, data source, publication type, year published or updated, review date, description of the publication and methods used, general findings, and findings relevant to SHFBOC. We saved reports in Zotero, a citation manager, to extract citations and develop bibliographies as needed.

Data Analysis

Existing literature, reports, and dashboards were synthesized to provide a comprehensive picture of what food and nutrition insecurity looks like in Orange County and identify populations most impacted.

Using Tableau and mapping software, we also combined publicly available census data, food insecurity estimates from Map the Meal Gap, and internal data, such as partner locations and food pounds distributed to partners, to develop maps of Orange County at the granular level. We then reviewed these maps, along with existing map dashboards of Orange County, to determine:

- neighborhoods and census tracts in OC with the highest need (high rates of food insecurity and limited food access to both food retail stores and charitable food distribution sites)

- proportionality, or where food pounds are primarily distributed relative to the need in the area

AIM 2

Study Design

For Aim 2, we used an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to answer our research questions. In our quantitative phase, we collected survey data from community members who receive food at SHFBOC partner food distribution sites. To explain survey findings regarding perceptions and experiences with charitable food and services, we conducted a qualitative study among community members and partner staff through focus groups. For this work, we referenced guidance from Creswell and Creswell.[3]

Community Advisory Board (CAB)

To guide the implementation of Aim 2, we created and sustained a community advisory board (CAB) with 12 members consisting of Food Bank staff, university partners, food pantry partners, and community members. The purpose of this board was to advise and support the planning and implementation of the assessment. This provided an opportunity for SHFBOC to strengthen existing partnerships, build new ones, and engage stakeholders in the research process. Responsibilities of the CAB included engaging in strategic discussions about study participant recruitment, reviewing and testing study materials such as data collection tools, and participating in data collection and analysis. Time commitment and level of engagement depended on each CAB member. Members received a $50 compensation for every monthly meeting attended throughout the assessment, with a maximum of 6 meetings.

A separate document will highlight CAB activities, discussions, opportunities, and evaluations. For the purposes of this report, we will summarize how CAB members contributed to each phase below.

Methods

Aim 2. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods: Quantitative Phase

Sampling

The project team identified SHFBOC partner distribution sites where survey data collection will take place. Because SHFBOC has over 300 partner distribution sites with varying sizes, services, and capacities, we purposively selected partners to conduct our surveys to account for a range of perspectives.

Factors we considered when selecting where survey data collection will take place include:

- Location in Orange County

- SHFBOC Partner Network categories (e.g. Mobile School Pantry, Senior Grocery)

- Days and hours of operations of distribution sites

Because the goal is to produce descriptive survey findings, we did not conduct a power analysis to determine sample size. Our population of interest for this survey are the community members who receive food at our partner food distribution sites. As such, we reviewed internal data on the total number of visits and estimated the unique number of visits a month. Due to the large population size and cross-sectional nature of the study,[4] we relied on Cochran's formula with a 99% confidence interval and ± 5% margin of error. We also expected a 70% response rate and potential for invalid surveys (e.g. incompletion, duplicates), we determined a sample size goal between 665 and 950 survey respondents would be sufficient.

Prior to data collection, we hosted an informational session with all partners during a quarterly call to provide an overview of the SAA, discussed details regarding data collection, analysis, and how data will be used, and general expectations of selected partners during the study phase. We requested partners to fill out an interest form via Qualtrics to aid in our partner selection process (Appendix B1) and recruitment.[5]

Data Collection: Survey

Prior to survey administration, the informed consent form and survey was reviewed by CAB members and Food Bank staff before pilot testing among English and Spanish-speaking clients.

Pilot Test:

The SAA Project Lead coordinated with two partner sites to pilot test the client survey. The purpose of the pilot test was to test the feasibility and validity of the client survey. We had the data collection team take observational notes and review the informed consent and survey questions with respondents at the conclusion of the survey. The general procedure was intended to mimic the actual survey data collection process.

A copy of the pilot test procedure, to be shared with staff at partner sites before the pilot test, and evaluation questions are presented in Appendix B2. Findings from the pilot test will inform the final versions of the informed consent form and survey.

Pre-Data Collection Procedure:

Once partner sites were confirmed to host data collection and are assigned a Partner ID# for the SAA (ex. SL##), the project team coordinated a day and time for point-in-time data collection to take place. During this initial communication, the Project Lead shared details on general data collection procedures (Appendix B4, Overview and General Procedure) and partners were asked if translations of the recruitment flyer or survey were needed.

We developed a recruitment flyer indicating the days and times of data collection for partners to disperse to staff and community members ahead of time. Recruitment flyers

indicated that participating in the study is completely voluntary and will not impact community members access to food and services provided at the distribution site. The eligibility criteria and compensation amount for participating in the study was also presented on the flyer. Please see Appendix B3 for an example of the recruitment flyer and its details.

Several days prior to the data collection day and time, the project lead reconfirmed with partner site staff the scheduled date and time for data collection, the location for set-up, and parking for the project team.

Data Collection Procedure:

Upon arrival, the project team checked-in with partner site staff and began to set up. Please refer to Appendix B4, Detailed Procedure (for Research Team).

To be eligible for the survey, participants must:

- Be at least 18 years of age

- Receive food at the partner distribution site at the designated day and time of data collection

These details were verified with clients before a copy of the informed consent form (Appendix B5) and survey were provided. The final survey was administered through two modes depending on community member preference: 1) via Qualtrics using SHFBOC electronic devices or 2) via paper. Assistance was provided by the project team and site staff upon request from respondents.

Participants were instructed to submit the survey to the project team member present at the site. The project team member then provided the participant with $20 in the form of a gift card or cash. We collected signatures in a sheet to track gift card distribution.

Images from Survey Data Collection

a. Data collection paper materials

b. Table set-up with research interns, Manny and Stephanie

SURVEY DETAILS

Alongside demographic characteristics, the survey included validated items and screener questions on:

- Neighbor perceptions and experiences at partner distribution site

- Food and nutrition security

- Ability to respond to financial shocks

We also provided translated versions of informed consent forms and surveys in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, and Farsi using the translation service, GLOBO. For the final, full survey in English, refer to Appendix B6.

A table of specific measures and how they were scored are noted on the next page.

Table 2. Survey Measures in SAA Community Member Survey

Section	Survey Measures	Number of Questions	Question #s	What it captures /Purpose	Scoring (if applicable)
I. Perceptions and Experiences at Food Pantry	General Experience	7	1-4m 10-11 15		New questions that SHFBOC developed assessing frequency of receiving food at site, satisfaction of food and service, and if and how it meets client needs and preferences
	Neighbor Experience[1]	7	5-9 13-14		Module that assesses neighbor experience at charitable food assistance sites & likelihood of recommending site to others
	NET Promoter Scale[1]	1	12		Assess likelihood of recommending site to others
II. Food and Nutrition Security	Household Food Security + Child Food Security[2]	18	16a, 16b, 16c; 17-21i 22a-26	Provide a score on food security status (very low, low, marginal, high), including Child Food Security among households with children	Responses of "yes," "often," "sometimes," "almost every month," and "some months but not every month" are coded as affirmative (=1). The sum of affirmative responses to a specified set of items is referred to as the household's raw score on the scale comprising those items.
					Questions HH2 through CH7 comprise the U.S. Household Food Security Scale (questions HH2 through AD5a for households with no child present). Specification of food security status depends on raw score and whether there are children in the household (i.e, whether responses to child-referenced questions are included in the raw score).
					o For households with one or more children: - Raw score zero–High food security - Raw score 1-2–Marginal food security - Raw score 3-7–Low food security - Raw score 8-18–Very low food security o For households with no child present: - Raw score zero–High food security - Raw score 1-2–Marginal food security - Raw score 3-5–Low food security - Raw score 6-10–Very low food security
					Households with high or marginal food security are classified as food secure. **Those with low or very low food security are classified as food insecure.**
	Food Insecurity Stability[3]	3/6	16a, 16b, 16c 16ai, 16bi, 16ci	Assesses the temporal state of a household's food insecurity – chronic, seasonal, intra-monthly, and intermittent food insecurity.	Selecting one or more seasons* gives the participant a point for seasonal food insecurity Selecting one or more times of the month gives the participant a point for monthly food insecurity Selecting "Randomly, no certain timeframe" gives the participant a point for intermittent food insecurity Selecting "Often true" for HH2-HH4 (HFS_1-HFS_3 | 16a-16c), they are not asked a follow-up question but are given a point for chronic food insecurity *If the participant selects four season options, they are given a point for chronic food insecurity in addition to monthly food insecurity

Section	Measure	# Items	Questions	Purpose	Scoring / Notes
	Nutrition Security[3]	4	27-30	Assess a household's perceived ability to acquire healthful foods without resource limitations or worry.	Points are then summed, and each participant receives a score from 0-3 for chronic (C1-3), seasonal (S1-3), monthly (M1-3), and intermittent (I1-3) food insecurity. **Higher scores for the four stability types indicate a greater degree of experiencing chronic, seasonal, monthly, and intermittent food insecurity.** 1. Four items are scored accordingly: Never = 4, Rarely = 3, Sometimes = 2, Often = 1, Always = 0 2. Take the mean of the responses **Higher scores indicate a greater degree of household nutrition security. Low scores are < 2.00**
	Healthfulness Choice, Brief[3]	1	31	Assess the degree of control a household perceives they have in acquiring foods that meet their healthfulness needs.	Those selecting "Never," "Rarely," or "Sometimes": Considered to have screened positively for "**low**" Household Healthfulness Choice (aka: **screened POSITIVE for needing support around accessing healthful foods**)
	Dietary Choice, Brief[3]	1	32	Assess the degree of control a household perceives they have in acquiring foods that meet their food preferences.	Those selecting "Sometimes," "Often," or "Always": Considered to have screened positively for "**low**" Household Dietary Choice (aka: **screened POSITIVE for having limited ability to control the types of foods that are able to eat due to external constraints** (e.g., affordability, transportation access, available options near them, etc.)
III. Household Resilience	Absorptive Capacity[3]	2	33-34	Assess factors associated with a household's ability to react to and handle household-level financial shocks that might otherwise lead to food insecurity (e.g., job loss, unexpected bill, expensive home damage not covered by insurance, etc.)	If both ≤1 adult reportedly contributed income to the household last month **AND** "Never" is selected for putting money into savings: **screened POSITIVE for needing support to improve their household's financial wellbeing.**
III. Household Resilience	Adaptive Capacity[3]	2	35-36		If "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," or "Slightly disagree" is selected for either question: **screened POSITIVE for needing support to improve their household financial skills, efficacy, address job barriers, and similar support to navigate financial challenges.**
III. Household Resilience	Transformative Capacity[3]	2	37-38		If "Strongly disagree," "Disagree," or "Slightly disagree" is selected for either question: **screened POSITIVE for living in a community that may have limited services, resources, and opportunities to support long-term household resilience.**
IV. Demographics	-	13	39 - 48f	Demographic characteristics of clients such as gender, race, income, participation in government assistance programs	

Notes:

Feeding America[6]
United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)[7,8]
Center for Health and Nutrition Impact[9,10]
Some demographic questions were adapted from the American Community Survey

At the conclusion of the survey, participants were asked if they would like to participate in a focus group to provide insight on survey findings.

Post-Data Collection:

The project lead and research team will complete a post-data collection to-do list on site to prepare for the next data collection day. This to-do list will help the project team account for all materials brought to the partner site, verify the number of gift cards distributed and remaining, and determine what additional prints are needed for the next data collection day.

Research interns are responsible for transferring paper surveys to Qualtrics and the project lead will complete administrative tasks to prepare for the next data collection day.

Data Analysis

To draft focus group questions, we analyzed preliminary data through Excel using descriptive statistics. Once survey data collection was complete, we analyzed the data further using Tableau.

CAB Involvement

CAB members provided key feedback on the survey measures and questions used for data collection during a monthly meeting. This includes suggestions of edits to specific questions and responses, the addition of questions, order of sections and questions, and format of the paper survey. We coordinated with 2 CAB members to pilot test the revised survey during their food distribution. Revisions and final versions of the survey were shared with the CAB.

Aim 2. Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods: Qualitative Phase

The aim of the focus groups was to explain survey findings, identify service strengths, and strategize ways to improve service gaps. The focus groups were conducted with partners who distribute food from SHFBOC and community members who receive food at our partner food distribution sites. Findings from the community member survey and Community Advisory Board discussions informed topics and questions to be discussed in the focus groups.

Sampling

For this phase, we relied on both a purposive and convenience sampling approach. Focus groups between partners and community members were held separately and with a sample size of 20 participants per population type (6-10 participants per focus group).

Focus Groups with Partners

The SAA Project Lead worked closely with Program and Services department to identify partners that may offer valuable perspectives. Similar to how we selected partner sites for the community member survey, we invited partners who represented different areas of Orange County and partner types to participate.

Focus Groups with Community Members

With the support of the CAB, we originally planned to reach out to community members expressed interest in the focus group in the survey and host the focus groups at a neutral location, such as public library. In light of recent events at the time of data collection, the SAA Project Lead decided that focus groups be held in familiar, safe, and trusted locations for community members. As a result, we reached out to CAB partners to assist with recruitment of community members and to host focus groups at their food distribution site. These partners were asked to refer at least 5-7 community members in their area who are interested, who could provide valuable insight, and commit to participate in a 1-hour focus group (in either Spanish or English depending on partner preference).

Prior to partner and community member focus groups, we communicated pertinent information such as date, time, and location, as well as general expectations. We also shared a recruitment flyer with partners to assist with the recruitment of community members (Appendix C1).

Data Collection: Focus Groups

Focus groups were scheduled in advance, held in-person, either at the Food Bank or at a partner food distribution site, and moderated by trained research team members. Similar to the survey data collection, there were pre- and post- procedures. For the full data collection procedure, please refer to Appendix C2. For this work, we referenced research methods described by Krueger and Casey.[11]

All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix C3) on-site to participate and have the focus groups audio-recorded for analysis purposes. Community members also completed a brief demographic questionnaire via paper before the focus group began (*See Section IV. Demographic Characteristics in Appendix B6*). At the conclusion of the focus groups, participants signed for and received a $50 gift card as remuneration.

Table 3. Focus Group Details

	Focus Group with Community Members		Focus Group with Partners	
Focus Group ID	C1	C2	P1	P2
Location	Partner Site - Classroom	Partner Site – Conference Room	SHFBOC Board Room	SHFBOC Board Room
Langauge	Spanish	English	English	English
Number of Partic-ipants	6	7	4	7
Co-Moderator Present?	Yes	No	Yes	No
Length of Time (Hour : Minutes)	1	1:05	1:23	1:24

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE DETAILS

Both partner and community member focus group guides included an introductory script outlining the purpose of the focus group, reason for invitation, and ground rules. Each guide followed a similar structure and included opening, main, and closing questions. Main questions and their probes were written to expand key descriptive findings from the survey as described in the table below and achieve integration.3,12 Most questions were similar across both guides, however, additional questions were included to account for unique perspectives from both populations.

Table 4. Overview of Focus Group Questions in Relation to Survey Findings

Survey Finding		Topic	Focus Group Questions	
			Community Members	Partners
Q2	From our survey, we found that <u>most clients are satisfied with the quality and variety of food available and the services provided</u> at our partner food distribution sites. Many agreed that it <u>meets their dietary needs and preferences</u> and that they can <u>store, prepare, and use</u> all the food.	Needs	Tell me about your experiences receiving free food and groceries. It can be about this site or other sites you have been to.	What do you think of these findings as they relate to your food distribution site and the community you serve?
Q3		Food Pantry Attributes	What characteristics of a food pantry are most important to you? What are some of the reasons you choose to go to certain food distributions over others?	What characteristics of a food pantry are most important to your community?
Q4	Most of the clients we surveyed <u>expressed concern about affording and accessing food</u> towards the *end of the month* and in the *winter and summer*.	Time Period	Let's explore when you typically go to food pantries. Are there specific times during the month or year that you find yourself needing more food assistance? If so, tell me more about that. What are some of the reasons why clients may be more concerned at these times?	Are there specific times during the month or year that you find an increased need in food? If so, tell me more about that. What are some of the reasons why your community may be more concerned at these times? How do you accommodate higher need at different times of the month or year?
Q5	In our survey, we also found that our clients <u>knew of others who can benefit from receiving free meals or groceries at our partner sites but currently do not</u>. Many <u>also share food</u> they get from these sites w<u>ith people outside of their household</u>.	Barriers for Non-Recipients	If you or people you know can't come to the food distribution, what are the main reasons? How have you or people you know navigated these challenges to access food?	What do you think are some of the main reasons why community members may not come to the food pantry? What methods have you explored to meet the needs of community members who are unable to come to the food distribution?

Q6	We also know that some families may find it challenging to find a site for free meals/groceries.	Reach	What is your preferred way to receive information about food distribution sites like this? How can we at SHFB or those who work at the pantry reach families and people you know who may face barriers accessing these services?	How do you currently advertise the food pantry to your community? How can we at SHFBOC better support you in reaching those who may face barriers accessing these services?
Q7	Among those we surveyed, most receive at least one government assistance program like Medicaid and SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Here in California, these programs are known as Medi-Cal and CalFresh.	Impacts of the Safety Net	How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected you, people you know, and your community who rely on these programs?	How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected the food pantry and organization? How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected the communities you serve?
Q8	More than half of those we surveyed experience food insecurity. This means that they experience worry about affording and accessing food to lead a healthy life. Many are out of work, retired, have limited income, and may need additional support to improve their financial well-being.	Improving the Charitable Food System	As clients yourselves, what would you like to see more of at our food distributions? What kinds of additional help, programs or services would make this site even more useful to you and your community? What additional suggestions do you have to make food pantries a welcoming, reliable space for people who may be experiencing food insecurity?	As partners, what would you like to see more of at your food distributions? What kinds of additional help, programs or services would make this site even more useful to you and your community? What type of support would you need to achieve this? What additional suggestions do you have to make food pantries a welcoming, reliable space for people who may be experiencing food insecurity?
Q9			CLOSING QUESTION Our goal was to gather information from all of you to better meet the needs of community members who may be facing challenges accessing and affording food. Out of everything we discussed, what is most important to you?	

For the full community member and partner focus group guides, please refer to Appendix C4 and C5, respectively.

Demographic characteristics collected from community members during the focus groups were similar to the demographic questions asked in the first phase. We asked focus group respondents about their gender, ethnicity, race, employment status, household income, household composition, and participation in government assistance programs.

Data Analysis

Focus groups were audio-recorded, transcribed using Otter.AI, and cleaned, which included removing any identifiable information. The audio recording for the Spanish focus group was submitted to a translation service (GMR Transcription) to be translated and transcribed. Once all focus groups were transcribed, they were analyzed for codes and themes by the Project Lead using Atlas.ti. Analytic memos were written following analysis.

CAB Involvement

CAB members worked in groups and co-designed the focus group approach. This includes providing feedback on the initial draft of the sampling and data collection procedure and sharing additional considerations. CAB members also reviewed preliminary survey findings and participated in drafting focus group questions. The project lead consolidated ideas post-discussion in draft focus group guides and shared it with CAB members. CAB members also engaged in preliminary data analysis of focus group excerpts with peers. Notes from these discussions were taken into consideration during the final analysis of focus group transcripts.

Results

AIM 1

For Aim 1, we conducted a literature and data review to describe populations and communities in Orange County who are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity.

Findings: Literature and Data Review

Food insecurity is defined as the uncertain or inconsistent access to food to lead a full life. In the United States, 13.5% of U.S. households experienced food insecurity.[13] The prevalence of household food insecurity varies by household characteristics and is statistically significantly higher among households with children (17.9%), households with children headed by a single female (34.7%) or male (22.6%), households with Black, non-Hispanic reference persons (23.3%), and households with Hispanic reference persons (21.9%).[13] In addition, food insecurity seems to be more prevalent among households with an adult with a disability than households without.[14] In California, the prevalence of food insecurity is lower than the U.S. average.[15]

Although Orange County has better access to food than most counties nationally,[16] according to Map the Meal Gap 2023, the rate of food insecurity in Orange County, CA, where this assessment takes place, has increased since 2020 from 9.4% to 11.4% in 2023.[17]
There are certain household-level indicators for food insecurity, such as poverty level, housing, and employment. According to United Ways of California, 35% of households in Orange County are below the Real Cost Measure,[18] which unlike other measures, accounts for the cost of living in California. This indicates that over a third of the county's population lacks inadequate income to afford basic needs. It is also estimated that 42% of renters and 30% of home-owners are cost-burdened, or spend more than 30% of their income on housing-related costs.[19] Furthermore, recent assessments identified that 53% are living paycheck to paycheck, and there is a greater need for services around income and finances as well as housing.[30,31]

To make ends meet and alleviate worries regarding limited access to food, many participate in the social safety net, which includes both government assistance and charitable food assistance. Programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), have been attributed to improve food insecurity. The number of households participating in SNAP, also known as CalFresh in California, has generally increased since 2020.[20] The average benefits allotted per person per day ($6.34), however, does not meet the estimated daily food costs in Orange County ($11.88).[20] Similarly, an average meal cost is 34% more than SNAP benefits in Orange County, and has generally remained unchanged since 2022.[21]

Our Reach

In FY2025, SHFBOC distributed 42.1M pounds of food. 35% of the food distributed was produce, followed by protein (19%), other groceries (15%), and dairy (13%). The average number of visits per month is 458,995, and we estimate that community members visit our sites, on average, 3 times a month. In collaboration with our 286 members that comprise our Partner Network, we provide food across 380 distribution sites. We serve youth and families through programs such as permanent school pantries (PSP), mobile school pantries (MSP), college pantries (CP), and at afterschool programs such as through Kids Cafe (KC). We also serve older adult populations through our senior grocery program (SG) and Park-it Market (PIM) programs. We also distribute food in partnership with churches and other non-profit, community organizations, including places of worship (PARTNER).

Pounds Distributed and People Served

We developed maps (Figure 3 and Figure 4) on the number of pounds distributed across our partner sites as well as the total number of people served per site in FY2025. In Figure 3, the size of the circle represents the total number of pounds distributed at that specific site and on the right, the size corresponds to the total number of people served. According to Figure 3, a majority of the pounds we distributed went towards our traditional partners (as indicated in orange). This may be due to a variety of factors including these partners having greater infrastructure, capacity, and availability to serve respective communities. Although we distribute more pounds to partners, there are discrepancies between the number of pounds distributed and the number of people served; some sites that receive more pounds of food may not be serving as many people compared to other sites with similar pounds received.

Days and Hours of Operations

In 2025, most SHFBOC partner food distribution sites were opened weekly, including all Permanent School Pantries (PSP), Park-it Markets (PIM), Kids Café (KC), and most College Pantries (CP). Those who were opened weekly were mainly opened on weekdays, with only 13 sites available on Sunday and 18 sites available on Saturday. All of the sites opened weekly on weekends were Partner sites. Among sites opened a month, availability was evenly distributed across the first, second, third, and fourth week of the month. Among sites opened twice a month, 31 were opened on the first and third of the month and 21 were opened on the 2nd and 4th.

Client Choice

After reviewing SHFBOC partner food distribution sites data on the types of client choice offered, all sites for older adults (PIM and SG) and for youth (CP, PSP, and MSP) offer full choice. Among traditinal partners, only 29 offered no choice, 22 offered limited choice, and 13 offered modified choice. Differences between choice models are explained in Table 5. Figure 5 shows our partner site by client choice offered.

