

NEIGHBOR FOOD NEEDS AND PREFERENCES: A BRIEF LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT OF THE NETWORK

A Section from the Nutrition in Food Banking Toolkit





INTRODUCTION

Understanding individuals' food needs and preferences is a critical element to addressing food insecurity with dignity and intention. One step food banks can take is to engage with community members to better understand their food preferences. This level of community engagement and information gathering is just one step of many in building trust, understanding, collaboration, and partnership with neighbors experiencing food insecurity.



For the purposes of this landscape assessment, the phrase “food needs and preferences” refers to neighbors' communicated responses, and like all people, are likely informed by one's cultural, geography, family traditions, historical food access, religion, medical needs, and taste preferences. Including and beyond food banks' expansion of food offerings to meet neighbor food needs and preferences, the work outlined in this asset involves transforming food bank operations, policies, and practices to be inclusive of all neighbors. Learning from neighbors, agency partners, and community-led organizations (via surveys or focus groups, for example) is essential in creating sustainable change.



The goal of conducting this landscape assessment was to better understand how Feeding America member food banks are addressing the food needs and preferences of neighbors today and then invite us all to build on and inform the future of the work together.

We recognize that every food bank's journey in engaging in this work will look different, as each community has unique food needs and preferences and access opportunities. Also, this resource will require continued refinement to meet the evolving understanding around the topic of intercultural competency and response.

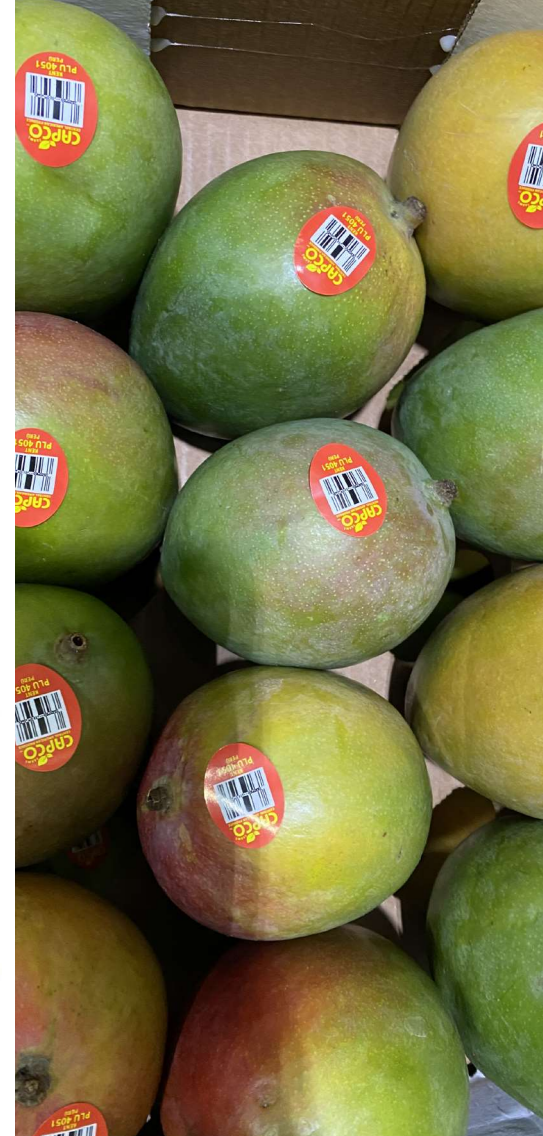
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Initially this report was referred to as the "Culturally Appropriate Foods Landscape Assessment." After learning more about the work food banks are doing to meet neighbor's needs, we realized the term "food needs and preferences" can be used as an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of initiatives. To describe these initiatives, food banks and partners use terms such as "culturally responsive," "culturally inclusive," "culturally relevant," "culturally sensitive," "culturally specific," and "culturally universal," all of which are used in this report interchangeably.

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FEEDING AMERICA MEMBER FOOD BANK SPOTLIGHTS

The following section features eight Feeding America member food banks who are currently engaged in neighbor food needs and preferences initiatives. This is not an exhaustive list of all the food banks engaging in this work, but rather a sample of food banks who agreed to participate in qualitative interviews with the Feeding America Research team to share their learnings with the network. This section is intended to provide insight and generate ideas as a starting point for food banks who are beginning their journeys in this area.



Food Bank of the Rockies | Denver, CO
 Amanda McGimpsey, Culturally Responsive
 Food Initiative Manager

Work to Date

Food Bank of the Rockies launched a Culturally Responsive Food Initiative (CRFI) upon receiving a Feeding America COVID-19 Relief Grant. The objectives of CRFI were to (1) gather feedback on cultural food preferences and source food items that are culturally relevant to the communities they serve; (2) streamline their internal workflow and develop metrics to sustain this culturally responsive work after the grant period ends (3) strengthen their existing partnerships by improving communication channels, creating new partnerships and providing agencies with education tools. This initiative was piloted in eight counties that were identified based on a review of racial disparities in poverty as well as food pantry usage. The food bank intends to roll out the initiative to their remaining service network in the next phase of this work. Over the course of this grant project, the food bank was able to hire two research consultants in addition to a program outreach representative and two tribal consultants. To inform their research methodology, they reviewed over 100 academic articles, met with other food banks engaging in culturally responsive food work, collected surveys about food preferences from more than 100 partner agencies and 700 neighbors, interviewed 12 community organizations, and conducted seven focus groups (five

with partners, two with neighbors). Based on the feedback that the food bank received, custom food-suggestion lists were developed for seven groups (Eastern Shoshone, Northern Arapaho, Ethiopian, Somali, Latinx, Russian, and Vietnamese neighbors). These preferred food lists included information on foods to avoid due to religious and dietary restrictions, and important cultural holidays that may impact the quantity or type of food needed. The food bank's sourcing team uses these food lists to inform ordering decisions regarding food type, quantity and seasonality. The food bank has developed a monthly report to track the availability of food items from their cultural food list in their ordering system. As a result of this work, the food bank has seen an increase from 19% to 34% in the number of cultural food items available. The food bank has identified 15 top food items that were most popular across cultures. The monthly availability of these top 15 food items has increased from 25% to 80%. To help partners identify culturally responsive food items when ordering, the food bank has started tagging these items as "culturally responsive" in their online portal. The food bank also supported 80 partners with food credits to help supplement the cost of ordering culturally responsive food items.

Additionally, Food Bank of the Rockies developed a best practices resource based upon partner, neighbor, and community organization feedback for their partners. The guidance included common foods across cultures, ideas on how to build trust, and tips on community engagement, culturally responsive outreach, and how to overcome language and access barriers. With the assistance of their tribal consultants, the food bank was able to build new partnerships with the Wind River Indian Reservation and support mobile pantries providing culturally responsive, customizable food offerings.

In Phase II of the CRFI the food bank will continue to prioritize increasing the availability of culturally responsive foods and building understanding of community demographics and needs through surveys, interviews and focus groups. In addition, the food bank is launching a consultation program for up to 50 partners to do in-depth best practices training and help the partners assess and develop a strategic plan for implementing culturally responsive practices. Participating partners in this program will also be eligible for food credits for culturally responsive foods as well as additional funding for translation services and diversity, equity and inclusion training.

Food Bank Insights

- » “It’s something we’ve wanted to do for a long time. When COVID-19 hit, it increased the immediate need to do [culturally sensitive work]. We already knew that there’s racial disparities in poverty rates. For some of our clients from different cultural backgrounds, we realized we might not be meeting their needs. With the pandemic it became that much more important to meet those communities and serve them in equitable ways.”
- » We tried to balance between unique items for cultures we don’t serve very well. For example, teff flour—we know that it’s important for Somali and Ethiopian people, but we also wanted to carry items that were cross-cultural because for sourcing it’s easier if it’s going out to multiple communities. We used our best judgment on which items to include there.
- » We used our agency feedback on items that were commonly requested, which also served the purpose of letting us know whether they had a good gauge on their community. If they say they have Arabic speakers, but they don’t say they have foods for those cultures, we see that maybe there’s a disconnect. Maybe some of those agencies could use some educational tools.
- » We feel a lot of responsibility talking with folks with lived experience and taking information, and not giving anything back. We’re trying to switch from a focus-group model to something with more reciprocity to build an ongoing trust with folks, rather than just tapping them one time—which doesn’t do them any good. Hopefully we’ll get that information about how to make our systems better and more inclusive, as we know there’s the potential for much more inclusion. We’re looking at this opportunity beyond this grant but if it continues to be more of a community forum situation, we might be able to work toward larger goals and build trust- in the community.



Atlanta Community Food Bank | Atlanta, GA
Kristen Elliot, RDN, LD, Nutrition Specialist

Work to Date

Atlanta Community Food Bank first began engaging in neighbor food needs and preferences work when the Nutrition and Wellness team (Kristen) received a request from the Food Sourcing team in January 2021 to promote a large donation of prepared jackfruit meals to all their partner food distributors.

Traditionally, the Atlanta Community Food Bank has promoted cultural foods to all partners and requests the Nutrition and Wellness team to educate neighbors about food preparation. They are now working toward a model of promoting cultural foods directly to partners that serve neighbors who are already familiar with the products. This will require gathering information on (1) which partners serve large ethnic populations and which countries are represented and (2) the cultural food preferences for different countries and religions.

The food bank has taken the following:

- » The Nutrition and Wellness team facilitated conversations with IT, county relationship managers and Service Insights to determine information we currently collect about neighbors and what information is needed to connect cultural foods with people who eat it. This will involve developing a survey for community members.
- » The Nutrition and Wellness team discussed possibilities for labelling/ categorizing foods in inventory with “culture tags” that are easy for partners to navigate. The food bank’s inventory system does not currently have a field to label or search for products as Latinx, Asian, Kosher, etc.
- » The Nutrition and Wellness team and the Retail Sourcing team have discussed ways to include more Culturally specific grocery stores (i.e., Asian, Halal, Latinx, etc.) in our Enabled Program.
- » The Nutrition and Wellness team has worked with the food bank’s marketing data analyst to pull census tract data (food insecurity rates crossed with cultural populations) about their service area. They were able to see where there are larger portions of different cultures across census tract data. This is going to help inform what agencies they should talk to moving forward with a pilot.
- » The Nutrition and Wellness team piloted a Facebook Live Spanish-cooking demo series and promoted it to ZIP codes with high concentrations of Latino people and food insecurity using census tract data.
- » Kristen has streamlined communication channels between food banks in the network and facilitated monthly working group meetings among food banks who are either exploring or currently engaged in neighbor food needs and preferences work.

Food Bank Insights

- » Our food bank and our partner network do not have a way to track client data related to country of origin. Many of our partners are using Oasis Insights, but the ethnicity field is not required or used consistently. I've considered starting with county data to identify large cultural populations, then surveying agencies in these areas.
- » We have identified several potential metrics: first/main language spoken, religious dietary needs and practices (Halal, Kosher, vegetarian, etc.), and race/ethnicity.
- » We realize that pantry managers and food bank operations staff may not know how to define cultural food preferences. This is a potential education opportunity. Census tract data can be used to map populations and food insecurity to identify community partners.
- » To market and onboard cultural grocery stores to the Enabled Program, a food bank must send a representative that speaks the language of the store owner/management to develop trust form a new relationship with the food bank. This could create a new volunteer opportunity for students or community members to engage with other cultures on behalf of the food bank.





Northwest Arkansas Food Bank | Bethel Heights, AR Nena Evans, Program Coordinator

Work to Date

The Northwest Arkansas Food Bank developed a produce survey in partnership with the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences Northwest Regional Campus to gauge community members' preferences of fresh produce and identify the barriers they face when utilizing this produce. The food bank designed the questions in their survey to help inform what they grow at their on-site Teaching Garden, a community gardening initiative that began in March 2020 that distributes fresh produce directly to their partner agencies. Their hope is that this will also serve as a useful tool to inform their future donors and purchasing policies. The survey was administered to community members at needed partner pantry distributions over the course of several months. The survey was available in English, Spanish and Marshallese—the three main languages spoken in their service area. The food bank has completed the first round of their Produce Preference Survey and received 146 responses. They are analyzing the results currently.

Food Bank Insights

- » We distributed just under 4,000 pounds of produce to our partner agencies [from our garden]. I was curious to see if the food we were growing was the food our neighbors wanted.
- » For our survey, we will have tablets and surveys in English, Spanish and Marshallese. We used data from Oasis to find the most commonly spoken languages in our service area.
- » Northwest Arkansas has the largest population of Marshallese in the United States. White rice is a staple in Marshallese diet. Our goal is to identify the top vegetables people wanted and use that [information] in garden planning and purchasing to inform donors. Fresh produce is something neighbors and agencies are always asking for.





Hawkeye Area Community Action Program, Inc.
(HACAP) Food Reservoir | Hiawatha, IA
 Jacquie Montoya, Diversity Food Program Coordinator

Work to Date

HACAP Food Reservoir began their neighbor food needs and preferences journey in September 2020 when they developed their Diversity Food Program as a component of a grant opportunity. When their community was hit by a derecho on Aug. 10, 2020, HACAP realized that the same populations who were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic were also negatively impacted by the derecho.

To address the increased need and cultural food preferences in their community, HACAP began working with local ethnic markets to provide neighbors with \$50 gift cards to purchase cultural food items at these local markets. HACAP's service area has large African immigrant refugee and Latino populations. By collaborating closely with families and community partners who have experience working with immigrants, refugees and new parent neighbors, HACAP started learning the nuances of cultural food needs and preferences between ethnic communities. For example, their Congolese and Sudanese populations had very different diet preferences from one another; similarly, their Guatemalan, El Salvadorian and Mexican populations also exhibited distinct dietary differences.



The Diversity Food Program consisted of 161 families between two counties who were asked to complete the Feeding America Client Survey (FACS) and a Social Triage and Response (STAR) assessment (local Iowa assessment of social determinants of health, healthcare, poverty, transportation, childcare, economics, and personal support networks). They added a question in FACS asking if there was anything that the families participating in the program would like to see in the pantry. Families enrolled in the program received benefits from September 2020 through April 2021. HACAP is learning that fresh foods are preferred across cultural groups over canned items and that trust is built through communication with interpreters, community partners, neighbors, friends, and other interpersonal connections. HACAP recognizes that interpreters are essential when engaging in culturally responsive work since they act as cultural liaisons between neighbors and food bankers. The grant that the food bank utilized to implement their program ended on April 30, 2021, but they are continuing to source diverse foods into their food bank.

