Food Insecurity

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of San José was challenged to quickly address issues surrounding food insecurity. Food security is a serious public health problem with potential long-term impacts associated with poor cognitive and emotional development in children and depression and poor health in adults.

Despite expanded eligibility and enrollment in federal food assistance programming, there still remains a gap locally in how to address the rising demand both logistically and through sustainable funding as more individuals and families have found themselves needing food assistance for the first time in their lives due to the pandemic. This growing demand has been compounded by the increased risk factors to food insecurity such as homelessness, high cost of living, as well as existing poverty and income levels, all of which the City of San José was experiencing before the pandemic.

This paper explores the key challenges and accomplishments the City of San José faced while identifying the human resources, funding, interdisciplinary partners, and logistical methods required to provide an inclusive expansion of the food system infrastructure to serve individuals and families within the City of San José and throughout the entire County of Santa Clara during COVID-19.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

In March 2020 the City was tasked as the lead organization for food distribution for all of Santa Clara Count. While the City had agreements with community-based organizations (CBOs) and some limited food distribution programs, taking on the responsibility of the entire county presented new challenges. These challenges included concentrated risk, distributed governance, and lack of scalable capability. The City was not only going to have to ensure food insecurity needs were met, but they would also need to create entirely new departments to ensure that food distribution was completed, and the data was gathered, reported, modeled, and monitored accurately.

Families and individuals that experience food insecurity lack access to enough food for an active, healthy life.[1] Before the coronavirus pandemic hit, San José was already experiencing multiple risk factors to food insecurity.

[1] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in San José-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA (MSA) [SANJ906URN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/SANJ906URN, October 20, 2020.

Homelessness

Prior to COVID-19, the 2019 San José Point- In-Time Homeless Census and Survey, on any given night, reported that there were 6,097 individuals experiencing homelessness within the city's limits. This number reflects an increase of 42% from the count conducted in 2017 and the highest number reported during the last 15 years.[2] Furthermore, more than one third (39%) of those who completed the 2019 City of San José Homeless Count and Survey indicated that they were experiencing homelessness for the first time.

Rising Cost of Living

In January 2020 the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics reported an unemployment rate in San José-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) of 2.7 percent.[3] This was below the national average of 3.6 in January 2020.[4] However, in San José like many other California communities, having a job does not equate to having financial security. This phenomenon is reflected in the familiar sight of residents using personal vehicles as their permanent home. San José residents need to earn a household income of $132,343 in order to pay 28% or less of their salary in rent. The median income in San José is $104,675 which categorizes many individuals and families as housing-cost burdened, even before the pandemic.[5]

This is further exacerbated by the fact that millions of American employees, approximately 74%, live paycheck to paycheck earning just enough to pay the bills each month.[6] Furthermore, 28% of American adults don't have enough or any emergency savings[7] which indicates that, for many households, difficult decisions for sustaining basic life needs have been occurring on a regular basis, even before the pandemic.

Poverty & Income

The 2020 Taking Count, a University of Berkley study on poverty in the Bay Area, estimated that 16% of Santa Clara's residents were living in poverty based on the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM).[8] Black and Latinx residents suffered the highest rates of those below the povertylevel living in the Bay Area.

The income disparity between the City of San José's Silicon Valley tech industry and blue-collar jobs is not a new finding. In 2019, 42.4% of students within the San José Unified School District were eligible to receive free or reduced-price school meals.[9]

---

[2] Applied Survey Research (ASR). "2019 Santa Clara County Homeless Census & Survey," San José. www.sccgov.org/sites/osh/ContinuumofCare/ReportsandPublications/Pages/HomelessnessCensusandSurvey.aspx

[3] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, The Economics Daily.

[4] Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, The Economics Daily, www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2020/unemployment-rate-in-january-2020.htm

[5] Smartasset. "The Income Needed to Pay Rent in the Largest U.S. Cities." (July 2019). smartasset.com/career/income-needed-to-pay-rent- in-us-cities-2019

[6] American Payroll Association, National Payroll Week 2019. "Survey Finds Majority of Americans Live Paycheck to Paycheck."