Figure 3. Food Pounds Distributed By Site in FY2025

Partner Type
- College Pantry
- Mobile School Pantry
- Traditional Partner
- Park-it Market
- Permanent School Pantry
- Senior Grocery

Size Legend
- 1,043
- 1,000,000
- 2,000,000
- 3,000,000
- 4,055,608

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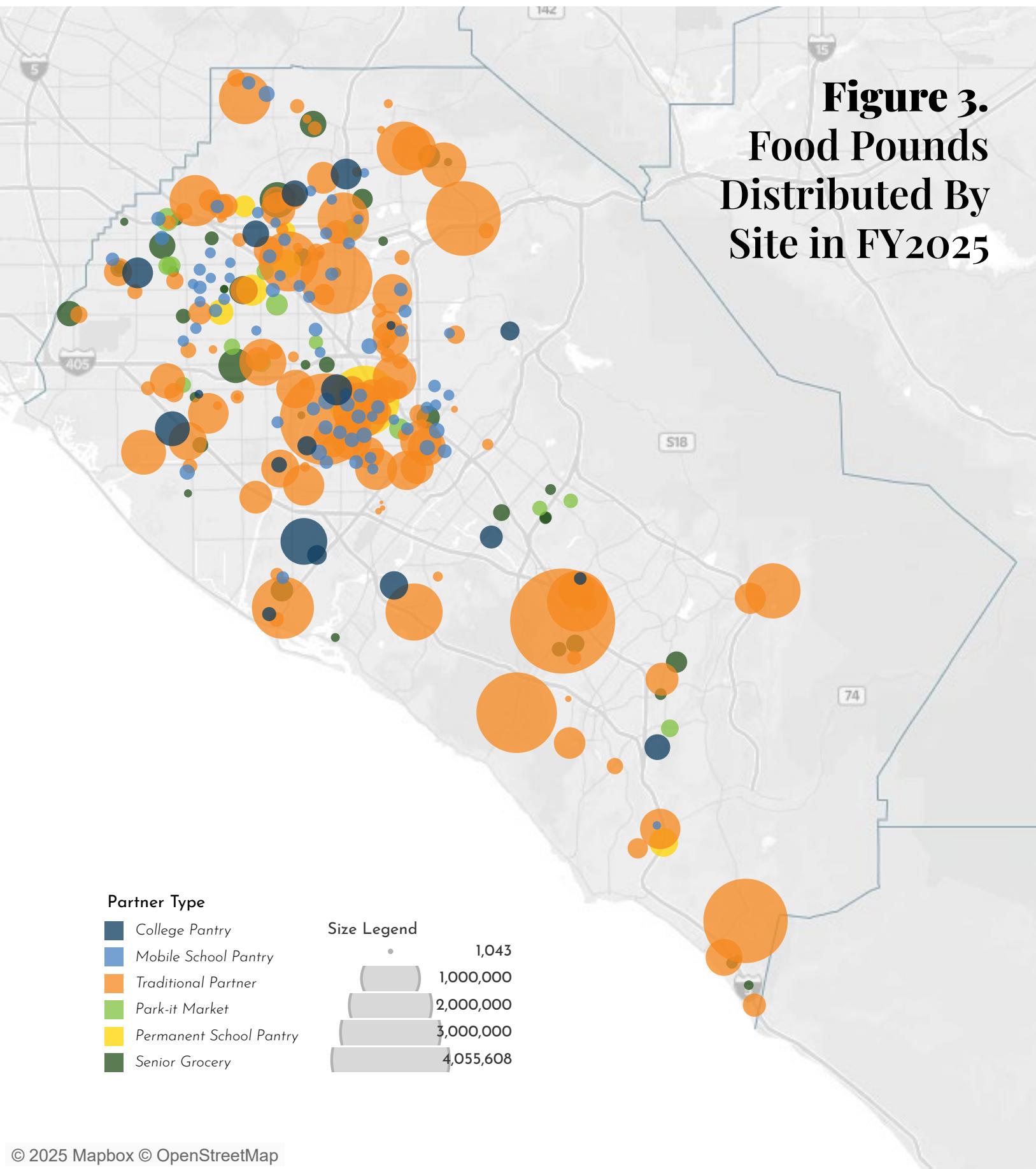
Figure 4. People Served by Site in FY2025

Partner Type
- College Pantry
- Mobile School Pantry
- Traditional Partner
- Park-it Market
- Permanent School Pantry
- Senior Grocery

Size Legend
- 295
- 200,000
- 400,000
- 600,000
- 853,870

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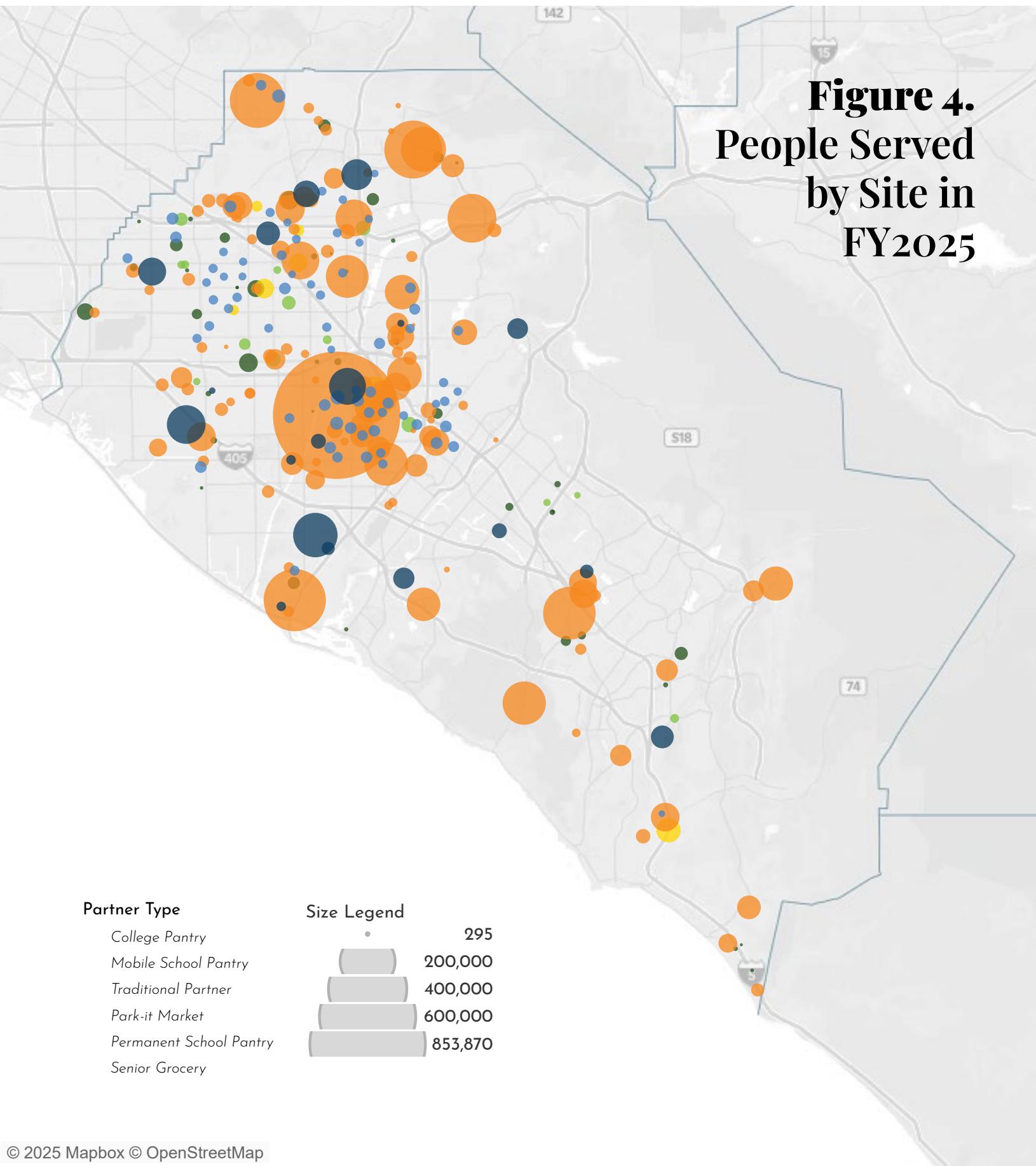
Table 5. Client Choice Models

Choice Type	Description
Full Choice	Have direct contact with food items presented at site and can fully select food
Modified Choice	Have an option to tell site staff what food items they like which will then be packed for them.
Limited Choice	May be able to choose between prepackaged bags or boxes with an assortment of food
No Choice	Do not have a choice in food items received

Figure 5. Partner Food Distribution Sites by Choice

Client Choice
- ● Full
- ✚ Limited
- ■ Modified
- ✖ No Choice
- ◆ Meal Provider

Partner Type
- College Pantry
- Mobile School Pantry
- Traditional Partner
- Park-it Market
- Permanent School Pantry
- Senior Grocery
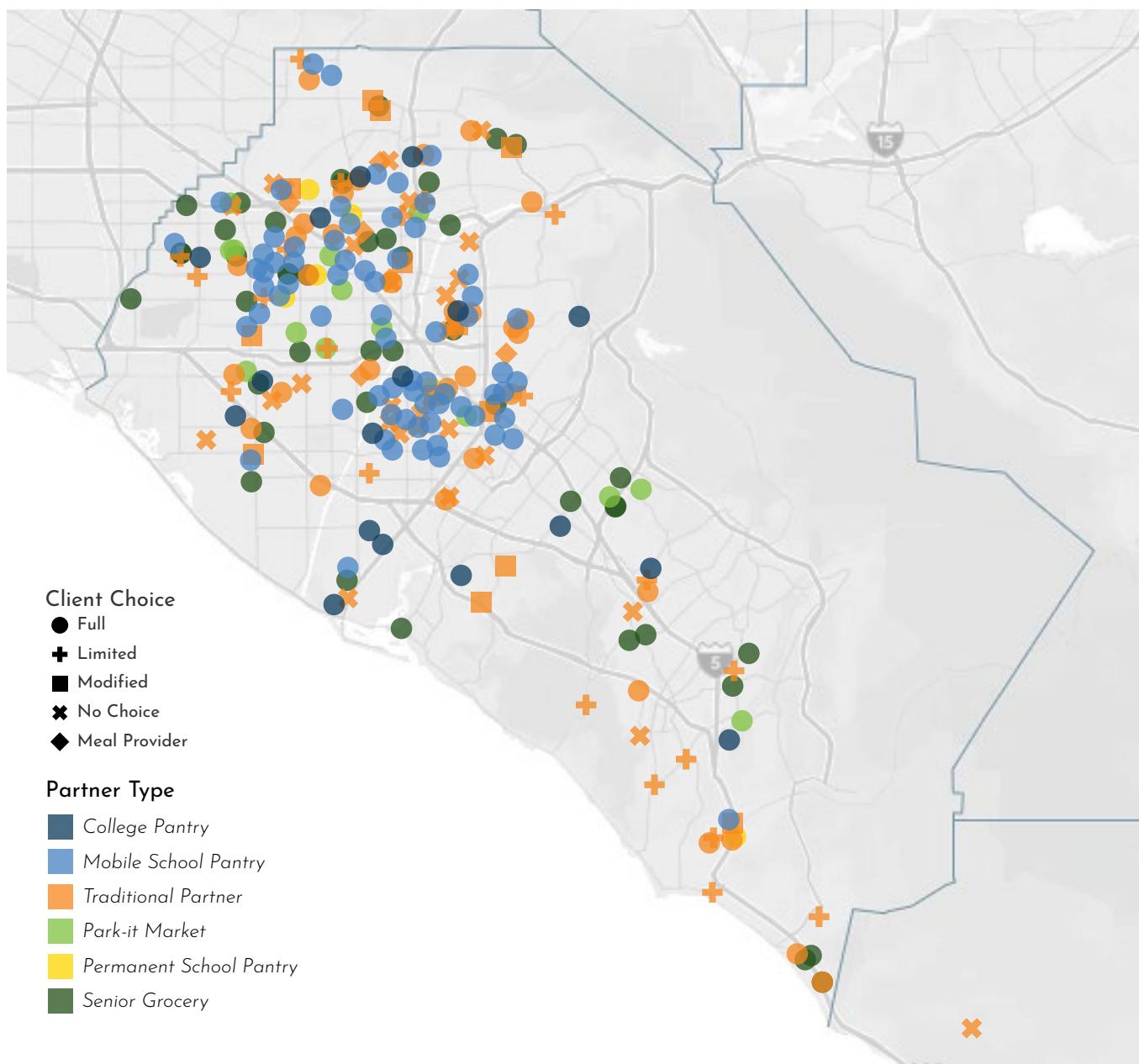
## *Mapping Tools for Service Area Assessment*

Using granular level data from Feeding America's 2025 Map the Meal Gap on food insecurity, related socioeconomic indicators from the American Community Survey, and internal data, we developed a map and an interactive dashboard through Tableau to identify communities in Orange County with highest food insecurity rates, disparities in need, and proportionality of our food distribution relative to need. We also included details about our partner site to determine the availability and accessibility of sites in areas with high food insecurity rates. An image of the tool and its components are presented in Figure 6.

Before proceeding to a summary of our results, it is important to note that the data presented is limited. **This data only shows the pounds we distribute to our partners; it does not show our reach, or where pounds are going once it arrives at our partner food distribution sites.** It is likely that pounds distributed to sites in a given census tract are reaching other communities and populations in need across Orange County and not only community members in the vicinity of the site.

Though limited, reviewing the data through these tools is a starting point for the Food Bank to assess where pounds are distributed, communities to consider, and availability and accessibility of food pantries. Iterations of these tools as well as additional data are needed to provide a more comprehensive picture of the reach of our Partner Network.

Figure 6. Components of Service Area Assessment Mapping Tool

Year
2023

% of Food Insecurity by Census Tract
4% ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ 25%

% of Food Insecurity Range
From 4%

Partner Site Deta

Site Name

1

A map of Orange County with SHFBOC partner food distribution sites on top of a layer showcasing rates of food insecurity in 2023 at the census tract level. Each site has a color representing the partner type. This map will allow us to visually explore OC communities with greatest need as well as locations of partner food distribution sites.

© 2025 Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Key
■ CP   ■ F
■ KC   ■ F
■ MSP   ■ F

FY2025 Pounds Distributed to Census Tracts by Food Insecurity Rates

2

A scatter plot of total pounds distributed to each census tract by food insecurity rate. If more than one partner food distribution site exists in the census tract, pound distributed were summed. The scatter plot will help determine proportionality and whether pounds distributed to partners are located in communities with greatest need as indicated by rates of food insecurity.

Socioeconomic

Tract ID	O Ins
06059075003	
06059087505	
06059011711	
06059099702	
06059087701	
06059087001	
06059011601	
06059001902	
06059052423	
06059062627	
06059099903	

A Gantt chart of site names, client choice offered at the site, as well as days and times of the week the site is open. Similar to the first component, the color corresponds to the partner type of the site. This chart will help determine the availablity and accessibility of pantries in certain OC communities.

3

ils

Client Choice	Days of Week	Frequency	
Full	Mon	WEEKLY	
No Choice	Tues	WEEKLY	
	Thurs	WEEKLY	
	Fri	WEEKLY	
Full	Wed	WEEKLY	
Full	Wed	WEEKLY	
	Thurs	WEEKLY	
	Fri	WEEKLY	
Full	Wed	WEEKLY	
	Thurs	WEEKLY	
	Fri	WEEKLY	
Modified	Mon	WEEKLY	
	Wed	WEEKLY	
	Fri	WEEKLY	
Full	Wed	1ST/3RD	

PARTNER ☐ SG
PIM
PSP

Hours of Operation
(06:00 AM – 09:00 PM)
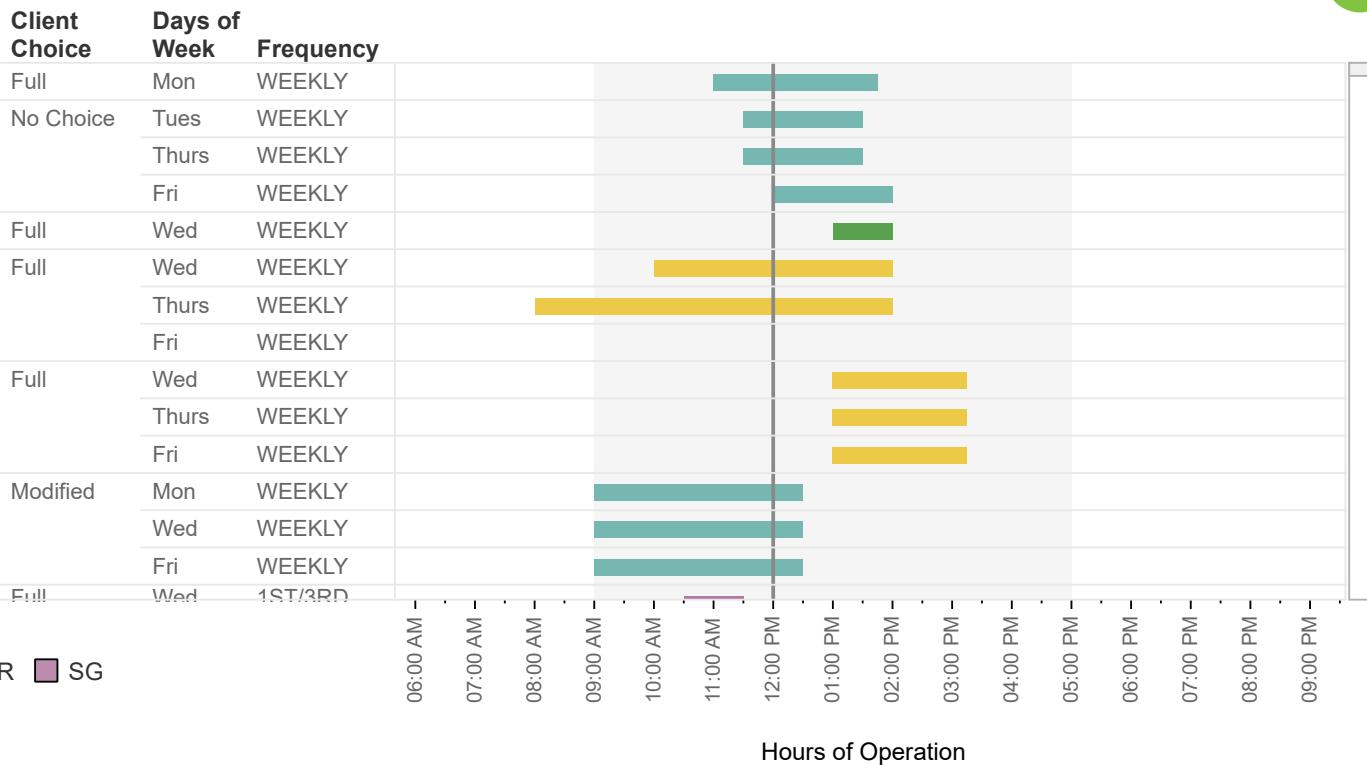
Characteristics

verall Food security Rate	Total Population	Median Income	Unemployment Rate	Disability Rate	Poverty Rate	Homeownership Rate	Percent Hispanic (any race)	Percent Black (all ethnicities)
24%	7,335	$59,688	8%	8%	30%	5%	95%	1%
22%	4,705	$54,977	10%	8%	29%	38%	76%	4%
25%	6,254	$58,539	11%	8%	28%	14%	58%	3%
20%	7,814	$71,372	4%	13%	28%	41%	20%	1%
23%	5,554	$70,944	12%	11%	27%	50%	39%	4%
21%	5,458	$61,600	7%	10%	27%	40%	46%	4%
22%	7,732	$81,648	7%	10%	25%	14%	76%	1%
19%	3,204	$112,098	9%	9%	25%	60%	55%	5%
17%	5,895	$115,215	3%	9%	24%	39%	29%	1%
20%	3,869	$66,434	4%	12%	23%	16%	10%	1%
18%	5,240							

4

A table of pertinent socioeconomic characteristics by census tract which include overall food insecurity rate, total population, median income, unemployment rate, disability rate, poverty rate, homeownership rate, and percent Hispanic (any race) and Percent Black (all ethnicities) from the 2025 Map the Meal Gap. This table provides information on key food insecurity indicators within specific communities.
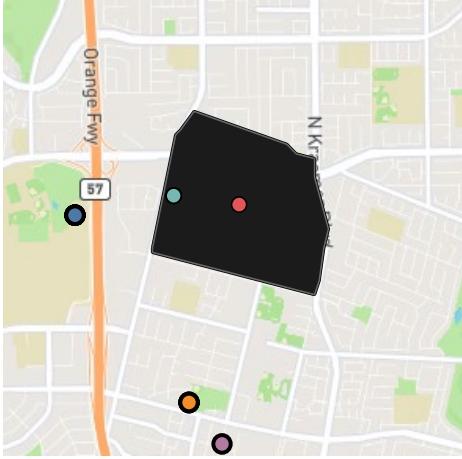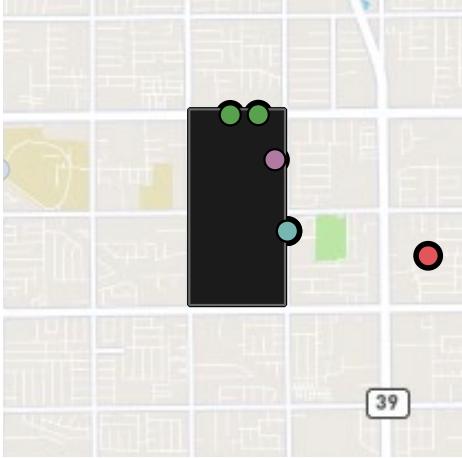
Communities with Need
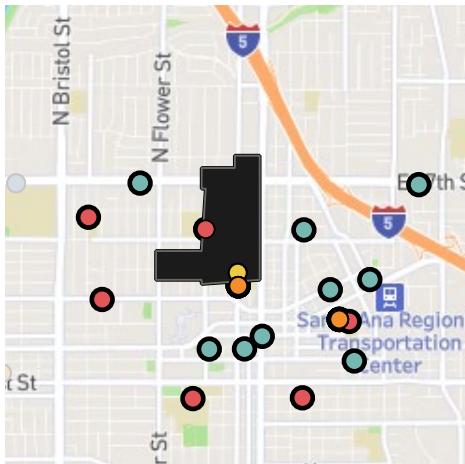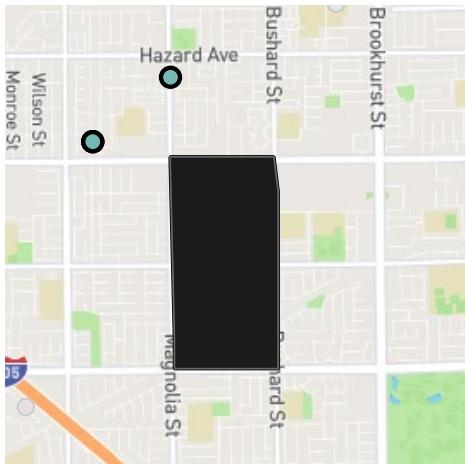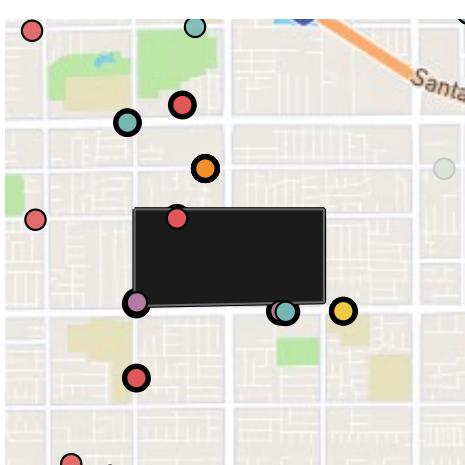
When reviewing this data, we identified that pounds distributed vary among census tracts (CT) with highest rates of food insecurity. Notably, although CT 869.01 in Anaheim, CT 992.22 in Westminster, and CT 750.03 in Santa Ana has the same level of food insecurity (24%), sites within 1-mile of CT 750.03 received a combined 2.9M pounds in FY2025. This is over 10 times greater than pounds distributed to sites within 1-mile of CT 869.01 (262k) and CT 992.22 (372k). This is likely due to having a greater number of sites within 1 mile of CT 750.03 at 16 compared to 5 and 2 for CT 869.01 and CT 992.22, respectively.

Table 6 summarizes dashboard findings of the top 5 CTs with highest rates of food insecurity. All CTs with the highest rates of food insecurity are located in different parts of north or central Orange County, where a greater percentage of households fall below the Real Cost Measure.[22]

Table 6. Census Tracts with Highest Rates of Food Insecurity

Census Tract (City)	Description
117.11 (Fullerton) 	Food Insecurity Rate: 25% Total Population: 6,254 # of Food Insecure Persons: 1,530 ***Pounds Distributed: 337K** Within an estimated 1 mile radius of the census tract, only 5 sites were available. Excluding Kids Café, all sites offer full choice and 2 within close proximity to each other are open weekly; one of these sites is a college pantry and may not be accessible to general community members in the area.
869.01 (Anaheim) 	Food Insecurity Rate: 24% Total Population: 8,479 # of Food Insecure Persons: 2,070 ***Pounds Distributed: 262K** The median income for this site is approximately $48k, with 50% of the population identifying as Hispanic. Although CT 86901 has 5 partner sites within a 1-mile radius, 2 are closed to independent senior living facilities. All sites offer full choice, yet they are only available for 1 hour. Four out of five sites are open weekly. This census tract may have poor food access in comparison to the other census tracts in Orange County.[16]

Note: *Calculation of total pounds distributed, rounded to the nearest thousand, in FY2025 to sites within an estimated 1-mile radius of CT. Sites within a 1-mile radius have a darker black border in the image.

Census Tract (City)	Description
750.03 (Santa Ana) 	Food Insecurity Rate: 24% Total Population: 7,335 # of Food Insecure Persons: 1,770 ***Pounds Distributed: 2.9M** Noticeably, CT 075003 is the census tract in Orange County with a high Hispanic population, the highest poverty rate, and one of the lowest homeownership rates. Also, within an estimated 1 mile radius of the census tract, there are 16 partner food distribution sites. Excluding Kids Café, most sites within a 1 mile radius of the CT offer full choice, and are open at a range of days and times throughout the week and month between 9am-5pm.
992.22 (Westminster) 	Food Insecurity Rate: 24% Total Population: 5,540 Number of Food Insecure Persons: 1,300 ***Pounds Distributed: 372K** Within a 1-mile radius of this CT, only 2 partner sites are accessible, with only 1 site offering full choice. The median income is higher in this CT compared to the other 4 CTs with high rates of food insecurity. Adjacent tracts do not have other SHFBOC partner food distribution sites. According to external data gathered from the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey, 58.9% of the population residing in this CT is Non-Hispanic Asian, with a majority being Vietnamese.
877.01 (Anaheim) 	Food Insecurity Rate: 23% Total Population: 6,254 # of Food Insecure Persons: 1,530 ***Pounds Distributed: 645K** CT 87701 has one of the highest poverty rates in OC at 27%. There are 9 partner sites within a 1-mile radius of the CT, mostly offering full choice. Excluding Kids Café, most sites are open at least once a month and are primarily available before noon. This census tract may have poor food access in comparison to the other census tracts in Orange County.[16]

Populations with Need

People with Disabilities

According to our data review, CT 995.10 in Seal Beach has one of the highest disability rates in the county. According to the U.S. Census Bureau and the American Community Survey 2023 5-Year Estimates, 65% of the population in this specific CT are Non-Hispanic White with 87.2% of households over the age of 65 years old. 10.3% are of veteran status. Geographically, this CT is down the street from the Veterans Affair Hospital in Long Beach and is home to Leisure World, an older adult community. The closest partner food distribution site is 3 miles away. Table 7 highlights CTs with the highest disability rates in Orange County.b

Table 7. Census Tracts with Highest Disability Rates

Disability Status	
Census Tract (City)	**Percent ± Margin of Error**
218.13 (Anaheim and Placentia)	*89.2% ± 25.2%
995.10 (Seal Beach)	38.4% ± 6.5%
995.09 (Seal Beach)	32.3% ± 7.5%
626.22 (Laguna Hills/Laguna Woods)	32.1% ± 5.9%
626.48 (Laguna Hills/Laguna Woods)	30.9% ± 5.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates
*Total population is 40 in 2023.

More data is needed to understand the reach of charitable food system among people with disabilities across Orange County. Based on the national data on food insecurity, households with an adult with a disability have higher rates of food insecurity compared to households without.[14] Almost half of adults with disabilities in California work and among those who do not work, safety net programs provides a critical buffer against poverty.[23] In Orange County, 9.3% of the population have a disability.[24] Since people with disabilities may face greater financial hardship, it is worth exploring the reach of the charitable food system among this population.

Single Parents

According to the 2023 American Commuvnity Survey 5-year Estimates, there are 11,301 male-headed single parent householders and 40,909 female-headed single parent householders in Orange County. Table 8 describes CTs with the highest percentage of single parents by male and female-headed householders in Orange County.

Table 8 Census Tracts with Highest Single Parent Householders by Sex

Single, Female Householders with Children under 18		Single, Male Householders with Children under 18	
Census Tract (City)	Percent ± Margin of Error	Census Tract (City)	Percent ± Margin of Error
744.05 (Santa Ana)	19.4% ± 7.3%	525.34 (Irvine)	9.5% ± 14.2%
875.05 (Anaheim)	16.8% ± 5.8%	992.14 (Huntington Beach)	8.9% ± 6.7%
761.03 (Orange)	16.4% ± 8%	995.02 (Seal Beach)	7.9% ± 10.8%
755.17 (Costa Mesa/ Newport Beach)	16% ± 12.8%	992.27 (Orange)	7.2% ± 6.7%
761.05 (Orange)	15.1% ± 7.7%	320.57 (Ladera Ranch)	7.1% ± 5.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Although mapping data that shows where households with single parents reside in Orange County are limited due to high margin of errors, the food insecurity data at the national level has continuously shown in recent years that single parents are disproportionately impacted.[13] Several reports also emphasized the need to support single parents, specifically households headed by single females.[25,26] Poverty rates are higher among families with single adults relative to families with married adults,[27,28] and 70% of single mothers in Orange County fall below the Real Cost Measure and may experience greater financial hardship.[22]

AIM 2

Using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design and community-engaged strategies, we collected survey data from community members and explained survey findings via focus groups with both partners and community members.

Findings: Survey among Community Members

We collected a total of 678 valid surveys across 17 partner food distribution sites:

- 7 represented traditional partner sites
- 5 represented sites that serve older adults
- 5 represented sites that primarily serve youth

We collected an average of 42 surveys per site. Most respondents completed the survey via paper and in English or Spanish.

Number of Respondents by Partner Category

Category	Partner	Value
Traditional	PARTNER	197
	MP	107
Older Adults	PIM	103
	SG	60
Youth	MSP	148
	CP	51
	PSP	12
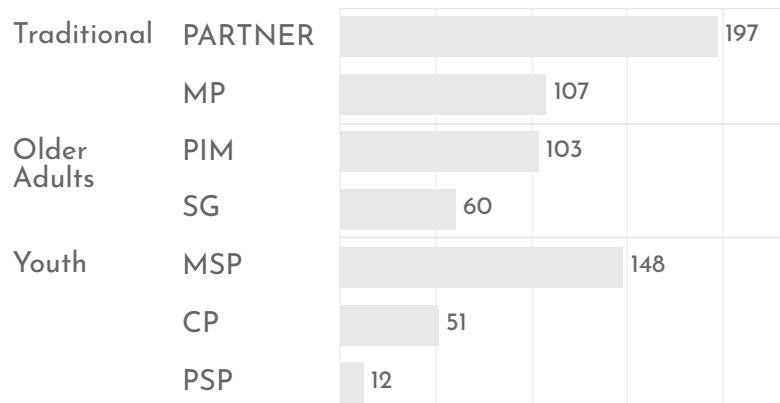
Number of Respondents by Survey Language

Language	Value
English	260
Spanish	227
Vietnamese	93
Korean	75
Farsi	23
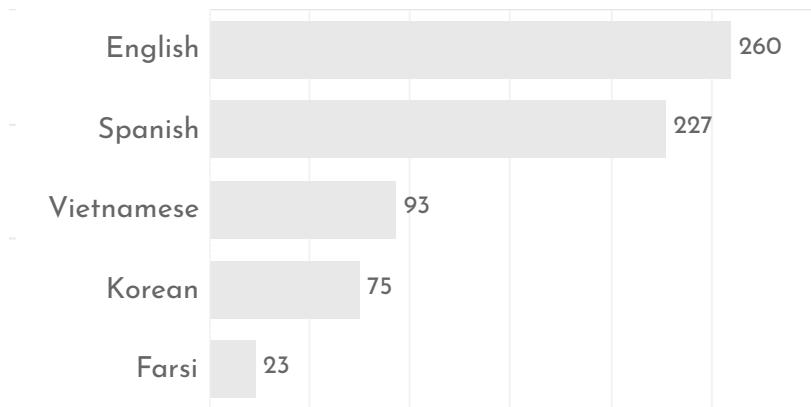
Demographics

The mean age for respondents was ~60 years old, with a range of 18-100 years old; a majority were women (73%). Most noted having at least 2 household members. 365 and 277 respondents indicated that they reside with older adults over 65 years old and with children under 18 years old, respectively. 16% reside in multi-generational households, with at least one older adult and one child present at home.

Number of Household Members

Members	Count
1	165
2	273
3	103
4	81
>5	22

n=644
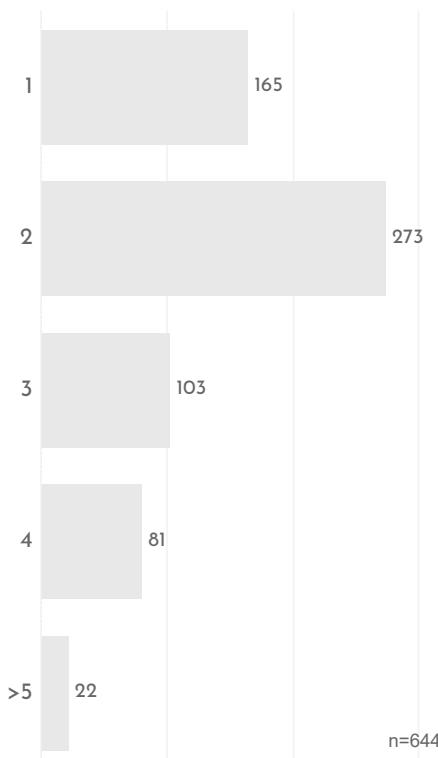
Number who Reside with Older Adults and Amount

	Count
Grand Total	365
1	190
2	161
3	9
4	4
5	1
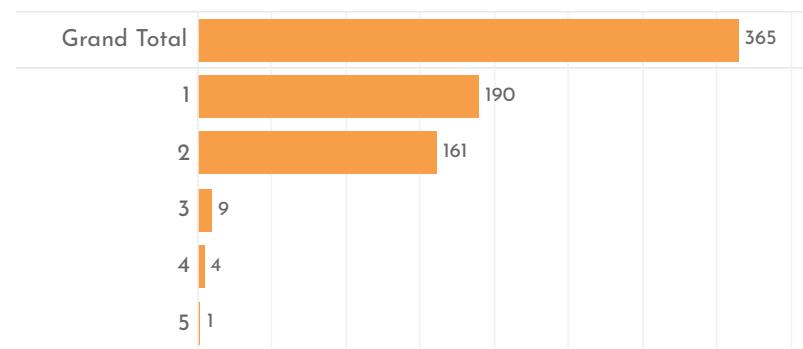
Number who Reside with Children and Counts

	Count
Grand Total	277
1	91
2	100
3	55
4	22
5	9
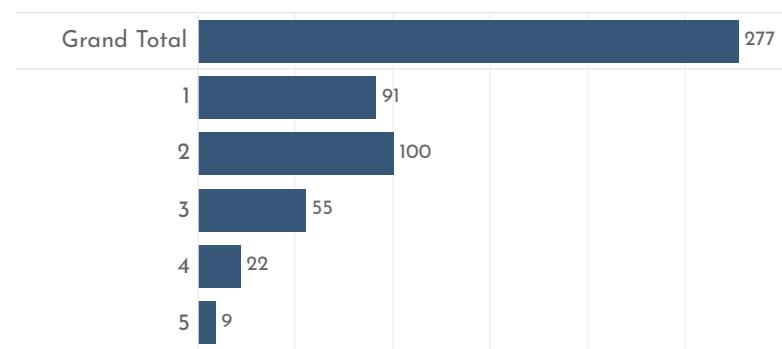
Among respondents who reported their ethnicity (n=664), 48% identified as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin. Among them, 75% indicated they were of Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a background. Among those who answered the question on race (n=615), 42% identified as Asian and 21% identified as White (with a majority indicating they were of Hispanic or Latino origin). The top sub-categories among those who selected Asian were Vietnamese (43%), Korean (30%), and Filipino (9%). The breakdown for overall race and ethnicity, including the number of no responses, is presented in the table below.

Number of Respondents by Race and Ethnicity

Race	Hispanic or Latino			
	Yes	No	No Response	Grand Total
American Indian or Alaska Native	8	2		**10**
Asian	1	248	9	**258**
Black or African American		6		**6**
Other:	97	20	1	**118**
Pacific Islander	2	1		**3**
Two+ Race	5	6		**11**
White	84	48		**132**
Don't know/not sure	71	5	1	**77**
No Response	54	6	3	**63**
Grand Total	**322**	**342**	**14**	**678**

Employment status varied among all respondents; 34% are retired, followed-by 19% who indicated they are employed for wages. Most who retired completed the survey at traditional partner sites and sites serving older adults, whereas those who were employed for wages or were out of work mainly represented traditional partner sites and sites serving youth.

Percentage of Respondents by Employment Status

n=662

Retired	34%
Employed for wages	19%
Out of work for more than a year	15%
Unable to work	13%
Out of work for less than a year	8%
A student	7%
Self-employed	4%
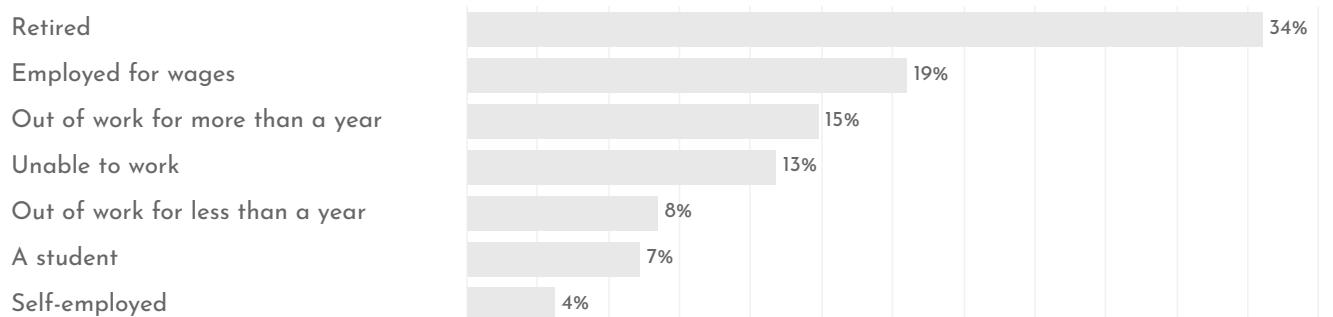
Employment Status by Program Categories

	Traditional	Older Adults	Youth
Retired	118	86	20
Employed for wages	60	19	45
Out of work for more than a year	38	8	53
Unable to work	34	41	12
Out of work for less than a year	23	2	29
A student	8	1	40
Self-employed	14	4	7
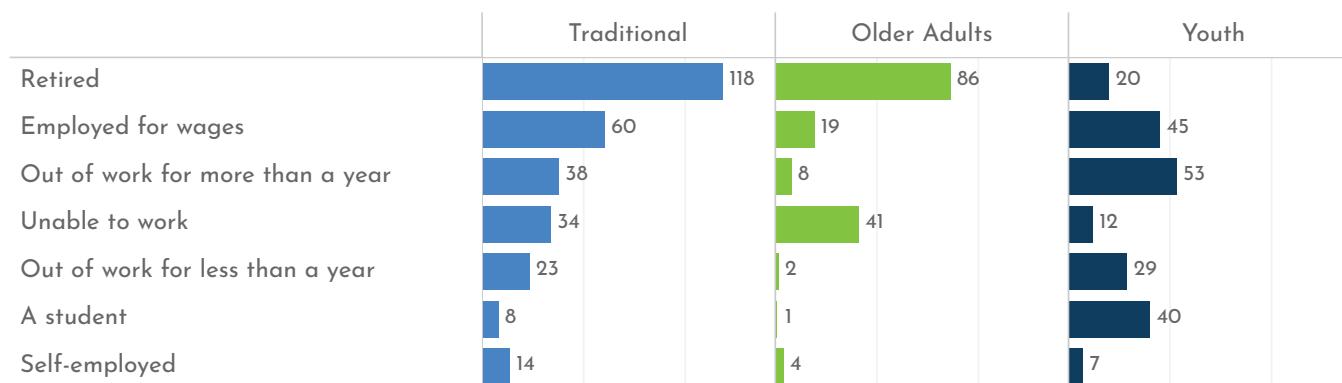
Among those who answered the question regarding household income in 2024 (n=552), approximately **81% indicated they received less than $30,000**.

Household Income in 2024

Income Categories
- Less than $15,000
- Between $15,000 to $30,000
- Between $30,000 to $45,000
- Between $45,000 to $60,000
- Greater than $60,000

3%
5%
10%
51%
30%
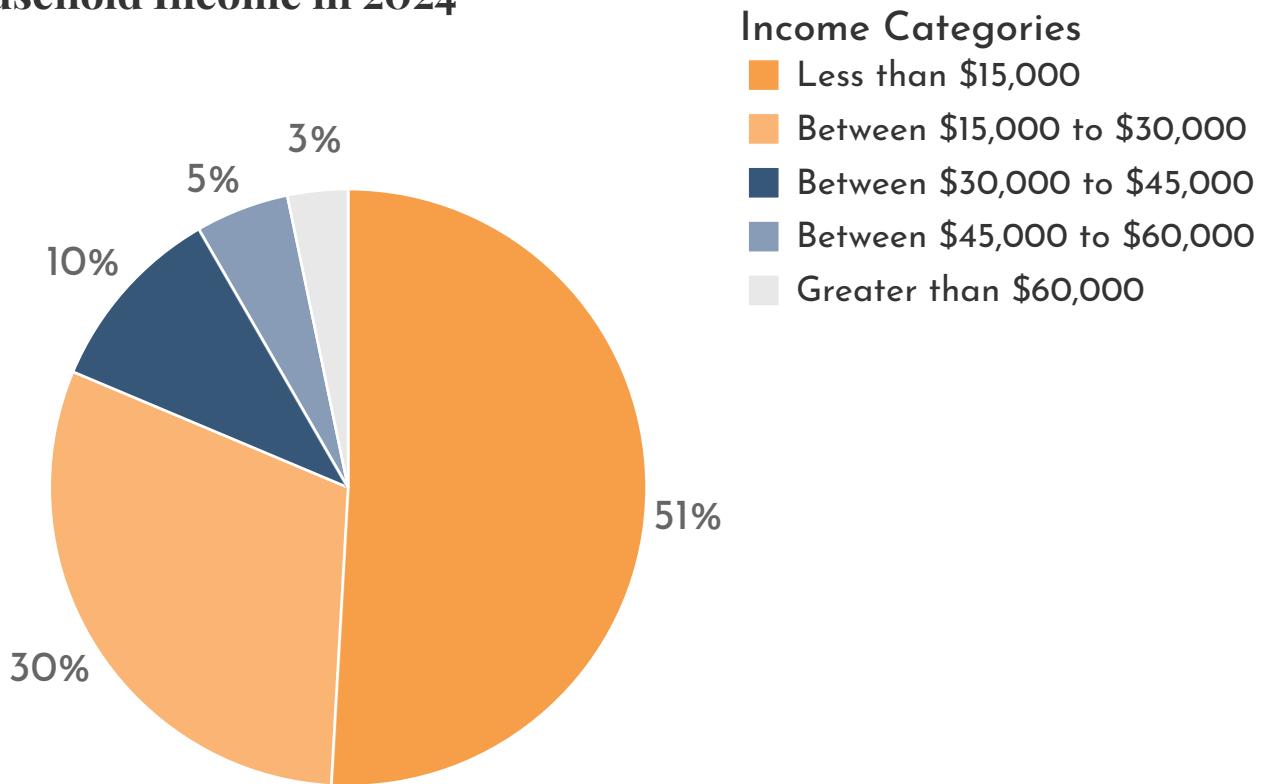
n=552

When asked if respondents participate in any of the following government assistance programs (Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, Free school lunch/breakfast, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and/or Unemployment), over 3/4s selected Yes to at least one. 62% of all respondents received Medicaid and 43% received SNAP; 32% received both.
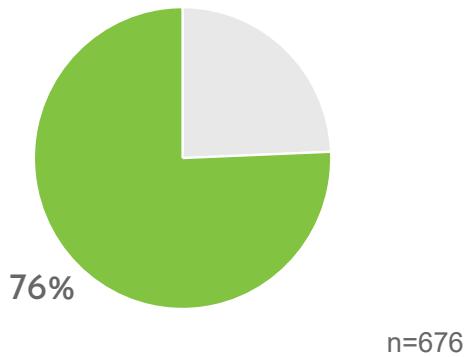
Participation in Government Assistance Programs


Medicaid		
Yes		412
No		234
Don't know		15
SNAP		
Yes		288
No		362
Don't know		17
WIC		
Yes		39
No		568
Don't know		27
Free school lunch/breakfast		
Yes		110
No		508
Don't know		28
TANF		
Yes		24
No		585
Don't know		32
Unemployment		
Yes		52
No		563
Don't know		26

Receive at least One Government Assistance Program

76%

n=676

Receive both SNAP and Medicaid

32%

n=676
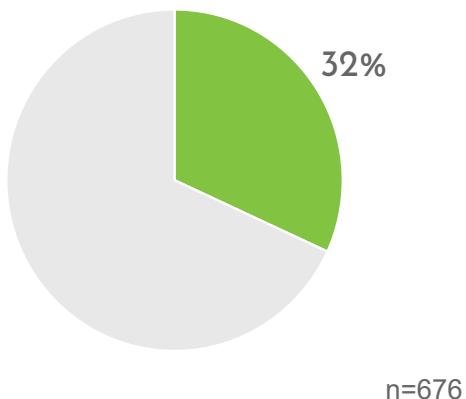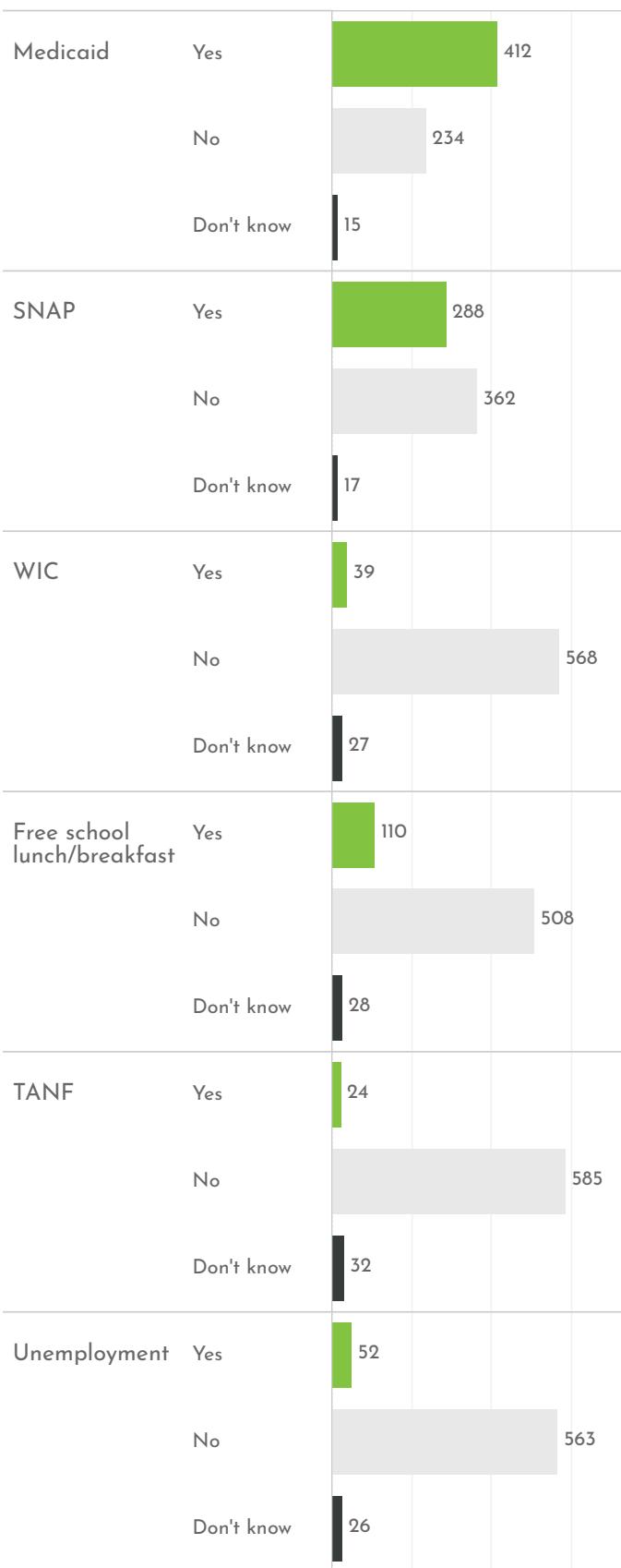
Perceptions and Experiences at Food Pantry

60% of respondents heard about the partner food distribution site via word of mouth. A little over half indicated that in the past year, they received food from the site over 5 times.

How Respondents Heard about Partner Food Distribution Site

Flyer	3
Neighbor / Passing by	17
Search engine (Google, etc.)	27
Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	28
Other	50
Referral (211, etc.)	62
Distribution Site	88
Word of mouth	393

n=668
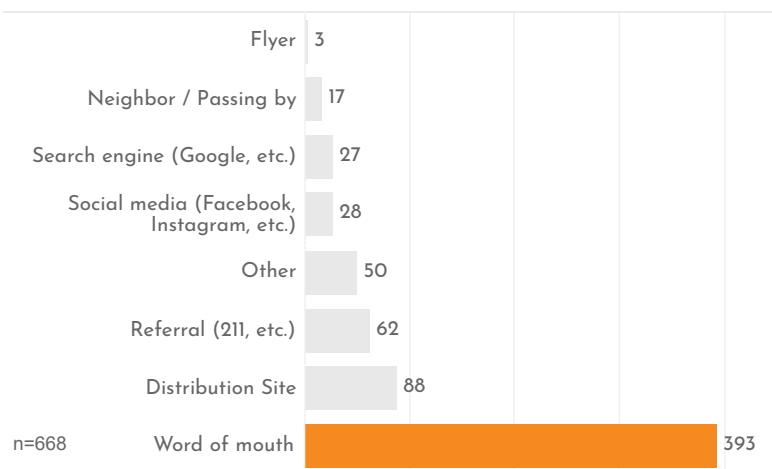
Frequency of Receiving Food from Site in the Past Year

- 11% — This is my first time receiving food from this site.
- 19% — 1 – 2 times
- 17% — 3 – 4 times
- 52% — Over 5 times

n=670
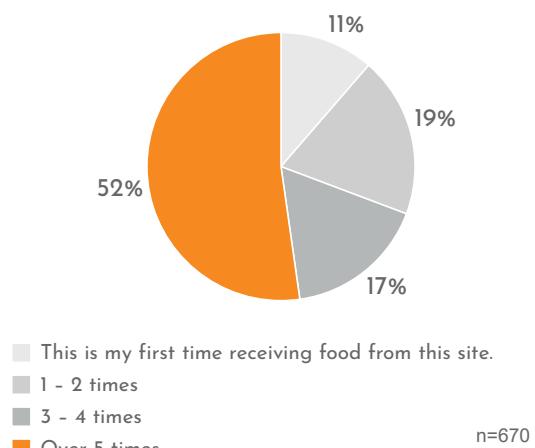
A majority were satisfied or very satisfied with all pantry characteristics such as the types of food offered, amount, interactions with partner site staff and the resources and services provided.

Satisfaction with Pantry Characteristics

	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Variety of food available	41%	38%
Nutritional value of food	43%	36%
Taste of food	44%	34%
Quality of food	45%	32%
Freshness of food	41%	34%
Amount of food	43%	35%
Interaction with staff and volunteers	35%	49%
Organization and layout	39%	43%
Additional services or resources provided by the site	34%	29%

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

■ Very dissatisfied   ■ Dissatisfied   ■ Neither   ■ Satisfied   ■ Very Satisfied

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the food available at the site meets their needs and preferences and that the site exposes them to new food. Most respondents are able to store, prepare, and use all the food that they received from the site.

Legend:
- ■ Strongly disagree
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Neither agree nor disagree
- ■ Agree
- ■ Strongly agree
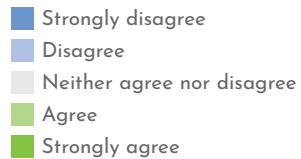
Thoughts about the Food Available

	The food I receive from this site meets my religious and/or cultural preferences	The food I receive from this site meets my health and medical needs	The food I receive from this site meets my dietary preferences	I enjoy that this site exposes me to new food I have not tried before
Strongly disagree	31	26	25	28
Disagree	12	15	13	13
Neither agree nor disagree	74	74	82	81
Agree	295	323	309	314
Strongly agree	181	208	212	197

Thoughts about Using the Food

|	I am able to safely store all the food that I receive from this site	I know how to prepare the food that I receive from this site	I am able to use all the food that I receive from this site
Strongly disagree	32	30	32
Disagree	11	9	12
Neither agree nor disagree	40	46	56
Agree	320	318	297
Strongly agree	240	237	244
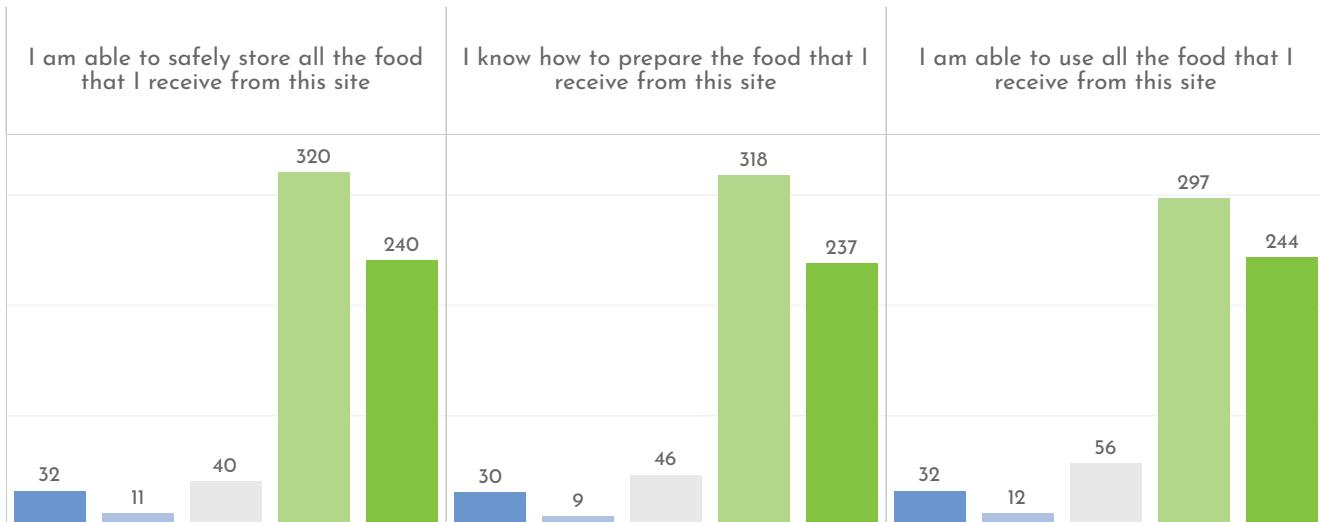
In addition, most respondents indicated that they felt safe and comfortable receiving food at the partner food distribution site and that the instructions on how to receive food were clear. Many responded that the site is close to their home or place of work or school and it is open on days and times that work with their schedule.

Legend:
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Thoughts about the Site

I feel safe and comfortable receiving food at this site

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
30	6	36	297	270

The instructions on how to receive food from this site are clear to me

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
30	8	53	321	229
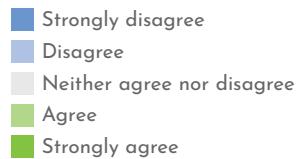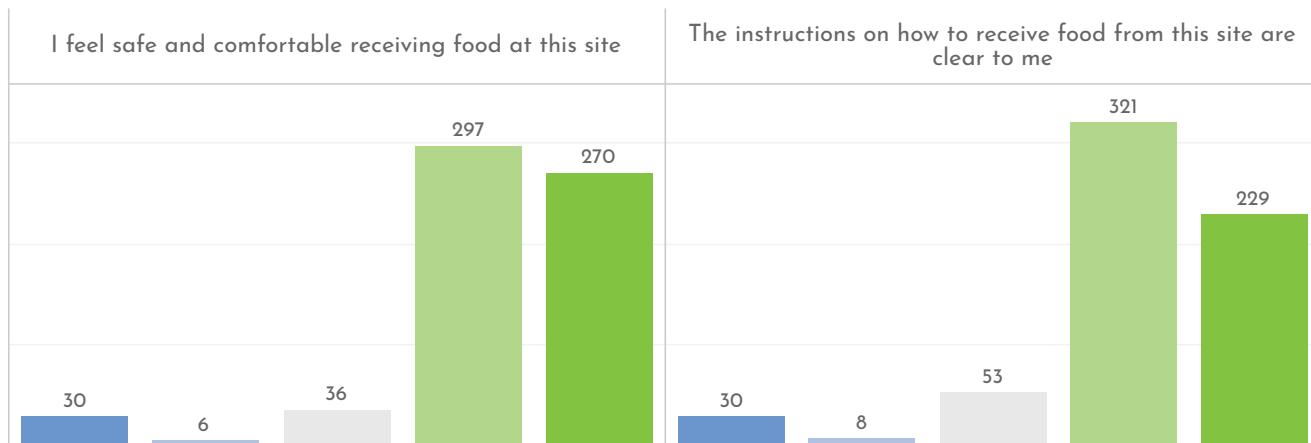
Thoughts about the Distance & Hours of Operations

This site is close to my home

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
30	9	45	286	259

This site is close to my place of work or school

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
32	19	55	226	212

This site is open on days that work with my schedule

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
35	14	40	288	239

This site is open on times that work with my schedule

| Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
38	17	45	289	228

A little over half said that they knew of others who can benefit from receiving free meals or groceries from this site but currently do not. When followed up on reasons why, many indicated distance, lacking reliable transportation, and inconvenient pantry hours as the primary reasons.

## Knowing Others who can Benefit from Receiving Food from Site but Do Not

51%

n=670
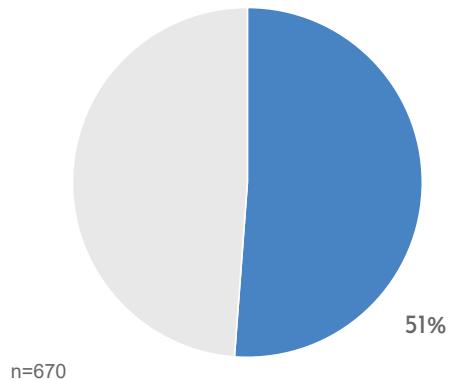
Top Perceived Reasons Why

Reason	Count
They do not live close to this site	160
They do not have reliable transportation to get to this site	85
This site is not open at times that work with their schedule	54
They are not eligible to receive food at this site	44
They do not feel comfortable receiving free meals or groceries	24
Other:	22
They are concerned about the quality of the food available at this site	13
The food offered at this site does not meet their dietary needs and preferences	10
They are not aware of this service	6
They are limited by age or health reasons	3

Most expressed that they sometimes, often, or always share food they receive from the food distribution site with non-household members.

Sharing Food Received from Site with Non-Household Members

11% Always
14% Often
21% Never
16% Rarely
38% Sometimes

n=642
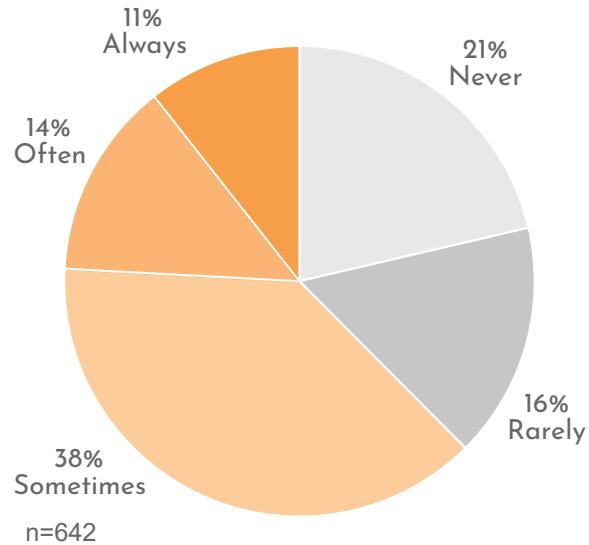
When respondents were given a range of food items and asked to select all items that they typically look for at charitable food distribution sites, the top food items selected were **fresh fruits**, **fresh vegetables**, **eggs**, and **dairy**.

Noticeably, most respondents seemed to **prefer fresh** fruits and vegetables **over frozen or canned** fruits and vegetables.

Food Items Community Members Typically Look for in Food Pantries

| Food Item	Percentage
Fruits - fresh	87%
Vegetables – fresh	77%
Animal protein - eggs	67%
Dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese, etc.)	64%
Animal protein – red meat (beef, pork, lamb)	55%
Plant-based protein (beans, nuts seeds, tofu, etc.)	54%
Animal protein – poultry & fish	51%
Whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat pasta, etc.)	51%
Food with low fat	39%
Food with low added sugar	38%
Staples (flour, sugar, salt, etc.)	37%
Food with low-sodium/salt	36%
Dairy alternatives (soy milk, oat milk, etc.)	35%
Refined grains (white rice, flour tortillas, etc.)	33%
Spices	27%
Fruits – frozen or canned	27%
Ready-to-eat meals (boxed lunches, microwaveable, etc.)	26%
Vegetables – frozen or canned	23%
Nothing specific	13%
Kosher foods	12%
Halal foods	10%

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

The next 3 pages describe results using Feeding America's 7-item Neighbor Experience module:

When it came to accessing the charitable food system in the past 6 months, 35% reported that it was somewhat challenging or very challenging finding a site that is open when they need it, and only 12% reported often or always having trouble finding free meals/groceries due to transit barriers including limited access to transportation, inability to afford gas/fare, or challenges carrying food.

Challenges Finding a Site for Free Meals/Groceries due to Time Barriers

n=638

Very challenging	79 (12%)
Somewhat challenging	146 (23%)
Not too challenging	180 (28%)
Not at all challenging	145 (23%)
Don't know	88 (14%)
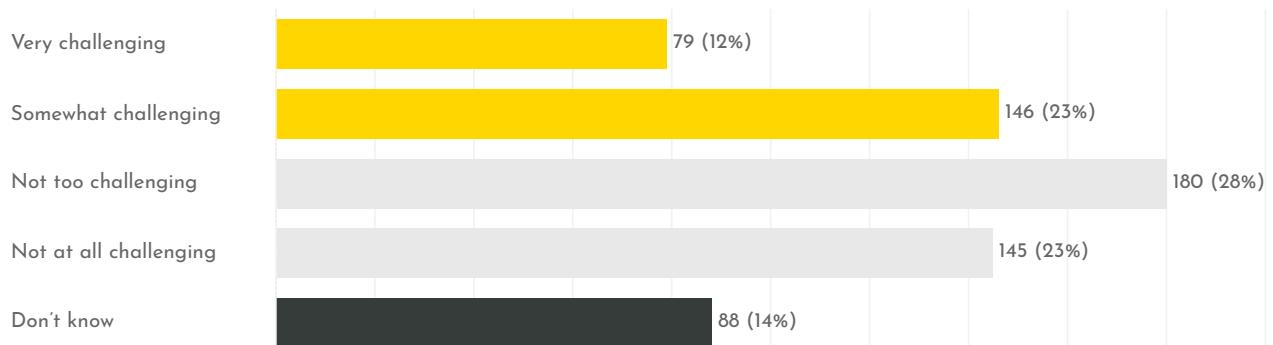
Trouble Accessing Free Meals/Groceries Due to Transit Barriers

n=648

|	
Always	20 (3%)
Often	58 (9%)
Sometimes	168 (26%)
Rarely	129 (20%)
Never	256 (40%)
Don't know	17 (3%)
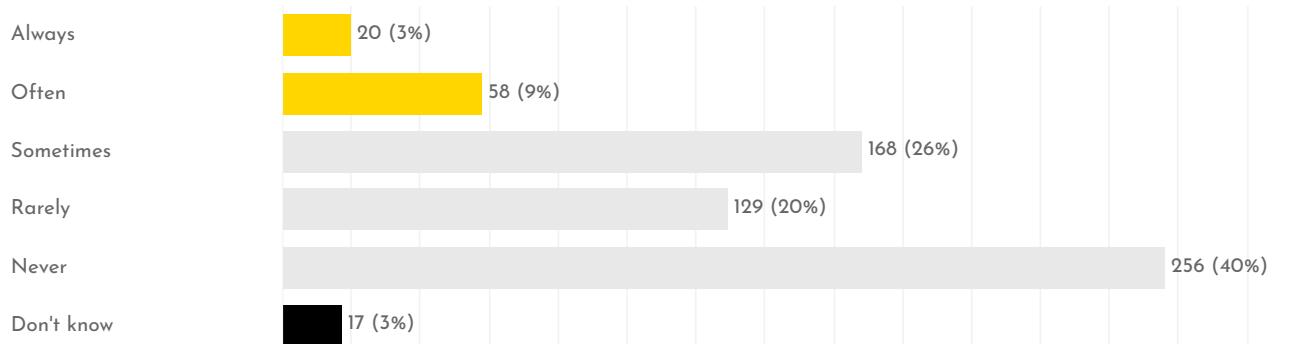
Although 54% of respondents reported living within 15 minutes from the partner food distribution site, most clients reported varying times spent on site, from arrival to departure, with 20% spending greater than 1 hour on-site.

Travel Time to and Time Spent at Food Distribution Site

Travel time to site	Less than 15 minutes	355
	15-30 minutes	188
	31 minutes – 1 hour	70
	Between 1 and 2 hours	30
	More than 2 hours	12
Length of time at site	Less than 15 minutes	172
	15-30 minutes	190
	31 minutes – 1 hour	159
	Between 1 and 2 hours	89
	More than 2 hours	45
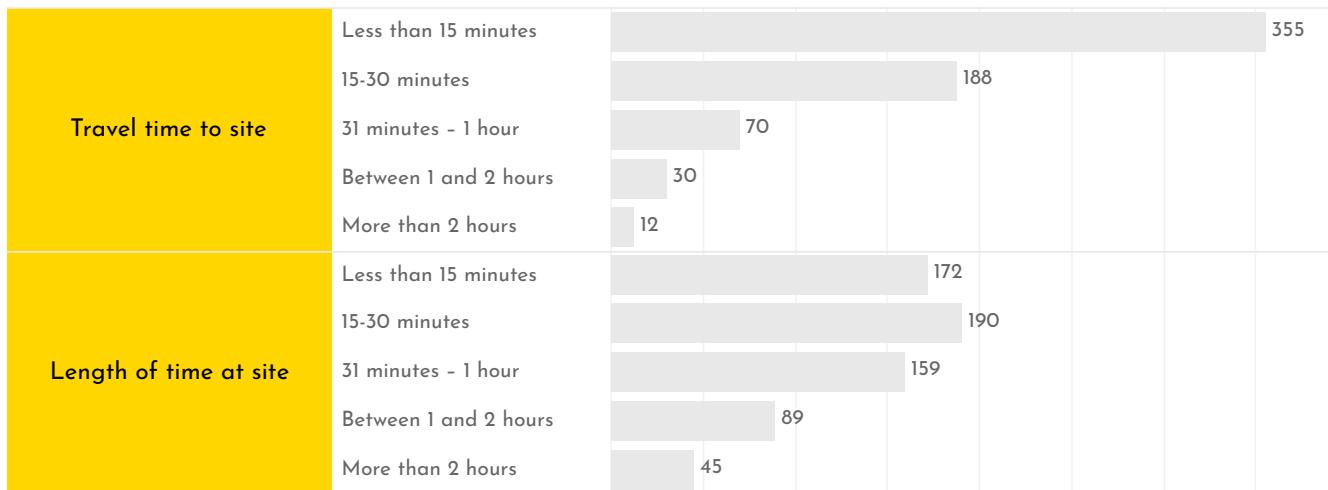
Receiving Variety of Food that Meets Needs and Preferences

2% Never
5% Rarely
23% Always
35% Sometimes
36% Often

n=638
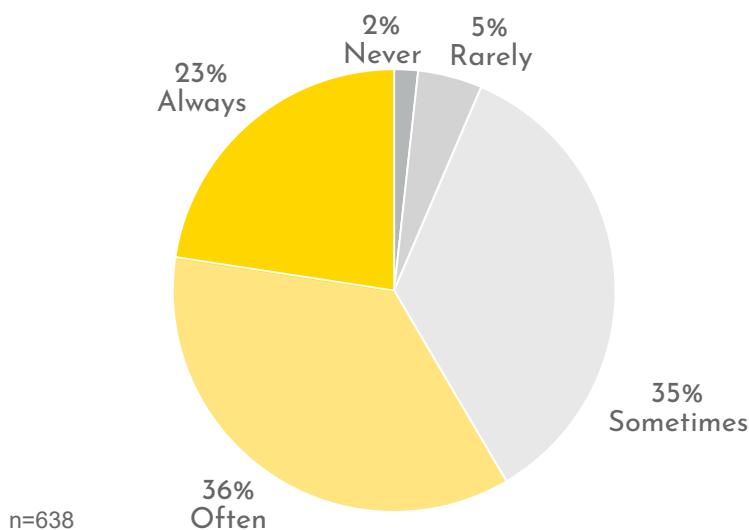
A majority (59%) of respondents indicated that they often or always get the variety and types of food they need or want from the partner food distribution site.

Only 9% reported experiencing judgment on site (n=57). Many respondents were unsure or preferred not to answer, but the main reasons among those who did respond were age, physical disability, and ancestry/national origins.

Judgment at Site

- 5% Don't know
- 2% Strong yes
- 7% Yes
- 22% Strong no
- 64% No

n=655
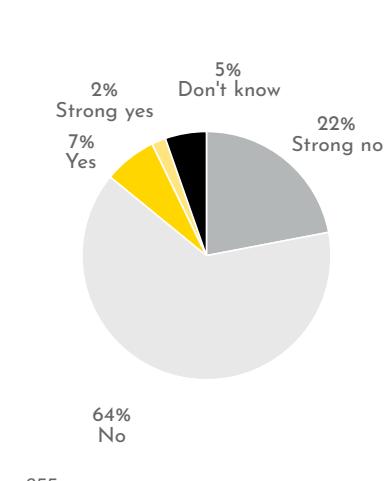
Perceived Reasons for Experienced Judgment on Site

Reason	Count
Don't know	12
Prefer not to answer	11
Your age	10
A physical disability	10
Your ancestry or national origins	8
Your religion	6
Your shade of skin color	5
Your race	4
Your gender	4
Some other aspect of your physical appearance	4
Other	4
Your tribe	2
Your sexual orientation	2
Your height/weight	1
Your education or income level	1
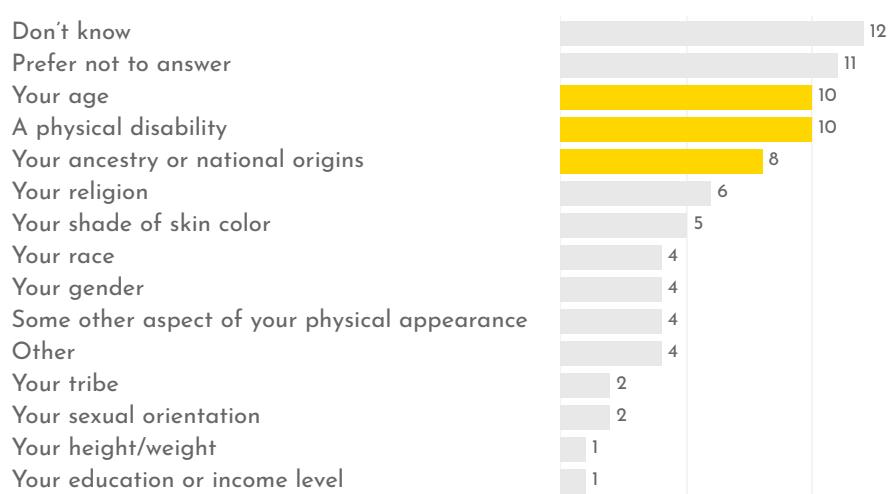
Overall, 63% of respondents received a Net Promoter Score of 9 or 10 and are classified as Promoters, highly likely to recommend the site to those in their network. The total Net Promoter Score across the 17 sites is 43 which falls between favorable (a score of 20) and excellent (a score of 50).

Likelihood or Recommending Site to Friend or Family Member

n=665

Recommend Group

Group	Value
Detractor	132 (20%)
Passive	112 (17%)
Promoter	421 (63%)

Recommend Number

Number	Value
0	24 (4%)
1	11 (2%)
2	16 (2%)
3	14 (2%)
4	9 (1%)
5	38 (6%)
6	20 (3%)
7	42 (6%)
8	70 (11%)
9	84 (13%)
10	337 (51%)
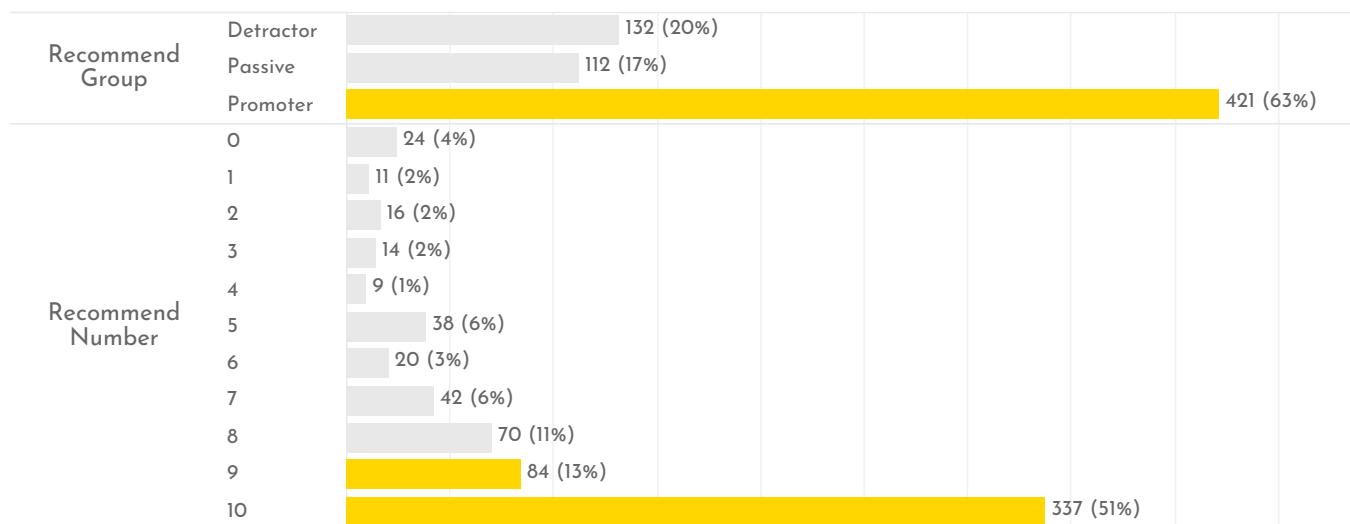
Food and Nutrition Security

Household Food Security

In the past year, among respondents with children in the household, 65% experienced food insecurity (24% very low food security and 41% low food security). Among respondents without children, 50% experienced food insecurity (16% very low food security and 34% low food security). Combined, 334 respondents experienced household food insecurity.

Household Food Security

Among those <u>with Children</u>

12%
24%
22%
41%
n=266

Among those <u>without Children</u>

16%
21%
29%
34%
n=318
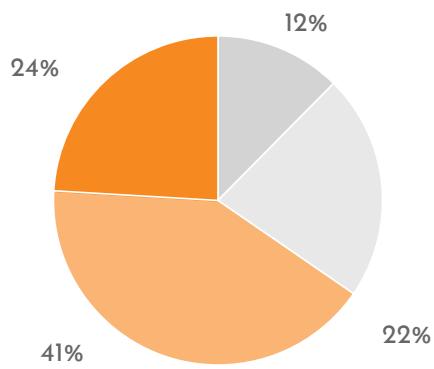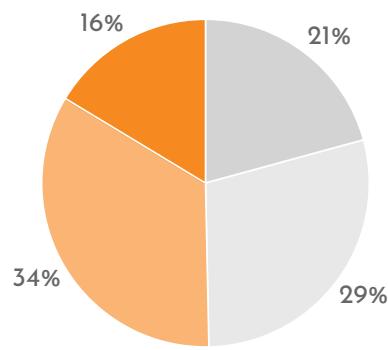
■ High food security   ■ Marginal food security   ■ Low food security   ■ Very low food security

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Side Note:

According to the USDA Economic Research Service, a household's food security status falls in a range and depends on certain indicators. These definitions and indicators are provided to the right.

■ **HIGH FOOD SECURITY**
No indications of food access limitations

■ **MARGINAL FOOD SECURITY**
1-2 indications worry about food sufficiency with little to no impacts on diet or food intake

■ **LOW FOOD SECURITY**
Reduction in quality, variety, or desiraility of diet with little or no impact on food intake

■ **VERY LOW FOOD SECURITY**
Multiple indications of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns

CHILD FOOD INSECURITY

The children experienced food insecurity in 37% of households with children. Among these 105 households, 76 (72%) reported low food security among children and 29 (28%) reported very low food security among children. A little over 2/3 identified as Hispanic or Latino and 65% reported earning less than $30,000 in 2024. Employment status varied among households where children experienced food insecurity, with 41% reported being out of work. 83% received at least one form of government assistance.

56% of food-insecure households identified as Hispanic or Latino and 31% identified as Asian. In addition, employment status among food-insecure households varied.

Food–Insecure Households

by Ethnicity and Race

		Number of Respondents
Hispanic or Latino	TOTAL	188 (56%)
	American Indian or Alaska Native	5 (1%)
	Asian	1 (0%)
	Other:	53 (16%)
	Pacific Islander	1 (0%)
	Two+ Race	4 (1%)
	White	46 (14%)
	Don't know/not sure	46 (14%)
	No Response	32 (10%)
Non-Hispanic or Latino	TOTAL	143 (43%)
	American Indian or Alaska Native	2 (1%)
	Asian	101 (30%)
	Black or African American	2 (1%)
	Other:	11 (3%)
	Pacific Islander	1 (0%)
	Two+ Race	1 (0%)
	White	22 (7%)
	Don't know/not sure	2 (1%)
	No Response	1 (0%)
No Response	TOTAL	3 (1%)
	Asian	3 (1%)

n=334

by Employment Status

Retired	80
Employed for wages	64
Out of work for more than a year	64
Unable to work	47
Out of work for less than a year	36
A student	24
Self-employed	12

n=327

Among food-insecure households (regardless of household composition) who reported their income (n=329), 70% received an income less than $30,000 in 2024. 77% of food-insecure households receive at least one government assistance program with 39% receiving SNAP and 61% receiving Medicaid. Overall, 28% of all food-insecure households receive both SNAP and Medicaid.