Food Bank Insights

- » By using FACS, we were able to collect data on what food would be useful and familiar to the families that were disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and the derecho. This data gave us a clear picture of what we should be sourcing for HACAP. We have been able to work with local ethnic markets, current distributors and local growers to source these foods into our reservoir and then into our pantries. Many of the foods identified as relevant across cultures were tomatoes, onions, squash and potatoes, as well as common fresh fruits such as apples, bananas and oranges. Some of this produce can easily be grown in our area and some of the foods such as Matabele, muchicha and white eggplant required research. We have been able to partner with a local grower who is originally from Africa and has been farming in the area for a few years to facilitate growing foods that might be somewhat unfamiliar in our area.
- » Through the work of the Diversity Food Program, new collaborations began, and existing collaborations have been strengthened since August 2020. We worked loosely with local minority-owned markets to provide the gift cards to the families and also began using the markets to source product for our pantries and events. This support of local businesses came at a time when they were feeling the effects of the pandemic and the derecho. One market inquired about being able to accept the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) through their store and we were able to connect them with the proper resources to start that process. This will help families that might have been struggling in the past to access culturally relevant foods to now be able to provide traditional foods for their families.
- » We have also collaborated with area agencies and pantries that work closely with the immigrant and refugee populations to expand their services or complement the work they are doing already. Families have been more receptive to completing assessments when it can be done with caseworkers present who they know or in a space they are familiar with prior to the Diversity Food Program. The program would not have been able to reach as many people without these relationships and we will continue to work with these partners to provide food to our most vulnerable communities.





Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana | Indianapolis, IN
Sarah Wilson, RDN, Nutrition Manager



Work to Date

Over the past few months, Gleaners has worked with a local organization called the Immigrant Welcome Center to better understand which countries/cultures are represented in Indianapolis, what specific barriers immigrant families face related to food security, which types of food they prefer, etc. This has been a great partnership for Gleaners and the food bank has learned a great deal while recognizing that this is only the beginning of their neighbor food needs and preferences journey. Over one-third of Indiana's foreign-born population lives in the Indianapolis area with the majority of the Immigrant Welcome Center's clients coming from Mexico and Nigeria, but also Honduras, Haiti, Ethiopia, and Burma/Myanmar. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated food insecurity among these immigrant communities largely due to loss of income and employment.

Gleaners looked at three census tracts in their service area focusing on the following three criteria: accessibility (proximity to stores, transportation and food cost), availability (nutritious, cultural food options and dietary needs) and usability (familiarity of foods, home cooking storage and cooking knowledge).



Aida and Maryori participating in Spanish cooking videos where they demonstrated how to use common pantry foods in culturally familiar recipes.

They worked with the Immigrant Welcome Center to identify commonalities across cultures for food preferences, such as fresh foods (vegetables and fruits), rice and beans, considerations for religious restrictions for meats (Kosher, Halal, vegetarian), as well as herbs and spices (turmeric, cumin, chili powder, cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, coriander, etc.).

The food bank has made progress in their cultural food work. For example, when neighbors or partners call the main food bank phone number, they can now select to hear the menu options in English or Spanish. The food bank has also expanded their collaboration with a local language services provider to communicate more effectively with neighbors who speak a language other than English. Additionally, Gleaners has collaborated with other local organizations and individuals to create the first draft of a “cultural food guide,” which is designed to help pantry staff and volunteers procure foods that meet the needs and preferences of the neighbors they serve. The food bank hopes to keep building upon this work and sharing these go-to resources with their network of agencies.

Food Bank Insights

- » The Immigrant Welcome Center hosts weekly “Partner Power Calls” for any organizations that serve immigrants in any capacity. They challenged me to think about what Gleaners was doing to serve immigrants, and we realized that was a great question—we honestly weren’t doing a lot.
- » The Immigrant Welcome Center was finding more and more families calling them for assistance with food needs because of the pandemic. The immigrant community was really hard hit by COVID-19.
- » Our food strategy team purchased spices for one of our big mobile distributions. They selected three different spices that were identified as being commonly used across multiple cultures: cumin, garlic powder and turmeric. Those went out in every food box at that distribution, and we put the extras up on our agency shopping list afterwards. However, we found that our agency partners were not interested in ordering spices because of their high cost. One food pantry that serves high numbers of immigrant families noted that they would rather put their limited budget toward staple foods (like rice and beans) and let neighbors purchase their own spices at international marketplaces. Spices are usually inexpensive and available in bulk at these stores, which families often prefer. If pantries are interested in providing cooking “extras” (such as oils, herbs, spices, etc.), I encourage them to ask for these items to be donated through food drives or local retail partners.
- » Our Food Strategy team has been great about trying new options to improve the cultural appropriateness of our food distributions. They have tried reaching out to some different cultural food stores to see if they might be interested in making donations. However, many of these stores are relatively small and do not have a lot of time or staff capacity to dedicate to coordinating food donations.

- » Language barriers and general trust in our organization are two major points to consider when working to address the needs of immigrant communities. We've learned that immigrants tend to only trust people they know well, and they often look to family members and friends for guidance on accessing resources and navigating life in the U.S.
- » [Advice to others] Start with a little research on what kind of organizations exist in your community that specifically serve immigrants. Reach out to their staff members or volunteers to better understand what food needs they see among the people they serve. Discuss some ways your food bank could partner with their organization to meet these needs in culturally responsive ways. Begin with one organization and build from there. I also recommend seeking out different learning opportunities and webinars to increase your knowledge and awareness of culturally responsive food assistance. You may have to ask tough questions and challenge yourself to see through different perspectives, but don't be afraid of this process of learning and growth!



