

San Francisco COVID-19 Command Center (CCC) Feeding Coordination Group Food Support Gaps Analysis | High Need Populations and Systems Level Gaps 12/9/2020

Introduction

This quarterly report produced by the COVID-19 Command Center (CCC) Food Coordination Group is meant to inform ongoing COVID-19 situational awareness and to demonstrate increasing food insecurity that has worsened as COVID-19 continues to impact our community. While there are differing definitions of food insecurity, the U.S Department of Agriculture defines it as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life”. In this report, we highlight the food security work that has occurred during the course of this pandemic, identify gaps in the existing food security system, and offer a series of recommendations intended to improve coordination across the many organizations partnering to address food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methods

The research methods used to develop this report include the integration and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data as described below:

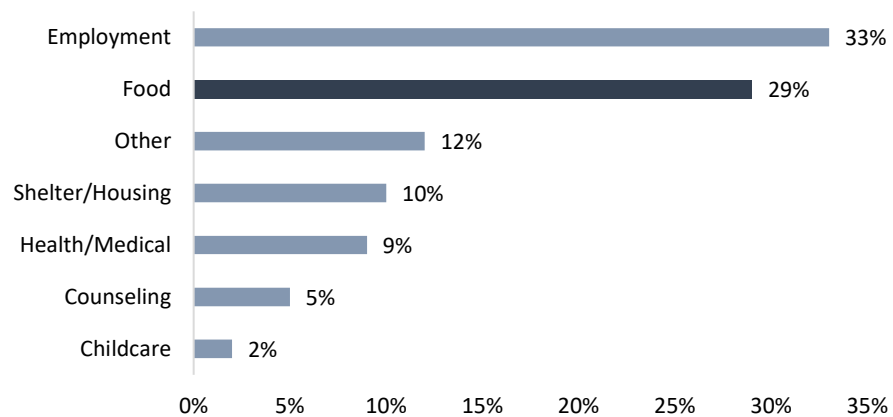
- Qualitative data presented in this report is the result of 10 interviews conducted with leadership from both large scale and small scale food distribution efforts across the City. For more detail regarding the interview participants please see Appendix A. Large scale food distribution programs are defined as programs that deliver food across the Bay Area or San Francisco and smaller scale programs are defined as programs that serve a particular region or neighborhood and that typically distribute a lower volume of food. Additional qualitative data was collected during participation in meetings with food security program operators during the Food Security Task Force (a task force of the Board of Supervisors with membership from public and private agencies) and the Human Rights Commission Community Round Table.
- Quantitative data integrated into this analysis was obtained from the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SF-HSA) Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey and food distribution data obtained directly from Food Coordination Group partner organizations that have been distributing food during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 and Increasing Food Insecurity

New evidence is quickly mounting that COVID-19 continues to exacerbate food insecurity in San Francisco and across the nation at alarming rates. High rates of unemployment, loss of income, physical school closures, and concerns related to COVID-19 exposure have disrupted individuals and families access to nutritious food. Nationally, food insecurity has more than doubled overall, and tripled among households with children under age 18 (Schanzenbach and Pitts, 2020). In a recent study of 375 households (1,875 individuals) in the San Francisco Bay Area conducted by the University of California San Francisco, they found the number of Spanish Speaking Latinx families unable to purchase nutritious meals and that go to bed hungry has more than doubled since the COVID-19 pandemic began (Wojcicki et al. 2020). San Francisco’s Human Services Agency Post Shelter-In-Place Client Survey indicates food support is an immediate and pressing need for low-income individuals and families overall. Of the 10,095 clients who responded to this survey, 29% indicated food support was their most pressing need after the shelter-in-

place order went into effect on March 16th, 2020. Food support was identified by clients as their second most pressing need, just behind 33% of clients that indicated employment support was their most pressing need. The substantial increase in food insecurity nationally and high needs for food support expressed by SF-HSA clients locally, has dramatically increased the demands placed on community based organizations, both large and small, that continue to selflessly provide food to residents in need.

Figure 1. SF-HSA Clients Most Immediate Needs Post Shelter in Place (N=10,095)



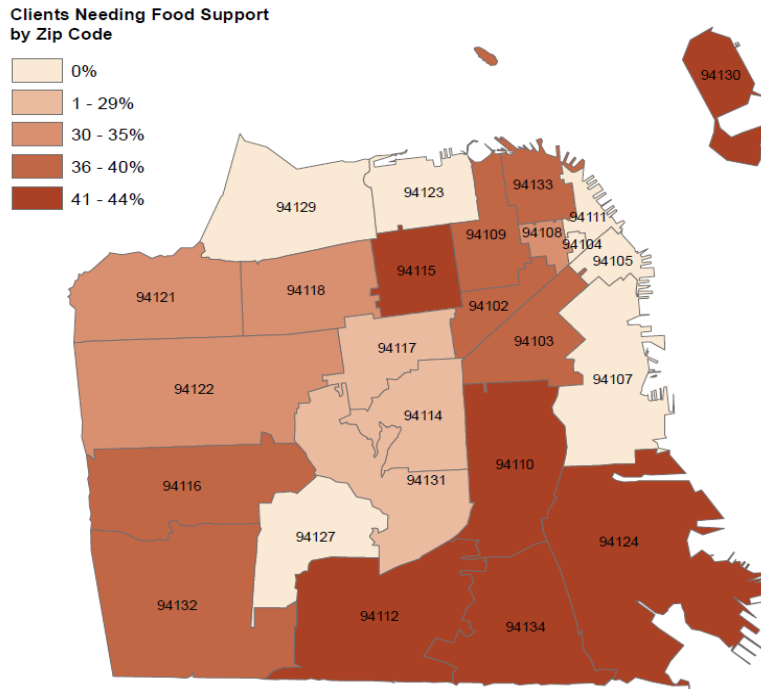
Demographics of Food Insecure Populations

In this section we describe the demographics of populations disproportionately expressing food support needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. To assess levels of food support need among populations, we analyzed data collected from the SF-HSA Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey. When possible, we also integrated insights from leadership of organizations working on food security to explore the extent to which perceptions about which groups are more likely to need food support are consistent with the results of the client survey. This allowed us to provide some level of validation, as the findings from the survey were consistent with the perceptions expressed by food program providers.

Neighborhood Level Food Support Needs

The results of the SF-HSA Post Shelter-In-Place Client Survey indicated that clients in the southeastern portion of the City, Western Addition, and Treasure Island expressed higher levels of food support needs after the shelter-in-place order went into effect, as compared to other regions of the City. The zip codes with the largest percentage of clients indicating a need for food support included zip code 94134 Visitacion Valley/Sunnydale (44%), 94110 Mission (44%), 94124 Bayview-Hunter’s Point (43%), 94115 Western Addition (42%), 94130 Treasure Island (42%), 94112 Ingleside Excelsior (41%), 94103 South of Market (40%), and 94102 Tenderloin (39%).

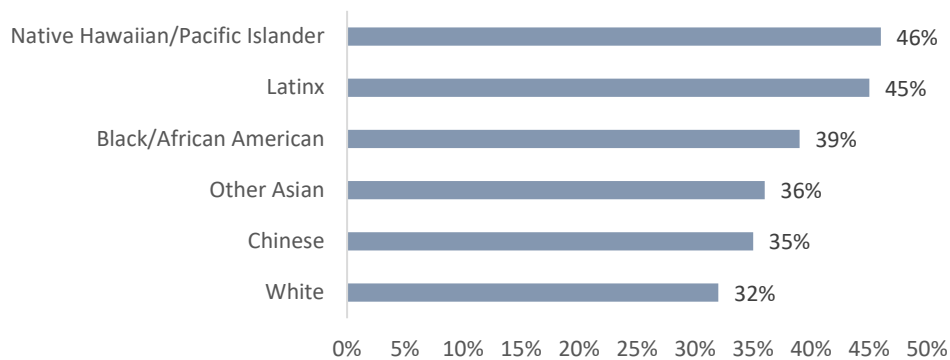
Map 1. HSA Clients Indicating Need for Food Support by Zip Code



Race Ethnicity

According to the SF-HSA Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey, certain racial or ethnic groups expressed higher levels of food support needs as compared to other groups. As shown in figure 2 below, *Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander’s (46%), Latinx (45%), and African American/Black (39%) clients expressed the highest levels of food support needs as compared to other Asian, Chinese, and White clients. Please note, the estimate for Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander is derived from a sample of n=108, and may not be as reliable as the estimates of food support need for the other racial or ethnic groups.

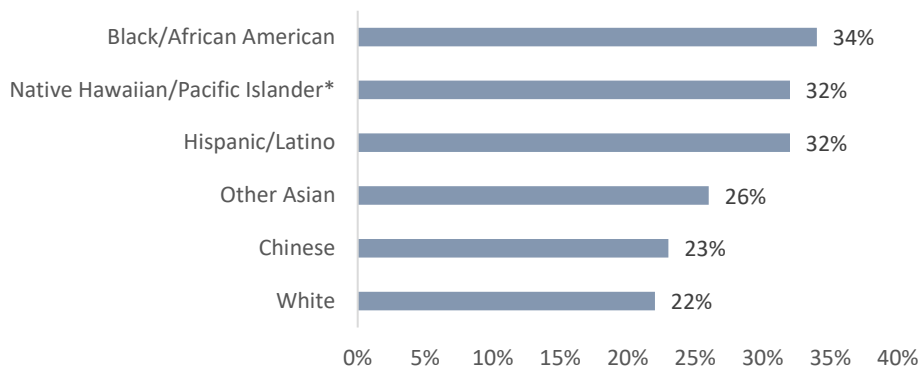
Figure 2. Clients indicating a need for food support post Shelter-In-Place by Race/Ethnicity (N=7,328)



Another question on the SF-HSA Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey provided an additional way to measure food needs by race and ethnicity. The survey asked clients to indicate what single need was their greatest need post shelter-in-place. As shown below in figure 3, the percentage of clients by race or

ethnicity that indicated food support was their most immediate need was highest among Black/African Americans (34%), Pacific Islanders (32%), and Latinx (32%) as compared to other groups. Slightly different from the previous finding reported above, African American/Black clients were most likely to indicate food support as their greatest need as compared to all other racial/ethnic groups.

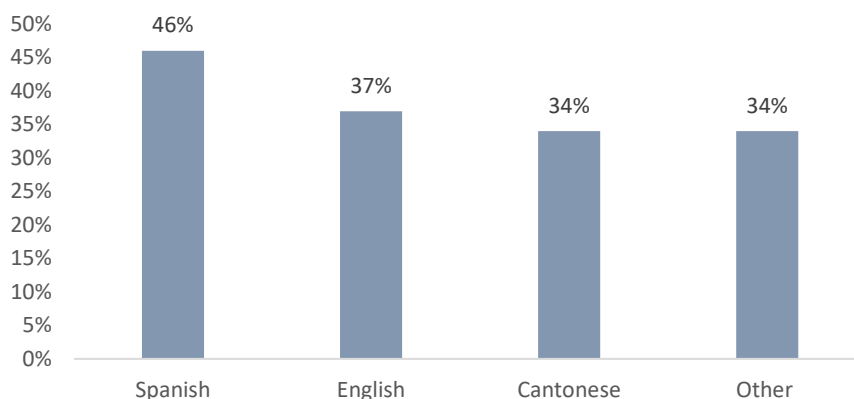
Figure 3. Clients by Race/Ethnicity that Indicated Food is Most Immediate post SIP Need (N=7,328)



Primary Language

HSA clients also expressed different levels of food support needs based on their self-identified primary language. Spanish speaking clients expressed the greatest need for food support, as compared to groups indicating English or Cantonese as their primary language. Small sample sizes of less than n=100 prevented us from reporting levels of expressed food support need for clients that indicated a primary language other than the languages reported below.

Figure 4. Client Need for Food Support by Primary Language (N=8,033)



Immigration Status and Food Insecurity

Food security experts we interviewed explained that many undocumented and newly arrived immigrants are especially vulnerable to food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, research showed that nationally undocumented residents were more likely to experience food insecurity (Pew Research, 2016), and children of newly arrived immigrants were at increased risk of poor health outcomes due to lack of access to nutritional food (Chilton, Black, Berkowitz et al., 2009). Undocumented residents are especially vulnerable to food insecurity as many do not qualify for public food assistance

through programs such as CalFresh and are not eligible to receive government stimulus checks or unemployment assistance. One food security program operator with experience serving immigrant communities stated:

“Undocumented residents or immigrants trying to obtain citizenship are especially vulnerable because they often won’t stand in line for food for themselves or their families, due to the perceived threat of Immigrations Customs Enforcement, or the fear that data collected on them by the program may impact their immigration status. Though most programs don’t collect that type of information, there is still a tremendous fear in the immigrant community that prevents them from seeking services”.

Data from HSA’s post shelter-in-place survey confirms that immigration status is associated with food insecurity, as clients that lived in a mixed-status households, where at least one family member has a different immigration status, were more likely to indicate a need for food support, as compared to clients not living in mixed-status households. As shown below, 47% of clients living in mixed-status households indicated a need for food support, as compared to 37% of clients not living in a mixed status household.

Figure 5. Mixed-Status Household Clients Need for Food Support (N=2,434)

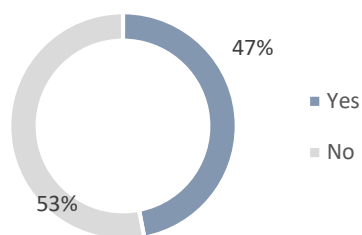
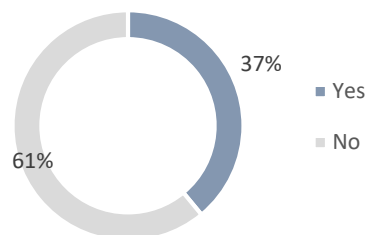


Figure 6. Non Mixed-Status Household Clients Need for Food Support (N=7,661)



Food Insecurity in Families

Another group that has become especially vulnerable to food insecurity post shelter-in-place are families with a child 18 or younger in the home. According to school food program administrators in San Francisco, providing adequate food support to children has become increasingly challenging as a result of physical school closures and changing guidance from the federal government on who is eligible for free meals distributed at San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) food distribution sites. While federal waivers have been extended that allow SFUSD to provide meals to all youth under age 18, regardless of enrollment in SFUSD, the school district has struggled to fully staff all food programs for youth. According to one food program administrator:

“The biggest challenge now is supporting the meal delivery programs that provide meals to students with disabilities or whose families have circumstances that prevent them from picking up meals at food distribution sites. The meal delivery program is maxed out at supporting 200 families, and the demand for this program has only increased, currently there are over 50 families on the waiting list for this program”.

HSA’s post shelter-in-place survey confirms that families are more likely to indicate a need for food support, as 44% of clients with a child in the home below age 18 indicated a need for food support as compared to just 35% of clients that did not have a child in the home.

Figure 7. Households with Child under 18 Need for Food Support (N=4,043)

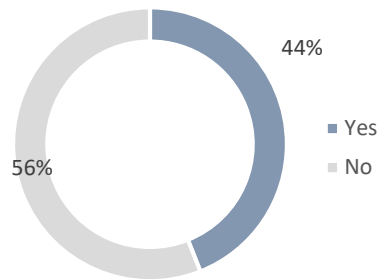
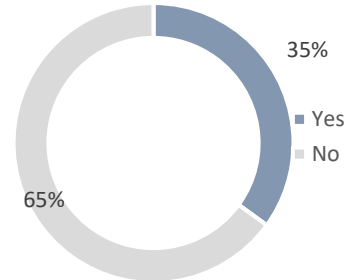