Food–Insecure Households

by Income

- Less than $15,000
- Between $15,000 to $30,000
- Between $30,000 to $45,000
- Greater than $45,000
- Prefer not to answer
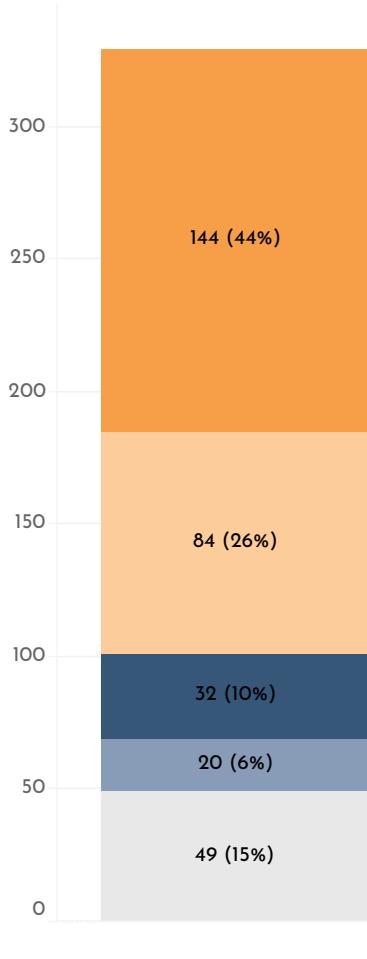
n=329

Participating in at least One Government Assistance Program   n=334

Grand Total	258 (77%)
Households with Children	
Households with No Children	

Receiving SNAP   n=319

Grand Total	129 (39%)
Households with Children	
Households with No Children	

Receiving Medicaid   n=329

Grand Total	204 (62%)
Households with Children	
Households with No Children	
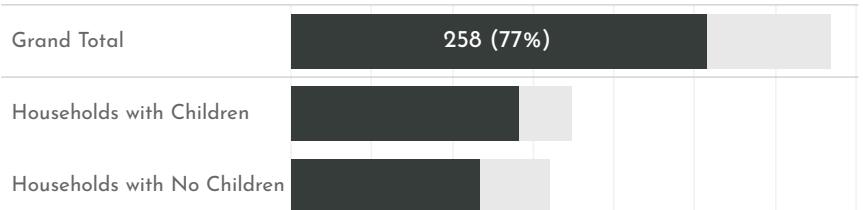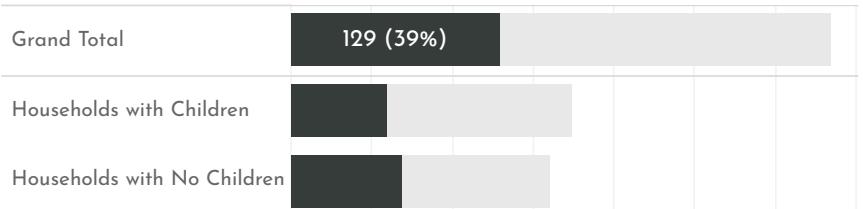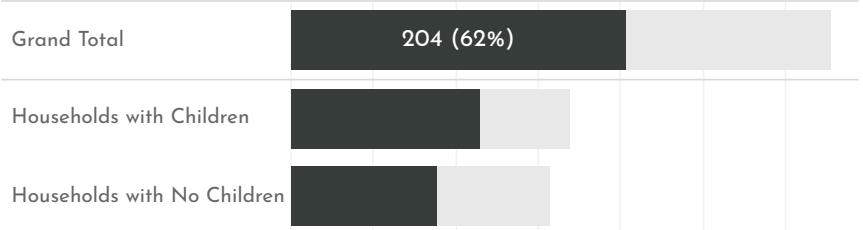
Receiving SNAP & Medicaid   n=329

Grand Total	93 (28%)
Households with Children	
Households with No Children	
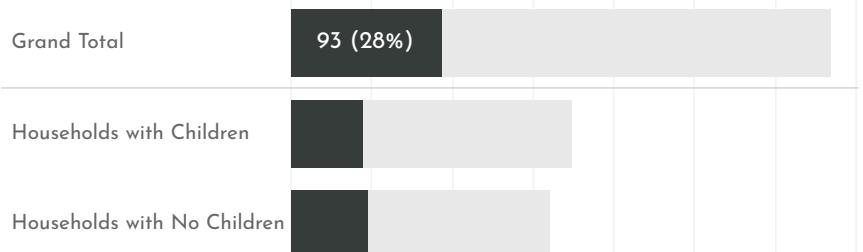
Among respondents residing in households categorized as having food insecurity, most indicated they were worried that food would run out, the food they bought did not last, and that they could not afford balanced meals. Responses to all indicators among food-insecure households with children and without children are presented on the next page.

Food Insecurity Indicators

Among Food-Insecure Households with Children

	Low food security	Very low food security
GRAND TOTAL	110 (100%)	64 (100%)
Worried food would run out	102 (93%)	60 (94%)
Food bought didn't last	101 (92%)	61 (95%)
Could not afford balanced meals	100 (91%)	61 (95%)
Cut the size of meals or skipped meals	16 (15%)	51 (80%)
Cut the size of meals or skipped meals, 3+ months	7 (6%)	42 (66%)
Eat less than they felt they should	20 (18%)	54 (84%)
Hungry but did not eat	8 (7%)	43 (67%)
Lost weight	5 (5%)	35 (55%)
Did not eat for whole day	3 (3%)	30 (47%)
Did not eat for whole day, 3+ months	1 (1%)	22 (34%)
Relied on low-cost food to feed children	60 (55%)	60 (94%)
Couldn't feed children balanced meal	49 (45%)	60 (94%)
Children were not eating enough	29 (26%)	55 (86%)
Cut size of children's meal	8 (7%)	42 (66%)
Children were hungry	1 (1%)	31 (48%)
Children skipped a meal	2 (2%)	23 (36%)
Children skipped a meal, 3+ months		15 (23%)
Chidren not eat for a whole day	2 (2%)	14 (22%)

Among Food-Insecure Households without Children

|	Low food security	Very low food security
GRAND TOTAL	108 (100%)	52 (100%)
Worried food would run out	105 (97%)	50 (96%)
Food bought didn't last	104 (96%)	51 (98%)
Could not afford balanced meals	106 (98%)	51 (98%)
Cut the size of meals or skipped meals	25 (23%)	46 (88%)
Cut the size of meals or skipped meals, 3+ months	15 (14%)	38 (73%)
Eat less than they felt they should	27 (25%)	48 (92%)
Hungry but did not eat	18 (17%)	45 (87%)
Lost weight	8 (7%)	41 (79%)
Did not eat for whole day	3 (3%)	33 (63%)
Did not eat for whole day, 3+ months	1 (1%)	21 (40%)

Food Insecurity Stability

Respondents were asked when they worried about food, when they usually ran out of food, and when they could not afford balanced meals.

27% have a greater degree of experiencing chronic food insecurity, 21% intermittent (or random) food insecurity, 38% monthly food insecurity, and 23% seasonal food insecurity. Over half of those who had a greater degree of experiencing chronic food insecurity were respondents at traditional partner food distribution sites. Most of the respondents who have a greater degree of experiencing monthly food insecurity were respondents at traditional and youth-serving food distribution sites.

Food Insecurity Stability

n=678
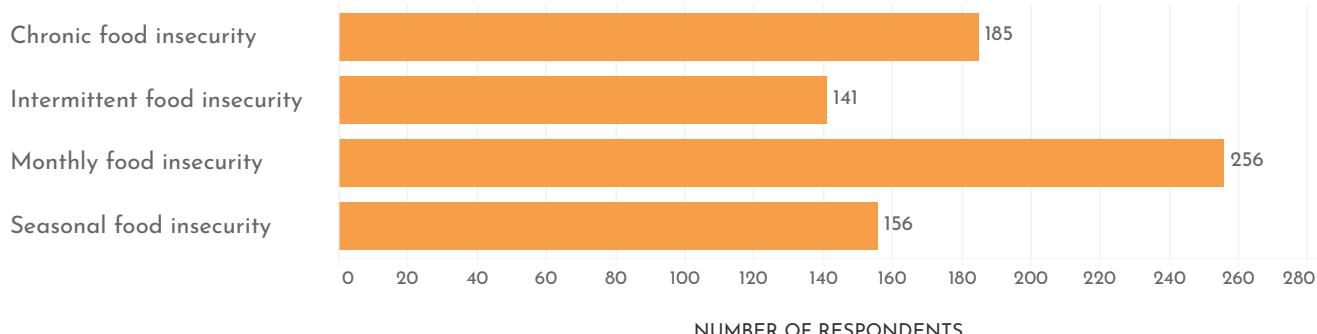
Category	Number of Respondents
Chronic food insecurity	185
Intermittent food insecurity	141
Monthly food insecurity	256
Seasonal food insecurity	156

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS

By Program Category

Legend: Youth, Older Adults, Traditional

Category	Traditional	Older Adults	Youth
Chronic food insecurity	102	39	44
Intermittent food insecurity	65	43	33
Monthly food insecurity	119	41	96
Seasonal food insecurity	72	29	55

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
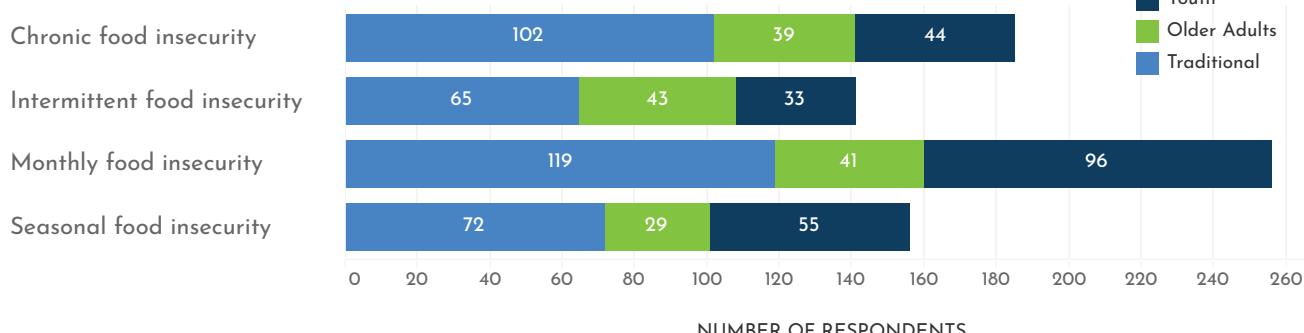
Among those who had a greater degree of experiencing monthly food insecurity, most respondents expressed concern about affording and accessing food towards the end of the month compared to the beginning or middle of the month. Among those who had a greater degree of experiencing food insecurity seasonally, most respondents were primarily concerned in the summer or winter seasons about accessing food.

Monthly and Seasonal Food Insecurity

When did your household usually **worry about running out of food**?
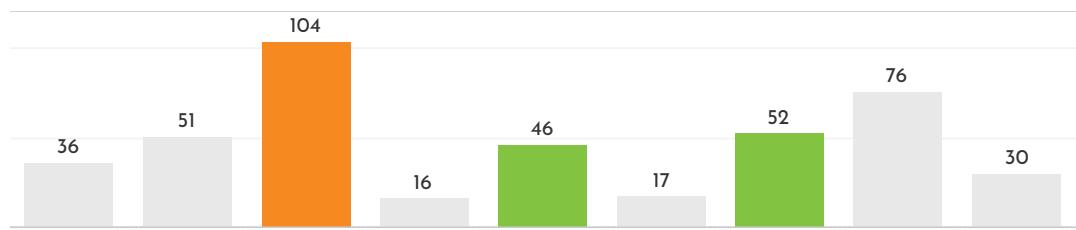
When did your household usually **run out of food** before getting more money to buy more?

When was your household **not able to afford balanced meals**?

	Beginning of the month	Middle of the month	End of the month	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter	Randomly no certain time frame	Don't know
worry about running out of food	36	51	104	16	46	17	52	76	30
run out of food	33	49	104	16	39	24	39	69	24
not able to afford balanced meals	30	45	91	13	31	13	37	83	23
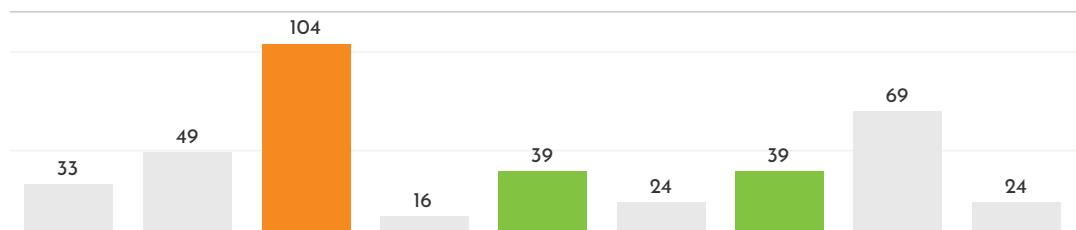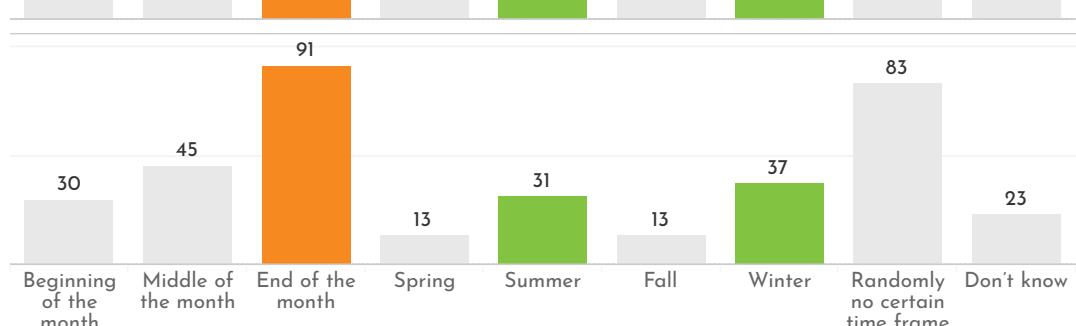
Nutrition Security, Dietary Choice, and Healthfulness Choice

23% of respondents were reported to have low nutrition security in which the household may face challenges accessing healthful, nutritious food. 44% of respondents screened positive for perceived limited control in acquiring foods that meet their food preferences and 71% screened positive for perceived limited control in selecting food that meets their healthfulness needs.

Household Resilience

34% were screened for low absorptive capacity and are likely to need support to improve their household's financial well-being due to a lack of tangible resources, such as a stable income and savings. Most respondents indicated they were unable to put money into savings in the past year and most reported that at least one adult in the household received income in the past month.

Absorptive Capacity
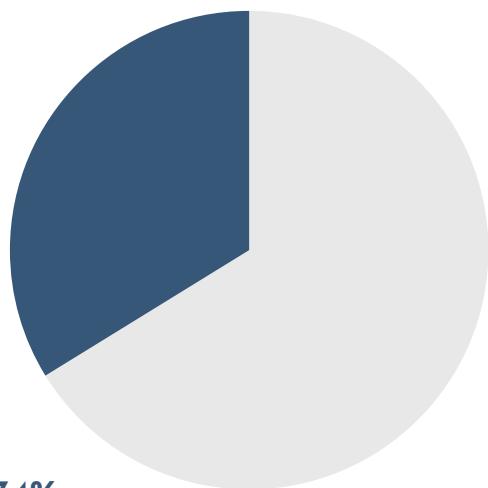
34%
screened for LOW
absorptive capacity

Number of Adults in Household who Received Income Last Month

0	68
1	292
2	201
3	42
4	22
5	6
6	4

n=635

Put Money into Savings in the Past Year

Never	373
Some months but not every month	108
Only 1 or 2 months	64
Almost every month	6

n=637
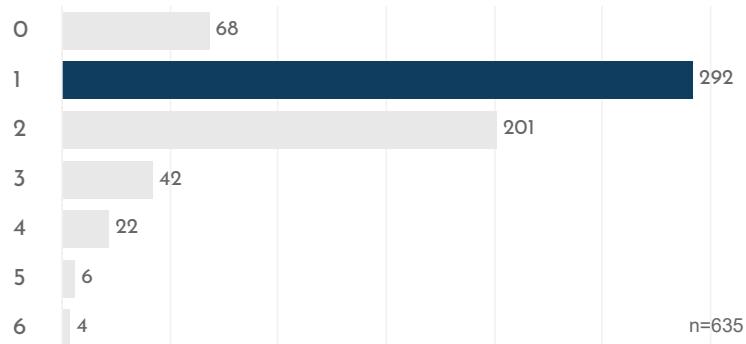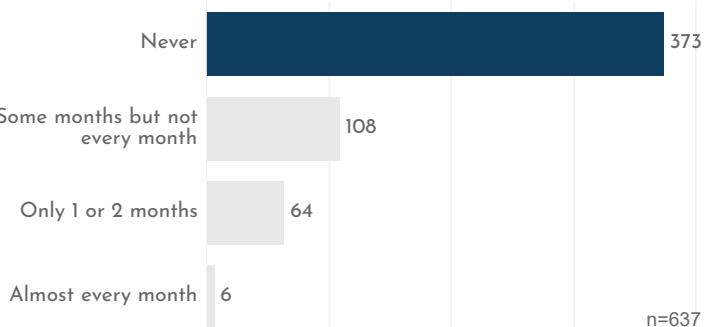
33% were screened for low adaptive capacity and may need support to navigate financial challenges and improve financial skills and efficacy. Most respondents agreed that they know people whom they can discuss resources and opportunities with and believe they can navigate a financial challenge.

Adaptive Capacity

33% screened for LOW adaptive capacity

I know people personally who we can discuss things with like assistance programs, charitable organizations, and/or job or educational opportunities

n=493

69	48	42	99	177	58	

If we have a financial challenge, I believe we can find ways to get what we need

n=532

61	51	48	109	212	51	

Strongly disagree   Slightly disagree   Agree
Disagree   Slightly agree   Strongly agree
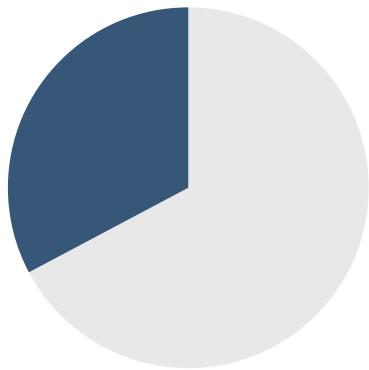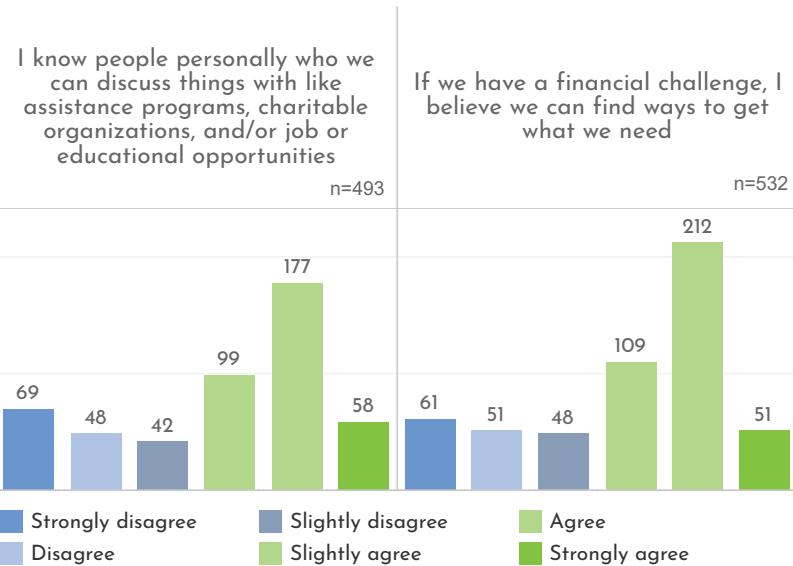
32% were screened for low transformative capacity and reside in areas with limited services, resources, and opportunities. Many respondents agreed that not only is it easy for people in their communities to get to where they need to be, but that they believe they will be better able to afford basic needs in the next several years.

Transformative Capacity

32% screened for LOW transformative capacity

It is easy for people in my community to travel around to the places they need to be

n=489

54	53	55	107	221	41	

In the next 5 years, I believe my household will be better able to afford basic needs such as food, housing, utilities, transportation, and medical care

n=466

49	45	40	95	210	68	

Strongly disagree   Slightly disagree   Agree
Disagree   Slightly agree   Strongly agree
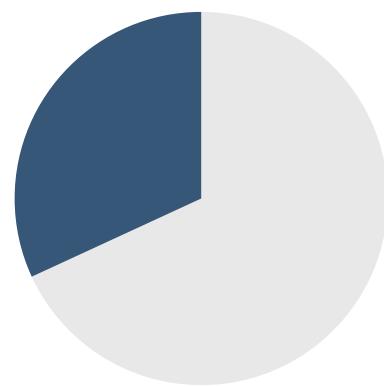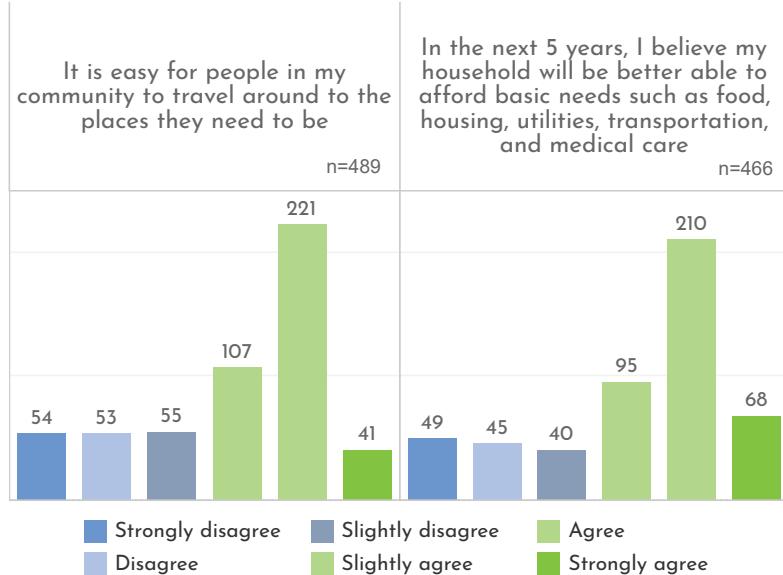
Findings: Focus Groups with Partners and Community Members

In total, 13 community members and 11 partners participated in focus groups. The average age for community members was 65 years old. Most identified as women (85%), Hispanic (77%), and retired (73%). 83% indicated they earned less than $30,000 in 2024. The average number of household members among community members who took part in the focus group was 1.9, and 46% reported having a child live at home. 92% received at least one type of government assistance program, with 62% receiving SNAP and 69% receiving Medicaid. 38% of community members who took part in focus groups received both SNAP and Medicaid.

Across all 4 focus groups, we identified 4 themes that supported or expanded on survey findings. These themes are listed and presented in the diagram below:

1. **MEETING NEEDS AND PREFERENCES**

2. **REACHING OTHERS IN NEED**

3. **FACTORS AFFECTING NEED**

4. **OPPORTUNITIES TO MEET GROWING NEED**

The themes and respective sub-themes are described in detail in the following pages with supporting quotes. Quotes in orange represent community members and quotes in blue represent partners.

Themes	Sub-Themes	

Meeting needs and preferences
- Attributes related to food
  - Importance of Quality
  - Importance of Variety
- Attributes related to service
  - Choice
  - Community and Connection

Reaching others in need
- Barriers to food pantry
  - Distance and transportation
  - Inconvenient pantry hours
- Opportunities to increase reach
  - Proxy pick-up & delivery
  - Referral to other resources

Factors affecting need
- Time period
  - Running out of government assistance benefits
  - Changes in household composition
- Political climate
- Limited purchasing power

Opportunities to meet growing need
- Need for additional programs and wrap-around services
- Building partner capacity and infrastructure
- Collaborative resource-sharing

Theme 1. Meeting Needs and Preferences

From our survey, we found that most community members are satisfied with the food and services provided at the partner food distribution sites, agreed that the food met their needs and preferences, and can use the food acquired.

Through focus groups, we wanted partners and community members to elaborate on their experiences and identify key pantry attributes that may contribute to high satisfaction with the food and services provided. The following attributes may also play an essential role in continuing to meet the needs and preferences of those in OC who rely on the charitable food system.

Attributes related to Food

IMPORTANCE OF QUALITY

Among focus groups with community members, many participants described wanting to receive quality food. Quality food, for some, was defined as fresh food items. One participant compared the quality of vegetables received at the partner food distribution site as similar to produce found in a grocery store and another perceived that food, when fresh, may be preserved to last longer.

Partners were also in agreement; one highlighted that fresh produce is typically selected first at their distribution. Another, who serves some members of the unhoused community, noted that fresh food is received well among their patrons who can prepare and use it.

In addition, some community members defined quality as those not past their expiration date. In one focus group, participants discussed receiving items from the food distribution site that

> "
> Yes, and **the vegetables are just as fresh**, I mean, there's no difference between the ones in the store and the ones they give us here.
>
> Community Member

> "But I think the produce has really made an impact on our area in terms of people coming and getting it, because they come in and **the first thing they hit is all that fresh, fresh produce.** That's first choice."
>
> Partner, Traditional

"

Community Member 1: **We need quality**.

Moderator: Yeah? So, when you say quality, what does that mean?

Community Member 2: **Not expired...** Some of it, like you said, is a week ahead of time. That's okay, but I've gotten some that I looked at expires today, and they gave it to us today.

were expired and showed signs of poor quality. This prompted discussion among participants on the definitions of different code dates (e.g. use-by, sell-by, expired) and what foods are safe to consume past the code date. Some even described receiving fresh produce from the site that had signs of poor quality, such as rotten avocados and broccoli with yellow tips.

These findings suggest that the quality of the food provided at partner food distribution sites leaves an impression on community members.

IMPORTANCE OF VARIETY

The variety of food available at food pantries is also important for community members of the charitable food system.

Variety was defined as a combination of both fresh and shelf-stable food that community members can select. One partner, who primarily serves college students, described that community members seek food pantries that mimic grocery stores which offer a range of nutritious food items and dry goods.

To expand on that, another partner emphasized that shelf-stable items are more suitable for community members who lack the time or resources to prepare or use fresh food, such as those who are part of the unhoused community. In general, some community members do not cook and prefer ready-to-eat food. A greater selection of even one food category, like vegetables, can be beneficial for community members especially when other food categories, like dairy and protein, are limited, as one partner noted.

"**People want variety. They want it to feel like a grocery store.** You go to the grocery store, you have your produce section, you have your dry goods, you have your meat counter, you have your deli. I think they want it that way. And you know, in order to have a balanced meal, a good, nutritious meal, sometimes you do need to have those extra things."

Partner, Youth

> " They're in a stressful situation because we offer a significant amount of fresh produce, but **it is not easy for our unhoused participants to store or obtain** these.

Partner, Older Adult

Knowing that variety is important for many community members, many partners described supplementing foods on top of the foods received through the Food Bank.

Focus group findings suggest that offering a variety of both fresh and shelf-stable food would meet a range of needs and preferences. This emphasis on quality and variety in the focus groups also supports additional survey findings including the range of food items typically sought out by community members and questions related to receiving the types of foods that meet their needs and preferences.

> "And, we used to get bread, milk, eggs, little cookies, crackers, beans... I mean, there was all kinds of variety on there. **Lately, it hasn't even been worth it to go.**"

Community Member

> " I think with me, everybody is pretty happy. More like this week, **we had like six or seven vegetables and fruit. So even though we didn't have milk or egg or chicken, we still have**.

Partner, Youth

Attributes related to Service

In addition to attributes related to food that contribute to positive experiences at food pantries, attributes related to service like choice, a sense of community and connection, and opportunity are as important.

> **"Being able to select** what you are going to consume and take it home."

Community Member

CHOICE

Participants from all focus groups described choice, or having community members personally select food they want, as an important characteristic of a food pantry.

Some community members discussed how much they appreciated sites that distributed food like a supermarket where they have the agency to not only select the food but the amount of food as well. Some recalled going to other food pantries that offered boxes or bags of food and discarding food they cannot use.

Among focus groups with partners, many agreed that choice was not only important for their communities but important for their service. A partner elaborated that offering choice facilitates interactions with community members and impacts the reach of the pantry.

Some noted opportunities to accommodate the needs of their community members, even if they may not offer full choice. One described listening to any dietary restrictions that community members have or allowing them to leave or take unwanted items.

"Giving clients the opportunity to select what they want versus being handed what we think they need. We've had a lot of clients return and tell us, **'Thank you for letting me choose.'**"

Partner, Traditional

"

It's true, they give you a bag full of something you may not like, and **you're going to throw it away**."

Community Member

"

I think it **gave us the time to really interact with the people**, versus, here's your food, okay?

Partner, Youth

"It goes back to client choice and **empowering our clients** to be able to make those own decisions for themselves."

Partner, Traditional

"It's about how much you take. **You don't have to take anything.** You take one item off the truck if you want to."

Community Member

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Focus group participants described the importance of a food pantry that fosters community and connection.

Between partners and community members

One way that partners foster community and connection is by intentionally creating a welcoming environment for their patrons. Many described offering greetings, having a conversation, playing music, providing signs in multiple languages, and strategically placing well-trained, friendly staff and volunteers on the distribution line as ways to make community members feel more comfortable. From the point of view of partners, these gestures leave an impression. This is supported by focus groups with community members who recall memorable and positive interactions with staff.

In addition, partners explained that creating a sense of familiarity, not only with the procedures of the distribution, but with the staff can alleviate tension and stress associated with going to a food pantry. Some partners noted, places of familiarity that offers compassion, where they can connect and talk to someone, can be the safe, supportive environment they need, especially in uncertain times.

"

The truth is, we feel like, apart from helping us, **they're like family because they understand us.**

Community Member

"I have a local volunteer who comes in, and he's always stationed at milk when we have milk, and that's the first station coming in. He's very charismatic. He's very exuberant. **Everybody refers to him as the milkman.** And I think, that level of familiarity helps tie in the fact that this is a **community service**... when they get to see that we enjoy providing a service to them, and that we're charismatic and striking a conversation and involved with it, **it relaxes them**...It feels like, "Oh, these are members of my community," and **that familiarity helps them feel like they're getting help, not pity**, if that makes sense."

Partner, Older Adult

Among community members

Partners described seeing families and community members not only interact with each other but support each other. Several partners recall community members carpooling to the food pantry and exchanging details about the types of food offered at the site with other families who were familiar with the distribution. One partner described patrons sharing recipes with one another, which fosters a sense of community at the distribution site.

This was supported by focus groups with community members who discussed exchanging food they acquired from the distribution with one another. Some stated that if they are unable to pick up food at the distribution, they know others in their community who would be able to pick up for them.

"

Partner 1: I've seen families give rides to other families. Like, you know, I'll take you home... Because they have all these vegetables and everything is so heavy, so **I've seen how families help each other that way.**

Partner 2: I've seen that too.

"There's often times that she (another community member) doesn't like something, then she'll give it to me or if I don't like, oh, you know, **we can share that way**."

Community Member

"I've seen them share recipes – Vietnamese speaking individuals and Hispanic – different cultures, sharing recipes, just getting along, sharing stuff within themselves. I think that's building a community within that community."

Partner, Traditional

Theme 2. Reaching Others in Need

In the survey, we identified that respondents knew others in their network who could benefit from receiving free meals or groceries at the site we collected data from, yet do not. The main barriers noted were proximity to the site, a lack of reliable transportation, and schedule conflicts with pantry hours.

In addition, many survey respondents shared food from the pantry with non-household members. 35% of respondents expressed challenges finding a site that is open when they need it in comparison to 12% who expressed trouble accessing a site due to transit reasons.

In the focus groups, we asked community members and partners to expand on reasons why others may not come to the distribution and opportunities to make these services more accessible to their community.

Barriers to Food Pantry

The common barriers discussed by focus group participants reflected findings from the survey and may explain why some respondents shared food with others. The main barriers noted were related to the accessibility of food pantries, specifically distance and transportation as well as inconvenient pantry hours.

DISTANCE AND TRANSPORTATION TO FOOD PANTRY

Both community members and partners expressed that the location of food pantries and limited access to transportation may present challenges for many. Some community members explained that the reason why they can access certain pantries is because they live close by or have transportation to get to the site. Access to transportation, as one community member described, allowed

> **"Not a lot of bus stops will stop into residential areas and the walk might be a bit further** from they would like it."
>
> Partner, Traditional

> 66
>
> **It started to seem too far away**, I was spending a lot on gas, and I stopped going.
>
> Community Member

> "My mother-in-law benefits from the food pantry, but she can't come because **she doesn't have transportation**; she earns money by babysitting, so **the hours she's babysitting are the same hours she would have to come**."

Community Member

her to seek food sources that were further away until it became too costly. Partners elaborated that even among those who have access to transportation, such as public transit, the location of the site may still not be accessible.

INCONVENIENT PANTRY HOURS

Community members described that the days and times that food pantries are available may be difficult to access, specifically among individuals or families who work. A couple of participants explained that they, along with others in their network, are knowledgeable of other local food pantries and similar resources but are unable to attend at the day and time of distribution.

Focus groups with partners reiterated this barrier. Some recalled interactions with community members requesting to pick up food for others they know who are unable to come to the distribution because it conflicted with their work schedule. One partner elaborated that the time pantries are available may only reach certain demographic groups, like older adults. This suggests that there may be populations with unmet need.

"

> "Even though I already knew it existed, **my schedule didn't allow me to go there**, so I didn't consider it."

Community Member

> "I think ours is definitely a timing with work, because we're Wednesdays at 10am which is not a convenient time, but it's really the only time that we could make it work for us. **We do get a significant amount of seniors attending because they're home**, and they oftentimes bring like grandkids or other family members with them. So, I think our main issue is just **we're not at a good time**."

Partner, Youth

Opportunities to Increase Reach

To address these barriers and increase reach among non-participating households, partners elaborated on solutions they have explored or implemented. In addition, ICE raids at the time of data collection, pushed partners to consider alternative solutions to continue meeting the needs of their communities. This includes proxy pick-up, delivery, and connecting community members to other local resources.

PROXY PICK-UP & DELIVERY

Both partners and community members described the benefits of having someone pick up food on behalf of another person. This includes friends, family, children, caregivers, and other community members.

Several partners noted collaborating with other members of the community, such as case managers, to pick up food for those who may have trouble accessing these services. Other partners discussed allowing staff and volunteers to deliver food to some community members, but also expressed concerns about maintaining that service and minimizing the risk of collecting personal information from community members.

Proxy pick-up and delivery seem to be feasible solutions to partners, especially those who serve communities impacted by ICE raids. Some partners emphasized that they believe this could help meet the need of those currently experiencing fear in accessing resources.

> "Most of them have **caregivers** who can come and get their food."
>
> Community Member

> 66
>
> "If they know a family at a school that doesn't offer a school pantry, **they'll come and pick up their food for that specific family** if they have like a medical need."
>
> Partner, Youth

> "**ICE came through the neighborhood.** So, a lot of our people typically just cross the street or just come two minutes from their house. But we've seen serious impacts where our numbers have just been low by like at least 20 families every week. So, we are also starting the proxy process and home delivery if possible."
>
> Partner, Youth

REFERRAL TO OTHER RESOURCES

Many partners expressed the need to connect and refer community members to other services, especially if the pantry is not available. One partner provided a list of pantries within a couple miles of the area to patrons and other partners directed community members to 211. Some partners explained wanting support from the Food Bank in referring community members to additional pantries and resources in the area.

"

"We've heard a lot of that, actually, because we're only open Monday through Friday from 1-4. Some families state, you know, "I work between that time," **so we try our best to connect them with other pantries in the area or redirect them to 211** and see if they can get more options."

Partner, Traditional

Theme 3. Factors affecting Need

This theme describes contributing factors that influence the need for food pantries and similar services among community members. Sub-themes below expand on survey findings on when community members are in need of food assistance and current influences to potential increases in need.

Time Period

In the survey, some community members expressed concern about affording and accessing food at certain time periods, specifically at the end of the month (in comparison to the beginning or middle of the month) and at the summer and winter seasons. In the focus groups, we asked partners and community members to expand on reasons behind this perceived increase in need among our survey respondents.

While some partner focus group participants saw an increase in the number of people served at those times, some did not. According to the focus groups, reasons why community members perceive an increased need for food at those times are due to running out of government assistance benefits and changes to their household composition.

RUNNING OUT OF GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE BENEFITS

According to focus groups, the reason why community members perceive an increased need toward the end of the month is possibly due to running out of government assistance benefits, such as SNAP or Social Security, which may present challenges affording food at the time. Although most focus group participants did not comment on this finding due to varying distribution times, one partner in a focus group noticed an increase in their distribution towards the end of the month. In addition, a community member noted struggling at certain times of the month when benefits are low.

> "Well, the end of the month, **when their SNAP cards have run out**, we find an increase there."
>
> Partner, Traditional

CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Both partners and community members explained that children are present at home during summer and winter which could increase the need for food at those times. One community member emphasized spending more for food to feed kids at home. Partners notice shifts in their clientele at these times, not only in numbers, but in the demographic characteristics of those who visit the pantry. Some partners did not notice an increase or difference and stated that the need remains consistent throughout the year. One partner highlighted that although the need may be the same, some community members go to food distributions in the summer selecting food that meet the preferences of those they care for, such as grandchildren. Other partners discussed that increases in numbers during the summer or winter may also depend on the other resources or services that or provided at the time.

For example, **in the summer, the children are at home** and eat more, so you spend more.

Community Member

"I think the summer is also a time where we see a lot more people as well, because **there's a lot of kids at home**. And our site specifically has a couple schools nearby, so we see a lot more of those community members come by and get food."

Partner, Traditional

"Let's say during the peak winter months, we notice that the seniors that come in for the senior grocery distribution, the comments are, 'Oh, this is great. This is going to be what I have for dinner tonight.' In the summer months, it transfers over into, **'My grandkids are going to love this,'** and **we notice that shift in why they're coming to the distribution.**"

Partner, Older Adults

I think definitely **during the holidays,** when you know **everything is really stretched**, then there's a need.

Partner, Traditional

Political Climate

According to focus group discussions, the current political climate, specifically changes in government assistance programs and immigration-related raids, are impacting communities who access food pantries.

Specifically, both partners and community members anticipate that federal changes to programs like SNAP, will push community members to further rely on food pantries. Some community members emphasized that the amount provided through SNAP is not enough to cover the cost of food, and reduction in funding will increase need.

Partners also described seeing their communities greatly impacted by immigration raids. They reported seeing a decrease in the number of visits to the pantry as well as perceived fear and paranoia among those who still go to the distribution. In response to these raids, some partners have set up security measures on their premises.

Furthermore, some partners have identified ways to supplement the food they provide to meet this potential influx in need. The ability to implement these strategies seems to be dependent on partner capacity and infrastructure.

3

66

Moderator: With SNAP funding being reduced, do you think people will try to seek out additional resources, other services?

Community Member 1: **You have to.**

Community Member 2: Absolutely yeah.

Community Member 1: Like **$10 a month on SNAP isn't going to buy you nothing.**

"I'm not expecting a rush, like, one day we were serving 75 and the next day we have 150 people. But I am kind of just **anticipating a gradual incline with the fall and into the holidays of more and more families in need."**

Partner, Youth

66

They're hesitant to come, because they go, '**How is this not a trap?'**

Partner, Older Adults

"I think that if they keep putting up more **barriers**, it's going to affect us a lot."

Community Member

Limited Purchasing Power

According to focus group discussions, the current political climate, specifically changes in government assistance programs and immigration-related raids, are impacting communities who access food pantries.

Specifically, both partners and community members anticipate that federal changes to programs like SNAP, will push community members to further rely on food pantries. Some community members emphasized that the amount provided through SNAP is not enough to cover the cost of food, and reduction in funding will increase need.

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Furthermore, some partners have identified ways to supplement the food they provide to meet this potential influx in need. The ability to implement these strategies seems to be dependent on partner capacity and infrastructure.

I'm also very grateful because there are six of us in my family. I have four children, all minors, and yes, the truth is that this helps me **because when I go to the store, I spend more than $200.00 a week**. Now that I've joined here, they help me a lot with vegetables."

Community Member

"

When I go to the supermarket, sometimes I buy two onions, a pound of tomatoes, and maybe some meat, and I only have four items totaling $40.00, not for the week, but for one day. **So, what I get here really lasts me two or three days of food**."

Community Member

"

Very well-dressed individuals coming from church, and they're coming to our distribution to pick up so that they can supplement the gaps that they have...**They have an income, but it has less and less buying power now**.

Partner, Older Adults

"I complain because sometimes the water and garbage bills are as high as $148."

Community Member

Theme 4. Opportunities to Meet Growing Need

We identified that over half of survey respondents experienced food insecurity, many rely on government assistance programs, have limited income, and are out of work or retired. We sought input from partners and community members on how we can better serve community members who rely on the charitable food system and experience financial hardship; to meet the growing need, opportunities were discussed throughout the focus group to better support partners. The following subthemes capture these opportunities.

Need for Additional Programs and Wrap-Around Services

In focus groups, many discussed the importance of providing additional resources through food pantries. This includes education and professional development opportunities as well as wrap-around services such as medical or dental care and application support for government assistance programs.

Many partners discussed offering different programs and services to meet the needs of their community including Meals on Wheels services and distributions of basic needs and toys during the holidays. In addition to food, some partners described receiving donations of basic needs such as toiletries and clothes, which they believe are appreciated by their community. This is supported by focus groups with community members who mention the benefits of receiving these resources from food pantries.

Community members explained that programs, courses, and workshops tailored to different audiences and focused on a range of topics can help others become more self-sufficient. One community member described the value of these experiences; through a workshop hosted on the pantry site, her father was able to connect with other seniors which she perceived was beneficial for his well-being.

> "I think **those programs that can develop motivation and individual development are very good**... the push for the community not to depend 100% on all the assistance, that's even better."
>
> Community Member

> ❝
> He discovered that on certain Wednesdays they had meetings for seniors to do crafts. **For him, it was like entering another world and meeting people**.
>
> Community Member

"For example, we are working with [REDACTED], so they help our families fill out all this Medi-Cal stuff. I sent out the form to sign up, and within minutes, it was completed. Like, full. So it tells me, they're not asking me for it, but I see the need."

Partner, Youth

Partners expressed that some community members may not directly communicate their wants for additional services, but offering these services on-site would not only be convenient but would fulfill unexpressed needs.

" I think offering different things to the community also kind of gets them to come back and **it goes back to building the community**.

Partner, Youth

Building Partner Capacity and Infrastructure

Based on discussions with partners, some have greater capacity and infrastructure than others to provide for their respective communities. Some have purchasing plans to offer a range of food options, while others do not. Many who are able to supplement the food from the Food Bank through grocery rescue programs, donations, food drives, and TEFAP indicated the challenges they are experiencing with limited staffing and volunteers. Some partners have to operate the food distribution site in addition to personally purchasing and gathering food to distribute.

"We have the luxury of funding to purchase things, but yet we haven't found the easiest way for us to do that. We're a team of two, and it was recently a team of two. **I was the only person**, so there's no way I'm leaving that office to purchase anything and load it myself and then unload it. I just can't do that."

Partner, Youth

Partners have tried to increase support by conducting outreach for youth in their area to complete service hours and implementing volunteer development programs. One solution that several partners brought up in both focus groups that may improve partner capacity is to connect partners to a consistent pool of volunteers through the Food Bank.

In addition, some partners described willingness to provide additional food and services to meet Food Bank goals but are limited by their infrastructure.

"

Like you're saying, I love grocery rescue so much, **but it takes all.**

Partner, Traditional

"I think **we have a problem with storage space** a little bit... I know, with the goals that Second Harvest has, with more produce coming in, and then more Grocery Rescue, we just want to make sure that we have a place to put so if there's any, like, extra donations of refrigerators."

Partner, Traditional

"You know, you get a lot of volunteers here at Second Harvest, and I'm wondering if you've got a big excess, that it might be helpful to **see if they are willing to come out and take on other pantries that may need help.**"

Partner, Traditional

"

But then there's also a portion of like us being realistic of **what's the capacity of refrigeration that we can have** because of our electric switch? We are **located on school property;** are they going to give us permission to bring in more container bins?"

Partner, Youth

Collaborative Resource-Sharing

Furthermore, some partners requested additional guidance on identifying other wrap-around services to provide to their communities. Some are not familiar with other resources in their areas and even expressed the need for an updated list of pantries to share with their communities. In response, other partners were quick to share suggestions and solutions that they have implemented at their site.

One partner discussed the importance of being well-informed of other resources in their area that they can direct community members to if they, as a partner, are inaccessible or limited in the types of food they offer at the time.

Providing a space for partners to collaborate, problem-solve, and share resources with one another seems to be a need at the partner level that may have indirect effects on the reach of the charitable food system.

Partner 1: If Second Harvest has, you know, things that we can work on, or people that I can send an email to. If you guys know people that can be here, like a medical company that gives free resources.

Partner 2: That would be amazing.

"

They are getting cut on other facets. They aren't receiving food outside of our distribution. And so I think we are trying to find some of those supplemental ways, **even if we can't receive more food**, maybe figuring out a system where we do **share with our clients or the individuals that come, what other resources are out there.**

Partner, Youth

Key Learnings

Findings from both Aim 1 & 2 were reviewed to identify how we are meeting the needs of Orange County community members who are impacted by food and nutrition insecurity. Below highlights key learnings, organized by gaps and strengths in our service, to consider in our response plan as well as suggestions of recommendations.

GAPS IN SERVICE

The following describe gaps in our service as identified in this assessment.

1. Unmet need in Orange County

From the literature review and maps we developed, we identified both geographical communities and populations that may be underserved in Orange County as a starting point for the operational response plan. Overall, the proportion of pounds distributed to partners in certain areas of Orange County does not align with the rate of food insecurity in those areas. Solutions are needed to prioritize communities with the highest rates of food insecurity and limited access to charitable food distribution sites as well as populations like people with disabilities and single parents who face financial hardships and may be at risk of food insecurity.

Recommendations to meet the need for underserved communities and populations:

- Establish new partnerships with organizations that serve these communities and populations. This may include organizations who provide application assistance for government assistance programs specifically for single parents and people with disabilities

- Provide additional support to build on the capacity and infrastructure of community partners who may currently serve these geographic areas and populations

- Collect additional data from people with disabilities and single parents to capture experiences navigating food environments, including experiences with the charitable food system

2. Pantry hours & reach

Findings from the data review on SHFBOC partner food distribution sites show that

some geographic areas with high rates of food insecurity have more access to pantries within a 1-mile radius than others with similar need. In the survey, we identified that some community members face challenges finding a site that is open when they need it. Some community members also perceive an increased need in food at certain times of the year (summer and winter) and month (end of the month) due to changes in government assistance benefits and household composition. Inconvenient pantry hours were reiterated by both partners and community members in focus groups as a barrier to non-recipients, especially those who work. In focus groups, some alluded that the current reach of pantries may only reach certain demographic groups, such as older adults, and as a result, may miss key populations in need.

Recommendations to address gaps related to pantry hours and reach:

- Expand pantry hours to include evenings and weekends. Evaluate the feasibility and reach of these changes

- Evaluate the availability of partner sites at specific times of the year and month and if able, expand

- Review data sources on transit accessibility of partner locations

- Develop a central resource or map that includes a list of pantries in Orange County for partners to reference and share with community members. This resource should be regularly updated and include contact information and eligibility requirements

3. Wrap-around services, resources, and programs

Findings from both the survey and focus groups suggest that community members are satisfied with additional services provided at sites. In focus groups, some expressed enthusiasm for additional resources and services. Partners are interested in connecting community members to resources and services but may need additional guidance. Supporting the network in building a pool of wrap-around services and resources may address economic indicators to food insecurity that are present among community members (refer to survey data on income, employment status, government assistance participation, and household resilience).

Recommendations related to meet the need for wrap-around services:

- Collect and compile a list of wrap-around services from partners to share with Partner Network

- Offer guidance to partners in identifying credible services and resources

- Offer strategies to partners in collecting additional data from community members on the need for educational and professional development programs

STRENGTHS IN SERVICE

The following describe gaps in our service as identified in this assessment.

1. High satisfaction rates on food and services provided at partner food distribution sites

In all 17 sites that hosted survey data collection, most community members indicated high satisfaction rates and agreement with food and services meeting their needs. Focus group participants described key pantry attributes related to food that may contribute to this positive response including offering quality (fresh or non-expired) and variety of foods.

Recommendations related to providing variety and quality food:

- Identify ways to support partners' Grocery Rescue efforts to continue providing a variety of food that meet a range of needs and preferences

- Re-evaluate nutrition guidelines when sourcing shelf-stable items

- Provide nutrition education on food safety of expired food

- Evaluate the impact of recent changes in purchasing on partners and community members

2. Promoting and implementing client choice

Most pantries in the network, specifically those serving youth and older adults, offer full choice and are located throughout Orange County. In focus groups, choice, along with community and connection, were emphasized as key pantry attributes related to service that contributed to high satisfaction rates and agreement in the survey. Partners in the focus groups who do not offer full choice at their sites described ways they accommodate the needs of their communities.

Recommendations related to continuing the promotion and implementation of client choice:

- Identify and share strategies with partners who do not offer full choice on accommodating community members needs and preferences

- Set up peer mentoring partnerships between sites who offer full choice and sites who offer limited or modified choice

- Review or collect additional data on the reach of full choice pantries in Orange County respective to non-full choice pantries

3. Partner commitment to supporting and building community

Community members and partners expressed the value of pantries that offered social connection and community. In their statements in focus groups and participation in the CAB, partners seemed deeply committed to supporting and advocating for the needs of community members and sharing solutions to challenges with other partners. Partners are a community asset and mobilizing them could lead to improvements across the network and new initiatives to address community needs.

Recommendations to mobilize and leverage partner commitment in addressing food insecurity:

- Create partner coalitions within different programs to co-create solutions related to capacity and infrastructure

- Integrate community-based participatory research principles and asset-based frameworks and approaches, such as asset mapping, in future research and evaluation

- Collect data and close feedback loops with partners on future operational and strategic decisions

Conclusion & Next Steps

The purpose of the Service Area Assessment was to assess the needs of those impacted by food insecurity and how the Food Bank meets those needs. In reviewing secondary data sources, developing an internal dashboard, and collecting data directly from community members and partners using mixed methods, we were able to identify gaps and strengths in our service.

Overall, the need for food, especially among vulnerable populations who are or likely to experience financial hardship, persists in Orange County. In this assessment, we identified that sites may not be available to certain community members, and that the need for charitable food may be more present at the end of the month and in certain seasons. The focus group data we collected indicated that there is a need beyond food among community members, and that additional wrap-around services, resources, and programs may be necessary to address food insecurity and related indicators.

Our survey data offers a snapshot of the perceptions and experiences of community members who receive food at our partner food distribution sites. Focus group data expanded on food pantry attributes to continue promoting, described ways to address barriers and increase reach, highlighted factors that affect the need, and identified opportunities for us as a food bank to continue to meet the need. Although many community members are satisfied and indicated that the food and services provided meets their needs and preferences, findings indicate that community members who currently rely on our services may be struggling financially. To continue to meet the need, SHFBOC can continue to provide variety and quality food items, promote client choice and connection, and mobilize and support the Partner Network in not only distributing food but addressing root causes of food insecurity.

Our next steps is to develop an Operational Response Plan (ORP), the second phase of Feeding America's Service Requirements. The ORP is a detailed action plan that identifies strategies and interventions that directly respond to findings from the assessment and elicit additional feedback from community members. We will also disseminate findings to our Partner Network, community members, and key stakeholders and expand on findings through additional research so that we continue to remain informed by those most impacted.

Strengths & Limitations

The next several pages describe the strengths and limitations of the assessment's research plan.

STRENGTHS

Mixed Methods

In Aim 2, this research employed an explanatory sequential mixed method design which allowed for a more complete understanding of perceptions and experiences among community members.[3] Although the sample of community member participants from the qualitative phase were not selected from the survey pool, their perspectives still provided rich context to survey findings.

Ethical Research Practices

Ethical considerations were accounted for in Aim 2. First, we created informed consent forms which communicated the purpose and scope of the study, a description of how data will be used, and provided the Project Lead's contact information in case participants had any questions or concerns. It was also communicated that the study is voluntary and at any time, participants could withdraw their participation in data collection. Because we collected personal information on the informed consent form, the data was stored in SHFBOC's remote server and was only accessible by the Project Lead to maintain participant confidentiality. Furthermore, to maintain participant anonymity, study ID numbers were given to each participant, and personal identifiers were removed in dissemination. Participants were a priority in the process, and this was reflected in our research practices.

Triangulation in Data Collection

Gathering perspectives through two methods (surveys and focus groups) and two data sources through focus groups (community members and partners) strengthens the credibility of research findings.[29] Also, when possible, a moderator and co-moderator were present at focus group sessions to minimize bias.

Data Collection Procedures

In Aim 2, validated measures were selected for the survey which increases confidence in the scores we obtained. Survey questions were not only reviewed by CAB members but were

also pilot tested among community members at two sites prior to launch to assess survey respondent and participant understanding of questions. Similarly, focus group questions were co-developed and reviewed by CAB members to ensure they expanded on survey findings.

Community Engagement

A major strength of this work is the integration of community engagement strategies. Primarily, the second aim of the assessment was informed by a Community Advisory Board representing different stakeholders. These stakeholders offered perspectives in the data collection materials in addition to the dissemination plan of the full report. Furthermore, efforts were made to close feedback loops and share findings back to community partners and community members when reports were available.

LIMITATIONS

Timing of the study

The survey data collection took place from late April to June 2025 and focus group data collection took place later in the summer. In the 4-month period we collected data, there were external factors, such as changes in the food environment like rising cost of certain food items and immigration-related raids, that shaped participation in the charitable food system. The latter also resulted in pivots in the research process; instead of reaching out to community members who took the survey and hosting focus groups at neutral locations, we conducted focus groups with community members at partner food distribution sites to prioritize the safety of community members. Furthermore, as we entered focus group data collection, SHFBOC stopped distribution for a couple of weeks to conduct inventory and transitioned into a new fiscal year, implementing operational changes such as the types of items purchased and distributed due to budget impacts and guidance to partners on proxy pick-up. This influenced some of the comments brought up in focus groups. Overall, the timing of data collection may have played a role in both survey and focus group data collection.

Cross-sectional study

Because this is a cross-sectional study in which we collected data at a single point in time, findings presented only offer a snapshot of perspectives and may not be representative of community members who use the charitable food system.

