AIDING THE BANDAID: HOW DO WE IMPROVE FOOD CHARITY?

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Background

- At least 1 in 10 Americans are food insecure, meaning they struggle to access adequate, safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food
- Food assistance programs distribute food to support food insecure populations
- However, these decentralized and private programs are limited and inefficient "bandaids" to food insecurity
  - Food can be insufficient, inappropriate, nutritionally inadequate, and in unstable supply
  - Programs may be inaccessible and perpetuate indignities
- Strengthening program support is critical for food insecure populations

Research Question

What best practices can Seattle food assistance organizations use to better serve food insecure populations?

Internship and Methods

- Interned at food nonprofit City Fruit during Summer 2022
  - Harvested fruit from urban tree networks (Fig. 1)
  - Supported community outreach via event tabling

- Interviewed staff at 10 Seattle food assistance programs
- Co-administered public survey (n=68)

Figure 1: Members of the City Fruit team at a July apple harvest in Bellevue.

Results: Best Practices

INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATION

© Seattle Food Committee

Figure 2: An inter-organizational training session organized by Solid Ground connects Seattle-area food bank staff with community experts.

Share resources, skills, and labor to overcome inequities between programs.
- Grant writing
- Training resources

"Partnerships are so important, because it's just impossible and not a good use of your time to try to do everything."

Interviewee

COMMUNITY-FIRST SERVICE

Center success around visitor satisfaction. Use "abundance" framing: food is not scarce.

"The majority of [program users] have a scarcity mindset. If we're coming from that scarcity place, we're perpetuating it on people who are already feeling that."

Interviewee

Northwest Harvest's SODO Community Market

Figure 3: The bottom platform in this market's produce bins can be raised, communicating abundance even when stock is low.

ACTIVELY COUNTER STIGMA

Ballard Food Bank's Kindness Café

Figure 4: This café counters stigma by serving free meals to any and all customers, creating a community hub that is not only for "the needy."

Encourage all community members to access resources, regardless of need.

"It wasn't this charity case. It was this whole cultural experience. They'd have art [and] local musicians. People felt more comfortable. It was more than just providing food."

Interviewee

ELIMINATE BARRIERS

- Service hours
- Entry requirements
- Invasive data collection
- Language

"Immigrant communities were opting out, not wanting to leave behind any record…that they felt could be used against them."

Interviewee

Seattle Community Fridge

Figure 5: Community-led efforts like this network of fridges, open 24-hours, are a Seattle example of no-barrier food assistance.

Implications

Pathways for programs to integrate best practices include:
- Replace quantitative volume-based success metrics with visitor-centric qualitative satisfaction metrics
- Reposition food assistance locations as community hubs to reduce stigma and broaden reach through universality
- Drop assumptions about procedures and get creative to avoid chilling effect on visitors

Acknowledgements: