

A Fork in the Road: Emergency Food Assistance in the State of Washington

Emergency Food Assistance Program
Capacity Building Project

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Findings and Recommendations

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Glossary

Commodities: foods provided by the United States government at no charge to qualifying citizens. The program is formally known as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Eligible clients self-declare that they live at or below 185 percent of the poverty level.

Distribution center: an agency that collects, warehouses, and distributes food to emergency food programs and other charities on a regional, county, or statewide basis.

Emergency food: food that is given, typically from either a food bank or meal program, to individuals who do not have the means to acquire that food on their own.

Emergency food provider: an individual who works or volunteers at a food bank, food pantry, meal program, or distribution center.

Food bank: an emergency food assistance program that distributes unprepared food without charge to its clients, is open a fixed number of hours and days each week or month, and publicly posts such hours and days.

Food pantry: in Washington, this term is synonymous with “food bank.”

Lead agency: a contractor that may subcontract with one or more local food banks to provide emergency food assistance to individuals, and with distribution centers to provide emergency food to food banks.

Meal program: programs that serve meals to the general public at no charge as a means of reducing the prevalence of hunger. Types of meal programs include soup kitchens, sandwich brigades, free restaurants, and shelter providers.

Executive Summary

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) is the Washington funding program for food banks, distribution centers, and tribal food voucher programs. EFAP is a part of the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development. This project is the first formal, written assessment of the statewide program since its inception in 1985. To provide food assistance, EFAP distributes funding and resources to approximately 320 EFAP participating food banks through a system of 28 lead agency contractors and 32 tribes across the state.

The goals for the project included the following:

- Identify barriers, gaps, and limitations on the local, regional, and state levels of the emergency food system;
- Identify strategies to address these challenges;
- Identify EFAP-related policies and procedures that are hindrances to providing customers the best possible service (and/or policies and procedures that need to be developed); and
- Identify “best practices” that can be replicated.

Information for the project was gathered through a series of regional outreach sessions with emergency food providers and tribes throughout the state, numerous in-person and telephone interviews with various stakeholders, an online survey of providers, and action research. More than 275 emergency food providers and 12 tribes, representing nearly 200 emergency food agencies, participated in the project. While there is no exact count of the number of emergency food agencies in the state, estimated counts range between 500 and 600. The following areas of inquiry were developed for the project: food; transportation; infrastructure; customer service; external relationships; internal capacity; and EFAP Policies and Procedures.

In fiscal year 2005-06—the most recent year for which complete statistics are available—food banks served more than 1.2 million different men, women, and children during nearly 6.2 million visits to local food banks. The Tribal Food Voucher Program served almost 9,500 individuals. Food banks, distribution centers, and lead agencies received \$3.7M and 32 tribes received \$319K. The total estimated population for the state in 2006 was just under 6.4 million; nearly 20 percent of the state’s residents—nearly one in five people—utilized emergency food services. And this is only part of the picture. Hundreds of meal programs are not reflected in the EFAP statistics because they do not receive state funding. There are also at least several dozen food banks that could receive EFAP funding but decline to do so.

The nation’s emergency food system helps to reduce the prevalence of hunger and ensure food security for individuals of all ages and ethnicities that need help making ends meet. Individuals may be unemployed, living on a fixed-income due to a pension or mental/physical disability, or earning less than the increasing costs of living, particularly transportation and shelter. The state’s emergency food system is made up of many different parts including local agencies (food banks and meal programs), distribution centers (some part of larger networks, some not), federal government support (through commodities), and state government support (through funding).

Emergency food operations in the state come in all shapes and sizes, from small church-operated food banks and meal programs to large, mature staff-led distribution centers and Community Action Programs. Despite these variances in capacity, conversations with providers across the state illuminated more

similarities in identified challenges than differences. One significant factor influencing the extent of challenges for providers is their location in either a rural or urban area of the state.

Across the state, there is currently an inadequate supply of food, particularly food with a high nutritional value; facilities are ill-equipped to handle today's donation stream which is dominated by fresh, cold, and frozen foods (as opposed to shelf-stable items); and a new generation of volunteers needed to continue this work remains untapped. The extent to which local agencies are cooperating to meet these challenges varies across the state. The presence of highly-functioning local coalitions helps to facilitate cooperation and the transfer of ideas. The distribution centers that procure and warehouse food for local agencies lack a formal mechanism for regular ongoing communication as do most local areas. Despite having a shared mission of eliminating hunger, local agencies and distribution centers are all operating at different levels of capacity, therefore creating more discrepancies than similarities. Scarce resources create a system that feels more competitive than cooperative.

The presence of the Tribal Food Voucher Program on reservations, which allows for customization and reduces infrastructure needs, adds another layer to the system. Like other layers of the system, this layer is without sufficient funding to meet current needs and demands. To better meet the needs of their customers, some tribes have decided to offer a food bank; as one might expect, they are now encountering some of the same challenges as non-tribal food banks.

Among local agencies there is beginning to be a paradigm shift from just giving food out to desiring to provide the best possible customer service; this influences decisions in everything from inventory of food to operating hours to facility design. The extent to which this shift is occurring is often based on human, capital, or financial resources. At the distribution center level, older warehouses are being retrofitted as possible and capital campaigns are in the works for new facilities.

The state's emergency food system has grown and evolved with the needs of Washingtonians, but rarely has the system taken charge of its own destiny. The system is now at a point where it can reflect on its past and determine its future. A deeper commitment to communication and cooperation—coupled with strategic investments from government, foundations, and corporations—will lead to improved efficiency, enhanced sustainability, and a greater impact on the people we serve.

Section 1: Introduction

Project Overview

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) is the Washington funding program for food banks, distribution centers, and tribal food voucher programs. EFAP is a part of the Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED). The EFAP Capacity Building Project for Emergency Food Providers and Tribal Food Voucher Programs was the first statewide formal, written evaluation of the program since its inception in 1985. To provide food assistance, EFAP distributes funding and resources to approximately 320 EFAP participating food banks through a system of 28 lead agency contractors and 32 tribes across the state. Participating tribes have the option of designating funding toward either a food voucher program or a food bank.

The goals for the project included the following:

- Identify limitations and barriers in the food distribution system on the regional, state, and local level;
- Identify gaps between what customers need and what emergency food programs are providing;
- Identify the barriers that create those gaps in services for food banks, tribal food voucher programs, and meal programs;
- Identify what is working well and what needs improvement in emergency food programs (and why);
- Identify any EFAP-related policies and procedures that are impediments to providing clients with the best possible service, and identify those areas where additional EFAP policies would be beneficial;
- Identify resources and strategies that may be employed to remove the barriers and gaps;
- Identify innovations and best practices among food banks, tribal food voucher providers, and meal programs that can be replicated.

Throughout this report, the term *client* has been replaced with *customer*, *diner*, or other terms with similarly positive connotations. This distinction reflects a commitment to treating all people with respect, and supporting a shift in the way we think about emergency food programs—from casting them as an emergency social service to believing they are an integral part of the fabric of communities.

Methodology

Information was gathered through a series of 11 regional outreach sessions with emergency food providers and tribes throughout Washington, numerous in-person and telephone interviews with various stakeholders, an online survey of providers, and action research. In an effort to be inclusive of as many emergency food providers as possible, non-EFAP food banks were invited to participate, as were meal programs (including senior meal programs). The majority of participants were participating EFAP food banks, lead agencies, and distribution centers.

In recognition of the various levels of emergency food provision, regional outreach sessions were segmented into two conversations, one including food banks and meal programs and the other including distribution centers. Tribes were invited to attend a meeting specific to the Tribal Food Voucher Program and their food banks. Tribes were also invited to attend the regional outreach meetings. Outreach sessions included participants from a multi-county area and were held in Aberdeen, Auburn, Bellevue, Mt. Vernon, Port Angeles, Richland, Spokane, Seattle, Tacoma, Yakima, and Vancouver.

More than 250 emergency food providers representing 190 agencies participated with the regional outreach sessions. An additional 34 emergency food providers were involved through surveys and one-on-one interviews. A total of 12 tribes participated. While there is no exact count of the number of emergency food operations in the state, estimated counts range between 500 and 600.

Areas of Inquiry

Seven areas of inquiry were identified as a framework for the project. The areas of inquiry included:

- **Food** – received from a distribution center, purchased from a wholesaler or local store, or received as part of TEFAP, the federal commodities program (suggested considerations include access/barriers to obtaining food products, nutritional content, and cost)
- **Transportation** – physically obtaining products from distribution centers and local stores/manufacturers, and transporting products between local programs
- **Infrastructure** – physical facilities, equipment, and technology (suggested considerations include condition of existing facilities, presence/absence of equipment needed to do the work, and presence/absence of technology)
- **Customer Service** – meeting clients’ needs (suggested considerations include food, diet/nutrition information, cultural competency, and transportation for clients to and from program sites)
- **External Relationships** – collaborations, local/regional coalitions, relationships with other providers and distribution centers
- **Internal Capacity** – volunteers, staffing, boards of directors, leadership, human resources, and training and technical assistance
- **EFAP Policies and Procedures**

Conversations with emergency food providers across the state illuminated more similarities in challenges than differences. Of course, some challenges are specific to regions or local areas. Participants in regional outreach sessions were invited to identify their greatest challenge within each area of inquiry as a preliminary step to informing the recommendations in this report. *Significant Challenges* noted throughout this report represent those challenges expressed by the largest number of participants. Challenges identified by food banks and meal programs are somewhat different from those for distribution centers (given their role in procurement and warehousing). Other identified challenges varied based on the agency’s scope and organizational capacity. For example, some food banks and meal programs are supported by churches—sometimes as an outreach ministry or through the donation of space; others are part of large, mature, staff-led organizations. Another notable difference among agencies is whether they are located in a rural or urban area.

Section 2: Overview of Washington's Emergency Food System

Ensuring that there is something for everyone to eat in this country dates to the bread lines of the Depression. The emergency food system of today began to emerge in the early 1980s at a time when the government was re-extending food assistance through the federal commodities program known as the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Federal commodities are distributed to participating food banks and meal programs, and the program is administered by the state's Department of General Administration.

Alongside federal government support, churches and concerned citizens were reclaiming food from grocers and manufacturers to feed hungry communities through the start-up of food banks, or food pantries as they are known in other parts of the country.

In 1985, the state of Washington increased its commitment to helping children, families, and individuals who were hungry through the creation of the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). The Tribal Food Voucher Program was established by the legislature during the 1990 session to begin in the 1991-93 biennium as part of a larger Anti-Hunger Bill. Washington is one of only a few states to provide funding to food banks and distribution centers and the only state to administer a Tribal Food Voucher Program.

Today's emergency food system, comprised of food banks, distribution centers, and meal programs is largely reflective of EFAP's and TEFAP's Policies and Procedures. Both programs promote local-decision making. As a result, there are no standard operating hours or service units, except as created by the local agencies.

EFAP-designated distribution centers, which also often distribute the commodities, exist in 27 counties. When not solely a distribution center, these organizations are typically Community Action Programs or large food banks. Distribution centers procure food themselves and/or access food from other distribution centers including Food Lifeline (FLL), Northwest Harvest (NWH), Oregon Food Bank (OFB), or 2nd Harvest Inland Northwest (SHIN).

FLL, OFB, and SHIN are members of America's Second Harvest—The Nation's Food Bank Network (A2H). A2H is the nation's largest charitable hunger-relief organization. Its network includes 200 member distribution centers and food-rescue organizations. In contrast, NWH partners with Pierce County's Emergency Food Network (EFN) and the Grays Harbor/Pacific County Food Bank Distribution Center (GHPCDC) to create Washington's Independent Food Distribution Network. These dual distribution networks have different resources, inventories, and operating philosophies.

FLL, OFB, and SHIN, as members of A2H, access donations made locally, regionally, and nationally to the network and additional operations training and support. A2H members typically include a handling charge, known as a shared maintenance fee, for their local member agencies. In some instances, this fee is waived on certain products or does not exist at all. When present, these fees still represent a significant value to participating agencies. Members of the A2H network also generally do not buy food to distribute to participating food banks and meal programs, instead relying on donations to fill their inventory. NWH as partners with EFN and GHPCDC share transportation, donations, and NWH and EFN jointly purchase product. They do not charge any fees to their member agencies.

Based on proximity, cost-effectiveness, and organizational budget, local food banks and meal programs may seek to become member agencies of either or both distribution networks. In addition to accessing food from distribution centers, local food banks and meal programs will also purchase varying levels of

their inventory (based largely on organizational budget) and solicit food donations as part of longstanding relationships with local grocery stores. For many, their recovery of food from local stores exceeds what they order or receive from a distribution center.

One of the primary wholesale suppliers to food banks and meal programs is Pioneer Human Service's Food Buying Service (FBS). FBS was founded in 1979 as a purchasing cooperative for food banks in Washington. Since its inception, its service area has grown to include six other western states and their customers extend beyond food banks. FBS specializes in handling shelf-stable items. In addition to FBS, food banks and meal programs will also shop local stores—from Costco to Grocery Outlet to the local supermarket—wholesalers, and producers. Their biggest deciding factors when purchasing are cost and proximity to the purveyor.

Local coalitions of food banks and meal programs exist across the state, but they are the exception rather than the norm. As coalitions, they share information resources, such as tips on where to buy bags or how to handle food safely, and sometimes share transportation and purchases.

Another facet of the state's emergency food system is the presence of Rotary First Harvest (RFH). RFH links farmers, distribution centers, and the trucking industry to move surplus product into the emergency food system at a reduced cost. RFH is a program of Rotary District 5030, which includes the Puget Sound area. Recently, RFH has begun trading surplus produce with other western states to increase the diversity of product available in the system. RFH works primarily with the state's distribution centers.

Section 3: Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) Overview

To provide food assistance, EFAP provides funding and resources to approximately 320 food banks through a system of 28 lead agency contractors and 32 tribes across the state. Across the state, EFAP collaborates with local agencies by contracting with a lead agency to provide emergency food services throughout a county. Lead agencies are often Community Action Programs, also known as multi-service centers. In other instances, the lead agencies are distribution centers or food banks, and function as both. Both lead agencies and distribution centers are selected by a two-thirds majority vote of local food banks.

Participating tribes have the option of designating funding toward either a food voucher program or a food bank. Tribes have traditionally chosen to administer a voucher program, given their often-limited resources and facilities. The voucher program is typically a very small program within a tribe's overall human services budget. Vouchers allow recipients to shop at a local store up to the designated voucher amount, which varies by tribe. Certain foods, deemed non-nutritious, are not allowed for purchase.

Funding is allocated by county based on a formula that allocates a base of \$6,000 to each county with the balance computed on each county's percentage of the people living at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty level. Funding for EFAP in the 2005-2007 biennium was \$9.2M, including administrative costs at the agency, division, and program levels. Nearly \$8.4M was allocated for food banks, food vouchers, and contracts for special projects. Currently, 32 tribes receive eight percent of the EFAP funding passed through to providers. This percentage is negotiated through the EFAP Advisory Group which includes EFAP lead agencies, appointed stakeholders, and participating tribes.

In fiscal year 2005-2006—the most recent year for which complete statistics are available—food banks served more than 1.2 million different men, women, and children during nearly 6.2 million visits to local food banks. That same year the Tribal Food Voucher Program served almost 9,500 individuals. In fiscal year 2005-2006, food banks, distribution centers, and lead agencies received \$3.7M and 32 tribes received \$319K.

EFAP has two dedicated staff members, a Program Manager and a Program Specialist, who are responsible for monitoring contractors, processing monthly contract reimbursements, and collecting statistics. The program is housed within the Community Services division of CTED.

Section 4: Summary of Trends in Emergency Food Provision

The emergency food system, made up of many different parts, rests on a delicate balance between donation and need. The relationship between food banks, distribution centers, and donors is interconnected—each relying and dependent on the other to take and receive food product. Meal programs continue to exist on the periphery of this system.

Below is a quick look at current trends.

Food

- Since its inception, the emergency food system has overwhelmingly relied on shelf-stable products—canned and boxed goods. In the last five years, along with a transformation in consumer grocery aisles, there has been a radical change in emergency food donations. The current donation stream is increasingly dominated by fresh and frozen perishable goods.
- In addition to continually shifting types of food, programs are receiving less volume. This is largely a result of food manufacturers entering new secondary markets and curbing over-production, as well as a decrease in designated and available commodities from the federal government.

Transportation

- Along with the general public, providers have watched the cost of fuel continue to rise. Volunteers who previously donated transportation can do so less frequently. An increase in the cost of fuel takes away from other areas of the agencies' budgets, especially food.
- Agencies' vehicles have not kept pace properly with the product shift to perishable and frozen foods.

Infrastructure

- Facilities are ill equipped and ill-designed to handle today's types of donations and customer volume.
- Technology systems for tracking customer data and inventory are outdated when present, and non-existent in many rural areas of the state.

Customer Service

- More food banks are creating evening and weekend hours to better meet the needs of working adults and families.
- Given the prevalence of more diet-related diseases, providers increasingly desire to influence the consumption of nutritious food.
- Maintaining culturally appropriate services continues to be a struggle in a sector dominated by Caucasian, English-only speaking staff and volunteers.
- At times, customers are choosing between the cost of transportation to the program and other household expenses. Some customers are without transportation altogether.

External Relationships

- The level of communication among providers varies widely in local areas, regions, and across the state.
- There continues to be a lack of awareness among the general public about the prevalence of hunger.

Internal Capacity

- Programs lack sufficient general operating support.
- The system relies overwhelmingly on a dedicated but aging volunteer base. Volunteers from younger generations remain largely untapped.

Section 5: Areas of Inquiry – Challenges and Recommendations

This section focused on challenges and suggested recommendations for each of the project's areas of inquiry: food; transportation; infrastructure; customer service; external relationships; internal capacity; and EFAP Policies and Procedures. The identified *Significant Challenges* are not listed in any particular order of importance, nor are the recommendations when more than one recommendation appears.

Recommendations are grouped together within each area of inquiry. The entity that would most likely assume primary responsibility for each recommendation is identified as follows:

- **LA** – local agencies (food banks and meal programs)
- **DC** – distribution centers
- **EFAP** – Emergency Food Assistance Program
- **ALL** – system level change requiring leadership and cooperation across the state and at all levels of the system (initiatives could be led by EFAP or another existing or newly-created entity)

Food

Food in the system is donated from various sources including food manufacturers or processors, grocery stores, individuals, and local farmers. Food is also provided by the federal government through the distribution of commodities. Some emergency food providers also purchase food from wholesalers, grocery stores, or farms.

Relevant Trends

- Food manufacturers and retailers are increasing supply-chain efficiency. As a result, emergency food providers are reclaiming less product altogether.¹ Bread and pastries remain relatively easy to obtain, if there is a local grocery or commercial bakery.
- The grocery business, like other industries, continues to experience consolidation as a result of globalization. Stores are increasingly becoming part of larger companies, which leads to changes in store policies and can also affect relationships with local emergency food providers. For example, Fred Meyer and QFC are now part of The Kroger Company. Kroger has a national relationship with America's Second Harvest, which has led to, in some instances, a shift in donations from one distribution center to another.
- In addition to the consolidation of companies, companies remain fearful of a donation of food resulting in bad publicity (should someone get sick from the food). Stores such as Costco, Wal-Mart, and Target remain inaccessible for many emergency food providers. When providers are able to access these stores, they cannot typically reclaim high-protein meat or dairy items.
- The cost of food (manufacturing, transportation, etc.) is linked inherently to the cost of energy and changes in the marketplace. For example, 2005's Hurricane Katrina touched off a series of product shortages due to government and private relief efforts and dramatically increased fuel prices.

- The federally supported United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) commodity program has been a mainstay for many food banks and meal programs over the last 15 years. However, as the buyout of crops has changed at the federal level and program participation has increased in the state, there has been less product available, leaving shelves empty—particularly in rural food banks. Rural food banks are typically those located farthest away from a distribution center, thus making product more expensive to access which leads to higher costs. These agencies also typically have the least resources—human, capital, and financial—which creates a reliance on the commodities.
- Today, Americans are increasingly overweight and suffer from diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease. Awareness is also increasing in the general population about various food allergies.

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Lack of food, particularly nutritionally-dense food
- Perishable product is too close to expiration, has already expired, or is not salvageable
- Lack of special dietary foods in the system
- Lack of dairy products

Nearly all agencies, except for those in the Tri-Cities area, stressed that there is a lack of food in the system—particularly nutritionally-dense food that is high in protein and rich in vitamins and minerals, such as meats, eggs, and dairy products. As one provider noted, “There’s too much candy and soda.” To make up for a lack of protein items in the system, many agencies have chosen to supplement their inventory by purchasing protein items, often low-cost items such as hot dogs or canned chili. Some food banks also purchase foods to stabilize their inventory and provide a consistent, pre-determined food box or bag for their customers.

Providers also consistently shared that the dairy products, fruits, and vegetables they did receive from distribution centers or directly from stores were already expired or too close to expiring to allow for timely distribution. Providers shared that they routinely budgeted for a portion of the perishable product they received from distribution centers to be rotten. Passing expired or rotten product from the distribution centers to local food banks and meal programs simply shifts the burden of disposal to the programs that are least able to absorb the costs or manage the disposal due to an already lacking or inadequate infrastructure. It is standard practice for emergency food providers in rural areas to have a relationship with a local farmer who takes leftovers and expiring food. In urban areas, emergency food providers will pay a fee for composting or trash removal.

As more and more Americans are developing food allergies and chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, the need for special dietary foods in the emergency food system is increasing. While EFAP’s policies allow for the purchase of special dietary needs foods—medical, religious, or based on personal preferences—these foods are expensive and have a limited presence in the donation stream. While many shelf-stable items can be modified to become low salt or low sugar, this requires a level of education among the customer and agency which is not often present. Providers are often working to quickly move customers in and out of a food bank, and thus have a limited capacity to share tips on how to make a can of vegetables low salt, or to direct customers to more healthful products on the shelves. Meal programs experience a somewhat different challenge in that they typically create menus that are suitable for a large number of people, not individuals.

Additionally, meal programs continue to exist on the periphery of the emergency food distribution system, as it is dominated by the needs of food banks and their customers. Food banks provide self-serving or family-sized portions, while meal programs are cooking for many and seek institutional size portions, such as gallons and No. 10 cans. Meal programs are generally more adept than food banks at handling donations of already-prepared foods, but typically have greater resource constraints.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

Many challenges identified by food banks and meal programs also exist for the distribution centers, as they are the agencies most often procuring and warehousing the food. While there appears, at times, to be little cooperation among the distribution centers, they are able to agree on challenges facing the system. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, distribution centers and lead agencies also noted:

- Inequitable distribution of food donations in the system
- Increasing cost of food
- Increasing prevalence of bulk foods which need repackaging, such as individual quick frozen (IQF) vegetables
- Relationships with manufacturers that require taking all available product as opposed to selecting desirable product
- Inability to increase relationships with local farmers with existing human and capital resources
- Inability to glean from farmers markets or stores after traditional business day
- Lack of advance notice about what products are coming either from other distribution centers or the federal government
- Continued need for donor education and a reduction in redundant solicitation of donors

Among the distribution centers, there is a tiered hierarchy of those distribution centers that procure food and those that redistribute the procured food. Food Lifeline (FLL), Northwest Harvest (NWH), and 2nd Harvest Inland Northwest (SHIN) are the distribution centers which procure donations statewide, regionally, and nationally. These three entities have the greatest impact on food flow and availability. FLL works with agencies in Western Washington while its counterpart, SHIN, works with agencies in Eastern Washington. NWH works with agencies across the state. One challenge of multiple entities managing food flow is maintaining the equitable distribution; this is coupled with a lack of communication among them.

Given the larger organizational capacity and scope of these distribution centers friction exists at times between them and other distribution centers. For example, some distribution centers have objected to food drives being held by either FLL, NWH, or SHIN in their local area when the food is not distributed locally. For example, SHIN may host a food drive in the Tri-Cities, but all of the collected food is not redistributed in the Tri-Cities; it is distributed in other parts of their service area as needed. One NWH staff member acknowledged the redistribution that occurs between resource rich areas and resource poor areas. "It's our job," he said, elaborating briefly when pointing to the resources available in Redmond versus Okanogan. Another point of contention expressed by some distribution centers was the use of their organization's names by these larger distribution centers despite their lack of an ongoing relationship.

In addition to the friction amongst themselves, distribution centers also noted the periodic lag in delivery from Food Buying Service and the need for continued improvement of food drives hosted by local

agencies as challenges. Some distribution centers also acknowledged the lack of institutional memory or resources at their agency when it came to food purchasing, an increasingly common need. In some instances, distribution centers were conversing with one another for the first time in months during the regional feedback sessions.

Distribution centers would very much like to capture more healthful foods as donations, particularly from farms, but they currently lack the human and transportation resources to make this kind of relationship successful. The desire to capture more healthful foods is being driven by the changing donation stream, including available commodities, the increased cost of food, the increase in diet-related diseases, and the growing concern among emergency food customers (and providers) about the safety of the food they eat. The same challenges arise when they contemplate gleaning from more stores or even farmers markets. One lead agency shared that they are looking at ways to capture more evening donations, from places like coffee bars and the weekend farmers markets, but acknowledged they had yet to develop the volunteer base to make this possible on a consistent basis.

While the amount of federal commodities available has been declining—so much so that when commodities were mentioned as a point of discussion, providers said, “What commodities?”—they are still a piece in the total inventory and drive some food purchasing decisions for local agencies. Because commodities are ordered through the government, information about what product is available and when it will be delivered often changes between ordering and receipt of goods.

Change is a natural part of any industry, but in this sub-sector it seems to create even greater challenges when there is already a lack of written resource material about how the system works or the needs of the system. One particularly challenging level of change is at the grocery store level. Providers are continually explaining their needs as store managers and department heads change, introducing themselves and their program repeatedly. At the store level, providing donations to emergency food providers is typically viewed as an added layer of work as opposed to good will.

Recommendations

While it may not seem intuitive to include recommendations about communication and cooperation in a list of recommendations related to food, the prevailing thought among the largest distribution centers is that more food is out there to be captured.

It is also worth acknowledging that recommendations related to food are intrinsically linked to other areas, such as transportation and infrastructure.

Communication

Currently, the distribution centers have no formal means of communicating among themselves, and direct communication is virtually non-existent between the distribution networks of FLL/SHIN and NWH/EFN, and the Grays Harbor/Pacific County Food Bank Distribution Center. Local agencies typically communicate with one or two distribution centers because that is where their food comes from; they do not regularly communicate with one another.

- **Establish a formal mechanism of communication for the distribution centers.** For example, develop a regularly scheduled conference call, frequency to be determined, or monitored electronic bulletin board to share product availability and better manage product shortages and surpluses in the system. Additional possible participants for inclusion: Food Buying Service, Rotary First Harvest, and Department of General Administration’s Food Programs that orders the federal commodities.
[DC]

- **Share relevant information among the distribution centers**, once a formalized mechanism for communication has been established. A series of initiatives or demonstration projects—such as cooperatively moving excess product to an area with a shortage or creating a formal trade agreement between Eastern and Western Washington—would help to facilitate information sharing. A residual effect of this information sharing should be an increase in trust. [DC]

Cooperation and Trust

Three primary factors contribute to a lack of cooperation and trust in the system. These factors include: a lack of incentives for cooperation; at least two distinct distribution networks; and the fact that an agency's or distribution center's inventory is in part based on donations received which are a result of relationships they make.

- **Create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the state's operating distribution centers** that establishes guidelines for disclosure of solicitations and acknowledges territorial boundaries. [DC]
- **Create more local emergency food provider/anti-hunger coalitions** and expand existing opportunities for networking across counties or regions as part of existing conferences. [LA]

Food Access

- **Increase awareness among trucking industry of the needs of the emergency food system** and location of local agencies in the event that product needs to be off loaded on short notice. [ALL]
- **Expand partnerships between grocers and local agencies**, while ensuring and maintaining food safety, by expanding or replicating programs such as Food Lifeline's Grocery Rescue Program or Oregon Food Bank's Fresh Alliance. [DC]
- **Explore the creation of additional agreements or pilot projects with commercial anglers or groups like 4-H and the Cattleman's Association to increase access to protein (meat and seafood)**. Agreements or pilots could be modeled after the existing salmon program between Grays Harbor/Pacific County Food Bank Distribution Center and the state and federal fisheries. [DC]

Food Quality

In a system that is dependent on donations from food manufacturers and the consumer marketplace, increasing food quality will remain a challenge. Nonetheless, there is potential if human and financial resources can be increased.

- **Improve local agencies' purchasing power by either** creating a local, regional, or statewide purchasing **cooperative** that specializes in fresh and perishable products such as meats and dairy **or expanding an existing relationship with a regional wholesaler** such as Charlie's Produce. Food Buying Service has no plans to add fresh or frozen products to their inventory. [ALL]
- **Create a statewide public awareness campaign**, which could be adapted locally, to encourage the donation of nutritionally dense foods through food drives and promotes the "Plant-A-Row for the Hungry" campaign. [ALL]
- **Increase gleaning from farmers markets and stores that have not traditionally been donors to the emergency food system.** [DC]
- **Increase alignment of distribution of emergency food with the USDA food pyramid.** [ALL]

- **Explore utilizing a nutrient density score**, which would assign nutrient density values to foods within and across food groups. Adam Drewnowski, a public health nutrition researcher at the University of Washington developed this scoring system.² A position paper has already been created by Rotary First Harvest which discusses its possible use. [ALL]

Special Dietary Needs

Meeting special dietary needs will continue to be a concern unless programs are able to increase their buying power or the donation stream changes significantly. Manufacturers are introducing more and more whole-grain and “natural” products, but these products do not yet represent a majority of the marketplace, and thus are not the norm in the donation stream. They are currently cost-prohibitive for the typical food bank or meal program to buy.

- **In cities or towns served by more than one food bank, explore the efficacy of having one food bank develop the resources to meet the needs of special populations.** [ALL]
- **Increase funding for special dietary needs foods and/or facilitate bulk buying to leverage a better price.** [EFAP]
- **Create a set of user-friendly nutrition materials (tip sheets) that are based on foods prevalent in the food bank and today’s most prevalent diseases.** Current materials were created by EFAP over 15 years ago and do not incorporate developments in health and nutrition education. Develop both print and online versions of these materials. [ALL]

Transportation

As stated in the preceding section, food availability and quantity is greatly impacted by transportation. Transportation between and among local agencies is often interconnected with transportation to and from distribution centers. Across the state, a few coalitions of agencies have joined together to transport product from distribution centers among themselves. In other instances, agencies are driving right past one another on the way to a distribution center or store for their own program. Every dollar spent on transportation is one less dollar that could be spent on food or human resources.

Relevant Trends

- Like the average American consumer, agencies have lost the ability to anticipate fuel costs due to continually rising and fluctuating prices.
- Food moves around our country predominantly by truck. Regulations for truck drivers dictate how and when product can move. There are multiple levels of regulations governing how often and when a truck driver can drive. For example, he/she may drive a maximum of 11 hours after 10 consecutive hours off duty. Time spent sitting in traffic counts toward those hours.
- Traffic congestion along the Interstate 5 corridor within Washington and between western states increases both personnel and fuel costs.
- Local agencies, particularly food banks and those agencies in small or rural communities, do not typically operate five days a week or to the full extent of “normal” business hours. This makes deliveries for wholesalers like Food Buying Service challenging, as they are without a consistent operating window of time.

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Increasing cost of fuel
- Lack of appropriate vehicles for pickups (i.e., lack of cold transport, and at times inability to carry large loads of shelf-stable items)

The increased and continually increasing cost of fuel has placed a significant burden on local agencies. In some instances, volunteers who have traditionally picked-up donations have had to scale back pick-ups or end their volunteering entirely when agencies have not been able to help subsidize the costs. With the changes in the donation stream, and increased donation guidelines from stores, agencies have struggled to keep pace with their vehicle fleet. Many years ago, a pick-up or box truck would have been sufficient; this is no longer the case. Traffic congestion particularly affects programs in Pierce, King, Snohomish, and Skagit Counties who travel into the Seattle-area to pick up from either Northwest Harvest or Food Lifeline. It used to be that a box truck could suffice for a pickup of cold or frozen items, but not with today's congestion.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

Distribution centers' transportation challenges are larger in scope as they are handling larger pickups of food and often traveling longer distances to do so. Distribution centers either cooperate with one another, rent vehicles, or maintain a diverse fleet to accommodate possible donations. Purchased product is delivered to their door. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, distribution centers also noted:

- Cost of fleet maintenance and vehicle replacement (and the difficulty of planning for those replacements)
- Lack of collaboration among local agencies and between distribution centers in Eastern and Western Washington
- Cost prohibitions of increasing rural delivery partnerships, given topography and sheer geographic size of a county
- Lack of operational funding to support transportation of products, particularly with regards to federal commodities

Less than half of the operating distributions centers are cooperating with one another in any significant way to move product. In rural parts of the state, particularly in Eastern and Central Washington, the distance between local agencies has made it cost prohibitive to create more transportation partnerships; neither the distribution center nor local agency have sufficient funding to do so.

Distribution centers are also now weighing the pick up cost of a donation versus its nutritional value. In order to maintain a relationship, distribution centers will still pick up product, even when it is not necessarily cost effective, in the hopes of obtaining another donation down the line. A similar equation is happening when it comes to the federal commodity program, TEFAP. TEFAP provides some operating support for its entitlement products. When bonus products are made available, which is happening with decreasing frequency, there is no added operational funding. Given the decline of bonus commodities, distribution centers are finding it less cost effective to pick up what product is available, whether it is bonus or entitlement.

Recommendations

There is no sign of decreasing fuel costs or traffic congestion in the foreseeable future. With that in mind, agencies must become more efficient or leverage additional operating support. Established agency models suggest that greater efficiency is possible with existing resources. The addition of a facility in the center of the state or along the I-5 corridor which works with all distribution centers equally would assist in both transportation and infrastructure needs.

One of the greatest challenges to improving transportation in the long-term is the ongoing operating costs. To add a truck or tractor trailer, where there has not been one before, increases ongoing operating costs. Replacing existing trucks or adding refrigeration units where they already exist is more sustainable. If cooperation can be increased regionally among distribution centers, the addition of just one refrigerated tractor trailer and a dedicated driver could have a significant impact in the ability to obtain more donations and to diversify inventories.

Local Collaboration

- **Add fiscal incentives for local agency collaboration in the EFAP Policies and Procedures.** [EFAP]
- **Form local agency transportation cooperatives in areas of the state where they do not exist based on current models** in Kitsap and King County to facilitate pickups from distribution centers and expand collective capacity. [LA]
- **Further develop relationships with Commercial Driver's License programs or schools** based on existing models in Moses Lake and Longview. [DC]
- **Explore feasibility of starting and or increasing delivery from distribution centers to local agencies** to reduce the transportation needs of local agencies and allow them to do what they do best—serve the customer. [DC]

Regional Collaboration

- **Add fiscal incentives for regional collaboration among distribution centers in the EFAP Policies and Procedures.** [EFAP]
- **Explore the possibility of increasing the capacity of an existing organization, such as Rotary First Harvest (RFH), to move more product between distribution centers.** [ALL]
- **Increase the capacity of RFH to further solicit donations for trucking and manage existing trucking donations to ensure full capacity.** [ALL]

Statewide

- **Map existing delivery partnerships across the state to identify areas for improvement.** [ALL]
- **Complete a detailed assessment of vehicle needs across the system and create vehicle succession plans** at the agency and distribution center level. Then, make strategic investments to **replace vehicles to help build capacity and increase collaboration.** [EFAP]
- **Create a pilot project to tie into the continually expanding green movement**, which serves as a model within the sub-sector. This serves several purposes: increases market for renewable energy, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and attracts a new and increasing segment of the public which is supporting green initiatives. [ALL]

Cost Sharing

- **Explore the feasibility of creating a group insurance plan** for local agencies and distribution centers to help drive down costs and/or expanding the coverage of EFAP lead agencies to local subcontracting food banks. [ALL]

Infrastructure

Infrastructure—facilities, equipment, technology—drives decisions about food even more so than transportation. Getting food is one half of the distribution equation, and having some place to put it is the other. There was nothing particularly planned about the emergency food system from its outset. It sprang from a need and people did all that they could think to do, reclaiming food from grocery stores, building shelves, taking over unutilized or underutilized rooms in churches or offices. Since its inception the emergency food system has grown exponentially with the assistance of state funding and federal commodities and the formalization of a national network of food distribution centers, America's Second Harvest. Some of the growth has been strategic, such as starting a food bank in a town that is without one, but for the most part outside factors which have been identified have shaped its growth.

Relevant Trends

- The change in the consumer marketplace from shelf-stable processed foods to ready-to-eat frozen or perishable foods has in turn changed the donation stream
- Healthful foods are typically fresh or frozen, as opposed to shelf-stable
- Many volunteers and staff who are working as emergency food providers have no formal training in food service or warehouse management
- Many rural areas remain without reliable high-speed low-cost internet access
- Today's older adults who did not learn to use a personal computer in the workplace often have not learned to use one in retirement (and when they have learned to use a computer it is often for just email and not for word processing or calculations).
- More and more food banks, recognizing the inherent dignity in allowing customers to choose their food, are moving to a self-select or shopping method of distribution

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Facilities are too small
- Lack of storage (cold, frozen, and dry)
- Technology is outdated, including databases for customers

Some agencies began providing emergency food assistance over 40 years ago. Beginning often in borrowed spaces, they have remained, retrofitting them as much as they could along the way. Despite when an agency or program started, most have outgrown their present facility and very few have a facility ideal for distributing food. In addition to the unsuitable physical layout of the facility, agencies are also often lacking in storage space for all items—from dry to cold to frozen. Many programs continue to use household-size refrigerators and freezers, as opposed to commercial walk-ins, because they obtain them over time and the initial cost is manageable. On one visit to a food bank, it appeared more like an appliance showroom, with chest freezers in rows and along walls.

In addition to facility and storage needs, agencies are also often lacking in technology. Some food banks still do not even have phones, let alone internet access or a computer. Because many of today's dedicated food bank volunteers are retirees, and did not learn to use a computer professionally, they have not embraced technology in the food bank. Databases for customers, which are present, have not kept pace with reporting requirements for funders. Despite requiring statistical information from food banks for 20 years, EFAP embarked on the creation of a database tool only one year ago. EFAP hopes to link the tool to a web-based database that will eliminate dual entry of data by lead agencies and EFAP staff, but this will be dependent on additional funding in the next biennium. The tool will be mandatory for lead agencies.

Because meal programs do not receive state funding and are often even more reliant on volunteer labor, they will often not have any kind of formal intake or data collection for diners. It is still fairly common to enter a food bank and be confronted with a large paper card file, similar to a library card catalog. Some agencies pride themselves on how little information they maintain about their customers or diners, viewing data collection as cumbersome, a necessary evil to access operating support, and an infringement on the privacy of their customers or diners.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

Distribution centers are inherently further impacted by the challenges experienced at the local level. While a distribution center's work must be somewhat simultaneous with local agencies, these relationships are often adversarial. In these instances, local agencies see the increased, and at times increasing, capacity of the distribution centers and resent the inequity. This is particularly easy to see in the instance of infrastructure—larger facilities and appropriate task-related equipment. Other challenges identified by distribution centers and lead agencies include:

- Lack of appropriate facilities designed to move people and goods simultaneously and subsequent lack of appropriate models at the distribution center and agency level
- Varying levels of capacity in dry, cold, and frozen storage among local agencies
- Lack of phones and internet access, particularly in rural areas and among local agencies
- Inability to handle seasonal surpluses

Like many food banks and meal programs, distribution centers have also converted facilities to meet their needs. Some distribution centers even have an appearance of instability at first glance. In order to maintain the balance of product coming into and going out of the system, local agencies must be able to consistently receive and distribute product in a timely manner. Because of the unanticipated shortages and surpluses in the system, local agencies have had a tendency to stockpile food rather than give it out. Meal programs will hang onto items until they can create a menu or dish out of them. Food banks will also try to accumulate enough of a particular item to ensure that everyone visiting on a particular day or week will receive the same item or items.

Surpluses in the system often occur unexpectedly. Some surpluses are more welcome than others. An unknown fruit or vegetable, or even canned good, may require some cajoling for customers to take. Another inherent problem with surpluses is the market saturation. While emergency food providers are helping to put food on the table, at some point families and individuals exhaust creative uses for a particular product, such as frozen mashed potatoes. At times the two dominant food distribution networks which local agencies most often access will carry the same products but from different manufacturers.

When local agencies are without phones or internet access, it often means an added level of work for distribution center or lead agency staff. For example, agencies which are still keeping track of customer numbers by hand will fax their monthly reports, requiring staff to input the numbers again. One rural lead agency shared their measure of progress with us: three of 16 subcontractors now fax their monthly reports.

Recommendations

Significant progress can be made in the system regionally through strategic investments. While some emergency food providers have done very well at improving their own infrastructure, other programs, particularly in resource poor areas, need additional assistance to ensure excellent service to the community and allow for a continuous flow of product in the system. The same rural lead agency mentioned above also shared that, due to increasing costs and lack of product, they were contemplating unplugging their walk-in freezers and refrigerators and returning to handling only shelf-stable items. While this is certainly one way to handle change, it is not likely the best way given the current trends in the donation stream.

Collaboration

- **Create a centralized nonprofit food processing center, open to all distribution centers and maintained by an entity that works with all of the distribution centers equally.** This facility could include cold and dry storage. [ALL]

Facility Conditions

- **Develop a more comprehensive understanding of capacity needs at the distribution center and food bank level.** Conduct capacity assessments of all EFAP food banks and distribution centers by county, including equipment, used and available square footage, transportation, technology, etc. Secondary information to be gathered from non-EFAP funded food banks and meal programs serving at least “X” (some significant pre-determined number of people per week). [EFAP]
- **Create and/or share existing blueprints for excellent facilities for agencies and distribution centers of varying sizes, for example small, medium, large.** [ALL]
- **Explore the creation of a “central” food bank when more than one food bank exists in a town, to better leverage available resources.** In many instances, towns which have more than one food bank do so because there is no facility designated for full-time use as a food bank and the needed level of ongoing resources is lacking. [LA]
- **Explore the creation of satellite food banks as an alternative model to a “central” food bank.** Satellite food banks operate from a central distribution center and are only in operation for the duration of food distribution. No food or product is stored on site long-term, thus reducing the need for a significant amount of storage space. Food comes in and goes out on the same day. [LA]

Equipment

- **All distribution centers should be functioning with a consistent minimum baseline for equipment.** At minimum this includes a fork lift, an electric pallet jack, and appropriate racking. If a distribution center can not effectively and efficiently do its work, local agencies will be similarly ineffective and inefficient in their work. Funding for this type of equipment is a long-term investment. [EFAP]

Technology

- **The use of technology should no longer be avoided, but rather embraced.** The addition of technology in agencies where it is absent would create opportunities for a younger generation of volunteers that are desperately needed. [ALL]
- **Upon completion of the EFAP database tool, the program should ensure that annual updates will be made to the application, and phase in required usage over a two-year period.** As one emergency food provider quipped, “We told our volunteers we didn’t want to wait for them to die before we made changes.” EFAP should move forward with a similar urgency. [EFAP]
- **Connect agencies statewide by creating a monitored listserv or online community via a bulletin board or blog.** [ALL]

Customer Service

Emergency food distribution by food banks has traditionally included offering customers a pre-determined box or bag of food made up by volunteers or staff based on donations received or food purchased. Meal programs have traditionally served everything from daily meals to curbside sandwiches to soup. Both methods of distribution typically involve customers or diners waiting in line, sometimes exposed to natural elements. In recent years, as agencies have matured, food banks have begun offering customers the opportunity to self-select or shop for items and some meal programs are allowing diners to serve themselves or provide tableside service, like a restaurant. Along with this change in service method, some food banks and meal programs have also started offering evening and weekend hours.

A new food resource and referral line, the Family Food Hotline, launched in June 2005 by Within Reach (formerly Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies Coalition of Washington), received 13,000 calls in its first month of operation. Many of these families were desperate to find food resources, even after accessing federal food programs such as the Basic Food Program and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Families had called thinking that the hotline offered a new resource.

Relevant Trends

- Communities of color in Washington State face much higher rates of poverty than white, non-Hispanic Washingtonians. While the white, non-Hispanic poverty rate is 9.6 percent, nearly 21 percent of African-Americans in Washington State are below the poverty rate. Nearly one in every four Hispanics in Washington State is below the poverty line.³
- The maximum WorkFirst grant for a family of three has not increased in 13 years, despite the growth in the cost of living. WorkFirst and Basic Food when combined cover only 61 percent of need standard for a family of three.⁴
- While overall taxes in Washington State are low compared to other states, this does not account for the way those taxes are distributed. Washingtonians at the lower end of the income scale paid more of their household income in state and local taxes than any other state (nearly 18 percent) in the most recent year available (2002).⁵
- The average daily student participation for the free and reduced-price School Breakfast Program (2005-06 School Year) in the state of Washington was 120,853. The average daily student participation for the free and reduced-price National School Lunch Program (2005-06 School Year) in the state of Washington was 295,408.⁶ Only 78 percent of school districts provide lunch and breakfast in all schools.⁷

- In fiscal year 2006 the average monthly number of individuals participating in the Basic Food Program was 535,768. Proportion of eligible persons who were participating in the Basic Food Program in FY 2004 (last year available) was just 65 percent.⁸

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Inability to meet the needs of non-English speakers, often Hispanic or Eastern European
- Inability to meet the needs of working adults
- Lack of consistency within inventory over weeks/months
- Lack of transportation for customers to program

Staff and volunteers of the state's emergency food system lack considerably in diversity compared to their customer base, which includes Africans, African-Americans, Asian-Pacific Islanders, Eastern Europeans, and Hispanics. The Washington Office of Financial Management previously projected that by 2005, minorities would increase to about 1.4 million and represent 23 percent of the state's population.⁹ The lack of universal standards or signage across the system has left agencies to cope with diversity on their own. Some have succeeded, while others continue to struggle and serve their customers less effectively and competently because of it.

In addition to these challenges, agencies are also struggling to meet the needs of working adults and families. With the continued growing disparity of wealth in our country, the shift to a service-sector economy, and the continuing increased costs of living, today's emergency food customer is now just as often someone who works or lives on a fixed-income due to mental or physical disability as someone who is temporarily in need of assistance due to unemployment or a disaster. For decades, this entire system has been geared more toward the needs of volunteers and the preferences of staff, as opposed to the needs and preferences of customers.

As a sub-sector, the system's existence is based on a premise of distributing food that is donated, provided by the federal government, or purchased at a minimum cost. The government's distribution of powdered milk as a bonus commodity is one illustrative example of just how far out of a food bank's control some things are. The federal government for many, many years distributed powdered milk as a bonus commodity (TEFAP) which helped shore up the market price for milk—that's how bonus commodities happen. The vast amount of milk coming through the system was often challenging for food banks to distribute—many customers could not really use all of the milk they received. The federal government then contracted with processors to turn the remaining milk into the popular and useable vanilla and chocolate pudding. So suddenly, emergency food providers had pudding but no "milk." That changed in July 2005 when the nutritious and storage friendly shelf-stable milk came onto the scene. While a "milk" product has been reintroduced, providers can not plan on its continuation or stable existence.

Even with this reliance on donated and low-cost food, many agencies strive to provide the same level of service to all of their customers regardless of whether they are the first in line or the last in line. For food banks this led to the development of providing a pre-determined box or bag. While this is a noble pursuit, it assumes that one-size fits all and that someone who is hungry will eat whatever they are given. If programs were truly providing food based on emergency need, as opposed to long-term chronic use, the concern for a stable inventory of product would be moot. A stable inventory of product allows both agencies and customers to plan. In the current system, in the absence of significant resources, the only thing agencies can plan for is the unexpected.

In addition to agencies struggling to meet their own transportation needs, customers are similarly challenged to get to the agencies. In some areas of the state, public transportation is nonexistent, or, when available, inhospitable to those traveling with a large load of food. Customers have also been challenged by the increased costs of fuel and are now choosing how often to visit a food bank or meal program. Often in urban areas, customers who are within walking distance of an agency are the luckiest as walking ensures they can get there. In rural areas, it is often impossible to live near the agency as in-town residences no longer exist. During conversations with a group of diners in Spokane, several referenced the inhospitable attitude of transit workers when they or someone else attempted to board a bus carrying multiple sacks of groceries from an agency. A lack of transportation options or resources ultimately results in customers being able to accept less food.

Another often-cited challenge by local agencies was that despite their desire to improve healthful food options, they were unable to do so. They also cited their inability to provide better nutritional information or counseling to assist customers in their food selections and daily living.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

In this instance, distribution centers and lead agencies also spoke to the challenges for customers at agencies as opposed to discussing their relationship with their food banks or meal programs. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, they also noted:

- Lack of knowledge about actual need and need for better demographic information on communities being served
- Change of product availability in relation to customer's refrigerator/freezer capacity; while the food banks are working to change their capacity, the customer is not
- Inability to meet the needs of those experiencing a true emergency—those who really have nothing or have been left with nothing

Given their work with many agencies and larger service area, distribution centers are particularly mindful of lacking information about what the total need for a city or county may be, as opposed to the agency's care for a particular neighborhood or town. The United States Census Bureau is the common source for demographic information and there can be a lag in data of between two and ten years, making current trends hard to validate statistically.

While emergency food providers have been watching their donation stream change, customers' needs have remained largely the same and therefore they have not been changing their own refrigerator and freezer space. In fact, for most customers, changing their appliances is not an option due to rented properties or lack of financial resources. Portion sizes in the emergency food system can often be "hit or miss" based on donations and an agency's ability to repackage large quantities. For example, a family may be offered to take a No. 10 (institutional-size) can of green beans or a five pound bag of pre-shredded lettuce (intended for restaurant use), quantities which are not necessarily ideal, but the only other option for them is, perhaps, not to take anything at all.

Given the often dual roles of distribution centers as multi-service agencies, they are particularly aware of their inability to meet the needs of someone experiencing a true emergency. Because the system has continually been referred to as an emergency service, it would be incongruous that agencies open on designated days and hours. Customers who truly experience a one-time emergency must fit their emergency into an established system.

Recommendations

Despite the prevalence of food banks and meal programs throughout the state, there are no universal forms or standard operating procedures. While allowing for local flexibility, this lack of universality has led to individuals using their own judgment to determine what level of service is appropriate. While some individuals exercise compassionate, culturally competent judgment, others are still working from their own racial, ethnic, or class biases which can lead to marginal service. Without an established set of standards, agencies have nothing to measure the quality of their service against.

Access

- **Explore new models of business**, such as evaluating at an agency level whether offering appointment times for customers would reduce wait times or eliminate customers having to stand in line for long periods. [LA]
- **Map customer accessibility by hours in each city/town that is served by more than one food bank to reduce duplication and provide, when possible, daily coverage and some level of evening service.** As part of this assessment, identify additional areas for collaboration, such as one agency providing all needed home-delivery or centralizing volunteer coordination or training. [LA]
- **Increase home delivery to reduce access barriers for customers in traditionally underserved areas.** [LA]

Cultural Competency

- **Promote the use of annual customer survey by developing and sharing a customer survey template that can be adapted to meet the needs of local agencies.** [EFAP]
- **Continue to improve cultural competency by expanding foods available and allowing for self-selection in as many instances as possible.** [ALL]
- **Develop or share existing multi-lingual posters or FAQs across the state and continue to add new languages systematically based on prevailing need.** [EFAP]
- **Create or further develop existing materials and implement a revolving cultural competency training program for emergency food providers** possibly including brochures and videos for use across the system to improve service delivery. [EFAP]

Communication

- **Create a template, allowing for local adaptability, which explains some basic operating principles of the emergency food system for customers and diners** (i.e., sharing more about where the food comes from and why some foods are received and not others). [ALL]

Nutrition Resources

- **Recognizing that food bank customers have varying levels of nutrition education and cooking skills, agencies should all maintain a file of recipes relating to common food bank foods and simple food preparation tips or recipes relating to those foods.** A file could be created from existing resources and shared statewide, and a system could be developed for regular updates. [LA]

- **Dedicate a full-time nutritionist to work with emergency food providers who would revise existing materials, develop new materials, and take calls from providers.** In order to ensure the broadest possible reach, this nutritionist should be placed with an entity that bridges distribution centers and is statewide in scope. [ALL]

Outcomes

- **Shift outcome measurement from pounds to include a measure for nutritional density or value to improve quality of service.** Nutritionally lacking food like soda is heavy, whereas healthful leafy greens are not. [EFAP/DC]

Root Causes

- **Form plan to augment food bank usage by supporting increased participation in Basic Food, WIC, school meals, summer food, EITC, etc. by working with other state agencies, public advocacy groups, and EFAP funded programs.** [ALL]
- **Identify and develop emergency food advocates in every county that will speak with public policy leaders about the needs of individuals and families who are hungry and food insecure.** [ALL]

External Relationships

Operating a food bank, meal program, or distribution center is the same as any community-based nonprofit, although some providers have yet to fully comprehend that. Having good community relations allows agencies to maintain and increase funding, including in-kind donations (primarily food), and attract an influential Board of Directors. Maintaining good relationships with peers allows for increased cooperation. Linking with other human service providers or issue groups increases providers' awareness and has the potential to increase resources.

Relevant Trends

- Nonprofits are increasingly competing for the same pool of donors and volunteers. In 2006, Washington State had 21,811 public charities designated as 501(c)(3), including registered congregations. This was an increase of 8,468 charities over 1996 for a change of 63.5 percent.¹⁰
- The typical evolution of a nonprofit is from an all-volunteer based operation to one of a combination of staff and volunteers.
- Washington is one of the few states to have an emergency food distribution system that combines both America's Second Harvest (A2H) distribution centers with independent distribution centers. In the majority of the country, the only operating distribution centers are those affiliated with A2H.

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Lack of communication between food banks on a local and regional basis, and from distribution centers
- Lack of communication across human service providers
- Lack of community awareness about hunger

- Lack of consistency among information required across EFAP/TEFAP/Food Lifeline/2nd Harvest Inland Northwest/Northwest Harvest, and from other funders where applicable
- Lack of state-level advocacy by emergency food providers

Food banks and meal programs were quick to point out the lack of information which exists between local agencies and from the distribution centers. One provider noted that this lack of information limited their ability to see trends. In a few areas of the state, local food banks and meal programs are working collaboratively with one another thus increasing communication. Local agencies, despite their ongoing relationship with distribution centers, felt as though the current level of information received was insufficient and at times online ordering systems were inaccurate.

In addition to a lack of communication among and between emergency food providers, agencies also identified that they are often not linked to other human service providers. Despite food being central to daily life, emergency food providers remain disconnected from other human service providers, such as shelters, health clinics, and seniors programs.

Agencies also identified that there is limited public awareness about the problem of hunger in their communities. This was shared consistently across the state. For the most part hunger is not visible at first glance or easily quantifiable—except when people are waiting in line—which makes generating public awareness a challenge. The designated advocacy group by providers for anti-hunger initiatives, the Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition, is chaired by the Children’s Alliance (CA), a statewide child advocacy group. The coalition is typically only active around the creation of the biennial budget. It does not have designated staffing for more than a couple of meetings and periodic email alerts and is without a significant funding base separate from CA’s operating budget. Food Lifeline and 2nd Harvest Inland Northwest have retained a lobbyist over the years; however, because they do not work with all distribution centers and emergency food providers, their efforts have been somewhat constrained. Washington Food Coalition, a statewide coalition of emergency food providers, began to work at the state policy level for the first time last year and may continue to do so if resources can be secured. The lack of resources and the absence of a unifying voice has left the public hearing many different messages or, in some instances, no message at all.

Connected to a lack of public awareness about hunger, agencies also identified their own lack of state-level advocacy as a challenge. For many years, it was particularly challenging to engage emergency food providers in advocacy work. Now, providers have a recognition that the work is needed, but are still without a mechanism to help facilitate communication with legislators or a united campaign which bridges the various distribution centers and regions of the state.

Recognizing the presence of multiple distribution networks and federal and state support, providers acknowledged the inherent challenge of juggling different levels of reporting requirements. Some programs, such as those in large urban areas, seem to handle these varying levels of reporting better than others. The absence of a standard operations manual makes this all the more difficult. One group of providers shared that they had recently inherited the task of running their local food bank; not having a written resource of any kind that explained how to complete reports has left them perplexed.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

Given their place in the system, distribution center and lead agencies spoke to a different set of challenges. They noted:

- Working with local agencies which are unable to think regionally

- Perceived overrepresentation of one distribution center over another and food drives which take food away from the area in which it was collected
- Lack of customer service provided by those distribution centers which are providing food to other distribution centers

In many instances, distribution centers work with local agencies in many counties. Because of their expansive territories, working with emergency food providers across multiple counties is inherently challenging when there is not a formal or informal coalition working to achieve common goals. When local agencies are not working outside of or across their service area, they have a very narrow view of what is needed. Another underlying assumption at the agency level is that they are “just handing food out.” As a result, agencies do not readily see the need to plan and work strategically.

While relationships between and among the distribution centers have been addressed previously in this report, it is included again here because these relationships are driving factors in the functionality of the overall system. When speaking with a staff member of the Oregon Food Bank, he noted three entities in the State: East, West, and Rotary First Harvest. This is viewed by some as a challenge and by others as a benefit.

Recommendations

With additional coordination and communication and a minimum level of capital investment, significant gains can be made in the area of public awareness.

Public Awareness

- **Reframe “emergency food” to accurately reflect its usage by citizens and permanently weave food assistance into the social and health services continuum.** [ALL]
- **Create and implement a public awareness campaign about hunger that is statewide in scope, but allows for local adaptability.** Segmented target audiences include the general public, food manufacturers, growers, the hospitality industry, and the trucking industry. The campaign should include tailored donor education/guidelines and service learning curriculum for grade schools and high schools. [ALL]
- **Increase publicity of existing national events which can be adapted locally to engage local officials and the general public,** such as the Mayor’s End Hunger Awards, Hunger Awareness Day, or World Food Day. [LA]

Internal Collaboration

- **Publish and regularly update a directory of emergency food providers for use within the sub-sector** (no directory currently exists). [EFAP]
- **Develop the resources to support staffing the state’s Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition on at least a part-time basis in order to engage more emergency food providers in public policy work.** [ALL]
- **Develop pilot projects that demonstrate to emergency food providers the value of working collaboratively on a regional basis.** [EFAP]

External Collaboration

- **Develop and/or formalize links between emergency food providers and other human and social service providers such as shelters and clinics.** Active participation in coalitions, meetings, or informal gatherings will increase synergy among providers. [LA]
- **Create stronger ties to the community food security movement.** The community food security movement represents a comprehensive strategy to address many of the ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system.¹¹ One place to begin in creating a linkage to the movement is through the adoption of local food policy councils. A food policy council brings together a diverse array of food system stakeholders, both public and private, who develop policy food and agriculture policy recommendations. Seattle/King County has an acting food policy council which is awaiting recognition by the King County Executive. The state has yet to formally embark on the creation of a food policy council. [ALL]

Internal Capacity

The emergency food system is heavily reliant on volunteers. This reliance, compounded by the lack of a consistent public message, has led to an overwhelmingly under-resourced sector. While some programs succeed, others continue to flounder and just get by, worrying whether there will be something to feed people.

Relevant Trends

- In 2006, 1.66 million Washington volunteers dedicated 265.8 million hours of service. Nearly 25 percent of all volunteers either collected, prepared, distributed or served food.¹²
- Among all states, Washington had the third highest number of volunteer service hours per capita in 2006, but 100,000 fewer individuals volunteered between 2005 and 2006.¹³
- Among the 13 western states, Washington had the second highest volunteer rate for older adults, the third highest rate for young adults, and the fifth highest rate for Baby Boomers.¹⁴

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Lack of general operating support
- Aging volunteer base, particularly in leadership roles, and lack of new volunteers
- Need for more volunteer training and recruitment
- Lack of adequate compensation for staff

Agencies quickly identified that they were lacking a sufficient level of support for general operations, and that this challenge was only increasing. In addition to changes in funding priorities, many agencies are without basic knowledge about how to conduct a successful fundraising campaign or write a grant. The fundraising efforts of many small agencies have typically consisted of food drives, pancake breakfasts, and raffles. With the increasing costs of food and transportation, agencies are being forced to engage in new fundraising activities or make do with less.

Also identified as a top issue, was the continually aging volunteer base and the inability to tap a new, younger generation of adults as volunteers and for leadership roles. This lack of a new generation of volunteers affects both the physical operations and the agency management. Volunteering with a food

bank or meal program typically entails some level of physical labor, whether it's lifting cases of cans, picking up boxes of produce, or washing large pots. In Wapato, a food bank staff member shared that he actively recruited young people to reduce the amount of lifting he needed to do. "Fifty pound bags of beans get heavy. It's nice to have them around," he said and smiled.

Food bank directors often come to their positions because they either started as a volunteer or needed the services of the food bank at one time. One director in Aberdeen is in her late 70s and would like to leave her position, but there is no heir apparent. She helped to open the food bank, and remains there more than 20 years later. This level of dedication is not unusual. Another food bank director we met northeast of Spokane would also like to leave her position but she too is without a successor; she has been looking for someone for over a year. As a way to manage succession, one food bank has created co-directors, recognizing both the various talents needed to operate the agency and the time involved. In another instance, a food bank director was changing the prevailing recruitment trend of weekly volunteers—if not daily volunteers—by recruiting more volunteers to assist less frequently. She found the strategy working, even in her small community.

In addition to the need to recruit more volunteers, agencies also recognized that they were without significant training and recruitment tools. Again, yet another instance in which a universal set of materials are lacking from the sub-sector. While emergency food providers are unique in some respects, this sub-sector has numerous commonalities, beginning with safe food handling and continuing through the need for good interpersonal skills.

While the sub-sector is heavily reliant on volunteers, the programs that do have some level of paid staffing stressed that compensation is not adequate for the level of work or amount of hours required. In a sub-sector that is under-resourced in terms of its physical infrastructure, it is not surprising that maintaining adequate staff and volunteer capacity is a challenge. Many organizations, in order to be open to the public multiple days a week, maintain several staff positions and fill-in with dozens of volunteers. Staff provide consistency for volunteers and customers as well as accountability to the organization. Great organizations can be entirely volunteer; however, there are inherent limitations on how much they can do.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges they also noted:

- Resistance to change, especially among older volunteers
- Duplicity of activities, such as site inspections among EFAP/TEFAP/and those distribution centers providing food to other distribution centers
- Need for board development at local agencies

The resistance to change is a consistent challenge across the state. It is evidenced in the gradual transition to self-select or shopping methods to the continued lack of technology. It seems as though in every cluster of emergency food providers, there is always someone willing to chart a new course; however, they do not always succeed in attracting followers without an outside influence. With respect to the previously referenced need for operating support, one distribution center executive director noted the issue succinctly, sharing, "The burden (of distributing a new inventory stream) is shifting to us faster than the funding base." This same executive director also emphasized the inherent challenge in attracting talented staff while competing with the private sector.

Given the various sources where food and funding comes from, some distribution centers will be visited by four different staff members from four different organizations, none of whom share any level of information with one another. This duplicity is time consuming and an apparent waste of already scarce resources. If among agencies that are receiving food from two distribution centers there were some level of information sharing, this would potentially reduce at least one site visit. Distribution centers who raised this challenge further suggested having the monitoring agencies coordinate amongst themselves to visit on the same day.

Recognizing their collaborative work with local agencies, distribution centers were keenly aware that more work is needed to develop local agencies further, particularly at the board level. In some instances, distribution centers share board members with local agencies which can simultaneously help and hinder their working relationships.

Recommendations

Board of Directors

- **Create a grassroots board training manual that can be adapted by local agencies to assist in providing an orientation to the emergency food system.** Develop a sample outline for a Board orientation and calendar of activities to promote ongoing recruitment. [EFAP]

Cost Sharing

- **Explore the feasibility of creating or accessing group insurance plans for local agencies for medical and dental insurance as well as Director's and Officer's Insurance.** [ALL]

Operations

- **Engage providers in an exercise to create several models of an "Ideal Food Bank," including templates for operations, fundraising, Board development, volunteer management, human resources, and service delivery, including cultural competency.** [EFAP]
- **Share existing resources and further develop a standard operations manual for local food banks and meal programs to use as a reference tool for their agencies.** [EFAP]
- **In addition to creating an operations manual, develop a staff training manual specific to emergency food provision.** [EFAP]

Standardization

- **Standardize those elements of emergency food provision which are universal across the state, allowing for local adaptability** for items such as volunteer agreements, media releases, and marketing materials. [ALL]

Training and Technical Assistance

- **Explore the creation of "Field Teams" that would provide onsite trainings** in Board development, food safety, fundraising, and inventory management. Continually the agencies which are resource poor are unable to attend existing trainings. In order to improve the entire system, it is necessary to build individual capacity strategically. Agencies which grow and develop more resources will continue to do so. Agencies that have not grown or changed will not be able to do so without additional tools, trainings, leadership or some external factor such as a death or disaster. [ALL]

Volunteers

- **Outline a continuum of service opportunities for various ages and types of groups across the emergency food system.** [ALL]
- **Work from existing resources to create a volunteer training and orientation manual** that can be adapted by local agencies and includes volunteer agreements and disclaimers. [EFAP]
- **Incorporate active demonstrations of volunteer management techniques into existing training opportunities.** [ALL]
- **Explore the feasibility of centralizing volunteer recruitment and training among local agencies.** [LA]

EFAP Policies and Procedures

As previously noted, to provide food assistance, EFAP provides funding and resources to approximately 320 EFAP participating food banks through a system of 28 lead agency contractors and 32 tribes across the state. The EFAP Policies and Procedures manual provides guidance in the following areas: qualifying eligible clients; performing outreach and networking activities; allowable activities and expenses; the application process; contractor program management and administration; department program management and administration; and the contractor appeal process. The manual is approximately 38 pages long.

Lead agencies are the “face” of EFAP to local agencies. Some lead agencies also serve as distribution centers, thus wearing two hats. EFAP staff meet three or four times during the fiscal year with lead agency staff, distribution center staff, tribes, and appointed stakeholders through Advisory Group meetings. EFAP staff also perform on-site monitoring throughout the year. Contract funding is provided on a reimbursement basis. Meal programs are not currently eligible for funding based on existing legislation. Concerns raised by tribes are addressed in a subsequent section.

Significant Challenges for Food Banks and Meal Programs

- Lack of understanding at local level regarding policies and procedures
- Lack of funding

Across the state, when asking local agencies about the impact of the EFAP policies and procedures on their work, most were not aware of the nuances of these policies or procedures. Many times, agencies shared that they did not have a copy of the manual, despite the stipulation by EFAP that local participating food banks should receive a copy as part of the biennial application process. Given the prevalent unfamiliarity with the manual, agencies could not generally point to policies or procedures that might need improvement.

Agencies participating in meetings held in Seattle, Mt. Vernon, and Tacoma clearly had a better understanding of policies and procedures, but still had gaps in their knowledge. One thing that all agencies shared consistently was that too little funding was available. Agencies in some areas have watched new food banks open while funding has remained the same. When funding remains stagnant, each new food bank essentially decreases the funding for other participating food banks.

In addition to limited funding and a lack of awareness about policies and procedures, agencies identified other issues: a lack of designated ongoing funding for capacity building initiatives or program development; a lack of training about policies/procedures at the local level; confusion about equipment

purchases; reporting requirements that are burdensome given the amount of assistance provided; and timelines for monthly reimbursement submissions that are not conducive for local agencies given their schedule of operations.

Another challenge that was identified in several feedback sessions was the veracity of the duplicated and unduplicated customer counts. Local agencies have the opportunity to decide whether or not to create service boundaries to assist in allocating resources. Some agencies choose to align service boundaries with school districts, others may use geographic boundaries such as streets or rivers, and still others have no boundaries instead serving all who come, which can lead to a customer being counted more than once. The other inherent challenge in the use of duplicated and unduplicated counts as a measure is the discrepancy in allowable visits during a month. Some food banks in the same area may allow customers to visit weekly, while others offer only a biweekly or monthly visit.

Significant Challenges for Distribution Centers and EFAP Lead Agencies

Given their closer working relationship with EFAP staff, lead agencies and distribution centers were more easily able to identify policies and procedures, which could be improved. They also all echoed the need for more program funding and the inherent challenge in using duplicated and unduplicated counts. In addition to the above-mentioned challenges distribution centers and lead agencies noted:

Significant Challenges Related to Policies and Procedures

- Clarification needed about minimum visit requirements
- Lack of dedicated funding for distribution center
- Lead agencies without a food bank/distribution center are sometimes without a funding match
- Lack of strong language to remove a food bank

Currently, the policies stipulate two different levels of service for customers—full-service and supplemental. Full-service clients are defined as those who receive “at least three of any of the five main food pyramid groups (excluding oils, fats, and sweets.)” Which three of the five are at the discretion of the food bank. Supplemental service is defined as those who receive items from less than three of the five food groups and nothing else and furthermore reporting these clients is optional. These varying levels of reporting and the local discretion has hindered the formalization of a standard unit of service and, at times, led to the continuation of programs who are without sufficient resources and eliminated any incentive to do better, including providing more.

Distribution centers and lead agencies identify that they shoulder the “burden” in the relationship between the state and local food banks, yet there is no established level of funding. Only ten percent of a lead agency contractor’s allocation may be used for administrative expenses including salaries (wages and benefits), office supplies, travel expenses, office space rental, telephone, postage, mailing, copying, insurance, and audit costs. The funding for distribution centers is at the discretion of the local food banks. Through FY1995, distribution centers received 40 percent of the contract. The EFAP policy now simply states that, “CTED strongly recommends that the food bank community financially support the distribution centers with EFAP funds.” Several lead agencies operate only as a lead agency and acknowledged that meeting the necessary 100 percent contract match (through a combination of cash—up to 50 percent—and the remainder may be in-kind) was a significant challenge.

Another referenced challenge was the lack of strong language throughout the manual that allows a lead agency to remove a subcontractor. While policy governs the addition of a new food bank, it does not

govern the removal of a food bank, unless the food bank is putting the public's health at risk (and even then, they have 30 days to comply). The language for the addition of a food bank is much stronger, stating that, "new non-tribal, eligible food banks requesting EFAP funds during the application process must be funded unless it is determined they provide a duplication of service."

Significant Challenges Related to Program Administration

- Customer reporting at food bank level has very little oversight
- Excessive and at times repetitious paperwork
- Inability to determine when funding is truly in jeopardy

EFAP contractors are responsible for monitoring subcontractors at least once every other year. This provides a low level of oversight outside the monthly reporting. However, even with this low level of oversight, some shared they felt that the basic paperwork and administrative functions were increasing beyond their own capacity. With regard to paperwork, they also shared that they would welcome additional templates from EFAP. Several agencies also acknowledged the limited communication among state agencies/programs/departments as they were often providing the same information several times, as opposed to the information being centrally located for internal use.

One other thing shared by lead agencies was that the timelines provided by EFAP were often too short and unrealistic to allow for an effective and comprehensive response. Furthermore, information disseminated by EFAP staff was not often accurate upon the initial dissemination. Lead agencies also shared that a prevalence of older volunteers—some with limited computer skills and others with diminishing mental acuity—makes receiving reports from subcontractors challenging.

Funding Allocation

While the biennial funding allocation is determined by EFAP in consultation with the EFAP Food Bank and Tribal Advisory Groups, a portion of our conversation with lead agencies and distribution centers revolved around this topic. The policies set forth only a general outline—a baseline amount to each county with the remaining funds allocated based on other criteria that measure need. Agencies from rural areas shared that the allocation formula has never compensated for the increased expenses of rural areas such as transportation and storage. Other agencies identified that there is no difference made based on the number of food banks in a county; whether it is one or a dozen, the funding remains the same. Lead agencies also shared the inherent challenge of balancing local autonomy with the demonstrated needs of the entire county.

Additional Challenges Identified

- Advisory Group meetings are too long and the time is not time well spent
- Website information is not correct regarding current contractors
- Proviso quarterly report is obscure
- A-133 audits are costly and time-consuming for contractors

General Comments by Contractors

- EFAP was applauded for getting the word out about existing capacity building resources and opportunities; progress has been made in both the level communication and availability of funds.

- The impact of capacity-building/proviso money in recent years has been significant.
- Existing flexibility of program funding has been appreciated.
- EFAP and TEFAP are both critical to their operations and local agencies.
- EFAP staff is very responsive and contractors appreciated their attention to details.
- Trainings for lead agencies are helpful, particularly during a staff transition.

Recommendations

With the information that has been gathered over the course of the last year, EFAP has the opportunity to take a leadership role in shaping Washington's emergency food system for the future by further promoting dignity, creating more universal standards that ensure a consistent level of service regardless of a customer's zip code.

Allocation Formula

- **Revisit for the next biennium reinstating some minimum level of funding for distribution centers and creating a metric which acknowledges the increased costs of doing business in rural areas.** [EFAP]
- **Open a dialogue among existing contractors and providers about the efficacy of adding meal programs to the list of eligible participating subcontractors and increasing program funding.** [EFAP]

Dissemination of Information

- **While EFAP does stipulate that all subcontractors must receive a copy of policies and procedures, we believe that a set of FAQs should be created to accompany this document for food banks.** The FAQs should be posted online and disseminated at the annual contractor meetings. [EFAP]
- **Improve accuracy of documents sent to contractors upon initial send to decrease redundancy in contractors work.** [EFAP]
- **Update EFAP web pages on annual basis to reflect correct information for contractors.** [EFAP]

Collaboration

- **Foster a culture of collaboration by creating fiscal incentives when possible for regional or local collaboration through special funding initiatives or RFPs.** [EFAP]
- **Explore the interest among Advisory Group members of designating a preferred vendor to conduct needed audits, to reduce the overall cost and involvement of staff.** [EFAP]

Communication

- **Retain an outside facilitator for the EFAP Advisory Group meetings to improve the exchange of ideas between and amongst contractors as some participants have not changed in over ten years.** While this lack of turnover does reduce the need for historical recall, it also creates stagnation. [EFAP]

- **Create a subcommittee of contractors to review the existing policies and procedures to see if updates are needed.** [EFAP]
- **Consider waiting to set a date for subsequent Advisory Group meetings until a straw poll can be conducted of absent participants.** A poll can be conducted quickly through the use of an online survey tool. [EFAP]

Outcomes

- **Further define existing baseline standards to help create a uniform unit of service.** For example, define which three of five food groups should be distributed. By further defining which items should be distributed, food banks will be able to work toward a common goal. [EFAP]
- **Recognizing EFAP's desire to measure unmet need, additional qualifiers will need to be established to create a picture which is accurate across the state.** [EFAP]
- **Increase strategic funding based on an area's demonstrated need in comparison with baseline standards,** as opposed to using a numeric point-based system. [EFAP]
- **Revisit the use of duplicated and unduplicated customer counts as a viable measure.** [EFAP]
- **Evaluate current methods of data collection to determine areas where paperwork can be reduced for contractors and subcontractors.** [EFAP]

Section 6: Customers and Diners

In addition to talking with over 250 emergency food providers, we also spoke with over 25 customers and diners of emergency food providers. The time spent talking with them was focused on trends which had already emerged during conversations with agencies. Customer and diners were asked about the ways they obtain enough food for themselves and their families, the amount of food received, why more people do not use the programs, one wish they had for the food they eat, and what they would tell the Governor if they had the chance.

Ways to Obtain Enough Food

Participants shared that the main way they obtained food was through the state's emergency food system, visiting food banks and meal programs. When shopping for food they acknowledged the need to look for items on sale. Several acknowledged receiving Food Stamps, but also shared that their benefits had been cut.

Amount of Food

All of the participants felt as though they were receiving enough food from emergency food providers, but wished the food provided was more diverse. They expressed wanting to see more fresh fruits and vegetables as well as meats and eggs. It became clear that customers and diners did not have a good understanding of how emergency food providers operate. Participants also acknowledged the inherent challenge of using some of the food items that are distributed because they don't know how to cook them. One participant shared, referencing the recent absence of powdered milk, "It makes a world of difference if you're living off this food."

What They Hear from Others

Participants identified issues consistent with prevailing wisdom about why more individuals who could benefit from assistance do not seek it. They expressed that others find waiting in line humiliating and they do not want to be identified when receiving assistance. They also shared that many people still do not know about various programs. Based on the typical operating hours, they also acknowledged that it is tough for working adults and families to access the programs. The availability of transportation was cited as another challenge. Participants also shared that the physical accessibility of a program—such as a set of stairs or a hill—is an access barrier.

One Wish for the Food They Eat

Participants were invited to share one wish about the food they eat. Several shared the same wish: a desire for more meat and healthier foods. Additional preferences included:

- More eggs
- Elimination of genetically modified organisms (GMOs)
- More organic foods
- The ability to grow more of one's own food through seeds or plant starts
- Foods should be further from their expiration dates
- More food available for single people

Thoughts for the Governor

Some participants were not quite sure what they would want the Governor to know, but when given a few minutes to hear from others, they were able to put their finger on something. Several shared that they think there should be more support for community gardens and assistance for getting gardening started at home. One asked that the Senior's Farmers Market program be expanded. Others recognized the need for agencies to be in closer proximity to public transportation. Another thought the Governor's staff should visit meal programs to better understand the need.

Section 7: Tribal Food Voucher Program and Tribal Food Banks

EFAP administers the only known Tribal Food Voucher Program (TFVP) in the country. The TFVP was established by the legislature during the 1990 session to begin in the 91-93 biennium as part of a larger Anti-Hunger Bill. Currently, 32 tribes receive 8 percent of the EFAP funding passed through to providers. In FY05-06 this was \$318,628. The largest contract is for an individual tribe is \$36,029 and the smallest contract is for \$5,847. With the program funding, tribes can choose to support a voucher program, food bank, or both. Tribes have traditionally chosen to administer a voucher program given their often-limited human services resources and facilities. The voucher program is typically a very small program within the tribe's overall human services budget. Vouchers allow recipients to shop at a local store up to the designated voucher amount, which varies by tribe.

Given the unique nature of the program, a meeting was held exclusively for tribes. Several one-on-one interviews were also conducted. Responses differed based on whether they administered a voucher program or managed a food bank (though in some instances they do both).

Recommendations are grouped together within each area of inquiry. The entity that would most likely assume primary responsibility for each recommendation is identified as follows:

- **LA** – local agencies (food banks and meal programs)
- **T** — tribe
- **EFAP** – Emergency Food Assistance Program

Food

As part of the voucher program, certain foods, deemed non-nutritious, are not allowed for purchase. Some of these non-nutritious foods identified by the Department include candy, gum, potato chips, desserts, and soft drinks. Each tribe has the ability to customize their voucher program and may restrict the purchase of additional items. All tribes must submit accompanying receipts for products purchased by customers. Tribes choose which store they will contract with for the voucher program and ask the store to assist in monitoring purchases. Each tribe has the ability to set the value of its voucher. Vouchers are supposed to be for emergency use only, therefore they typically expire in a relatively short period of time. Tribes operating a food bank access food in the same ways as a non-tribal food bank.

Relevant Factors

- American Indians and Alaskan Natives are more likely to live in poverty than any other racial or ethnic group in Washington.¹⁵
- The prevalence of type 2 diabetes in Northwest AI/ANs is disproportionately higher than in the general population. The prevalence of diabetes is rapidly increasing.¹⁶
- Some reservations are geographically remote and have limited grocery shopping options in the vicinity.

Significant Challenges Identified by Tribes

- Current program funding does not meet demonstrated need
- Existing food restrictions on voucher purchases

- Difficulty in meeting costly special dietary needs i.e., elders, infants
- Limited amount of fresh product available
- Lack of (individual and collective) purchasing power for food banks and local tribal stores

The funding allocated to the tribes is based on a negotiation between the tribes and the non-tribal members of the EFAP Advisory Group including representatives of food banks, distribution centers, and lead agencies. In order for tribes to receive more funding, they must either request more funding from this group or the total program funding must be increased. While some tribes have wanted to ask for more funding, they have lacked a majority of the participating tribes to do so. Tribes are recognized as individual sovereign nations and as a result do not represent one another. Given the continued lack of growth in the funding and increasing need, the non-tribal group has not wanted to yield funding.

Like non-tribal food banks and meal programs, tribes are also struggling to meet the needs of customers with special dietary needs. For voucher program participants, the dominant challenge is the high cost of special dietary needs items such as nutritional supplements like Ensure or infant formula.

In administering the voucher program, tribes will either contract with the store on the reservation or one in the neighboring city or town. Stores on the reservation do not typically stock a wide array of fresh or frozen items. When fresh items are present, their freshness declines over the course of a week, until restocking occurs. For example, a staff member of the Spokane Tribe acknowledged that the best day to shop the tribal store for produce was on Friday. By Monday, the items would already be in decline. Like food banks and meal programs, tribes are without any mechanism that allows for increased purchasing power such as a cooperative.

Recommendations

- **Tribes should mobilize to request a greater percentage than their current eight percent allocation.** [T]
- **To increase healthful food in the food bank, tribes should further explore the availability of meat and fish through tribal hunting and fishing committees.** Programs could be modeled after an existing program at the Muckleshoot Tribe. [T]
- **Tribes should look for ways to improve the reimbursement process based on existing models or through the creation of new models.** Existing models are outlined in a companion publication. [T]

Infrastructure

Given the administrative nature of the voucher program, participating tribes reported fewer infrastructure challenges. All tribes we spoke to had access to the internet. The infrastructure challenges that were the most significant related to running a food bank.

Significant Challenges Identified by Tribes

- Lack of dry, cold, and frozen storage

Storage and space issues have been discussed previously in relation to non-tribal food banks and meal programs. In addition to storage and space issues, tribes further identified the challenges of pests, the costs of repairs, and the lack of appropriate equipment needed to operate a food banks such as scales and

hand trucks. Some also experienced challenges associated with having poorly situated space without easy access for cars and trucks and requiring staff and customers to carry food up and down stairs.

Recommendations

- **All tribes should operate at a pre-determined baseline for food bank operations based on prevailing donation trends and an excellent customer service model.** Given the limited amount of funding available to the tribes and the significant costs of infrastructure, a further capacity assessment should be made and funding designated to bring all food bank operations up to this pre-determined baseline. [EFAP]
- **Tribes operating food banks, when feasible, should join existing non-tribal emergency food provider coalitions.** Non-tribal emergency food providers should also make an effort to connect with tribal food banks in their service area on a regular basis. [T/LA]

Customer Service

Since tribes are able to customize the program within their tribe they are able to be more responsive to customers; however, EFAP does place some restrictions on non-allowable foods. Tribes also have the opportunity to determine their eligibility criteria such as whether the program will target a specific population such as elders or serve anyone with demonstrated need. The most fundamental question facing tribes with regard to EFAP funding is how best to invest those dollars to reduce hunger among tribal members. Tribes are given the option to administer a food voucher program, run a food bank, or do both. In most cases, tribes also combine EFAP funded programs with the federal Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR—commodities), encouraging food stamp enrollment or other anti-hunger programs. While tribes choose whether to use EFAP funds to support a voucher program or food bank, this choice does not necessarily determine whether a food bank exists on the reservation.

Relevant Factors

- In 2004, the State had the seventh largest population of American Indian and Alaska Native-alone or in combination population, coming in behind New Mexico and ahead of North Carolina and Alaska.¹⁷ In 2005, American Indians and Alaska Native persons represented 1.7 percent of the state's population.¹⁸
- American Indians are more likely than non-Hispanic Whites to live with and care for grandchildren.¹⁹
- The household income of American Indian and Alaska Native households is about 35% of the median income of non-Hispanic White households.²⁰ American Indians and Alaska Natives are more likely to live in poverty than any other racial or ethnic group in Washington.²¹

Significant Challenges Identified by Tribes

- Inability to meet needs of larger families
- Customers shopping outside of voucher restrictions; tribes generally have to pay for disallowed foods and cannot seek reimbursement
- Limited control in ensuring “healthy,” balanced diet

Tribes administering a comparatively small amount of funding through the voucher program find it challenging to meet the needs of larger families with a one-size fits all voucher. While they are able to

make many decisions about the program, they cannot increase the size of the voucher without limiting the total number issued. Another ongoing challenge in the program administration is that customers will shop outside the allowable foods and stores do not closely monitor the purchases upon check-out thus leaving the tribe to cover expenses which will not be covered by the state. To help improve this process, the Muckleshoot Tribe has started accompanying their elders on shopping trips. The elders enjoy the company and staff count the trip as a visit in another program area.

Like other emergency food providers, tribes are concerned about promoting a healthy, balanced diet given the prevalence of diabetes and obesity. The vouchers, based on allowable foods, do assist in encouraging nutritional purchases, but only for that one-time use. Tribal food banks, unless they are purchasing a significant amount of food, are subject to a similar donation stream as non-tribal emergency food providers. However, tribes report difficulty in establishing donor relationships with local grocery stores and other food donors because these businesses often have pre-existing relationships with the non-tribal food bank in the area. These non-tribal food banks are in some cases territorial or hesitant to share donations received.

Another area of concern for tribes was voucher fraud. Some tribes experienced vouchers being issued to customers being sold for cash in front of the partnering grocery. Staff further shared that other members of the tribe alerted them to this fraud. While this demonstrates that an informal network exists to prevent fraud this is certainly not a reliable way to monitor the program.

Recommendations

- **When possible, tribes should adopt procedures that are working well for other tribes** as outlined in a companion publication to improve store relations and reduce voucher misuse. [T]
- **Tribes should monitor changing demographic trends within their tribes and adjust eligibility criteria to best serve current needs.** [T]
- **To improve store relationships, tribes should develop a specific plan outlining steps to build the relationship such as regular meetings and trainings for cashiers.** [T]
- **Tribes should evaluate at the start of each biennium whether the voucher program remains an effective form of assistance for their tribe given customer needs and program capacity.** [T]

External Relationships

Tribes, as sovereign nations, have one-to-one relationships with state and federal governments, therefore functioning as their own independent jurisdictions with police departments, public works departments, and human services divisions. Their sovereignty, combined with historic injustices, current discrimination, and geographic isolation, may conspire to discourage collaboration outside of Indian Country.

Relevant Factors

- Tribes are less likely to follow a traditional US volunteerism model of recruiting individuals to perform tasks on an ongoing basis. Tribal staff are more likely to rely on personal networks for assistance.
- Human service agencies are facing increasing pressure to collaborate to better serve customers. In many cases, advocacy, participation in coalitions and networking within your field is crucial to attract funding.

Significant Challenges Identified by Tribes

- Local non-tribal food banks do not equitably distribute resources
- Non-tribal food banks are turning away tribal members who are seeking assistance
- Gaming impact fees do not always reach tribal programs, including food banks
- Prevailing misperception that tribes have enough money due to casino proceeds

Among non-tribal emergency food providers distribution of food is often inequitable, as previously discussed. Tribes experience this same inequity, but to a greater extent as they are small in size, have very limited staffing, and may be isolated from other emergency food providers. Tribes considering designating more resources to a food bank have to weigh the time and energy involved in soliciting donations of food. Establishing donation relationships can be particularly challenging in some communities where long-standing relationships between non-tribal food banks and stores exist. Tribes also shared that they have heard from customers that they have been turned away from non-tribal food banks and told to seek assistance on the reservation. When tribes learn this, it further deteriorates already tenuous relationships with non-tribal peers.

Tribes also shared that despite the presence of casinos, revenue generated does not often reach their human services budget. They noted that the general public assumes that the tribe does well if there is a casino, but in reality tribal human service providers experience the same challenges that non-tribal human services face—shrinking budgets, reduced compensation, and limited staffs.

Recommendations

- **Increase awareness of human services needs on the reservation among the general public,** beginning with non-tribal emergency food providers. [T]
- **Actively collaborate with other non-tribal emergency food providers.** Formalize existing bartering relationships and create new bartering partnerships when possible. [T]
- **Identify areas for further collaboration among all tribal food banks,** including those tribal food banks which do not use EFAP funding. [T]

Internal Capacity

Each tribe's human services are organized differently, and administration of the food voucher program is typically one of a number of responsibilities delegated to a single staff person. Of the eleven tribal staff members that we surveyed, 90 percent had worked for the tribe six or more years, and fully 45 percent had been at their tribe more than 15 years. However, in many cases they had worked with the tribal food voucher program for a shorter period of time. For almost 80% of our respondents, the program takes somewhere between 25-50 percent of their time. Overall, tribes were working with volunteers less extensively than non-tribal programs.

Relevant Factors

- Tribes typically administer the voucher program as one of several forms of emergency assistance.
- Tribal emergency food assistance is often integrated with other human services, sometimes offered to customers at a single site.

- The level of tribal council support for human services varies tremendously from tribe to tribe, and it is more difficult for smaller tribes to offer an array of services.

Significant Challenge Identified by Tribes

- Staff assuming extra duties without recognition

The tribes we spoke with were nearly unanimous in this area sharing that the single greatest challenge was their continually increasing workload. They are not alone in this trend. Receiving more work without added resources or recognition has been a common facet of the workplace for those in staff positions and mid- to lower-level management for the last two decades.

Recommendations

- **Increase awareness of human services needs on the reservation to increase related program funding.** [T]
- **Explore adding job training programs to enhance staffing and create a needed in-kind match.** Programs could be modeled after an existing program developed by the Yakama Tribe. [T]

EFAP Policies and Procedures

Tribes must adhere to the same set of policies and procedures as non-tribal food banks, distribution centers, and lead agencies. As sovereign nations, tribes individually contract with the state, except in cases where a coalition exists.

Significant Challenges Identified by Tribes

- Lack of available training for new staff
- Conducting required audit for entire tribe, not just program
- Submitting monthly reports

While many tribal staff members have worked with the voucher program for multiple years, there are instances of staff turnover. When there is a change in staff, new staff is without a formal training opportunity or without a training manual outside of the policies and procedures. All EFAP Contractors must undergo an annual A-133 audit if it receives federal funds totaling \$500,000 or more per year from all sources, or must undergo an independent audit once every two years if it receives \$75,000 or more per year in state funds from all sources. Recognizing that the EFAP funding is a very small amount of the tribe's overall budget and having the policies stipulate occurrences for an audit, tribes found the audit requirement a challenge and an undue burden. Also in view of the size of the program, tribes felt that monthly reports were a burden.

Recommendations

Policies and Procedures

- **Engage tribes in a dialogue aimed at identifying tribe-specific policies and procedures that may need adjusting based on present conditions.** [EFAP]

- **Provide option for quarterly rather than monthly reporting for tribes whose funding falls below a specific designated level.** [EFAP]

Communication and Networking

Although EFAP administrators endeavor to bring tribal food voucher administrators together regularly, participants in the feedback session were anxious to network and share information more frequently.

- **Establish multiple avenues for networking**, including facilitated meetings, a listserv or other online networking forum, and inclusion of tribal issues in statewide conferences for emergency food providers. [EFAP]
- **Schedule EFAP Advisory Group to meet in a more central location and during months when it is easier to travel**, particularly during key decision making times, ex. funding allocation. Also, allow non-attendees at EFAP Advisory Group to provide input on next meeting date. [EFAP]

Training

- **Develop a virtual training that can be accessed on-demand**, as needed. [EFAP]
- **Continue to identify and share best practices among the tribes.** Where a best practice is widely adopted, consider making it a standard part of the food voucher program. [EFAP]

Closing Thoughts

Emergency food providers in Washington do an amazing amount of work with limited resources and very little formal acknowledgement. They provide an invaluable community service on par with public safety while leveraging thousands of hours of volunteer hours with millions of dollars of in-kind goods and services each year. Providing food to someone who is hungry, simultaneously reducing their worry and providing nourishment, is a critical part of ensuring that an individual's basic needs are met. Aspiring to do so in a manner that is dignified—free of bias, judgment, or pity—and culturally competent is the next step in emergency food assistance.

Customers and diners of emergency food operations access the system because they are without other options. Many have needed some level of ongoing assistance for years, while others need assistance only for a limited time. Still other individuals, who may suffer from food insecurity, never come to the door of a food bank or meal program at all, because of embarrassment, pride, or physical or mental challenges.

With the completion of this formal assessment, entities at all levels of the system have a chance to reflect and plan for how to move forward both individually and collectively. This report will hopefully serve as a catalyst for revisiting old conversations and starting new dialogues. While the challenges are many, the opportunities are just as great. Some, though not all, of the recommendations will require a considerable financial investment; the first question should not be who should fund these endeavors, but whether the various undertakings are worth the needed investments of time, energy, and financial resources. As the title of this report suggests, this system is at a proverbial fork in the road. Research shows that providers in the system must shift from answering questions based on current capacity to posing questions based on the real needs in our communities.

Appendix 1: Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations are grouped together within each area of inquiry. The entity that would most likely assume primary responsibility for each recommendation is identified as follows:

- **LA** – local agencies (food banks and meal programs)
- **DC** – distribution centers
- **T** — tribe
- **EFAP** – Emergency Food Assistance Program
- **ALL** – system level change requiring leadership and cooperation across the state and at all levels of the system (initiatives could be led by EFAP or another existing or newly-created entity)

Food

Communication

- **Establish a formal mechanism of communication for the distribution centers.** For example, develop a regularly scheduled conference call, frequency to be determined, or monitored electronic bulletin board to share product availability and better manage product shortages and surpluses in the system. Additional possible participants for inclusion: Food Buying Service, Rotary First Harvest, and Department of General Administration’s Food Programs that orders the federal commodities. [DC]
- **Share relevant information among the distribution centers,** once a formalized mechanism for communication has been established. A series of initiatives or demonstration projects—such as cooperatively moving excess product to an area with a shortage or creating a formal trade agreement between Eastern and Western Washington—would help to facilitate information sharing. A residual effect of this information sharing should be an increase in trust. [DC]

Cooperation and Trust

- **Create a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the state’s operating distribution centers** that establishes guidelines for disclosure of solicitations and acknowledges territorial boundaries. [DC]
- **Create more local emergency food provider/anti-hunger coalitions** and expand existing opportunities for networking across counties or regions as part of existing conferences. [LA]

Food Access

- **Increase awareness among trucking industry of the needs of the emergency food system** and location of local agencies in the event that product needs to be off loaded on short notice. [ALL]
- **Expand partnerships between grocers and local agencies,** while ensuring and maintaining food safety, by expanding or replicating programs such as Food Lifeline’s Grocery Rescue Program or Oregon Food Bank’s Fresh Alliance. [DC]
- **Explore the creation of additional agreements or pilot projects with commercial anglers or groups like 4-H and the Cattleman’s Association to increase access to protein (meat and seafood).** Agreements or pilots could be modeled after the existing salmon program between Grays Harbor/Pacific County Food Bank Distribution Center and the state and federal fisheries. [DC]

Food Quality

- **Improve local agencies' purchasing power by either** creating a local, regional, or statewide purchasing **cooperative** that specializes in fresh and perishable products such as meats and dairy **or expanding an existing relationship with a regional wholesaler** such as Charlie's Produce. Food Buying Service has no plans to add fresh or frozen products to their inventory. [ALL]
- **Create a statewide public awareness campaign**, which could be adapted locally, to encourage the donation of nutritionally dense foods through food drives and promotes the "Plant-A-Row for the Hungry" campaign. [ALL]
- **Increase gleaning from farmers markets and stores that have not traditionally been donors to the emergency food system.** [DC]
- **Increase alignment of distribution of emergency food with the USDA food pyramid.** [ALL]
- **Explore utilizing a nutrient density score**, which would assign nutrient density values to foods within and across food groups. Adam Drewnowski, a public health nutrition researcher at the University of Washington developed this scoring system.²² A position paper has already been created by Rotary First Harvest which discusses its possible use. [ALL]

Special Dietary Needs

- **In cities or towns served by more than one food bank, explore the efficacy of having one food bank develop the resources to meet the needs of special populations.** [ALL]
- **Increase funding for special dietary needs foods and/or facilitate bulk buying to leverage a better price.** [EFAP]
- **Create a set of user-friendly nutrition materials (tip sheets) that are based on foods prevalent in the food bank and today's most prevalent diseases.** Current materials were created by EFAP over 15 years ago and do not incorporate developments in health and nutrition education. Develop both print and online versions of these materials. [ALL]

Transportation

Local Collaboration

- **Add fiscal incentives for local agency collaboration in the EFAP Policies and Procedures.** [EFAP]
- **Form local agency transportation cooperatives in areas of the state where they do not exist based on current models** in Kitsap and King County to facilitate pickups from distribution centers and expand collective capacity. [LA]
- **Further develop relationships with Commercial Driver's License programs or schools** based on existing models in Moses Lake and Longview. [DC]
- **Explore feasibility of starting and or increasing delivery from distribution centers to local agencies** to reduce the transportation needs of local agencies and allow them to do what they do best—serve the customer. [DC]

Regional Collaboration

- **Add fiscal incentives for regional collaboration among distribution centers in the EFAP Policies and Procedures.** [EFAP]

- **Explore the possibility of increasing the capacity of an existing organization, such as Rotary First Harvest (RFH), to move more product between distribution centers.** [ALL]
- **Increase the capacity of RFH to further solicit donations for trucking and manage existing trucking donations to ensure full capacity.** [ALL]

Statewide

- **Map existing delivery partnerships across the state to identify areas for improvement.** [ALL]
- **Complete a detailed assessment of vehicle needs across the system and create vehicle succession plans** at the agency and distribution center level. Then, make strategic investments to **replace vehicles to help build capacity and increase collaboration.** [EFAP]
- **Create a pilot project to tie into the continually expanding green movement**, which serves as a model within the sub-sector. This serves several purposes: increases market for renewable energy, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and attracts a new and increasing segment of the public which is supporting green initiatives. [ALL]

Cost Sharing

- **Explore the feasibility of creating a group insurance plan** for local agencies and distribution centers to help drive down costs and/or expanding the coverage of EFAP lead agencies to local subcontracting food banks. [ALL]

Infrastructure

Collaboration

- Create a centralized nonprofit food processing center, open to all distribution centers and maintained by an entity that works with all of the distribution centers equally. This facility could include cold and dry storage. [ALL]

Facility Conditions

- **Develop a more comprehensive understanding of capacity needs at the distribution center and food bank level.** Conduct capacity assessments of all EFAP food banks and distribution centers by county, including equipment, used and available square footage, transportation, technology, etc. Secondary information to be gathered from non-EFAP funded food banks and meal programs serving at least “X” (some significant pre-determined number of people per week.) [EFAP]
- **Create and/or share existing blueprints for excellent facilities for agencies and distribution centers of varying sizes, for example small, medium, large.** [ALL]
- **Explore the creation of a “central” food bank when more than one food bank exists in a town, to better leverage available resources.** In many instances, towns which have more than one food bank do so because there is no facility designated for full-time use as a food bank and the needed level of ongoing resources is lacking. [LA]
- **Explore the creation of satellite food banks as an alternative model to a “central” food bank.** Satellite food banks operate from a central distribution center and are only in operation for the duration of food distribution. No food or product is stored on site long-term, thus reducing the need for a significant amount of storage space. Food comes in and goes out on the same day. [LA]

Equipment

- **All distribution centers should all be functioning with a consistent minimum baseline for equipment.** At minimum this includes a fork lift, an electric pallet jack, and appropriate racking. If a distribution center can not effectively and efficiently do its work, local agencies will be similarly ineffective and inefficient in their work. Funding for this type of equipment is a long-term investment. [EFAP]

Technology

- **The use of technology should no longer be avoided, but rather embraced.** The addition of technology in agencies where it is absent would create opportunities for a younger generation of volunteers that are desperately needed. [ALL]
- **Upon completion of the EFAP database tool, the program should ensure that annual updates will be made to the application, and phase in required usage over a two-year period.** As one emergency food provider quipped, “We told our volunteers we didn’t want to wait for them to die before we made changes.” EFAP should move forward with a similar urgency. [EFAP]
- **Connect agencies statewide by creating a monitored listserv or online community via a bulletin board or blog.** [ALL]

Customer Service

Access

- **Explore new models of business,** such as evaluating at an agency level whether offering appointment times for customers would reduce wait times or eliminate customers having to stand in line for long periods. [LA]
- **Map customer accessibility by hours in each city/town that is served by more than one food bank to reduce duplication and provide, when possible, daily coverage and some level of evening service.** As part of this assessment, identify additional areas for collaboration, such as one agency providing all needed home-delivery or centralizing volunteer coordination or training. [LA]
- **Increase home delivery to reduce access barriers for customers in traditionally underserved areas.** [LA]

