

# FOOD JUSTICE IN TURBULENT TIMES: NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES IN SAN FRANCISCO'S API COMMUNITIES

Report Summary

*Created by Intention 2 Impact  
September 2021*

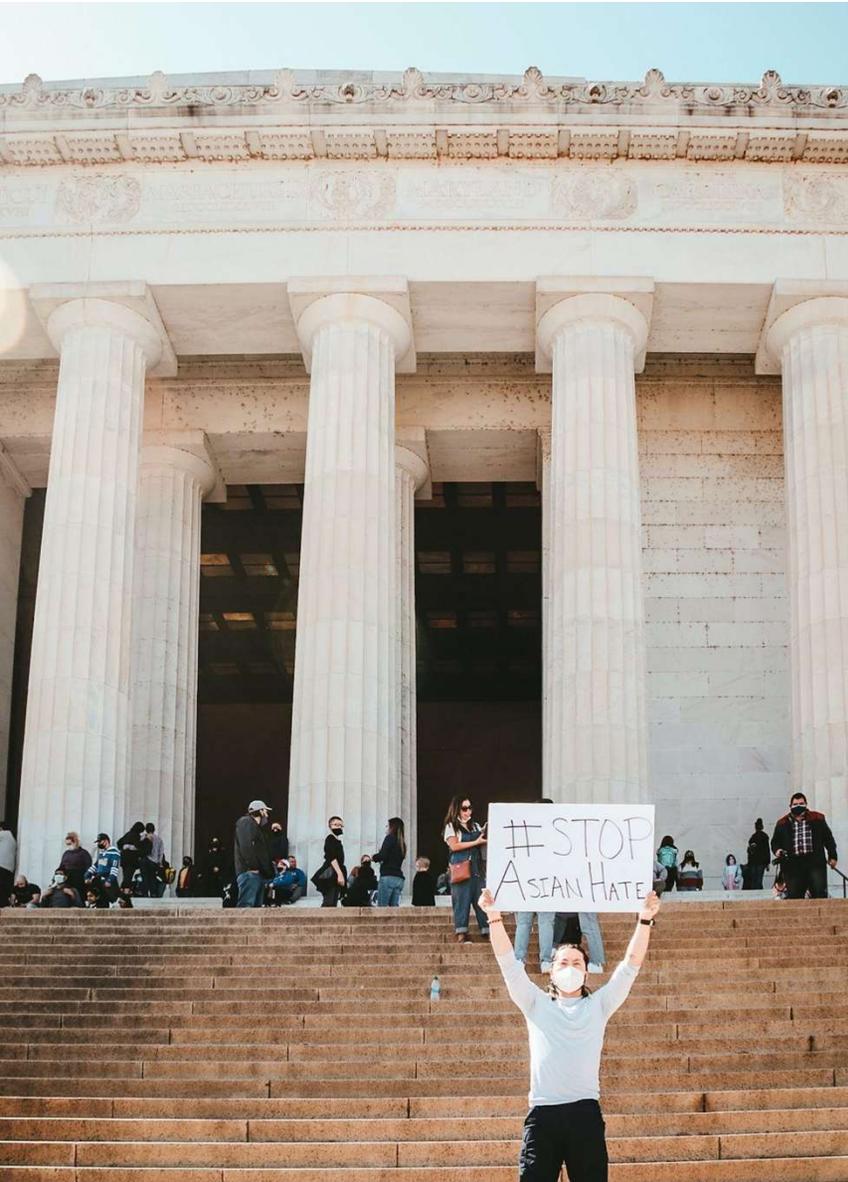


# INTRODUCTION

The systemic inequities faced by API residents within San Francisco have been historically overlooked, but **COVID-19** and the subsequent violence against APIs has exposed and exacerbated their devastating impacts.

*Specifically, food injustice has surfaced as a tremendous challenge within San Francisco's API communities due to the pandemic.*





## Racialization of API Communities

API communities face unique food justice challenges, both pre and post COVID-19 pandemic, that are often concealed by race-based assumptions.

*Asian and Pacific Islanders living in the United States are often **viewed as forever foreigners** (or outsiders) while also being situated adjacent to whiteness. Although **not seen as fully American, API community members are assumed to be able to access privileges, resources, and status** that are out of reach for many members of the Black and Latinx communities.*



## Food As a Human Right

People of color are the most severely impacted by hunger, poor food access, diet-related illness and other problems with the food system. Food justice is needed to ensure access to healthy food for all.

“ Food justice is important for everyone because **food is culture**. Food is your **family**. Food is part of **how we communicate** with one another; it’s a way we share our love. Being able to enjoy and prepare food that actually nourishes the body and keeps us healthy is **connected to our ability to stay sane as human beings**” -Nikki Henderson-Silvestri



This landscaping study reveals that **food justice** — not only food security — is a key to **breaking down structures of racism and economic injustice** that perpetuate food inequity.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are *community assets and leverage points* related to food security?
2. What are *barriers* to accessing and utilizing these levers?
3. How does awareness of these levers, assets, and barriers *tangibly inform community-led transformation* within these neighborhoods?

To fully understand the scope of the *assets* and *barriers* related to food security within API communities in San Francisco, we conducted a *participatory, mixed-methods* needs and opportunity *landscape analysis*.

# DATA COLLECTION SOURCES + METHODOLOGIES

## Neighborhood Strategy Sessions

Conversations with CBO reps from **5 neighborhoods** Japantown, Chinatown, SOMA, Bayview, Westside.



## Literature + Document Review

Reviewed **25** documents to identify common food related assets and barriers as well as **16** additional documents to identify food-related interventions and case studies.



## Key Informant Interviews

Interviews with **15** informants (municipal government officials, local CBO representatives, nonprofit representatives, food systems experts, & policy experts)

## API Community Resident Survey

Paper and online surveys were administered to **478 API residents** within San Francisco.



## San Francisco Food Asset Map

Virtual asset map, depicting the various food resources across San Francisco, with an emphasis on regions/neighborhoods with larger concentrations of API residents.



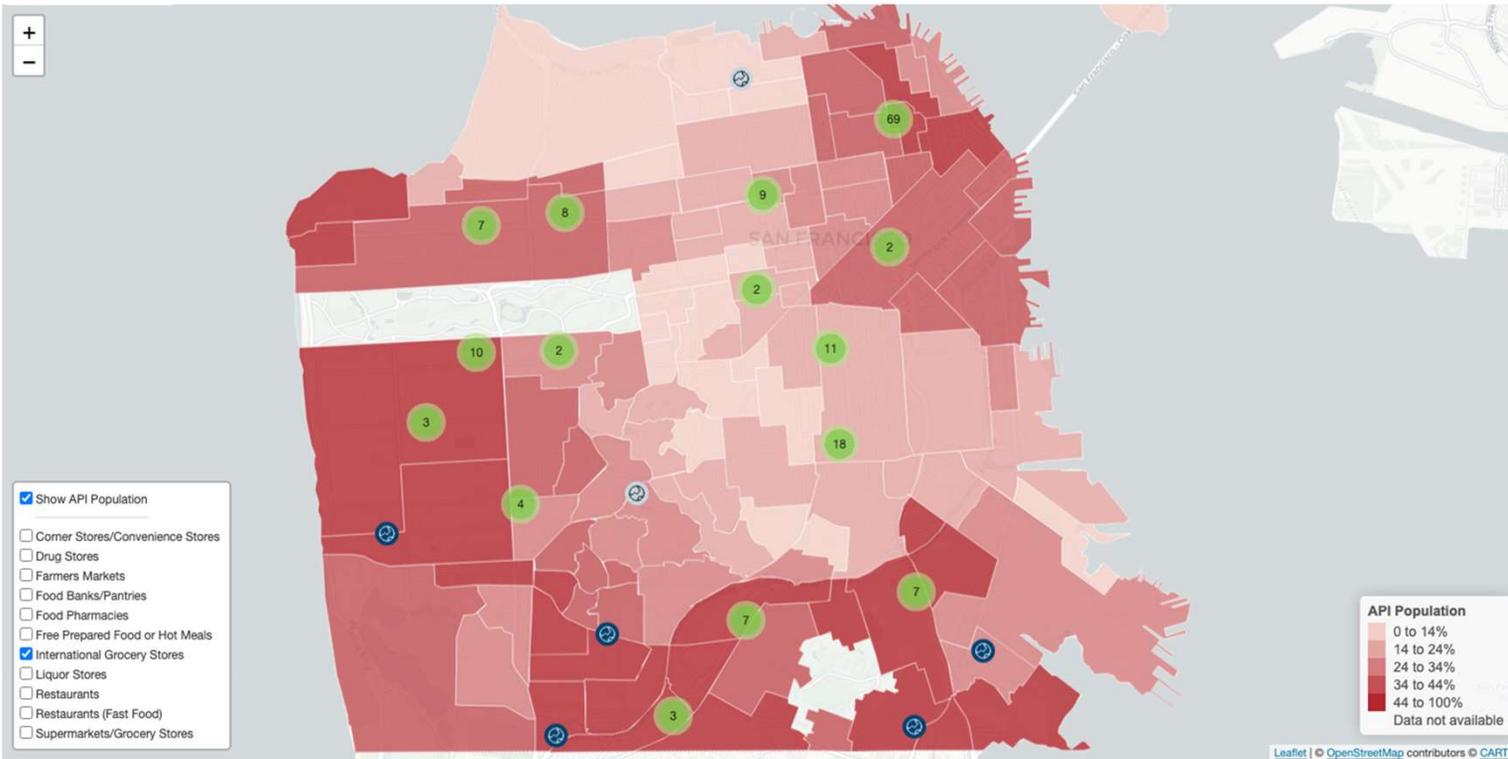
## QUESTION #1 FINDINGS

What are the community and food assets available to API neighborhoods in San Francisco?

# 1.1 | FOOD ASSETS



Home Neighborhoods Contact



● Accepts SNAP/WIC

## MAPPING IDENTIFIED:

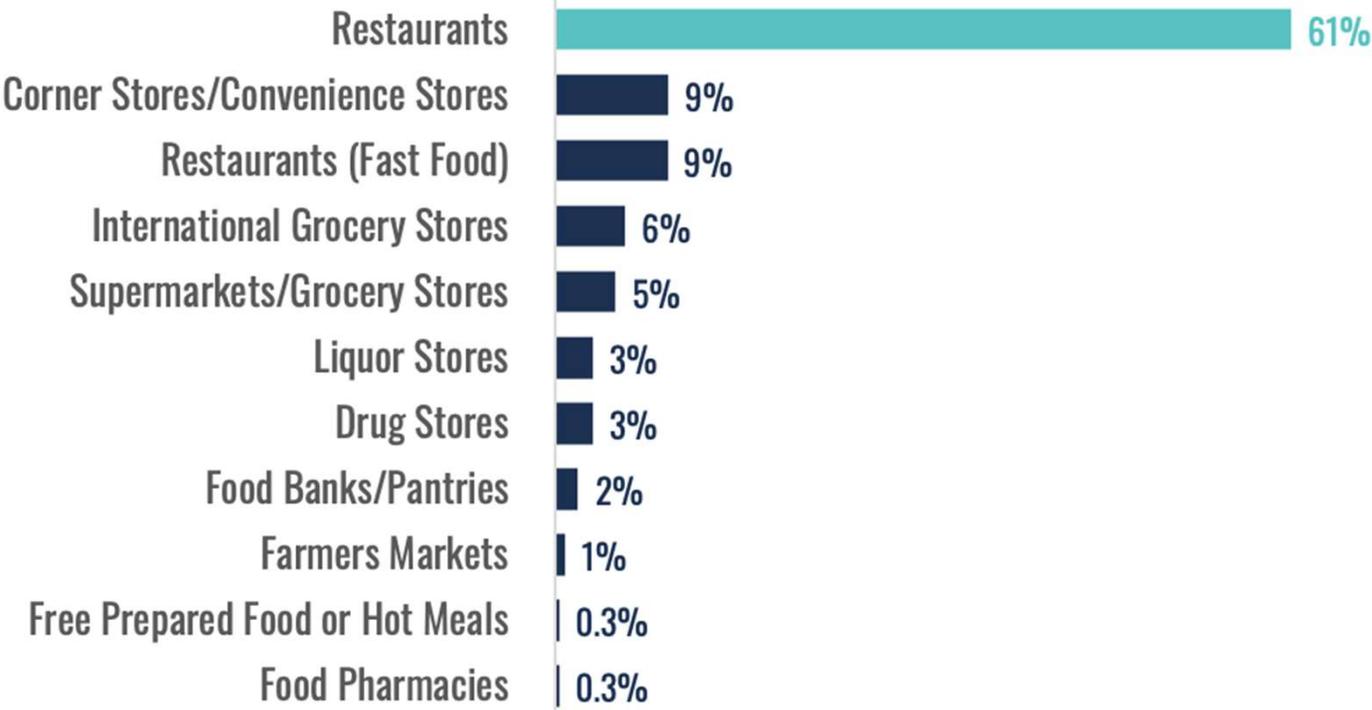
**2,915 FOOD ASSETS ACROSS SAN FRANCISCO**

**33% (N=963) IN API PRIORITY NEIGHBORHOODS**

- Bayview
- Chinatown
- Excelsior
- Japantown
- Richmond
- SOMA
- Sunset
- Tenderloin
- Visitacion Valley

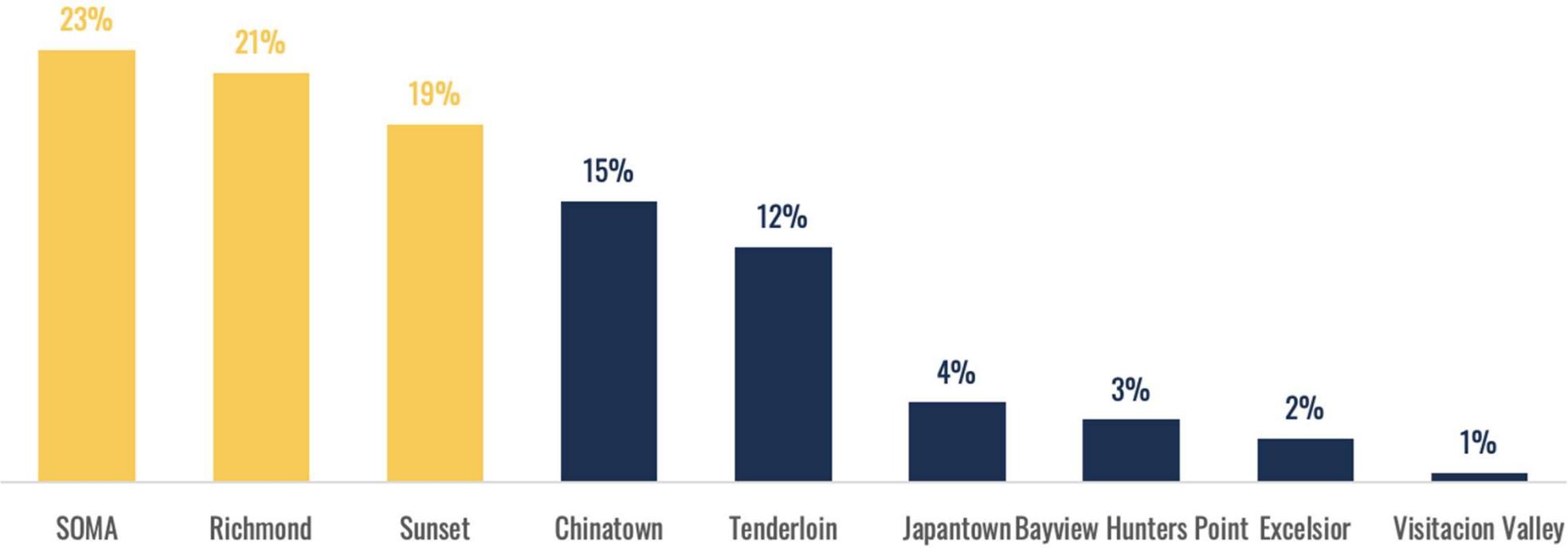
# 1.1 | FOOD ASSETS

Most food assets in the API neighborhoods were **restaurants**, followed by corner stores and fast food establishments.



# 1.1 | FOOD ASSETS

The majority of food assets are concentrated in the SOMA, Richmond, and Sunset neighborhoods.



## 1.2 | STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY + CULTURE



### BENEFITS OF CULTURAL CORRIDORS:

- API markets, restaurants, & merchants promote economic health & cultural resilience.
- There is a social connection and community-building at food access points.
- Cultivate trusted spaces for people to socialize, organize, engage in commerce
- Communication channels to spread awareness about resources
- Incubators for local programs



*Community is our biggest asset. We need to continue tapping into what they want to do... and promote it. We have learned to **respect the API community and just get out of the way; they get done what they want to get done.***

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

## 1.3 | DEDICATED FLEET OF CBOs, FUELED BY COMMUNITY TRUST

### FINDINGS:

- CBOs provide services & refer community members to charitable & reduced-cost food.
- Food resources are more likely to be leveraged by API community members when referred by a trusted CBO.
- 1 in 4 survey respondents have been visiting their local CBO to access food for 3+ years.



## 1.4 | EXISTING COLLABORATIVE FOOD SECURITY NETWORKS AND COALITIONS



### FINDINGS:

Example collaboratives:

- California Food is Medicine Coalition
- SF Food Security Task Force
- CalAIM
- UCSF Anchor Institution Initiative

Key informants representing coalitions expressed a need and willingness to partner with the API Council; however, none have reached out.

**API Council + API Health Parity Coalition are working together to engage in partnerships and dialogues across CBOs and coalitions.**

## 1.5 | POLITICAL WILL & EMERGENT POLICY AGENDAS



Throughout key informant interviews, there was a heightened sense of anger, confusion, and urgency to do better for API communities. Repeatedly, interview participants emphasized that the only way to bring food justice, sovereignty, and transformation to communities is via a ***massive overhaul of current systems.***



## QUESTION #2 FINDINGS

What barriers exist to accessing & utilizing community and food assets?

## SYSTEMIC RACIAL INEQUITY AS A PRIMARY BARRIER

Systemic racial inequity underlies ALL the economic, social, cultural, and physical obstacles faced by API Communities. We view racial inequity as the primary, “upstream” issue from which all other “downstream” barriers cascade.

There is a **consistent pattern of exclusion of API communities from large scale data collection and needs assessment efforts** nationally and within San Francisco.



When API communities are **absent from the data**, it is no coincidence they are **also absent from policy priorities** and resource allocation.



When API communities are **invisible in policy priorities** and resource allocation, they are **not invited to discussions** to strategize solutions.



“**Exclusion from data is an act of racism and discrimination.** Without proper representation in the data, there is little evidence of the struggles faced by low-income API residents.

*Data bring visibility to marginalized communities, and serve as a gateway to change. **Data are powerful.** Thus, when the data systematically exclude API community members, an entire racial group is **stripped of the power to speak their truth.**”*

**Omission of API data silences reality.**

## 2.1 | LACK OF FOOD AVAILABILITY + ACCESS

**FINDING:** The current food system is insufficient to meet the food justice needs of API communities.



### Data highlighted issues related to:

- Affordability
- Availability and access
- Exclusionary/“westernized” understandings of “culturally relevant” + “healthy” food
- Safety concerns
- Lack of transportation
- Limited access to cooking spaces, especially for SRO residents

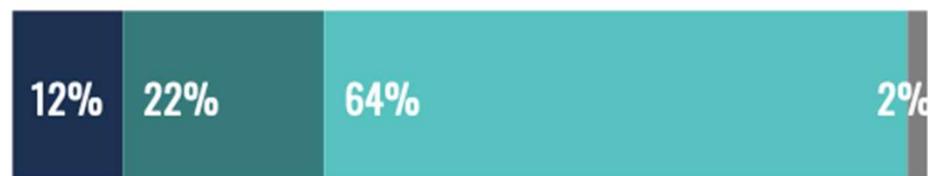
## 2.1 | LACK OF FOOD AVAILABILITY + ACCESS

“ We break it down into ‘find’, ‘afford’, and ‘choose.’ From our research ‘afford’ is the most influential barrier to getting healthy food. People will drive or walk long distances to a grocery store. While that is not ideal, they will do it if they can afford to.”