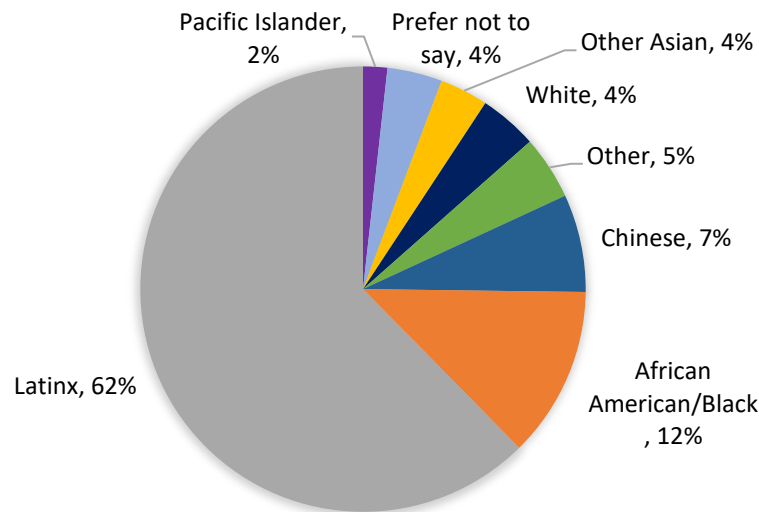
Figure 8. Households without Child in Home under 18 Need for Food Support (N=4,291)



Demographics of Food Insecure Families

The demographic profile of food insecure families indicates the majority of families dealing with food insecurity are Latinx families. While 37% of SF-HSA Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey respondents identified as Latinx, 62% of individuals in families needing food support identified as Latinx. The next largest racial or ethnic group of families needing food support identified as African American/Black (12%) followed by Chinese (7%). For the demographic profile of all SF-HSA Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey respondents please see Appendix B.

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of Food Insecure Families (N=1,706)



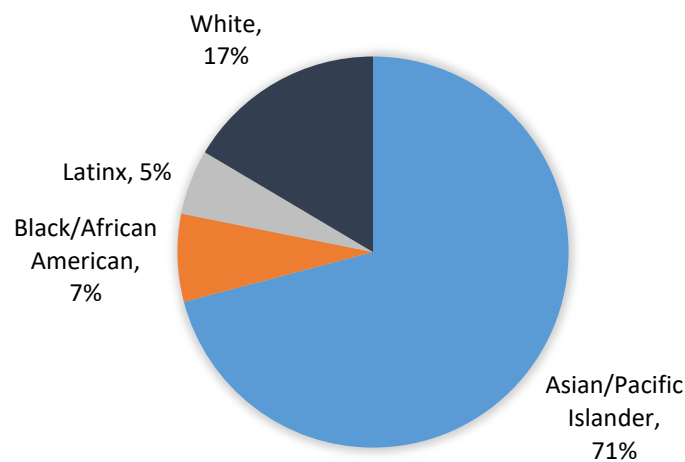
African American/Black and Latinx Seniors

African American/Black and Latinx seniors were also identified by food program administrators as especially vulnerable to food insecurity during this pandemic. Nationally, African American/Black and Latinx seniors are over twice as likely to be food insecure as other seniors (Gundersen and Ziliak, 2020). While some organizations such as the George W. Davis Senior Center and IT Bookman Community Center serve a large number of African American/Black seniors, food distribution program leadership we spoke with identified several challenges in continuing to serve this community. According to one food security program operator serving African American/Black seniors:

“The hilly topography of this city and reduced bus service has made it increasingly difficult for our seniors to access food at our sites. This was our primary method for serving meals to seniors that meet their nutritional needs. Because we didn’t want to put our seniors at risk of exposure to COVID-19, we had to move to a food delivery model, which is much more labor intensive, and this is at a time when we have declining staff capacity due to many of our volunteers returning to work or school”.

Of concern is that African American/Black seniors and Latinx seniors do not participate in large scale food security programs in San Francisco at similar rates as other racial or ethnic groups of seniors. For example, the largest food delivery program created in response to COVID-19, Great Plates Delivered, has lower levels of enrollment among African American/Black and Latinx seniors as compared to similar food programs serving seniors (Food Coordination Group, 2020). Of Great Plates clients, the majority of seniors identify as Asian/Pacific Islander or White as compared to just 7% African American/Black and 5% Latinx. Eligibility may partially explain lower rates of African American/Black and Latinx participation in Great Plates as the program excludes seniors living below 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL), and African American/Black and Latinx seniors are more financially vulnerable than other groups (Dumez and Derbew, 2011). Lower rates of participation among Latinx and African American/Black seniors suggests an opportunity exists to do greater outreach to these communities and that a need exists to support culturally competent food programming that meets the needs of African American/Black and Latinx seniors.

Figure 9. Race/Ethnicity of Great Plates Clients June, 2020 (N=1,390)



The Food Support Landscape and Support for Grassroots Feeding Efforts

As demand for food support increased during the early stages of this pandemic, many smaller grassroots groups emerged at the neighborhood level to address food insecurity in their communities. One food program operator I spoke with explained these efforts:

“What changed was that seemingly overnight, many of the community organizations who were not even doing food before, started to do food to meet the needs of their communities. For example, 3rd St. Youth Center, Bayview Senior Center, HOMEY, and many other groups understood what was happening in their neighborhoods, and tried to address the distinct food needs in their community in a culturally appropriate way. We started to see new populations in need, people in the hospitality industry who lost their jobs seemingly overnight and needed help with food. The demand quickly became overwhelming”.

Another food support provider added: *“some of these grassroots efforts were and continue to be completely reliant upon volunteers and sometimes they don’t have kitchen space. They often are operating out of churches, or many times distributing food out of their garage”.*

Many of the food support providers we spoke with agreed that to more adequately address food insecurity during this pandemic, large scale food distribution programs and small neighborhood level programs need to better coordinate efforts to deliver culturally appropriate meals to the communities they collectively serve. Many of the providers we spoke with felt large scale programs can provide the necessary volume of food, but added the food provided may not be tailored to meet the unique needs of different communities. According to one food program administrator:

“Some communities are less inclined to stand in line for food even if they are starving, because they feel like there is a loss of dignity in doing so, or feel the programs just aren’t for them. Also, there is a lack of trust among many groups for good historical reasons, and I think the smaller neighborhood programs often do a better job of establishing trust and providing culturally appropriate food to folks who wouldn’t otherwise seek food support”.

Providers we spoke with from large scale food distribution programs agreed that small scale neighborhood based programs fill critical gaps in service and meet distinct cultural needs, but recognized that many have very limited resources, which negatively impacts their ability to meet the demand for food in their communities. For example, one large food support program operator stated:

“What became crystal clear to me during this response, is that we need to be able to support grassroots neighborhood level efforts who have so few resources. They reached out to us in desperate need to find food so they could meet the unique needs in their community. Some of the organizations that began to do delivery to serve their most vulnerable clients did not have food to make all their deliveries. Thankfully, as a result of donations we received, we were able to take them the food they needed to complete deliveries. I am glad we could help in that instance, but I know of times when organizations simply had to suspend service”.

Large and small scale food distribution programs expressed a shared desire to better coordinate service delivery and support neighborhood level programs. One food support program administrator concluded:

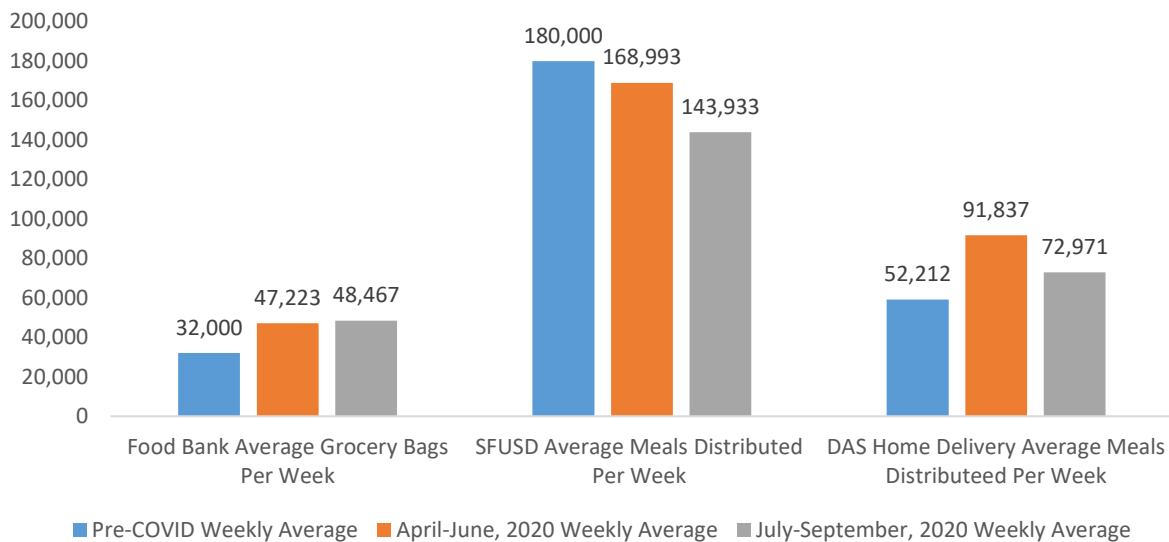
“I think we need to find the organizations in the community who are trusted so that we can partner with them. When we have long lines we have had icky racial tension going on, I think we need to work with trusted neighborhood groups to ensure people who need food can go to places where they feel

comfortable getting it. I think that is the approach we need to take and I believe we are starting to take now”.

Increasing Need for Food Support and Strained Capacity

Many of the largest food support programs continue to distribute a higher volume of food than pre-COVID-19, others are returning closer to pre-COVID-19 levels, while some have fallen below pre-COVID-19 distribution. Large scale food programs such as the SF-Marin Foodbank and San Francisco Disability and Aging Services (DAS) Home Delivery have maintained higher levels of food distribution since shelter-in-place began, while SFUSD has confronted logistical and staffing challenges stemming from school closures which has resulted in reduced food distribution. As shown below in Figure 10, the SF-Marin Food Bank has continuously increased distribution, DAS Home Delivery increased delivery initially but is trending slightly closer to pre-covid-19 levels, and SFUSD distribution has decreased.

Figure 10. Large Food Distribution Programs Avg. Weekly Distribution (Pre-SIP – September 2020)



Several logistical challenges related to food distribution emerged for SFUSD as students were no longer able to receive meals as part of in-person instruction and worsened as teachers and staff who served as food distribution volunteers returned to work to implement distance learning. An SFUSD representative we spoke with explained:

“Many of our volunteers were teachers who were out for summer and they are teaching now. So, it has compounded the fact that we were already short staffed. We started blasting out a call for volunteers on our website and we began opening up volunteering to a larger group of people. But this has been very challenging because we have never had to rely on volunteers to support our food distribution programs”.

Another challenge that occurred according to SFUSD was that *“when school resumed pick-up hours conflicted with virtual classroom hours making it difficult for parents or youth to pick-up the food they needed. This was due to labor union constraints on when employees could work”.* Other factors identified as impacting SFUSD’s ability to increase food distribution have been confusion around the extension of federal waivers that allowed SFUSD to serve all youth under 18 regardless of SFUSD enrollment, and

uncertainty around when they would receive federal funding to support food distribution. The SFUSD representative we spoke with further explained:

“There is not much financial support, we are mostly reliant on funding from the federal government, and that is very frustrating. That is probably the hardest part. We often aren’t aware of funding until the very last minute which makes it hard to plan and can create service gaps. We have to decide if we can take a financial loss or stop serving food, which we hate to do”.

The Future of Food Distribution Programs Created in Response to COVID-19

Programs created in response to COVID-19 such as Great Plates, which continues to serve seniors and Meals in Place which served unsheltered residents have uncertain futures or have ended as is the case with Meals in Place (program ended October, 31st 2020). Great Plates has been extended until December 8th but its future remains uncertain. Great Plates provides over 40,000 meals per week across the City and Meals in Place was providing over 1,000 meals per day. Many of the food distribution program operators we spoke with indicated that some of the smaller scale neighborhood efforts that began to respond to COVID-19 food needs in the community have ended due to either a lack of resources, staff burnout, or the loss of volunteers that occurred as the economy reopened and volunteers returned to work.

