
Notes from 9/29/2016

Food Access Community Conversation @ Plenty

1. What are the primary Barriers & Challenges to Food Access in the communities you serve?

Financial:

- Afterschool + summer feeding should be same funding
- Family could not afford to waste the amount of produce it takes to build a taste for it in children
- Unemployed
- Low income
- Fixed income

Physical:

- Too far to get produce
- No transportation
- Lack of stove/freezer
- Requires refrigeration/freezer
- Lack of storage for fresh foods

Cultural:

- Lack of education on what to do with FRESH food
- Lack of family dinner time
- Raised on beans and cornbread
- Misperception of food cost for health versus junk
- Raised eating a diet which in fat and added sugar

Nutritional:

- Parents giving snacks instead of MEALS
- Changing children's food habits
- From a backpack perspective- needs to be easily prepared & transported so good nutrition is often tricky
- Cost of higher nutrition canned food is cost prohibitive
- Functional limitations that prohibit preparation of nutritious meals-elderly, disabled, children, etc.
- Habits
- Balance nutrition with the ability to carry in a backpack

Policy/ Regulation:

- Big Picture Focus: Why do we have so many hungry and poor? So many structural and policy solutions.
- In-adequate wages/jobs? Training? Affordable housing?
- Cost of fresh food. SNAP does not go as far.
- Federally funded programs are too dated and the process is difficult
- Housing allowance for active military- SNAP.
- Need to observe child eating food @ SF feeding sites

Other:

- Genuine people
- Willing to work individuals
- Sustainable leadership- what if we move, burn out, move on??

Small Group Discussion

2. From the challenges/barriers listed by the group, which ones do your hunger relief program(s) try to address? And how?

- Highlander Helpers- they have learned to maintain nutrition standards in a backpack program through a lot of trial and error.
- Feeding America- offer 2 healthy choices to kids in backpack programs to get them to choose good foods. Providing 2 healthy choices in a backpack means a kids is more likely to eat something healthy.
- Warm Hearth- in regards to transportation issues, Warm hearth has a bus that goes to food banks and St. Mike's Soup for Senior's brings food to residents. This also helps with isolation.
- Feeding America- in regards to public policy- Feeding America is working on child re-authorization act and passage of the Farm Bill. They have a policy alert email that everyone can sign up for.
- Radford Fairlawn Daily bread- serves 20,000 meals a year. Offers meals on wheels and an on-site feeding program. They operating with a large volunteer base and a part time coordinator. Food largely comes from donations and they have a partnership with VT dining halls which provides food and RU which provides student volunteer support. United Way also funds their meal programs. They ask for very few requirements of those they serve and the primary one is that Meals on Wheels must truly serve homebound individuals.
- The Area Agency on Aging- runs a week day meal home delivery program. Meals are delivered through senior services and the food is prepared by Aarmark. They serve 70,000 meals a year. AAA also runs the Friendship café throughout the NRV for older adults to get together and share meals and companionship.

- The Bobcat backpack program- helps to fill the gap that beans and rice cannot fill either because they are not eligible or don't like to be associated as a free and reduced lunch kid. They currently serve 100 students, mostly at the elementary level.
- Community services- is trying to address affordability of fresh produce by distributing to clients on site.

3. How do you define success?

Measures of Success

- Community support
- Passion
- Build administration cost into grant applications (funds)
- Learn to let somethings go
- Allow folks to volunteer where they have passion (buy-in)
- Align the mission with the community values
- Shared Identity
- Nourish Communities
- Neighbors helping neighbors approach
- Inclusion of the whole community
- Fairness & Justice paired with Economic Development
- Strategic Planning



This way



Not this way (traditional, top-down)

- Have all parts of the operation/process be a part of the decision making, especially if you depend on volunteers.
- Know your audience (needs assessment)
- Improved education
- Changes in health habits/improved health/improved shopping skills
- Gardens
- Financial Fitness
- Ability to serve more of clients
- When others give back after receiving services
- Increased Volunteer Hours
- Funding
- Less reliance on grants- financial sustainability
- Finding solutions

4. Describe any successes or innovations you've had with your programs?

Nutrition

- Spend slightly more \$ on food if it means improving nutrition
- Cooking demonstrations and samples to slowly introduce new foods and how to prepare them.
- Having fresh produce available to distribute to clients when they visit social services or other central locations.
- Prices Fork will have a community kitchen that could be a processing resource for pantries and other programs soon.
- Food pantries giving out seeds and seedlings.
- Working to engage clients in the "food process"- learning how to grow and prepare food
- Putting labels on food that explain how to cook & prepare in order to increase consumption of 'new' foods.
- Offering nutrition classes in addition to their food distribution program
- Focusing on youth education
- Community services trying to address affordability of fresh produce by distributing to clients on site.

Cultural

- Creating a pantry at school for older students, so that they can choose what they like and stop off to pick up a lunch if needed that they can heat in the microwave at school.
- Placing a pantry at the school that parents could access when they come to pick up their child. Would pantries be better than backpacks?
- Taking the time to survey the community as to what is really needed.