-Policy Expert Interviewed

Most respondents reported they are **sometimes** able to purchase food they prefer.

ALWAYS | OFTEN | **SOMETIMES** | NEVER



## 2.2 | LANGUAGE + TECH BARRIERS

**FINDING:** Data reveal API community members experience significant language and technological barriers when accessing food assistance.

“*Also translation and language is an issue. There are lots of Chinese resources and less Korean, Arabic, Vietnamese. In general, there is not enough outreach to APIs because they are seen as the model minority. We rely on lots of word of mouth within these communities.*” -CBO Rep. Interviewed

In an increasingly virtual world, with technology being used to solve a growing number of problems, those who don't speak English, don't have access to the internet, don't own internet capable devices, or are elderly are often left behind.

## 2.3 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS



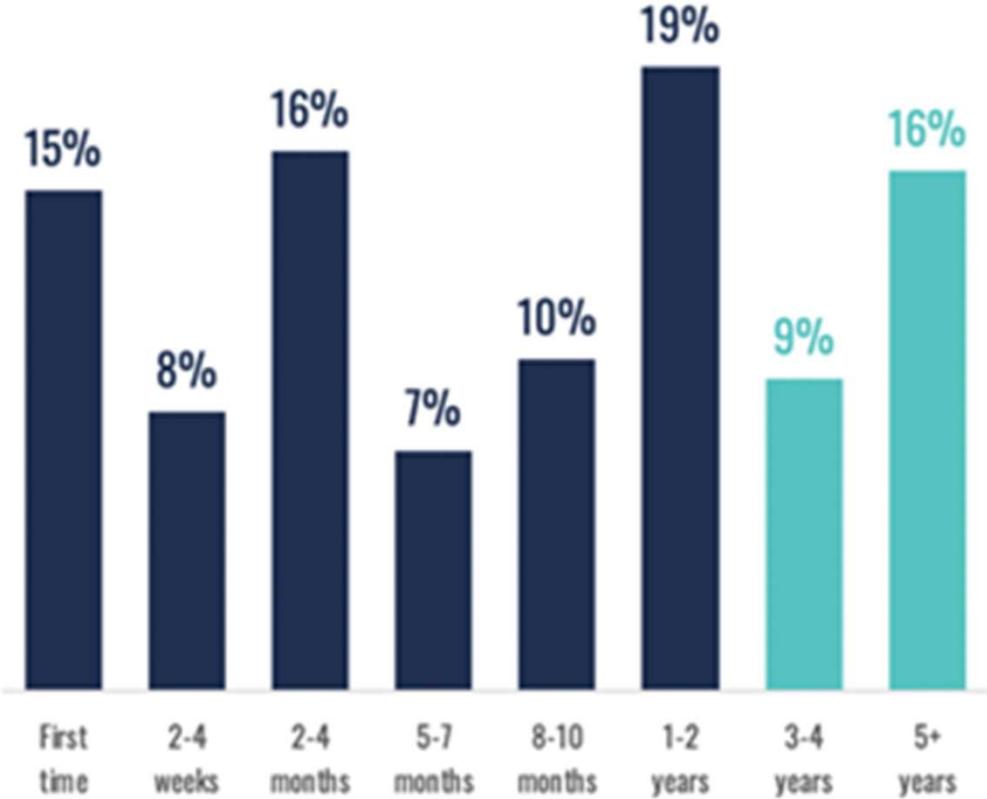
### **FINDING:**

CBOs are doing the work that systems have failed to do well. Changes that should be implemented at a systems level are being initiated and practiced by very small organizations, which have exceeded their capacity due to the pandemic.