All of the organizations we spoke with stressed the seriousness of staff burnout and realized it as a factor that could impact their capacity to continue operations. One administrator stated:

“Non-profit workers are burnt out and many are leaving because they simply can’t do it anymore. Their heart is in the right place, but they and their families are struggling too. I’m concerned it could cause a growing number of operations shut down and that would create more gaps”.

As demand for food support continues to increase while capacity continues to be strained, it is vital that the City and community based organizations efficiently coordinate services and resources to ensure food supports meet the rapidly growing demand for food among residents.

Recommendations for Addressing Emerging Needs

- **Support programs that serve African American/Black, Pacific Islander, and Latinx communities’:** Food insecurity in San Francisco is highest among these racial or ethnic groups. Funding and resources should be directed to ensure food security programs that have established trust with these communities can continue to operate and address food insecurity within these communities.
- **Consider innovative approaches to support immigrant communities in need of food support.** This may include supporting smaller neighborhood level organizations that have established trust with immigrant and undocumented communities. Other strategies as suggested by one food security program administrator included “developing meal programs that meet these folks where they already are, and provide access to food supports at their place of work”. As an example, explore partnering with sectors such as the hospitality industry to ensure management is aware that some of their employees may be impacted by food insecurity and can direct them to food support programs, or can develop food programs internally to assist their employees.
- **Help prepare and support organizations addressing food insecurity among families:** As food insecurity worsens among families, it’s vital that city agencies and community based organizations coordinate efforts to ensure families who need food supports are able to access them. Families

that are especially vulnerable to worsening food insecurity include mixed-status households where family members immigration status precludes them from accessing nutritional programs or other forms of public assistance and children in households where disabilities or limited access to transportation prevents them from accessing food at school distribution sites.

- **Address food insecurity among African American/Black and Latinx seniors:** Increase outreach to African American/Black and Latinx seniors to ensure they are aware of the large scale food support programs they may be eligible for. Coordinate food distribution efforts to ensure organizations that serve African American/Black and Latinx seniors have access to the resources they need to continue to provide cultural appropriate food to these communities.
- **Develop strategies that support greater coordination between large and small scale programs:** Food security program administrators agreed that in order to effectively serve historically underserved communities, greater coordination is needed between larger better resourced food distribution programs and smaller food support programs that may have established greater trust with these communities. While this coordination is beginning to occur on an ad hoc basis, the development of a sustainable strategy for coordinating these partnerships is needed to ensure fear or distrust is not a barrier for individuals needing to access food support programs.
- **Maintain ongoing awareness of staff and volunteer capacity at organizations working on food security:** To prevent food support programs from experiencing disruptions in service due to limited staff or volunteer capacity, city staff should maintain ongoing awareness of volunteer and staffing capacity at organizations working on food security. City departments may also consider ways to support community based organizations through increased outreach for volunteers, or by providing some limited term staffing to prevent disruptions in service due to staffing or volunteer shortages.

Appendix A

Interview Participant	Primary Population Served
Large Scale Program Leader	All low-Income/Food Insecure (3)
Large Scale Program Leader	Seniors/Adults with Disabilities (2)
Small Scale Program Leader	Latinx and Immigrant Community (1)
Small Scale Program Leader	African American/Black (1)
Large Scale Program Operator	Youth and children (1)
Small Scale Program Leader	Young children age 0-5 (1)
Large scale program Leader	Unsheltered/all low-income (1)
Total	10

Appendix B

SF-HSA Post Shelter-in-Place Client Survey Race/Ethnicity	Freq.	Percent
Latinx	3,088	37%
White	1,712	21%
African American/Black	1,091	13%
Chinese	902	11%
Other	517	6%
Other Asian	427	5%
Prefer not to say	322	4%
Pacific Islander	108	1%
Native American	96	1%
Total	8,263	100%

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