Cultural Competency

- **Promote the use of annual customer survey by developing and sharing a customer survey template that can be adapted to meet the needs of local agencies.** [EFAP]
- **Continue to improve cultural competency by expanding foods available and allowing for self-selection in as many instances as possible.** [ALL]
- **Develop or share existing multi-lingual posters or FAQs across the state and continue to add new languages systematically based on prevailing need.** [EFAP]
- **Create or further develop existing materials and implement a revolving cultural competency training program for emergency food providers** possibly including brochures and videos for use across the system to improve service delivery. [EFAP]

Communication

- **Create a template, allowing for local adaptability, which explains some basic operating principles of the emergency food system for customers and diners** (i.e., sharing more about where the food comes from and why some foods are received and not others). [ALL]

Nutrition Resources

- **Recognizing that food bank customers have varying levels of nutrition education and cooking skills, agencies should all maintain a file of recipes relating to common food bank foods and simple food preparation tips or recipes relating to those foods.** A file could be created from existing resources and shared statewide, and a system could be developed for regular updates. [LA]
- **Dedicate a full-time nutritionist to work with emergency food providers who would revise existing materials, develop new materials, and take calls from providers.** In order to ensure the broadest possible reach, this nutritionist should be placed with an entity that bridges distribution centers and is statewide in scope. [ALL]

Outcomes

- **Shift outcome measurement from pounds to include a measure for nutritional density or value to improve quality of service.** Nutritionally lacking food like soda is heavy, whereas healthful leafy greens are not. [EFAP/DC]

Root Causes

- **Form plan to augment food bank usage by supporting increased participation in Basic Food, WIC, school meals, summer food, EITC, etc. by working with other state agencies, public advocacy groups, and EFAP funded programs.** [ALL]
- **Identify and develop emergency food advocates in every county that will speak with public policy leaders about the needs of individuals and families who are hungry and food insecure.** [ALL]

External Relationships

Public Awareness

- **Reframe “emergency food” to accurately reflect its usage by citizens and permanently weave food assistance into the social and health services continuum.** [ALL]
- **Create and implement a public awareness campaign about hunger that is statewide in scope, but allows for local adaptability.** Segmented target audiences include the general public, food manufacturers, growers, the hospitality industry, and the trucking industry. The campaign should include tailored donor education/guidelines and service learning curriculum for grade schools and high schools. [ALL]
- **Increase publicity of existing national events which can be adapted locally to engage local officials and the general public,** such as the Mayor’s End Hunger Awards, Hunger Awareness Day, or World Food Day. [LA]

Internal Collaboration

- **Publish and regularly update a directory of emergency food providers for use within the sub-sector** (no directory currently exists). [EFAP]
- **Develop the resources to support staffing the state’s Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition on at least a part-time basis in order to engage more emergency food providers in public policy work.** [ALL]
- **Develop pilot projects that demonstrate to emergency food providers the value of working collaboratively on a regional basis.** [EFAP]

External Collaboration

- **Develop and/or formalize links between emergency food providers and other human and social service providers such as shelters and clinics.** Active participation in coalitions, meetings, or informal gatherings will increase synergy among providers. [LA]
- **Create stronger ties to the community food security movement.** The community food security movement represents a comprehensive strategy to address many of the ills affecting our society and environment due to an unsustainable and unjust food system.²³ One place to begin in creating a linkage to the movement is through the adoption of local food policy councils. A food policy council brings together a diverse array of food system stakeholders, both public and private, who develop policy food and agriculture policy recommendations. Seattle/King County has an acting food policy council which is awaiting recognition by the King County Executive. The state has yet to formally embark on the creation of a food policy council. [ALL]

Internal Capacity

Board of Directors

- **Create a grassroots board training manual that can be adapted by local agencies to assist in providing an orientation to the emergency food system.** Develop a sample outline for a Board orientation and calendar of activities to promote ongoing recruitment. [EFAP]

Cost Sharing

- **Explore the feasibility of creating group insurance plans for local agencies for medical and dental insurance as well as Director’s & Officer’s Insurance.** [ALL]

Operations

- **Engage providers in an exercise to create several models of an “Ideal Food Bank,” including templates for operations, fundraising, Board development, volunteer management, human resources, and service delivery, including cultural competency.** [EFAP]
- **Share existing resources and further develop a standard operations manual for local food banks and meal programs to use as a reference tool for their agencies.** [EFAP]
- **In addition to creating an operations manual, develop a staff training manual specific to emergency food provision.** [EFAP]

Standardization

- **Standardize those elements of emergency food provision which are universal across the state, allowing for local adaptability** for items such as volunteer agreements, media releases, and marketing materials. [ALL]

Training and Technical Assistance

- **Explore the creation of “Field Teams” which would provide onsite trainings** in Board development, food safety, fundraising, and inventory management. Continually the agencies which are resource poor are unable to attend existing trainings. In order to improve the entire system, it is necessary to build individual capacity strategically. Agencies which grow and develop more resources will continue to do so. Agencies that have not grown or changed will not be able to do so without additional tools, trainings, leadership or some external factor such as a death or disaster. [ALL]

Volunteers

- **Outline a continuum of service opportunities for various ages and types of groups across the emergency food system.** [ALL]
- **Work from existing resources to create a volunteer training and orientation manual** that can be adapted by local agencies and includes volunteer agreements and disclaimers. [EFAP]
- **Incorporate active demonstrations of volunteer management techniques into existing training opportunities.** [ALL]
- **Explore the feasibility of centralizing volunteer recruitment and training among local agencies.** [LA]

EFAP Policies and Procedures

Allocation Formula

- **Revisit for the next biennium reinstating some minimum level of funding for distribution centers and creating a metric which acknowledges the increased costs of doing business in rural areas.** [EFAP]
- **Open a dialogue among existing contractors and providers about the efficacy of adding meal programs to the list of eligible participating subcontractors and increasing program funding.** [EFAP]

Dissemination of Information

- **While EFAP does stipulate that all subcontractors must receive a copy of policies and procedures, we believe that a set of FAQs should be created to accompany this document for food banks.** The FAQs should be posted online and disseminated at the annual contractor meetings. [EFAP]
- **Improve accuracy of documents sent to contractors upon initial send to decrease redundancy in contractors work.** [EFAP]
- **Update EFAP web pages on annual basis to reflect correct information for contractors.** [EFAP]

Collaboration

- **Foster a culture of collaboration by creating fiscal incentives when possible for regional or local collaboration through special funding initiatives or RFPs.** [EFAP]
- **Explore the interest among Advisory Group members of designating a preferred vendor to conduct needed audits, to reduce the overall cost and involvement of staff.** [EFAP]

Communication

- **Retain an outside facilitator for the EFAP Advisory Group meetings to improve the exchange of ideas between and amongst contractors as some participants have not changed in over ten years.** While this lack of turnover does reduce the need for historical recall, it also creates stagnation. [EFAP]
- **Create a subcommittee of contractors to review the existing policies and procedures to see if updates are needed.** [EFAP]
- **Consider waiting to set a date for subsequent Advisory Group meetings until a straw poll can be conducted of absent participants.** A poll can be conducted quickly through the use of an online survey tool. [EFAP]

Outcomes

- **Further define existing baseline standards to help create a uniform unit of service.** For example, define which three of five food groups should be distributed. By further defining which items should be distributed, food banks will be able to work toward a common goal. [EFAP]
- **Recognizing EFAP's desire to measure unmet need, additional qualifiers will need to be established to create a picture which is accurate across the state.** [EFAP]
- **Increase strategic funding based on an area's demonstrated need in comparison with baseline standards,** as opposed to using a numeric point-based system. [EFAP]
- **Revisit the use of duplicated and unduplicated customer counts as a viable measure.** [EFAP]
- **Evaluate current methods of data collection to determine areas where paperwork can be reduced for contractors and subcontractors.** [EFAP]

Tribal Food Voucher Program and Tribal Food Banks

Food

- **Tribes should mobilize to request a greater percentage than their current eight percent allocation.** [T]
- **To increase healthful food in the food bank, tribes should further explore the availability of meat and fish through tribal hunting and fishing committees.** Programs could be modeled after an existing program at the Muckleshoot Tribe. [T]
- **Tribes should look for ways to improve the reimbursement process based on existing models or through the creation of new models.** Existing models are outlined in a companion publication. [T]

Infrastructure

- **All tribes should operate at a pre-determined baseline for food bank operations based on prevailing donation trends and an excellent customer service model.** Given the limited amount of funding available to the tribes and the significant costs of infrastructure, a further capacity assessment should be made and funding designated to bring all food bank operations up to this pre-determined baseline. [EFAP]
- **Tribes operating food banks, when feasible, should join existing non-tribal emergency food provider coalitions.** Non-tribal emergency food providers should also make an effort to connect with tribal food banks in their service area on a regular basis. [T/LA]

Customer Service

- **When possible, tribes should adopt procedures that are working well for other tribes** as outlined in a companion publication to improve store relations and reduce voucher misuse. [T]
- **Tribes should monitor changing demographic trends within their tribes and adjust eligibility criteria to best serve current needs.** [T]
- **To improve store relationships, tribes should develop a specific plan outlining steps to build the relationship such as regular meetings and trainings for cashiers.** [T]
- **Tribes should evaluate at the start of each biennium whether the voucher program remains an effective form of assistance for their tribe given customer needs and program capacity.** [T]

External Relationships

- **Increase awareness of human services needs on the reservation among the general public,** beginning with non-tribal emergency food providers. [T]
- **Actively collaborate with other non-tribal emergency food providers.** Formalize existing bartering relationships and create new bartering partnerships when possible. [T]
- **Identify areas for further collaboration among all tribal food banks,** including those tribal food banks which do not use EFAP funding. [T]

Internal Capacity

- **Increase awareness of human services needs on the reservation to increase related program funding.** [T]
- **Explore adding job training programs to enhance staffing and create a needed in-kind match.** Programs could be modeled after an existing program developed by the Yakama Tribe. [T]

EFAP Policies and Procedures

Policies and Procedures

- **Engage tribes in a dialogue aimed at identifying tribe-specific policies that may need adjusting based on present conditions.** [EFAP]
- **Provide option for quarterly rather than monthly reporting for tribes whose funding falls below a specific designated level.** [EFAP]

Communication and Networking

- **Establish multiple avenues for networking**, including facilitated meetings, a listserv or other online networking forum, and inclusion of tribal issues in statewide conferences for emergency food providers. [EFAP]
- **Schedule EFAP Advisory Group to meet in a more central location and during months when it is easier to travel**, particularly during key decision making times, ex. funding allocation. Also, allow non-attendees at EFAP Advisory Group meetings to provide input on next meeting date. [EFAP]

Training

- **Develop a virtual training that can be accessed on-demand**, as needed. [EFAP]
- **Continue to identify and share best practices among the tribes.** Where a best practice is widely adopted, consider making it a standard part of the food voucher program. [EFAP]

Appendix 2: Provider Demographics

Food banks, meal programs, and distribution centers—participating in one of a series of 11 regional outreach sessions—were invited to complete a survey that included questions about them and their agencies. Online survey participants were provided with the same questions. Responses to selected questions are included below.

Gender

<i>number of respondents</i>	221
Male	35%
Female	65%

Race

<i>number of respondents</i>	220
Caucasian	90%
African-American	2%
Asian	1%
African	0%
Hispanic	2%
Native American	3%
Bi- or multi-racial	2%

Age

<i>number of respondents</i>	219
35 and under	10%
36-50	23%
51-65	39%
66-80	24%
81 and over	4%

Length of time “working” in or around emergency food

<i>number of respondents</i>	219
0-1 year	11%
2-5 years	32%
6-10 years	24%
11-15 years	11%
More than 15 years	21%

Primary role within current program

<i>number of respondents</i>	<i>220</i>
Volunteer	45%
Part-time staff	11%
Full-time staff	45%

Type of pay

<i>number of respondents</i>	<i>115</i>
Hourly	29%
Salary	71%

Computer use

<i>number of respondents</i>	<i>214</i>
Don't use	14%
Use at home	20%
Use at work	8%
Use at home and work	58%

Internet access

<i>number of respondents</i>	<i>204</i>
Don't have	11%
Have at home	26%
Have at work	11%
Have at home and work	52%

Appendix 3: Program Statistics

Food banks, meal programs, and distribution centers—participating in one of a series of 11 regional outreach sessions—were invited to complete a survey that included questions about them and their agencies. Online survey participants were provided with the same questions. Responses to selected questions are included below.

How does your food bank provide its food to customers?

<i>number of respondents</i>	172
In a prepared food box/bag	36%
By allowing clients to self-select/shop	28%
Through both methods	35%

How often can someone visit your program?

<i>number of respondents</i>	200
Daily	10%
Multiple times a week	13%
Weekly	31%
Every two weeks	16%
Once a month	31%

Does your program offer evening hours?

<i>number of respondents</i>	202
Yes	36%
No	64%

Does your program offer weekend hours?

<i>number of respondents</i>	202
Yes	20%
No	80%

Are you using a computer to assist with customer intake?

<i>number of respondents</i>	202
Yes	64%
No	36%

Which of the following best describes your relationship with your facility?

<i>number of respondents</i>	<i>199</i>
Own	38%
Rent/Lease	40%
Borrow/Use at no charge	23%

Where does your food come from (check all that apply)?

<i>number of respondents</i>	<i>203</i>
Community/School Food Drives	82%
Commodities (TEFAP)	71%
Local Grocery Store	75%
Cascade Blue Mountain Food Share	5%
Community Services of Moses Lake	4%
Emergency Food Network	14%
Food Lifeline	41%
Northwest Harvest	56%
Oregon Food Bank	6%
2nd Harvest	22%
Rotary First Harvest	1%
Wholesaler	26%
Other	20%

Endnotes

- ¹ “Food Banks Go Hungry.” Lauren Etter. *The Wall Street Journal*, 5/22/07.
- ² “Concept of a nutritious food: toward a nutrient density score.” Adam Drewnowski. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 2005, 82:721-732.
- ³ “New data released today shows economic growth has made little progress for working families.” Summary. Washington State Budget and Policy Center, 8/29/06.
- ⁴ “New data released today shows economic growth has made little progress for working families.” Summary. Washington State Budget and Policy Center, 8/29/06.
- ⁵ “Washington State Taxes Remain Low Compared to Other States.” Sandeep Kaushik and Jeff Chapman. Washington State Budget and Policy Center. 2007.
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