## 2.3 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

**FINDING:** CBOs are strained; they are asked to do more, with less.

**56% of API Community members reported on the survey that they only began using their preferred charitable food source within the past 10 months.**

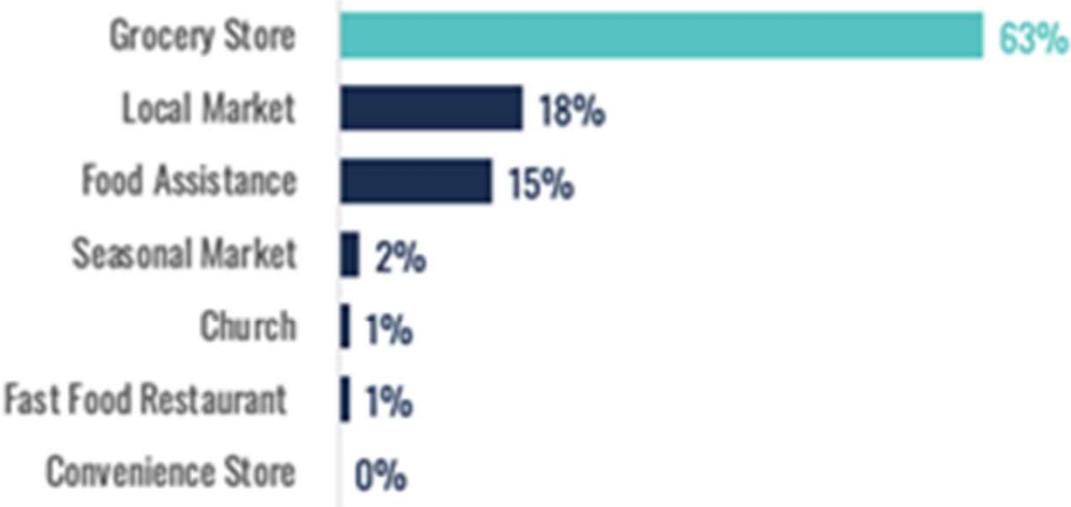


## 2.3 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

**FINDING:** CBOs are strained; they are asked to do more, with less.

“ People should give some grace to food banks because of the model that they are. Food banks are there for emergency purposes. But because **our society doesn't address hunger the way it needs to, food banks became grocery stores.**”  
-Government Rep. Interviewed

**16% of API Community members reported charitable sources are their primary source of food.**



## 2.3 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

**FINDING:** Thus, strained CBOs cannot always provide a dignified experience to community members that honors their culture or personal preferences.

“*We try to think of the demographics when we are sending the food... but we have not focused on culturally specific and appropriate food. I wish we would, but I understand the restrictions; that costs more money. How do we support and feed people how they prefer to be fed? Within Chinatown, we are not using culturally appropriate food enough...*

*...but we get rice out to Chinatown more than other places.”*

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

## 2.3 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

**FINDING:** Especially among API community members, there is tremendous stigma related to using charitable food. This is both culturally embedded and driven by fear.



*There is a fear of accessing programs: goes back to prior federal administrations - public charge and attacks on the immigrant community.”*

-Government Rep. Interviewed



## QUESTION #3 FINDINGS

How does awareness of these assets and barriers tangibly inform community-led transformation within these neighborhoods?

# OPPORTUNITY AWAITS:

## *This is our call to action!!*

- **Hyper-local Solutions that are Culturally Grounded + Dignified**
  - Transformational food solutions that promote the prosperity of API communities need to be borne of the community wisdom that already exists.
- **Centralized Leadership & Capacity**
  - Food justice solutions, while rising up from the hyper-local community, must also have a centralized arm to connect the offerings together.
- **Thinking Bigger Picture: Integrating Systems Change**
  - We need investments in systemic change to avoid putting further burden on small organizations that are already under impossible pressures to address structural problems.

*“Food is the necessary sustenance of life but it is also history, community memory, family, homeland, and love.”*



# DATA-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

