

Findings from a Needs Assessment of Rural and Remote Food Banks in California

Opportunities for Novel Partnerships

Purpose

Food banks in California provide critical food resources to the 1 in 8 Californians facing food insecurity through a network of food banks and pantries across California.

Commissioned by the California Association of Food Banks (CAFB), the Nutrition Policy Institute (NPI) conducted a needs assessment to identify opportunities, challenges and strategies to increase the capacity of CAFB's Rural and Remote Food Bank members to better serve their communities.

Methods

Focus on 4 areas

- Organizational structure
- Organizational practices
- Organizational capacity
- Community needs

Mixed methods:

- Online survey gathered data on food banks' operations
- Service area profiles developed to capture

sociodemographic and food-related indicators

- Site visits to all 15 Rural and Remote Food Banks: semi-structured interviews with key staff; observations of food distributions and operations

Findings

Considerable variation in scale of operations:

- Procurement and distribution of 1.1 to 4.4 million pounds of food annually
- Budgets of \$150,000- \$1.9 million
- Paid FTE staff of 0 to 23

Common challenges

- Insufficient funding, particularly for purchase of nutrient dense foods, improved/expanded infrastructure and operational costs
- Challenging transportation logistics
- Limited access to foundation, corporate and individual donor support
- Limited access to retail food donations
- Limited capacity of local pantries

Opportunities

- Good geographic coverage within service areas
- High satisfaction with quality of donations from USDA and local retailers
- High satisfaction with fresh produce acquired via programs such Farm to Family and Donate Don't Dump
- Provision of services including nutrition education, referrals to health and social services, CalFresh outreach
- Dedicated staff and volunteers
- Innovative programs including "virtual food drives," "homeless kits"
- High interest in engaging in advocacy and raising awareness of hunger

Key Recommendations

Nutritional Quality of Food

- Conduct advocacy to increase quality of donations from Feeding America affiliates.
- Provide assistance with messaging to increase the quality of food donated via community food drives.

Fundraising

- Improved access to timely information regarding relevant funding opportunities.
- Develop collaborative grants to address common needs across multiple food banks.
- Provide assistance to transition from food drives to cash contributions to support increased purchase of foods of choice.

Transportation

- Explore innovative partnerships to transport and deliver food, including with commercial and public sector entities, commuters

Pantries

- Identify mechanisms to improve food bank monitoring and provide assistance to increase local pantry capacity.

Leadership

- Provide networking opportunities to connect new EDs and food bank managers with more experienced colleagues, particularly in the same region.
- Provide assistance with board development.

Network and Sharing Positive Practices

- Create a forum for rural and remote food banks to network, ask questions, share positive practices and explore ways of solving common problems.
- Create opportunities to allow food banks, especially those in the same geographic region, to visit with and learn from one another.
- Publish an annual "best practices" report, including categories such as fundraising, special events, programming, rural distribution, etc.



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