Sampling Approach

In our survey research design, we used a non-random sample which presents issues related to representativeness and generalizability. For example, the goal of this study was to gather perspectives from a variety of SHFBOC programs and partners, however, all older adult

and youth partner sites offer full choice. Only three of the sites we collected data from offered non-full choice. Although we gathered perspectives from partners who represented food pantries who do not offer full choice, future SAAs where survey data is collected should account for greater representation of partners across all choice models.

Lack of Triangulation in Analysis of Focus Groups

Due to the timing of the study, only the Project Lead analyzed focus group transcripts. In qualitative research, multiple analysts are recommended to avoid bias and increase the trustworthiness of the analysis. To combat potential issues that may arise from a single coder, the Project Lead relied on co-moderators' notes and methodological memos and reviewed preliminary codes developed by CAB members during one meeting to consider additional perspectives. Furthermore, especially when analyzing and interpreting research findings, the Project Lead practiced reflexivity and examined personal assumptions and judgments.

Additional Statistical Tests

Because this is a descriptive study, additional statistical analyses are required to test differences and associations between key variables.

Missing Qualitative Perspectives from Non-Recipients

In the original plan for this assessment, we wanted to collect data from individuals who currently do not rely on the charitable food system but experience food insecurity. This additional perspective is key to not only build on findings from the SAA but is necessary as SHFBOC drafts its operational and strategic plans to meet the needs of the broader OC community experiencing food and nutrition insecurity. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative data from non-recipients on measures such as food access, perceptions on charitable food assistance use, and food resource management would be a start in increasing Food Bank reach among these populations.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Timeline of the Service Area Assessment

Appendix B. Survey Materials

B1. Partner Interest Form

B2. Pilot Test Procedure and Evaluation Questions

B3. Recruitment Flyer

B4. Survey Data Collection Procedure

B5. Survey Informed Consent Form

B6. Community Member Survey Questions

Appendix C. Focus Group Materials

C1. Recruitment Flyer

C2. Focus Group Data Collection Procedure

C3. Focus Group Informed Consent Form

C4. Focus Group Guide for Partners

C5. Focus Group Guide for Community Members

C6. Focus Group Demographic Questionnaire for Community Members

Appendix A.

Timeline of the Service Area Assessment

2024

2025

LATE OCT - DEC 2024
INITIAL STAGES
- Reviewed the Service Target & Assessment Tool (STAT)
- Developed guiding questions
- Discussed stakeholder involvement

EARLY NOV - JAN 2024
DRAFT RESEARCH PLAN

NOV DEC JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG

JAN - AUG 2025
AIM 1

EARLY MAR - AUG 2025
COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD

LATE JAN - AUG 2025
AIM 2

JAN 31
Introduced SAA to partner network
Sent out partner interest form

EARLY MAR
Coordinate survey data collection with partner site

LATE APR - EARLY JUL
Survey data collection

LATE MAY
- Coordinate focus group data collection with partners
- Begin survey data analysis

EARLY JUN
Begin SAA dissemination

EARLY JUL - AUG
Focus group data collection

EARLY AUG
Begin focus group analysis

Appendix B1.

Partner Interest Form

In the spring of 2025, Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County (SHFBOC) will complete a Service Area Assessment (SAA).

The purpose of the SAA is to:
- identify and assess the needs of communities in Orange County who are impacted by food and nutrition insecurity
- describe how SHFBOC is currently meeting those needs

As part of this assessment, SHFBOC will collect both survey and focus group data from those who receive the food (your clients) alongside those who distribute food to communities (SHFBOC partners).

As a partner of SHFBOC, you and your agency can get involved in three ways:
1. Take part in a Community Advisory Board (CAB)
2. Let SHFBOC collect survey data from clients at an upcoming distribution
3. Participate in a focus group alongside other SHFBOC partners

For each option, please indicate how you would like to be involved in the SAA.
More details are provided in the next page.

1. Take part in a Community Advisory Board (CAB):

We would like 2-3 individuals representing our SHFBOC partners to take part in the CAB. Representatives will:
- attend 6 monthly meetings (5 held virtually, 1 held at the food bank) to discuss the progress of the SAA, beginning February 2025
- provide input on the recruitment of study participants
- test data collection tools
- actively participate in discussions about study progress and findings

This is a great opportunity for partners interested in community research and working closely with food bank staff and university partners.

Partner representatives who participate in the CAB will receive compensation.

Are you or someone in your team interested in taking part in the Community Advisory Board (CAB)?

o Yes
o No

2. Let SHFBOC collect survey data from clients at an upcoming distribution

If a partner is selected*, the project team will coordinate a day and time with you to collect data from clients.

Survey questions include:
1. Demographics
2. Food and nutrition security

3. Ability to respond to financial shocks
4. General food access & utilization
5. Perceptions and experiences receiving charitable food.

At the conclusion of the assessment, de-identified data collected from a partner site will be shared with that specific site.

Clients who take the survey will receive compensation.

*Due to the budget for this assessment, we will not be able to collect survey data at all partner distribution sites. We want to account for a range of perspectives so we will purposively select partners who expressed interest based on certain factors including, but not limited to, location in Orange County, type of distribution, and number of people served.

Are you interested in letting SHFBOC collect survey data from clients at an upcoming distribution?
o Yes
o No

3. Participate in a focus group alongside other SHFBOC partners

Once survey data is analyzed, we would like to review the findings with at least 20 individuals* representing our partners through 1-hour focus groups. Your input in these focus groups will help clarify findings and identify any service strengths and gaps.

Individuals selected to participate in a focus group will receive compensation.

*Due to the budget for this assessment, not all interested individuals may be selected to participate.

Are you or someone in your team interested in participating in a focus group?
o Yes
o No

Because you indicated YES to at least one of the options, we would like to follow up with you!

Please provide the contact information for the individual who will mainly be involved in the SAA.

First Name _____

Last Name _____

Email Address _____

Phone Number _____

Position Title _____

Is there anything else you would like to share with the SAA team? If not, please leave the box blank.

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Lastly, please provide the agency name and 4-digit SHFB agency number.

Agency Name _____

SHFB Agency Number _____

Appendix B2.

Pilot Test Procedure and Evaluation Questions

General Pilot Test Procedure:

1)   SHFBOC will arrive 30 minutes before the distribution time to set up a table, chairs, marketing materials, and survey materials
        a.   To minimize traffic, we will set up in an area towards the end of food distribution flow

2)   Data collection begins
        a.   The survey will be available in English and Spanish. Partner sites may request the survey in additional languages.
        b.   The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.
        c.   Clients may take the survey via Qualtrics or paper. SHFBOC staff will be available to administer the survey if requested.
        d.   During this process, SHFBOC staff will take observational notes.
        e.   Clients will receive a $20 gift card for their participation in the survey.

3)   Once respondents complete the survey, SHFBOC staff will ask respondents follow-up questions (*see below*).

4)   Clean up & check back with site staff before departing site

PILOT TEST EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Directions: Answer the following as the respondent is taking the survey. You will need a timer/watch to track minutes and will need to be familiar with the survey structure.

Pilot Test ID#:

_____

Survey mode (circle one):

Qualtrics   Paper   Staff-administered

1.   In minutes, how long did the respondent take to:

a. Review and sign the informed consent	b. Complete Section 1	c. Complete Section 2	d. Complete Section 3	e. Complete Section 4	f. Complete the survey	g. Both informed consent + survey

2.   What questions, if any, did respondents want clarification or explanation? *Provide brief details regarding what respondents needed clarified or explained with the question.*

3.   Do you have additional observations to share?

Once staff has received the survey back from clients, staff will review the informed consent and client survey with pilot test respondents.

INFORMED CONSENT
Directions: Please ask participants whether after reading the consent form, the following was not clear, somewhat clear, or clear and circle their response:

1. **The purpose of the survey**	Not clear	Somewhat clear	Clear
2. **Participation in the survey is voluntary**	Not clear	Somewhat clear	Clear
3. **How long the survey will take to complete**	Not clear	Somewhat clear	Clear
4. **By taking the survey, you will receive a $20 gift card**	Not clear	Somewhat clear	Clear
5. **Who to contact with any questions, comments, or concerns**	Not clear	Somewhat clear	Clear

If respondents indicated Not clear or Somewhat clear, ask: **How can we improve the informed consent form to make the information presented more clear for you?** *Take notes of their response below.*

CLIENT SURVEY
Directions: Please go through each section of the survey with the respondent. Ask and discuss the following. Discussion prompts will vary based on actual responses to survey questions.

6. How did you interpret the questions in this section?
Note: Specifically go in-depth with the questions that we developed (Questions 8 & 9, including sub-questions) and take notes in the participant's survey. If the participant completed it in Qualtrics, you may take notes in a separate sheet of paper or on a paper survey.

Other prompts:
o   What do you think this question was asking you?
o   If the question contains key words, ask: How did you define [insert key word]?"

7. What questions or response options were confusing or difficult in this section?

After you review each section, ask the respondent:

8. What are your thoughts on the survey layout?

9. What are your thoughts on the flow and survey question order?

10. What are your thoughts on the length of the survey?

11. Do you have additional suggestions for us to improve the survey?

We want to hear from you!

Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County is visiting **FOOD PANTRY SITE NAME** on **TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2025**

We will collect survey data from community members on their perceptions and experiences receiving food at this site as part of our county-wide Service Area Assessment (SAA)*. By participating, **you will inform the decisions we make as a food bank** to better serve communities in Orange County who may not have consistent access to nutritious food.

To be eligible for the survey, you must be:
- 18 years old or older
- Plan or will receive food at the distribution site on the date stated above

The survey will take approximately **15-20 minutes** to complete. You can take the survey via paper or online (using your own or our device).

The first 60 people to complete the survey will receive a $20 gift card!

We are committed to protecting your privacy and maintaining participant confidentiality. We will not share any individual responses to third parties and report de-identified, aggregate results only.

*The SAA aims to assess the needs of communities in Orange County impacted by food and nutrition insecurity and identify how we, as a food bank, are meeting that need.

Any questions, comments, or concerns?   Email Dr. Reah Chiong at reah@feedoc.org.

Appendix B4.

Survey Data Collection Procedure

Overview

This outlines the steps for survey data collection for the Service Area Assessment at partner food distribution sites. The purpose of the survey is to assess the perceptions and experiences of clients at SHFBOC food distribution sites.

General Procedure (for Partners & Research Team)

1. SHFBOC will arrive 30 minutes before distribution time to set up a table, chairs, marketing materials, and survey materials
   a. To minimize traffic, we will set up in an area towards the end of food distribution flow unless discussed otherwise with partner sites prior to data collection

2. Data collection begins

   c. The survey will be available in English and Spanish. Partner sites may request the survey in additional languages.

   d. The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

   e. Clients may take the survey online through Qualtrics or paper. SHFBOC staff will be available to answer brief questions that clients may have.

   f. Clients will receive a $20 gift card for their participation in the survey.

3. Data collection ends once the distribution ends or when we have reached 50-60 surveys (whichever comes first).

4. Breakdown, clean up, and check back with partner representative

5. Follow-up with pantry site contact to discuss survey findings specifically pertaining to pantry site

Detailed Procedure (for Research Team)

A. SET-UP

B. SCREENING

1. Confirm eligibility
2. Ask what language they would prefer

C. INFORMED CONSENT (PAPER ONLY)

1. Refer to participant tracking sheet for Study ID#
2. Write Study ID# on respective informed consent form
3. Give participant the paper informed consent form to review and sign
4. Collect signed informed consent and store in Informed Consent envelope
5. Ask participants how they would like to take the survey: paper or online

D. CLIENT SURVEY (PAPER OR ONLINE)

IF PAPER:
Write Study ID# on paper survey
*IF ONLINE:
Fill in language and Study ID#
*If participant is taking the survey on their device, provide guidance as needed.

→

Have participant complete the survey.

Update the participant tracking sheet.

→

Once returned,

i. Complete participant tracking sheet

ii. If paper survey was completed, store survey in *Survey* envelope

E. REMUNERATION

1. On gift card tracking sheet, fill in:
   o Gift Card ID# (if not already filled)
   o Study ID #
2. Have participant sign corresponding row
3. Give gift card to participant
4. Thank them for completing the survey!

Data Collection Checklist

The following materials are needed for survey data collection.

Materials	Quantity	Purpose
SET-UP		
o Table	x 1	To set up data collection materials
o Table cover	x 1	For marketing purposes
o Chairs	x 8	For participant use
o Canopy	x 1	For shade (if needed)
o Acrylic stands	x 4	To display recruitment materials
o Recruitment flyers	x 4	
o 8.5 x 11 flyer in English		
o 8.5 x 11 flyer in Spanish		
o 8.5 x 11 flyer in Vietnamese, Korean, and Farsi		
o 8.5 x 11 flyer QR code		
o Clipboards	x 8	For participant use
o iPads	x 3	For participant use
o iPad charger	x 1	
o Charging brick	x 1	
o Hotspot	x 1	
o Pens	x 20	
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS & CLIENT SURVEYS		
o Informed consent forms		
o English	x 60	
o Spanish	x 60	
o Vietnamese	x 60	
o Korean	x 60	
o Farsi	x 60	
o Client surveys (Paper)		
o English	x 60	
o Spanish	x 60	
o Vietnamese	x 60	
o Korean	x 60	
o Farsi	x 60	
STAFF USE		
o Laptop - Tracking Sheet: Participant participation		Excel file to track study ID &
o Tracking Sheet: Gift cards	3 pages	To track remuneration
o Envelope: Informed consent forms	x 1	To store signed informed consent
o Envelope: Paper survey	x 1	To store completed paper surveys
o Envelope: Gift cards collection	x 1	To store gift cards during data
o Visa gift cards (# verified by _____)	x 60	

Post-Data Collection To-Do List

Partner ID: | **S** | **L** | | |

Date of Data Collection: ___/___/___

Research Team Member: _____

Before leaving the site, please complete the following and upload to the OneDrive folder:

- Using the *Data Collection Checklist,* confirm that all SET-UP materials are accounted for

- Count the following:

  o   _____ Number of signed informed consent forms

  o   _____ Number of total participants (according to participant tracking sheet)

      »   _____ Paper (ENG: ___ SPAN: ___ VIET: ___ KOR: ___ FAR: ___)

      »   _____ Qualtrics

  o   _____ Number of gift cards distributed (according to gift card tracking sheet)

  Note: These numbers should match. Verify numbers using both tracking sheets.

- Indicate the number of remaining gift cards: _____

  Does the number of remaining gift cards and number of
  gift cards distributed add up to the original quantity?   Yes   No

- Store gift card tracking sheet in gift card envelope with remaining gift cards

- Count the remaining number of paper informed consent forms and client surveys in each language and determine how many are needed for the next data collection.

	Informed Consent Forms		Client Surveys (Paper)	
	Starting #	# Used	Starting #	# Used
English	60		60	
Spanish	60		60	
Vietnamese	60		60	
Korean	60		60	
Farsi	60		60	

Note: The "# Used" will be printed for next data collection.

- Save participant tracking sheet and this document in OneDrive

Next Steps

Research Interns:
- Transfer responses from paper survey to Qualtrics
- Confirm that data has been transferred with Project Lead
- Return paper surveys to Project Lead at the next data collection site.

Project Lead:
- Download de-identified data from Qualtrics and share with Research Interns
- Submit gift card tracking sheet to finance department
- Check out number of gift cards needed for next data collection
- Print:
    - Informed consent forms & client surveys in respective languages as indicated in *Post-Data Collection To-Do List*
    - Tracking sheet: Gift cards
- Scan the following documents to secure servers:
    - Signed informed consent forms
    - Completed paper surveys
- Charge iPads, charging brick, and hotspot

Both:
- When ready, review de-identified data from Qualtrics & prepare follow-up aggregated report for partners

Gift Card Tracking Sheet

Partner ID: | S | L | | |

Date of Data Collection: ___/___/___

	Gift Card ID	Study ID#	Client Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19			
20			

Gift Card Tracking Sheet

Partner ID: | S | L | | |

Date of Data Collection: ___/___/___

	Gift Card ID	Study ID#	Client Signature
21			
22			
23			
24			
25			
26			
27			
28			
29			
30			
31			
32			
33			
34			
35			
36			
37			
38			
39			
40			

Gift Card Tracking Sheet

Partner ID:

S	L		

Date of Data Collection: ___/___/___

	Gift Card ID	Study ID#	Client Signature
41			
42			
43			
44			
45			
46			
47			
48			
49			
50			
51			
52			
53			
54			
55			
56			
57			
58			
59			
60			

Appendix B5.

Survey Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form (Short) - English
2025 Service Area Assessment

The following survey will ask you to answer general questions about you and your household, food security and access, and your perceptions and experiences receiving food from this specific pantry and other charitable food assistance sites.

STUDY ID #					
S	**L**				

Your participation will inform operational and strategic decisions of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County to better serve communities in Orange County who may not have consistent access to nutritious food.

This survey will take approximately **15 - 20 minutes** to complete. *Your participation in the survey is voluntary and will not impact you receiving food from this site today and in the future.* We encourage you to *be open and honest* with your responses so that we know how to best serve this community.

We are committed to protecting your privacy and maintaining participant confidentiality. We will not share any individual responses to third parties and report de-identified, aggregate results only.

For more details on this study and our research practices, you may contact Reah Chiong, PhD, RD, the project lead, at or call/text (949) 590-3049.

At the completion of the survey, you will receive a **$20 Visa gift card**.

Statement of Consent:

By signing below, you:

- o   Agree to take part in a survey as described above

- o   Agree to provide personal information such as your name, email, and phone number to be used to communicate with you throughout your participation

First Name _____   Last Name _____

Best Contact Email _____

Best Contact Phone Number _____

Your Signature _____   Date _____

Please submit to research staff to begin survey.

Appendix B6.

Community Member Survey

<div style="background-color:orange">

I. Perceptions and Experiences at Food Pantry

</div>

STUDY ID #
S	**L**				

When answering these first set of questions, consider your experiences receiving free meals or groceries **at this site**.

> 1. First, how did you first hear about this site?

- o Word of mouth
- o Search engine (Google, etc.)
- o Social media (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)
- o Referral (211, etc.)
- o Other:_____

> 2. How often did you receive food from this site in the past 12 months?

- o This is my first time receiving food from this site.
- o 1-2 times
- o 3-4 times
- o Over 5 times

3. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following characteristics **at this site**?	Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither	Satisfied	Very satisfied
a. The variety of food available	O	O	O	O	O
b. The nutritional value of the food	O	O	O	O	O
c. The taste of the food	O	O	O	O	O
d. The quality of the food available	O	O	O	O	O
e. The freshness of food available	O	O	O	O	O
f. The amount of food I receive	O	O	O	O	O
g. My interaction with staff and volunteers	O	O	O	O	O
h. The organization and layout of food	O	O	O	O	O
i. Additional services or resources provided by this site *This may include basic needs, housing/rental assistance, SNAP application assistance, and/or health-related services.*	O	O	O	O	O

4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
a. The food I receive from this site meets my religious and/or cultural preferences.	○	○	○	○	○	○
b. The food I receive from this site meets my health and medical needs.	○	○	○	○	○	○
c. The food I receive from this site meets my dietary preferences.	○	○	○	○	○	○
d. I enjoy that this site exposes me to new food I have not tried before.	○	○	○	○	○	○
e. The instructions on how to receive food from this site are clear to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○
f. I am able to safely store all the food that I receive from this site.	○	○	○	○	○	○
g. I know how to prepare the food that I receive from this site.	○	○	○	○	○	○
h. I am able to use all the food that I receive from this site.	○	○	○	○	○	○
i. I feel safe and comfortable receiving food at this site.	○	○	○	○	○	○
j. This site is close to my home.	○	○	○	○	○	○
k. This site is close to my place of work or school.	○	○	○	○	○	○
l. This site is open on days that work with my schedule.	○	○	○	○	○	○
m. This site is open on times that work with my schedule.	○	○	○	○	○	○

5. How long does it typically take you to get to **this site** for free meals/groceries?

- o Less than 15 minutes
- o 15-30 minutes
- o 31 minutes – 1 hour
- o Between 1 and 2 hours
- o More than 2 hours
- o Don't know
- o Prefer not to answer

6. How long does it typically take to get your food from the time that you arrive **at this site**, to the time you leave, including waiting in line and filling out any paperwork?

o Less than 15 minutes
o 15-30 minutes
o 31 minutes – 1 hour
o Between 1 and 2 hours
o More than 2 hours
o Don't know
o Prefer not to answer

7. How often can you get the variety and types of foods that you need or want **at this site**?

o Never
o Rarely
o Sometimes
o Often
o Always
o Don't know
o Prefer not to answer

8. Have you ever felt that a staff member or volunteer **at this site** judged you because of your personal circumstances or other reasons?

o Strong yes
o Yes
o No
o Strong no
o Don't know
o Prefer not to answer

9. **If you answered Yes or Strong Yes to #8**: What do you think is the main reason for these experiences? You can choose more than one reason.

o Your ancestry or national origins
o Your gender
o Your race
o Your age
o Your religion
o Your height/weight
o Some other aspect of your physical appearance
o Your sexual orientation
o Your education or income level

- A physical disability
- Your shade of skin color
- Your tribe
- Other (specify): _____
- Don't know
- Prefer not to answer

10. Do you know of others, such as family and friends, who can **benefit** from receiving free meals or groceries from **this site but currently do not**?

- Yes
- No

i. If Yes to #10: What are some of the reasons why? *Select all that apply.*

- They are not eligible to receive food at this site
- They do not live close to this site
- They do not have reliable transportation to get to this site
- This site is not open at times that work with their schedule
- They are concerned about the quality of the food available at this site
- The food offered at this site does not meet their dietary needs and preferences
- They do not feel comfortable receiving free meals or groceries
- Other: _____

11. How often do you share food you receive from this site with people outside of your household?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always
- Prefer not to answer

12. On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to recommend this site to a friend or family member?

Not at all likely   Extremely likely

0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10
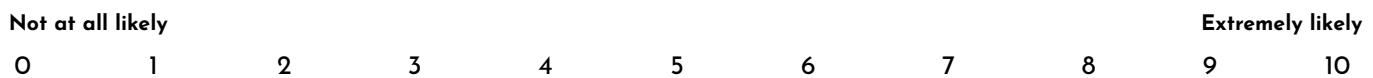
When answering these next set of questions, consider your experiences **at sites for free meals or groceries in the last six months**.

13. How challenging is finding a site for free meals/groceries that is open during the times or days of the week when you need it?

o Very challenging
o Somewhat challenging
o Not too challenging
o Not at all challenging
o Don't know
o Prefer not to answer

14. How often have you had trouble accessing free meals/groceries because you did not have easy **access to a car or public transit**, **couldn't afford gas/fare**, or **had trouble carrying your food home**?

o Never
o Rarely
o Sometimes
o Often
o Always
o Don't know
o Prefer not to answer

15. What food items do you typically look for **at sites for free meals or groceries** like food pantries? *Select all that apply.*

o Fruits - fresh
o Fruits – frozen or canned
o Vegetables – fresh
o Vegetables – frozen or canned
o Whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat pasta, etc.)
o Refined grains (white rice, flour tortillas, etc.)
o Dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese, etc.)
o Dairy alternatives (soy milk, oat milk, etc.)
o Animal protein – red meat (beef, pork, lamb)
o Animal protein – poultry & fish

o Animal protein – eggs
o Plant-based protein (beans, nuts seeds, tofu, etc.)
o Ready-to-eat meals (boxed lunches, microwaveable, etc.)
o Food with low-sodium/salt
o Food with low fat
o Food with low added sugar
o Halal foods
o Kosher foods
o Spices
o Staples (flour, sugar, salt, etc.)
o Nothing specific

16. The following are statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was <u>often</u> true, <u>sometimes</u> true, or <u>never</u> true for your household **in the last 12 months.**

	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	Don't know
a. "We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more."	○	○	○	○

i. If "Sometimes true": In the last 12 months, <u>when</u> were you usually worried about running out of food? *Select all that apply.*

o Spring
o Summer
o Fall
o Winter
o Beginning of the month
o Middle of the month
o End of the month
o Randomly, no certain time frame
o Don't know

	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	Don't know
b. "The food that we bought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more."	○	○	○	○

i. If "Sometimes true": In the last 12 months, <u>when</u> did your household usually run out of food before getting money to buy more? *Select all that apply.*

o Spring
o Summer
o Fall
o Winter
o Beginning of the month
o Middle of the month
o End of the month
o Randomly, no certain time frame
o Don't know

17. The following are statements that people have made about their food situation. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was <u>often</u> true, <u>sometimes</u> true, or <u>never</u> true for your household **in the last 12 months.**

	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	Don't know
c. "We couldn't afford to eat balanced meals."	○	○	○	○

i. If "Sometimes true": In the last 12 months, <u>when</u> was your household not able to afford to eat balanced meals? *Select all that apply.*

- o Spring
- o Summer
- o Fall
- o Winter
- o Beginning of the month
- o Middle of the month
- o End of the month
- o Randomly, no certain time frame
- o Don't know

	Yes	No	Don't know
18. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household *ever* cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○

i. If Yes to #17: How often did this happen?

Almost every month	Some months but not every month	Only 1 or 2 months	Don't know
○	○	○	○

	Yes	No	Don't know
19. In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○
20. In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○
21. In the last 12 months, did you lose weight because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○
22. In the last 12 months, did you or other adults in your household ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○

i. If Yes to #21: How often did this happen?

Almost every month	Some months but not every month	Only 1 or 2 months	Don't know

Please answer questions #22 to #26 **ONLY IF** **you have children residing in your household**. If you do not have children residing in your household, **please move to question #27.**

22. The next set of questions are statements that people have made about the food situation of their children. For these statements, please tell me whether the statement was <u>often</u> true, <u>sometimes</u> true, or <u>never</u> true for your household **in the last 12 months** for children living in the household who are under 18 years old.

	Often true	Sometimes true	Never true	Don't know
a. "We relied on only a few kinds of low-cost food to feed our children because we were running out of money to buy food."	○	○	○	○
b. "We couldn't feed our children a balanced meal, because we couldn't afford that."	○	○	○	○
c. "The children were not eating enough because we just couldn't afford enough food."	○	○	○	○

	Yes	No	Don't know
23. In the last 12 months, did you ever cut the size of your children's meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○
24. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○

i. **If Yes to #24:** How often did this happen?