This photo was taken from a research project led by a dietetic intern at Gleaners regarding nutrition concerns for immigrant and refugee populations and cultural food preferences. As a part of her research, she visited a local international market, tried some Nigerian food, and shared about her experience on [Gleaners' NutritionHub blog](#).



**The Idaho
Foodbank**

The Idaho Foodbank | Meridian, ID

Amy Luginbill, Director of Community Initiatives

Work to Date

The Idaho Foodbank started engaging in neighbor food needs/preferences work upon receiving funding from a Feeding America COVID-19 Relief Grant and following community and partner requests for more culturally specific foods. The grant itself was particularly helpful in providing funding to hire community liaisons to support this work. These liaisons have been instrumental in planning a series of focus groups with community members from Latino and refugee communities to inform what types of foods are preferred. The Idaho Foodbank worked with local suppliers to source a selection of these foods in a pilot test model. With the support of leadership and the help of community liaisons, The Idaho Foodbank has prioritized cultural foods and is working on incorporating them into their existing food program.

With the success of the pilot, The Idaho Foodbank is now in the process of evaluating this ongoing work (how to get the right product to the right area, building partnerships, etc.).

Food Bank Insights

- » We applied some of the Feeding America COVID-19 relief grant funds to hiring community liaisons. Working with these individuals has supported and strengthened the need for culturally relevant programming and education, and from this we've seen a lot of enthusiasm and momentum within our teams to engage in this work.
- » [Focus group planning]: I love the question 'What does health mean to you?' because it's important to recognize my idea of health may be different than someone else's idea of health.



Blue Ridge Area Food Bank | Verona, VA
 Maria Bowman, MPH, Manager of Programs

Work to Date

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank with the support of a Feeding America COVID-19 Relief Grant has focused on building relationships with trusted immigrant-serving organizations in their service area to better assess community needs, assets and opportunities for food bank engagement.

The food bank asked 50 community organizations for their input on a variety of topics over the past nine months. These topics include: barriers to food access that their communities face; common misunderstandings about food assistance in these communities; preferred means and trusted forms of communication; ideas for potential new partnership models; what information they can provide about their services to make people feel safe and informed about participating in our network; how they can redesign their online Food Finder tool for diverse users; what foods they should consider adding to our inventory; and desired languages for food bank communications.



In collaboration with community organizations, Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is working to improve immigrant food access in the short and long-term in three stages: (1) Reduce language and information barriers to existing resources to reach a more diverse audience; (2) Improve their capacity to reach diverse communities including streamlining intake processes, expanding volunteer language diversity and adding culturally sensitive foods; (3) In partnership with community groups, consider if, how and where the food bank may develop new programs, partnerships and models to meet the nutrition needs of diverse communities.

Food Bank Insights

- » Our service area is broken down into four regions with one partner engagement manager focused on each region because it's such a big geographic area. It's helpful to have somebody who knows those communities more intimately and can build relationships and make connections. We've really invested quite a bit of time and energy in developing strong relationships.
- » We were able to tap our partner engagement managers and ask them 'Within your region, who serves immigrants?' We provided some frameworks for that conversation to help spark connections, memories and past partnerships that they may have been aware of. We provided categories such as schools/school districts, churches, immigrant-owned businesses, grocery stores, retail vendors, nonprofit organizations, social services organizations, and healthcare providers. It was a matter of tapping existing relationships and resources even if we had never had formal partnerships with those folks before and then asking who else we should be included in the conversation.
- » Getting out of our own existing bubbles is hard for all of us. The bubble that we operated in wasn't big enough. We needed to burst our bubble and set a bigger table. We needed to learn what we didn't know.
- » There are also more formal groups we tapped into, such as the Welcoming Harrisonburg Council, a group of approximately 20 organizations that all serve immigrants in different ways. As a body, try to figure out how we welcome immigrants to Harrisonburg (a refugee resettlement city). There is a base of knowledge and connections within those organizations that, independently, I do not have access to. It's just about asking the question, 'Who has the relationships and serves as the trusted bridge to these communities that we don't?' and recognizing that we may never be that trusted bridge. Hopefully we get there, but really, do we need to be the one cultivating direct relationship, or can we work in partnership with other organizations who have already done this work so well?
- » These conversations have already yielded some great results including new 'How to Find Food' flyers in 10 languages, a culturally universal foods pilot program, a goal to develop a Language Access Plan for our network, a website overhaul to make it available in multiple languages, and deepening relationships with trusted immigrant-focused organizations who now feel more comfortable coming to us with concerns and ideas.
- » 'If a problem exists in a community, so does the solution.' This strikes me as the crux of our work with immigrant communities, and what we aspire to in our program design. Starting with relationship building and asking questions about their needs/assets/barriers/fears—and then asking the same communities for their ideas, offerings and desired solutions. Maybe the food bank has a role to play in the solution, and maybe not. We focus on doing with—not for—communities and do our best to avoid making assumptions.