Financial/Organizational Capacity

- Feeding America has bench mark indicators (meals per person per county). Getting nutrition bills passed is another bench mark. FA is working on a client data tracking program that will text clients information on resources in their community.
- Serving a large number of individuals/ all individuals that come in need of a meal.
- Building community partnerships/networks
- Building effective relationships with Universities
- Ability to maintain a college student run program with high student turn over.
- Effectively utilizing Americorps volunteers to overcome lack of staffing
- Could we develop a combined resources list of GRANT OPPORTUNITIES?
- Could we increase collaborate with other hunger relief organizations and community partners thru Community Foundation NRV?

Communication

- Effectively building community partnerships/networks
- Being able to access and reach out to in-need areas (ex. trailer park communities)
- Making one-on-one connections with clients
- Warm Hearth- Success is the number of participating residents, so neighbors don't have to feed neighbors when they all have little to give away. Residents now feel comfortable asking for help. They provide personal care items as well as food now too.

5. What barriers (challenges) does your organization continue to face? Why?

Financial/Organizational Capacity

- Cost/lack of financial contributions
- Fewer corporate food donations as businesses like Walmart get more efficient.
- If you are not a Feeding America partner, then you are often not eligible to receive donations from some major food suppliers.
- Dependence on individual donations and low pay to staff
- Lack of volunteers/staff
- Coordinating meetings between partners and volunteers takes a lot of effort
- Finding consistent/regular volunteers
- Operational Sustainability
- Investing time and effort in strategic planning/thinking
- Board creating direction and taking on all parts of work, not just 'fun' work
- Limited time/difficulty scheduling
- Lack of connections and coordination among the hunger relief network
- Lack of knowledge about available grant opportunities
- Best process for record keeping
- Ability to/knowledge of how best to collect data to show funders the program's worth. Value of Qualitative vs. Quantitative- donors want quantitative.
- Increasing knowledge among the community about all the resources available within the community beyond a singular partner organization.

Cultural

- Disconnect between programs offered and utility of programs (we want to do cooking classes- but what kind. Do people have ovens or necessary utensils?)
- Dietary restrictions or food preferences of clients (ex. picking white over wheat bread) and how to accommodate them
- What people like to eat is different from what is nutrient dense.
- The struggle to serve middle and high school students because these students would often rather go hungry than be targeted as a free and reduced lunch kid.
- Getting the word out about the programs offered to the people that need them.
- Misconceptions among clients that the cost of healthier foods are significantly greater than that of junk foods.

Nutritional

- Serving what is donated doesn't always allow them to share a 'healthy' meal
- Finding a food service provider that can prepare nutritious and tasty meals that meet federal guidelines.
- Finding foods that a child can transport and prepare themselves that are also nutritious/ whole food options.

Physical

- Transportation (of clients and those serving them)
- Getting the most nutritious meals to feed people while using food that is easy to prepare and transport.
- Lack of adequate room temperature and cold storage space for food.
- Maintaining equipment used to support feeding programs.
- Food spoilage during transportation and delivery

Donor/Volunteer Misperceptions

- What type of people are getting resources because of a bad stigma around assistance programs. Lack of education about who these people are and what their hardships are.
- Perceptions on who is hungry, perceptions of who is on SNAP
- Perception that receiving SNAP takes money from those who need it more
- Invisibility of senior hunger, misperception of Warm Hearth as not having low income residents.

Large Group Discussion

6. Does anyone have suggestions for how to overcome the challenges/barriers identified?

Fresh produce going to waste

- Creating a blog/webpage to connect with fellow organizations (pick up/drop off)
- Turning vegetables into soups/sauces (shelf stable)

Cost/access to fresh produce

- Working with farmers to purchase bulk food before the season at a discounted price

Clients cultural perceptions or lack of knowledge on healthy eating

- Pantry education (workshops/recipes)

Unsure of needs to clients/how to access them

- Conducting a needs assessment
- Additional resources through the VCE

7. Which barriers do you think are not being addressed in your community by your program or others?

- A place to process extra/gleaned fresh food before it spoils.
 - Prices Fork Elementary – being turned into a local food center/affordable housing for seniors
 - Commercial kitchen, storage, farm to table restaurant, brewery

- Meeting the needs to local food services and entrepreneurs
- Potential ability for food by food access organizations (ex. gleaners turning apples into apple butter)
- “Shortening the line”
 - What resources can we give clients so they are food secure on their own?
 - Moving from temporary assistance to learning/obtaining the skills necessary to succeed on their own
 - Fresh/local food component – is this feasible?
 - Difficult in ghost towns/food deserts
 - Need to invest in our farmers!
 - Discussion shifted toward the shift in the labor force away from farmers and toward STEM programs in schools (a push away from agricultural)
 - Value of growing your own food or being able to understand the price/value of your food
 - SHARE – old distribution center in Pulaski through New River Community Action Center
 - Idea of creating a common ground for extra foods, packaging it and sending it out to those in need (volunteer component?)
 - Similar to CSA concept

Wrap Up

Main focuses from today:

- Having a listserv/database of food access groups in the region – working on it, please fill out your surveys!
- Creating a website/Facebook page to connect with other organizations
 - Needs/availability of food items and coordinating pick-ups/drop offs
- Cultural considerations when working with clients – developing educational workshops or recipes to encourage clients to try new foods/eat healthier
- Needs assessments – lack of data of clients/needs of the community

Next meeting – November

- Will email everyone to find a common time for meeting
- Main focus – **food distribution**