Almost every month	Some months but not every month	Only 1 or 2 months	Don't know
○	○	○	○

	Yes	No	Don't know
25. In the last 12 months, were the children ever hungry but you just couldn't afford more food?	○	○	○
26. In the last 12 months, did any of the children ever not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food?	○	○	○

The following questions ask about your household's ability to be able to decide what you eat.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always	Don't know
27. In the last 12 months, we had to eat some foods that were not good for my health and well-being because we couldn't get other types of food.	○	○	○	○	○	○
28. In the last 12 months, we knew there were things we should or should not eat for our health and well-being, but could not get healthful food.	○	○	○	○	○	○
29. In the last 12 months, we worried that the food we were able to eat would hurt our health and well-being.	○	○	○	○	○	○
30. In the last 12 months, we had to eat the same thing for several days in a row because we didn't have money to buy other food.	○	○	○	○	○	○
31. In the last 12 months, we could control if we were able to eat foods that were good for our health and well-being.	○	○	○	○	○	○
32. In the last 12 months, we had little control over the food we were able to eat.	○	○	○	○	○	○

III. Household Resilience

The following questions ask about your household's expenses and help you may receive.

33. How many adults in your household received income last month that was used for household expenses? (Count any income such as from a job, assistance program, retirement program, or any other income that came to the household)

_ _ _ _ _ adults in your household that received income last month

34. How often in the past 12 months has your household able to put money into savings?

o Never
o Only 1 or 2 months
o Some months but not every month
o Almost every month
o Don't know

The following questions ask about how your household handles financial challenges.

35. I know people personally who we can discuss things with like assistance programs, charitable organizations, and/or jobs or educational opportunities.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
o	o	o	o	o	o	o

36. If we have a financial challenge, I believe we can find ways to get what we need.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
o	o	o	o	o	o	o

The following questions ask about your opinions of your community or your household.

37. It is easy for people in my community to travel around to the places they need to be.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
o	o	o	o	o	o	o

38. In the next five years, I believe my household will be better able to afford basic needs such as food, housing, utilities, transportation, and medical care.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
o	o	o	o	o	o	o

I. Demographic Characteristics

The final set of questions will ask you questions about your background. We are asking these questions to help us understand the communities we are serving.

39. What is your age?   _ _ _ _ _ years old

40. What most accurately describes your gender identity? *Select all that apply.*

- o   Woman
- o   Man
- o   Non-binary
- o   Prefer to self-describe: _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
- o   Prefer not to answer

41. Are you of Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin?

- o   Yes
- o   No

i. **If Yes to #41**, are you (*select all that apply*):

- o   Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano/a
- o   Puerto Rican
- o   Cuban
- o   Another Hispanic, Latino/a, or Spanish origin

42. Which one or more of the following would you say is your race? *Select all that apply.*

- o   American Indian or Alaska Native
- o   Asian
- o   Black or African American
- o   Pacific Islander
- o   White
- o   Other: _
- o   Don't know/not sure

i. **If you selected Asian to #42**, are you (*select all that apply*):

- o   Asian Indian
- o   Chinese
- o   Filipino
- o   Japanese

- o Korean
- o Vietnamese
- o Other Asian

i. If you selected Pacific Islander to #42, are you (*select all that apply*):

- o Native Hawaiian
- o Guamanian or Chamorro
- o Samoan
- o Other Pacific Islander

43. Select the category which best describes you. Are you currently…?

- o Employed for wages
- o Self-employed
- o Out of work for less than a year
- o Out of work for more than a year
- o A student
- o Retired
- o Unable to work

44. What was your annual **household** income in 2024, before taxes?

- o Less than $15,000
- o Between $15,000 to $30,000
- o Between $30,000 to $45,000
- o Between $45,000 to $60,000
- o Between $60,000 to $75,000
- o Between $75,000 to $90,000
- o Between $90,000 to $105,000
- o Between $105,000 to $120,000
- o Greater than $120,000
- o Prefer not to answer

45. How many members of your **household**, including yourself, are 18 years of age or older?	_ _ _ _ _ number of adults
46. How many children less than 18 years of age live in your **household**?	_ _ _ _ _ number of children
47. How many older adults greater than 65 years of age live in your **household**?	_ _ _ _ _ number of older adults

48. Are you or anyone in your **household** currently enrolled in any of the following government assistance programs?	Yes	No	Don't know
a. CalFresh / SNAP / EBT			
b. CalWORKS / TANF			
c. WIC			
d. Medi-Cal / Medicaid			
e. Unemployment			
f. Free school breakfast/lunch			

49. Lastly, would you like to take part in a focus group with other community members to review findings from this survey?

We will provide you with an additional incentive for participating in the focus group. If you select Yes, we will contact you using the information you provided at the beginning of this survey.

o   Yes
o   No

You have reached the end of the survey. Thank you!

We want to hear from you!

As part of our Service Area Assessment (SAA), we recently conducted a survey with clients across our partner food distribution sites on their perceptions and experiences receiving charitable food.

To clarify those findings and identify gaps and strengths in our services, we are conducting a **1-hour, audio-recorded focus group in English with clients at Food Pantry Name.**

By receiving this, you were invited to participate!

WHEN: Tuesday, July 1st, 2025
TIME: 9AM - 10AM
LOCATION: Food Pantry Name

Your input will inform the decisions we make as a food bank to better serve communities in Orange County who may not have consistent access to nutritious food.

For your participation you will receive a $50 Visa gift card.

We are committed to protecting your privacy and maintaining participant confidentiality. We will not share any individual responses to third parties and report de-identified, aggregate results only. Any personal identifiers in audio-recordings will be removed.

*The SAA aims to assess the needs of communities in Orange County impacted by food and nutrition insecurity and identify how we, as a food bank, are meeting that need.

Any questions, comments, or concerns? Email Dr. Reah Chiong at reah@feedoc.org.

Appendix C2.

Focus Group Data Collection Procedure

Overview

This outlines the steps for focus group data collection for the Service Area Assessment. The purpose of the survey is to explain survey findings, identify service strengths, and strategize ways to improve service gaps among partners and community members.

Focus Group Procedure with Partners
Location: Second Harvest

AT LEAST 3-5 WEEKS PRIOR:

1) The project lead and Program and Services team will create a list of partners representing different programs and locations in Orange County.
2) The Program and Services team will send out an initial email to partners on the list.
3) The project lead will ask interested partners for their availability to coordinate a day and time for the focus groups to take place.
   a. Each focus group will have at least 5 – 8 participants and may be categorized by program type & population served (ex. Older Adults, Youth, Traditional Partners)
   b. Each focus group will last approximately 1 hour
   c. Focus groups will take place at the Board Room or Blue Room depending on availability
4) The project lead will send out a calendar invite which will include:
   a. Directions to food bank & parking details
   b. Focus group expectations

1 WEEK PRIOR:

1) The project lead will inform food bank staff, including the front desk, that the focus group will take place with partners at specific dates/times.
2) The project lead will send out a friendly reminder to partners.

DAY OF:

1) The moderators will arrive 30 minutes before the focus group is expected to begin to set up materials (see *Data Collection Checklist*) in the designated room.
   a. If not already, moderators will organize tables in a conference format
2) Moderators will greet partners as they arrive
3) Participants will then:
   a. Write name on name tags
   b. Read and sign informed consent form
4) When all participants have arrived, the focus group begins.
   a. Focus groups will be conducted in English by a moderator.
   b. Focus groups will be audio-recorded
   c. A co-moderator will take notes
   d. At the conclusion, participants will receive a $50 gift card
5) Break down and clean up space

Focus Group Procedure with Community Members
Location: Partner Food Distribution Site

AT LEAST 3-5 WEEKS PRIOR:

1) The project lead will reach out to select partners to host focus groups on-site
    a. If necessary, the project lead will meet with partners virtually or in-person to review expectations for the focus group
    b. Focus groups may be conducted in either English or Spanish, depending on partner preference
2) Partners will be responsible for the recruitment of 5 community members to take part in the focus group at a date/time that works best for their team (such as before or after distribution)
    a. The project lead will provide the following items for the partner to share with the clients
        i.   a recruitment flyer
        ii. an informed consent form
3) The project lead will send out a calendar invite to partners and moderators

1 WEEK PRIOR:

1) The project lead will send out a friendly reminder to partners & confirm:
    a. The selection of 5 community members
        i.   Partners will be asked to reconnect and confirm with the 5 community members that they will be able to attend the focus group at the date listed
    b. The language of the focus group
    c. Private space/room on-site for the focus group to take place in

DAY OF:

1) Moderators will arrive 30 minutes before the focus group is expected to begin and check-in with the partner
2) Partner will direct moderators to the designated room for the focus group
3) Moderators will set up materials (see *Data Collection Checklist*) in the designated room
    a. If not already, moderators will organize tables in a conference format
4) Moderators will greet community members as they arrive and check-in
5) Participants will then:
    a. Write name on name tags
    b. Read and sign informed consent form & take the brief demographic questionnaire
6) When all participants have arrived, the focus group begins.
    a. Focus groups will be conducted in English or Spanish by a moderator.
    b. Focus groups will be audio-recorded
    c. A co-moderator will take notes
    d. At the conclusion, participants will receive a $50 gift card for their participation in the focus group
7) Clean up space. Rearrange tables and chairs if needed.
8) Check out with partner

Detailed Procedure (for Research Team)

A. SET-UP

Organize chairs/tables so that participants are facing each other. Examples below:
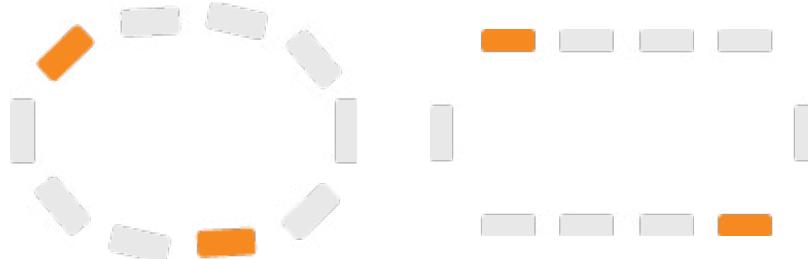
     = Moderators/Co-moderators

     = Participants

B. CHECK-IN

Have participants write name on name tag and find a seat

C. INFORMED CONSENT (PAPER ONLY)

Give participant the paper informed consent form to review and sign

Have participant fill out the brief demographic questionnaire

D. FOCUS GROUP

Refer to **Focus Group Guide**

E. REMUNERATION

1. On gift card tracking sheet, fill in:
   o Gift Card ID# (if not already filled)
   o Study ID #
2. Have participant sign corresponding row
3. Give gift card to participant
4. Thank them for participating in the focus group!

Data Collection Checklist

The following materials are needed for survey data collection.

Materials	Quantity	Purpose
SET-UP		
o Name tags / Cardstock paper materials	x 10	To set up data collection
o Sharpie	x 2	For name tags
o Pens	x 10	
o Table (if needed)	x 1	For focus group use
o Chairs (if needed)	x 8	For focus group use
o Clipboards (if needed)	x 8	For participant and moderator use
INFORMED CONSENT FORMS		
o Informed consent forms + brief demographic questionnaire		
o English	x 10	
o Spanish	x 10	
STAFF USE		
o iPad / Laptop	x 1	For audio-recording purposes
o iPad / Laptop charger	x 1	
o Tracking Sheet: Gift card	1 page	To track remuneration
o Visa gift cards (# verified by _ _ _ _ _)	x 5-10	

Post-Data Collection To-Do List

Partner ID:

F	G		

CIRCLE ONE:

 Partners [P]   Community Members [C]

Date of Data Collection: ___/___/___

Research Team Member: _____

Before leaving the site, please complete the following and upload to the OneDrive folder:

o   Using the *Data Collection Checklist*, confirm that all SET-UP materials are accounted for

o   Count the following:

  o   _____ Number of signed informed consent forms

  o   _____ Number of total participants

  o   _____ Number of gift cards distributed (according to gift card tracking sheet)

o   Indicate the number of remaining gift cards: _____

  Does the number of remaining gift cards and number of gift cards distributed add up to the original quantity?   Yes   No

o   Store gift card tracking sheet in gift card envelope with remaining gift cards

Next Steps

Moderators / Co-moderators
- Write methodological memo
- Download transcript from Otter.ai
- Listen to audio recording and match with transcript
- Upload final transcript to OneDrive

Project Lead:
- Submit gift card tracking sheet to finance department
- Check out number of gift cards needed for next data collection
- Prepare materials for next focus groups
- Scan informed consent forms to secure servers:
- Charge iPads, charging brick, and hotspot

Both: Begin analysis

Gift Card Tracking Sheet

Partner ID: **F** **G** [ ] [ ]

CIRCLE ONE:

Partners [P]   Community Members [C]

Date of Data Collection: ___/___/___

Research Team Member: _____

	Gift Card ID	Study ID#	Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Appendix C3.

Focus Group Informed Consent Form

We are asking you to participate in a focus group to explain findings from our *Service Area Assessment - Client Survey* which examined perceptions and experiences with charitable food and services at SHFBOC partner food distribution sites among community members, identify service strengths, and strategize ways to improve service gaps.

STUDY ID #			
F	**G**		

Your participation will inform operational and strategic decisions of Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County to better serve communities in Orange County who may not have consistent access to nutritious food.

The focus group will take approximately **1 hour** to complete and **will be audio-recorded for analysis**. Any personal identifiers mentioned in the recording, such as names, will be removed. *Your participation is voluntary and will not impact you receiving food from this site today and in the future and/or your partnership with the food bank. We encourage you to be open and honest* with your responses so that we know how to best serve this community.

We are committed to protecting your privacy and maintaining participant confidentiality. We will not share any individual responses to third parties and report de-identified, aggregate results only.

For more details on this study and our research practices, you may contact Reah Chiong, PhD, RD, the project lead, ator call/text (949) 590-3049.

At the completion of the survey, you will receive a **$50 Visa gift card**.

Statement of Consent:

By signing below, you:

- o   Agree to take part in an audio-recorded, focus group described above

First Name _____   Last Name _____

Your Signature _____   Date _____

Thank you for your time!

We will collect this form at the conclusion of the focus group.

Appendix C4.

Focus Group Guide for Partners

Welcome, everyone! Thank you for taking the time to join us for this focus group.

My name is __[MODERATOR]__ and this is __[CO-MODERATOR]__ and we are with Second Harvest Food Bank of OC.

This year, Second Harvest Food Bank of OC, initiated their Service Area Assessment which assessed the needs of communities in Orange County who are experiencing challenges accessing nutritious food and describe how we, as a food bank, are meeting and not meeting those needs.

As part of this assessment, we conducted a survey with over 600 community members at 15 partner food distribution sites in Orange County. In the survey, we assessed food and nutrition security, ability to respond to financial shocks, and perceptions and experiences accessing free food and groceries at partner food pantries and other charitable food sites. **We would like you to hear your input on our survey findings to develop actionable ways to better serve the growing need for food in Orange County.**

You were invited because as partners, you have invaluable insight; you know, day in and day out, not only the food needs of your respective communities, but also what it may take to meet those needs.

So, before we begin, a couple ground rules:
- This is informal, so please free to grab water or use the restroom at any point. They are located in _____. I ask that you silence your phones; if you need to pick up a call, you may quietly step outside and rejoin us when you can.
- Throughout this session, _____ will be taking notes.
- To ensure we don't miss any important comments, **we will also record the audio**. A transcript of the audio will be helpful for our analysis. Any names mentioned in the recording will be removed.

I have questions that I will use to help guide the discussion, but our goal is to listen. Please treat this like an informal conversation and feel free to follow up and respond to each other's comments.
We encourage you all to share your point of view even if it may be different from others or even if comments are negative.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

Let's begin.

Opening Question:
1. First, let's go around the table and introduce ourselves. Please tell us your name, the organization you represent, your role, and foods you enjoy eating.

     Notes: Moderator introduces self first then proceeds clockwise.

Main Questions:

2. From our survey, we found that <u>most clients are satisfied with the quality and variety of food available and the services provided</u> at our partner food distribution sites. Many agreed that it <u>meets their dietary needs and preferences</u> and that they can <u>store, prepare, and use</u> all the food.

     a. What do you think of these findings as they relate to your food distribution site and the community you serve?

          Notes: Probe for partners to reflect on how pantries are currently doing, their experience distributing food, including feedback they may have received from their community members

3. What characteristics of a food pantry are most important to your community?

     Notes:
     o Examples of characteristics: shorter wait times, faster application/intake process, nutritious food, positive interactions with staff

4. Are there specific times during the month or year that you find an increased need in food? If so, tell me more about that.

     a. The reason we ask is because most of the clients we surveyed <u>expressed concern about affording and accessing food towards the <i>end of the month</i> and in the <i>winter and summer</i></u>. Let's talk about that. What are some of the reasons why your community may be more concerned at these times?

     b. How do you accommodate higher need at different times of the month or year?

5. In our survey, we also found that our clients <u>knew of others who can benefit from receiving free meals or groceries at our partner sites but currently do not</u>. Many <u>also share food</u> they get from these sites <u>with people outside of their household</u>.

     c. What do you think are some of the main reasons why community members may not come to the food pantry?

     d. What methods have you explored to meet the needs of community members who are unable to come to the food distribution?

          Notes:
          o Have partners elaborate on methods
          o Examples: promotion/outreach, delivery, etc.

6. We also know that some families may find it challenging to find a site for free meals/groceries.

    a. How do you currently advertise the food pantry to your community?

        Notes:
        o   Explore both challenges and successes.

    b. How can we at SHFBOC better support you in reaching those who may face barriers accessing these services?

7. Among those we surveyed, <u>most receive at least one government assistance program like Medicaid and SNAP</u> (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Here in California, these programs are known as Medi-Cal and CalFresh.

    c. How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected the food pantry and organization?

        Examples of ways it could affect partner: strategic decisions, increased grant funding, identifying other food sources

    d. How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected the communities you serve?

        Examples of ways it could affect clients: how they budget, where they buy food, seeking out additional resources/support

        Side Note:
        o   Medi-Cal/Medicaid: provides health insurance to individuals with low-income to cover health-related expenses.
        o   CalFresh/SNAP: provides monthly food benefits in the form of an EBT card to families with low-income that they can use to purchase food items from grocery stores. CalFresh is California's SNAP Program

8. More than half of those we surveyed <u>experience food insecurity</u>. This means that they experience worry about affording and accessing food to lead a healthy life. Many <u>are out of work, retired, have limited income, and may need additional support to improve their financial well-being</u>.

    e. As partners, what would you like to see more of at your food distributions?

        Note: Explore ideas beyond food such as capacity, community, infrastructure, etc.

    f. What kinds of additional help, programs or services would make your sites even more useful to you and your community?

        Note: Explore ideas such as types of food, programs, educational, financial, and health resources

    g. What type of support would you need to achieve this?

h. What additional suggestions do you have to make food pantries a welcoming, reliable space for people who may be experiencing food insecurity?

Now we're going to summarize the key points from our discussion.
[Assistant-moderator will provide a 2-minute summary of responses.]

Does that reflect the conversation you heard? Did we miss anything?

Closing

9. Our goal was to gather information from all of you to better meet the needs of community members who may be facing challenges accessing and affording food. Out of everything we discussed, what is most important to you?

Thank you all so much for coming!

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR MODERATORS:

Examples of Follow-Up Questions or Probes
- What do others in the group think of that?
- Would anyone else like to comment on that?
- Does anyone see it differently?
- Thank you for sharing, ＿＿＿＿＿＿. What do you think, ＿＿＿＿＿＿?

- Tell me more about that.
- Would you explain further?
- How did that make you feel?

Suggested Timing for Each Question

Question	Time
WELCOME 1. Introductions	5 mins
MAIN QUESTIONS 2. …What do you think of these findings as they relate to your food distribution site and the community you serve?	8 mins
3. What characteristics of a food pantry are most important to your community…	8 mins
4. … Are there specific times during the month or year that you find an increased need in food…	5 mins
5. …What do you think are some of the main reasons why community members may not come to the food pantry… what methods have you explored…	8 mins
6. …How do you currently advertise…How can we at SHFBOC better support you in reaching those who may face barriers…	8 mins
7. …How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected the food pantry and org… the communities you serve	5 mins
8. …What would you like to see more of…additional help, programs or services…type of support…	8 mins
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES + Did we miss anything?	2 mins
CLOSING 9. …Out of everything we discussed, what is most important to you?	3 mins

Appendix C5.

Focus Group Guide for Community Members

Welcome, everyone! Thank you for taking the time to join us for this focus group.

My name is __[MODERATOR]__ and this is __[ASSISTANT MODERATOR]__ and we are with Second Harvest Food Bank of OC. SHFBOC provides the food here at __[INSERT PARTNER NAME]__.

This year, Second Harvest Food Bank of OC, initiated their Service Area Assessment which assessed the needs of communities in Orange County who are experiencing challenges accessing nutritious food and describe how we, as a food bank, are meeting and not meeting those needs.

As part of this assessment, we conducted a survey with over 600 community members at 15 partner food distribution sites in Orange County. In the survey, we assessed food and nutrition security, ability to respond to financial shocks, and perceptions and experiences accessing free food and groceries at partner food pantries and other charitable food sites. **We would like you to hear your input on our survey findings to develop actionable ways to better serve the growing need for food in Orange County.**

You were invited because as community members who receive food at this distribution and possibly others, you have invaluable insight; you have needs, wants, and preferences, and we want to hear that.

So, before we begin, a couple ground rules:
* This is informal, so please free to grab water or use the restroom at any point. They are located in _____. I ask that you silence your phones; if you need to pick up a call, you may quietly step outside and rejoin us when you can.
* Throughout this session, _____ will be taking notes.
* To ensure we don't miss any important comments, **we will also record the audio**. A transcript of the audio will be helpful for our analysis. Any names mentioned in the recording will be removed.

I have questions that I will use to help guide the discussion, but our goal is to listen. Please treat this like an informal conversation and feel free to follow up and respond to each other's comments.
We encourage you all to share your point of view even if it may be different from others or even if comments are negative.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

Let's begin.

Opening Question:

1. First, let's go around the table and introduce ourselves. Please tell us your name and some foods you enjoy eating.

    > Notes: Moderator introduces self first then proceeds clockwise.

Main Questions:

2. From our survey, we found that <u>most clients are satisfied with the quality and variety of food available and the services provided</u> at our partner food distribution sites. Many agreed that it <u>meets their dietary needs and preferences</u> and that they can <u>store, prepare, and use</u> all the food.

    a. Tell me about your experiences receiving free food and groceries. It can be about this site or other sites you have been to.

        > Notes:
        > · Probe for both positive and negative experiences.
        > · Topics can range from the food available, the hours/location, and interactions with staff and services

    b. How does the food you get at food pantries compare to the food you would get at a grocery store?

3. What characteristics of a food pantry are most important to you?

    > Notes:
    > o Can be rephrased to: When you decide to go to a food pantry, what do you look for?
    > o Examples of characteristics: shorter wait times, faster application/intake process, nutritious food, positive interactions with staff

    a. What are some of the reasons you choose to go to certain food distributions over others?

4. Let's explore when you typically go to food pantries. Are there specific times during the month or year that you find yourself needing more food assistance? If so, tell me more about that.

    a. The reason we ask is because most of the clients we surveyed <u>expressed concern about affording and accessing food towards <i>the end of the month and in the winter and summer</i></u>. Let's talk about that. What are some of the reasons why clients may be more concerned at these times?

5. In our survey, we also found that our clients <u>knew of others who can benefit from receiving free meals or groceries at our partner sites but currently do not</u>. Many <u>also</u>

share food they get from these sites <u>with people outside of their household</u>.

    a. If you or people you know can't come to the food distribution, what are the main reasons?

    b. How have you or people you know navigated these challenges to access food?

> Example: According to our survey, one of the reasons is that people live far away from that specific food pantry or have transportation challenges. To navigate, these individuals might seek out support from organizations locally or ask a neighbor for help.

6. We also know that some families may find it challenging to find a site for free meals/ groceries.

    a. How can we at SHFB or those who work at the pantry reach families and people you know who may face barriers accessing these services?

    b. What is your preferred way to receive information about food distribution sites like this?

7. Among those we surveyed, <u>most receive at least one government assistance program like Medicaid and SNAP</u> (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Here in California, these programs are known as Medi-Cal and CalFresh.

    a. How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected you, people you know, and your community who rely on these programs?

> Examples of ways it could affect clients: how they budget, where they buy food, seeking out additional resources/support
>
> Side Note:
> o Medi-Cal/Medicaid: provides health insurance to individuals with low-income to cover health-related expenses.
> o CalFresh/SNAP: provides monthly food benefits in the form of an EBT card to families with low-income that they can use to purchase food items from grocery stores. CalFresh is California's SNAP Program

8. More than half of those we surveyed <u>experience food insecurity</u>. This means that they experience worry about affording and accessing food to lead a healthy life. Many <u>are out of work, retired, have limited income, and may need additional support to improve their financial well-being</u>.

    a. As clients yourselves, what would you like to see more of at our food distributions?

        i. What kinds of additional help, programs or services would make this site even more useful to you and your community?

Note: Explore ideas such as types of food, programs, educational, financial, and health resources

b. What additional suggestions do you have to make food pantries a welcoming, reliable space for people who may be experiencing food insecurity?

Now we're going to summarize the key points from our discussion.
[Assistant-moderator will provide a 2-minute summary of responses.]

Does that reflect the conversation you heard? Did we miss anything?

Closing
9. Our goal was to gather information from all of you to better meet the needs of community members who may be facing challenges accessing and affording food. Out of everything we discussed, what is most important to you?

Thank you all so much for coming!

ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR MODERATORS:

Examples of Follow-Up Questions or Probes
- What do others in the group think of that?
- Would anyone else like to comment on that?
- Does anyone see it differently?
- Thank you for sharing, _____. What do you think, _____?

- Tell me more about that.
- Would you explain further?
- How did that make you feel?

Suggested Timing for Each Question

Question	Time
WELCOME 1. Introductions	5 mins
MAIN QUESTIONS 2. …Tell me about your experiences receiving free food and groceries… How does that compare	8 mins
3. What characteristics of a food pantry… What are some of the reasons you choose to go to certain food distributions over others…	8 mins
4. …Are there specific times during the month or year that you find yourself needing more food assistance…	5 mins
5. …If you or people you know can't come, what are the main reasons…	8 mins
6. …How can we at SHFB reach families who may face barriers… What is your preferred way to receive information…	8 mins
7. …How have proposed cuts to these types of programs affected you…	5 mins
8. …What would you like to see more of…	8 mins
SUMMARY OF RESPONSES + Did we miss anything?	2 mins
CLOSING 9. …Out of everything we discussed, what is most important to you?	3 mins