Houston Food Bank | Houston, TX

Sarah Crulcich, MPH, RD, LD, Community Health Supervisor
Natalie Hill, MPA, Community Development Senior Manager

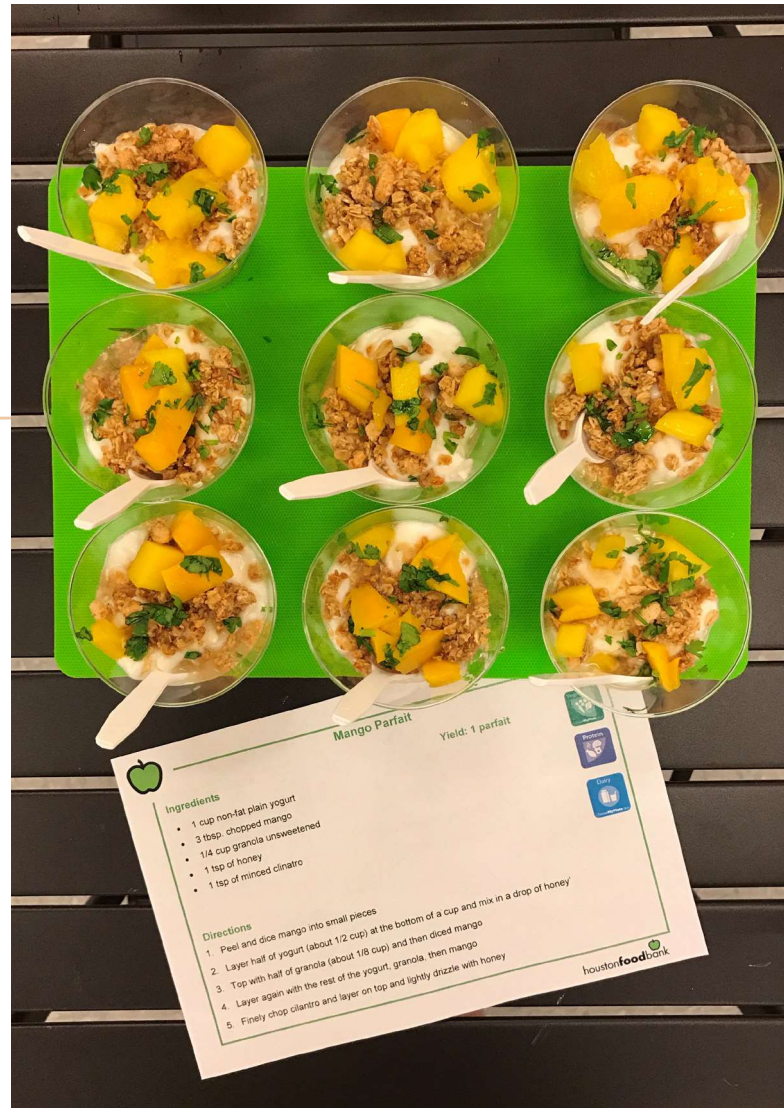
Work to Date

Houston Food Bank began their cultural food journey when they received a Feeding America COVID-19 Relief Grant opportunity that provided them with the resources to move this work forward. They have taken a data-driven approach to engaging in this work, while gathering qualitative feedback from neighbors as well.

In December 2020, they created a survey to give to community members asking basic COVID-19 questions about need, household demographics and cultural food preferences. Initially, they started distributing the survey in-person but quickly recognized that neighbors may not show up in-person due to health restrictions and shifted to a self-administered survey distribution, using QR codes and flyers to get more survey responses. They hope to get a good sample size for the surveys and will be collecting data from targeted agencies.

Houston Food Bank plans to gather additional neighbor feedback by conducting hour-long qualitative interviews by phone. They strive to conduct qualitative interviews in multiple languages such as Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese and Arabic in addition to English and Spanish. They were able to translate the survey in the top six languages their neighbors speak: English, Spanish, Vietnamese, Mandarin Chinese, Cantonese, and Arabic.

Additionally, Houston Food Banks plans to provide electronic nutrition nudges by sending weekly nutrition messages through One Call Now, an automated texting-and-call platform, which will be auto-translated into multiple languages to increase accessibility.



Food Bank Insights

- » We knew we needed a lot of technology and data to be able to do this so the grant has allowed us to take on new technology in our warehouses and inventory, as well as partner with data consultants in the Houston area that really know our community and understand what it means to have rigorous data in these kinds of community settings.
- » We looked at what we knew from our own research and trends what we were hearing from Harris County, that our rural area was identifying more as Black and Hispanic communities. Mindful of what was happening with COVID-19 and wanting to make sure we're targeting those communities—we knew that we could do better in reaching out to our rural communities. Our data consultants looked at the percentage of clients from Link2Feed that identified as Black and Hispanic/Latin and looked at other maps to determine if a community was rural or not, as well as other COVID-19 factors like the percentage of unemployment since the pandemic This helped us evaluate which communities had been hit the hardest by COVID-19
- » We also have a mobilized communications flyer. We had it adapted for each partner so that they have their own unique code that people can type in for insights. This is going to be more familiar to them than a QR code would be. We're trying to mobilize communications and QR codes and email them directly using Link2Feed data (we had serious conversations about using this data).
- » On site when we tried to gather this information, a lot of people have smartphones, but a lot of people don't. I think technology is still a big barrier. QR codes can still be very tricky for people. Each distribution site has its own personality. QR codes did great [at a mega site], but for our other projects like the Kids Café Program, we found that almost no one used QR codes. In my observation, Latino communities and Spanish speakers especially are very confused by QR codes and [we] lose their voices if we use them (QR codes).
- » Our consultants are building a platform for our Procurement team that will help them say when you get a donation for this type of item, this is the community or partner based on client responses. On our inventory side, we are also implementing Well Scan, we're trying to highlight both the nutrient-rich and culturally responsive foods to show that culturally responsive foods are nutrient rich. I think there's a misconception out there that they're the 'unhealthy' foods for many reasons.

- » [Neighbor food needs and preferences work] requires new collaborations across teams and departments with people that we've worked with for a while. So, it helped a lot of us better understand how the food bank works as a whole. It's been a really positive opportunity of growth and learning for everyone across the food bank.”
- » [Advice to others]: A lot of people may not be aware of what we mean when we say ‘culture.’ Some people who are very aware are in touch with that side of their identity, while other people when asked about culture’ don’t really know what we’re talking about. Maybe other food banks can get a jump on that before they start this process by being able to talk about culture in a way that doesn’t use the word culture.
- » Asking questions like ‘How do I talk to people about this?’ and ‘Who may not know what I’m saying when I reference culture?’ would be helpful for this and other projects as well.



NEXT STEPS IN THE NETWORK AND COMMONLY ASKED SURVEY QUESTIONS

15 Next Steps Food Banks are Taking to Sustain Neighbor Food Need and Preferences Work

The following 15 next steps listed below are a compilation of next steps that were identified by the eight Feeding America member food banks who participated in qualitative interviews with the Feeding America Research team.

1. Conduct focus groups or qualitative interviews with agency partners and neighbors
2. Establish ongoing feedback loops for agency partners and neighbors
3. Continue to build community trust
4. Develop educational resources and improve ordering system for agency partners
5. Ask questions and create a work plan to operationalize food need and preferences work
6. Survey community members to identify food needs and preferences
7. Start a community garden initiative and invite neighbors to participate in growing a variety of preferred foods
8. Expand language accessibility by translating food bank websites and other resources, as well as diversifying staff and languages spoken on site
9. Continue to build partnerships with cultural organizations and international grocery stores
10. Offer cooking demonstrations using food bank food items
11. Provide intercultural competence trainings to food bank staff
12. Develop an online ordering system that prioritizes client choice with cultural foods
13. Limit eligibility criteria for neighbors visiting food banks in order to improve access
14. Incorporate the principles of trauma-informed care to create safe and comfortable environment in the food bank for neighbors
15. Integrate food needs and preferences in prepackaged food box model



Resource

[Applying an Intercultural Competence Lens](#)



Commonly Asked Survey Questions

The survey questions below were identified by the Feeding America Research team by cross-referencing member food bank surveys that included questions about neighbors' food needs and preferences.

Please note that the survey questions listed below have not been validated and are provided as general guidance. The Research team hopes to develop a validated measure for surveying neighbors about their food needs and preferences with the assistance of Feeding America's Technical Advisory Group.

Additionally, to accurately reflect language used by member food banks in their surveys, there are variations in word choice regarding "cultural foods." It is important to be aware that people may have different perceptions of what the word "culture" means, which can make surveying neighbors for their food preferences and needs challenging.

These questions are not intended to be administered all at once—instead, these are general topics you may find useful in surveys, focus groups or interviews.

Food offerings at food bank

- Have you received any foods that you would like to receive again?
- Have you received any foods from a food pantry that your or your household would NOT like to receive again?
- Do you feel the foods you receive are culturally relevant?
- Can you prepare culturally significant or special meals with the foods you receive from this location?

Identifying food needs and preferences

- Do you identify with a country or culture outside of the United States?
- Please select all the dietary preferences of your household.
 - » (Vegan, dairy free, gluten free, halal, kosher, none, other)
- Does anyone in your household have any of the following dietary factors or concerns? Select all that apply.
 - » Low-sugar/low-carb (“diabetes-friendly”), Low-sodium (salt)/low saturated fat (“heart healthy”), Gluten-free, Halal, Kosher, Vegan, Vegetarian, Soft diet/dental concerns, Limited/no cooking equipment, Food allergen (e.g., peanut, seafood, dairy), None, Other, Don’t know, Prefer not to answer
- Provide a list of foods that neighbors can select from based upon what foods they would like to see at the food bank.
- What regional foods do you and your family prefer?
- Please list two foods you use or eat most often.
- What ingredients are most important in your kitchen? (Meats, spices, produce, etc)
- Are there any cultural or traditional foods you would like to see available?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your food preferences?
- Is there a food that is important to you and/or your family that is not generally available? This could be a traditional food from your culture, ingredients used for cooking or baking, condiments or spices, etc. Please specify the type of food (i.e., tortillas or cooking oil)
- If the following locally grown vegetables were available, which would you choose? (Choose your top 5 choices)
 - » (Salad greens, bell peppers, tomatoes, garlic, chili peppers, etc.)
 - » Similar questions can be asked about other food groups such as: proteins, spices/herbs, legumes, nuts, seeds, and grains, dairy, baking goods, and cooking oils.
- Looking at the list, what are the top 3 things related to food and nutrition that you’d like to see in your community?
 - » Affordable culturally inclusive food at local stores
 - » Community garden: land, seeds, public equipment etc.
 - » Cooking classes
 - » Affordable and good quality fresh produce
 - » Access to local foods: buying directly from a grower, producer or hunter
 - » Nutrition education
 - » Food storage and preservation: education, equipment, supplies

Neighbor experience at food bank

- Please check the top 5 items that are most important to you in your food pantry experience.
 - » Friendly, kind and welcoming staff and volunteers Staff or volunteers who speak the same language as me or can assist me in my language
 - » Having staff or volunteers with the same ethnic/cultural background as me
 - » Signage in my language
 - » Having a comfortable waiting area
 - » Feeling safe
 - » Being decorated with colorful artwork, representative of diverse ethnic and cultural groups
- Rank the following from 1-3, in order of most important to least important, with 1 being the most important.
 - » Foods from my culture are available
 - » Available foods look fresh and appealing
 - » A variety of foods available

Food needs and preferences sourcing and partnerships

- Is there a grocery store you like best (include other with entry box)? What do you like most about this grocery store?
- Surveying partner agencies for food need and preferences offerings
- What is the racial and ethnic composition of your neighbors?
- What are the most common languages spoken by your neighbors?
- Do you have bi/multi-lingual staff or volunteers consistently available that meet the language needs of your neighbors?
 - » Yes/No/Sometimes
- Do you feel like the food available at [insert food bank/program] is culturally inclusive or representative of the communities that you serve?
 - » Yes/No/Don't know
- Do you receive or purchase culturally specific foods from other sources (i.e., international grocers, community gardens, donations)? Please describe.
- What are the top culturally specific food items frequently requested by your neighbors that you don't have consistent access to? Please describe with as much detail as possible.
- List the top 3 challenges that your organization faces in serving culturally diverse neighbors? (For example, language barriers, limited food choices, trust, cultural differences, hours of operation etc.).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENGAGING NEIGHBORS AND COMMUNITIES ABOUT FOOD NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

The following tips have been collected from academic literature, food banks and partner agencies.

Planning engagement with neighbors and communities

- Conduct Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) assessment to understand how to best begin, collaborate with, and understand communities when engaging in neighbor food needs and preferences work.
- Create an action plan that prioritizes engaging recipients, strengthening partnerships and communication with cultural agencies, and developing funding strategies.
- Learn about historical trauma contexts for the populations you serve¹ and adopt a trauma-informed care approach to instill an environment of compassion, empowerment and safety. This requires realizing that trauma is widespread, recognizing the symptoms of trauma and how it impacts the people that we serve, responding by integrating knowledge of trauma into organizational policies and practices, and actively resisting re-traumatization through staff training and education.²
- Conduct preliminary research on food ingredients and recipes from neighbors' country of origin.
- Strengthen relationships with staff and volunteers at food distributions as they hold valuable knowledge about neighbors' preferences.

During neighbor and community engagement

- Building familiarity and trust is incredibly important. Consider hiring a community liaison or outreach coordinator who shares a cultural background to the targeted cultural community.
- Outreach and community engagement, using culturally adapted materials in appropriate languages, can help alleviate some of the primary barriers to neighbors accessing preferred foods such as:
 - » Language barriers
 - » Knowledge around eligibility to access services
 - » Cultural stigma and shame
 - » Neighbors with different religious backgrounds may feel hesitant to access food from faith-based organizations

¹ Feeding America. Next Steps & Resources Supporting Mental Health & Well-Being (2020). Retrieved from: <https://feedingamerica.sharepoint.com/fsop/dr/COVID19/files/Mental%20Health%20Next%20Steps.pdf>.

² SAMHSA (2014). "SAMHSA's Concept and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf>.

- Establish partnerships with local ethnic grocery stores or markets to identify and collect culturally specific food donations.
- Be mindful when including lengthy lists of cultural foods in a survey that it may be difficult to administer. Instead, try asking neighbors to list foods that they eat most often or what food offerings that they would like to see more readily available at the food bank. If referencing a food list, keep it short so that it is easier to administer to neighbors.
- Word-of-mouth networking among community members is a highly effective tool during neighbor and community engagement.

Additional recommendations from food bankers

- Fostering new partnerships with local immigrant or refugee organizations is a good way to build trust within these communities to better address neighbor food needs and preferences.
- [USDA Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit](#) is useful for surveying neighbors.
- SNAP and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) have limitations in types and quality of foods neighbors can access.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables are foods typically in highest demand for many cultural and ethnic groups in the community.
- When sourcing neighbor food needs and preferences, try sourcing food directly from local growers and producers to support your local community.



RESOURCES TO SUPPORT NEIGHBOR FOOD NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

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