[7] Bankrate. "A growing percentage of Americans have no emergency savings whatsoever." (July 1, 2019).

[8] UC Berkley Tipping Point. "Taking Count: A study on poverty in the Bay Area" https://tippingpoint.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Taking-Count-Executive-Summary-2020.pdf

[9] Data collected by the California Department of Education (CDE) through the California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System (CALPADS). Aggregate data files are provided by the CDE – Data Reporting Office at http://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/sd/sd/filesenr.asp. http://www.ed-data.org/district/Santa-Clara/San-Jose- Unified

In 2015, of the total number of adults over age 65 living in the City of San José, 29,755 were considered low-income. This means that they earned less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.[10] The pandemic has only exacerbated these factors and pre-existing inequities, leaving many individuals and families even more vulnerable to the reality of food insecure.

Early in the pandemic the City of San José experienced sharp increases in unemployment as the regional "shelter in place" order went into effect on March 17, 2020. The ongoing impact of COVID-19 has led to increased financial hardship as many seek food assistance and face tough decisions each day in order to put food on the table.

The City of San José was quickly challenged to 1) leverage existing food system infrastructure to meet the surge of families, individuals, and children in need, 2) support organizations in the delivery of emergency food operations including the resources and logistics necessary to provide safe and healthy food, and 3) engage Whole Community partners including public and private organizations to help mitigate local food insecurity and crisis in the community.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND STEPS TO MEET CHALLENGES

Food security programs are structured to provide access to healthy food and nutrition through food banks, mobile food pantries, school lunch programs, and government assistance. Many of these programs provide emergency and short-term relief from hunger and are not structured to address the underlaying factors of food security.

However, due to the pandemic, more families and individuals are relying on local food programs as their primary source of food and nutrition with thousands of people newly at risk of experiencing food insecurity due to COVID-19 each day.

The City of San José took on the challenge of directly providing food service in March 16 as the County Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and City EOC Directors quickly stood up the Food Distribution Branch by May 2020.

The City of San José deployed 6,051 volunteers to supplement various functions by CBOs and non-profits to successfully get meals in the hands of those that need it most. Volunteers have been assigned various roles such as delivering meals, supplying back-fill to Meals on Wheels, and deliveries of School Lunch and reduced cost meal programs to schools.

This response operation has been so complex that the Incident Command Structure (ICS) was required to expand in order to include large-scale food security operations within their Operations branches.

To date, food security operations for the City of San José includes the successful distribution of over 3 million meals and counting thanks to the support and commitment of thousands of volunteers. In March 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom deployed nearly 500 service members to food banks across six Bay Area counties including Santa Clara County and the City of San José on a humanitarian support mission. This helped support many non-profits to supplement their volunteer workforce and meet increased demand for services.

[10] Healthtrust. "Food for Everyone." Accessed October 16, 2020. healthtrust.org/wp- content/uploads/2018/10/Food-for-Everyone.pdf

National Guard troops have been able to support by sorting and boxing food items, delivering food, and providing safe crowd control and organization for individuals receiving services. They have also been able to provide translations at non-profit call centers to meet the surge of phone calls from community members seeking food services.

Social Safety Nets and Nonprofits are crucial to issues of food security for families and individuals alike. Food distribution requires significant resources to provide what for some will be their only source of food and nutrition.

The City of San José was able to approve a $22 million contract through City Council for food security in case of mass hunger. This proactive action and foresight into the months that would follow helped to support one-time funding to select non-profits and CBOs for food services. Direct funding of this type is a first for the City of San José to service organizations that are essentially the safety net for the community.

Organizations such as Second Harvest have been able to provide direct service program for seniors, families with children, and individuals. According to Second Harvest Silicon Valley, there has been a significant rise in demand. The non-profit prior to COVID-19 served about 270,00 people a month and now serves 500,000 an increase of nearly 85 percent.[11]

For-profit organizations such as Revolution Foods have been contracted by the City of San José to provide food to families with children on free and reduced lunch programs. This aides in covering the gaps experienced by students when schools are not open and dispensing on weekends and holidays. Google donated 3.75 million on behalf of Revolutionary Food to reserve food.

For free meal delivery programs, the City of San José has worked with nonprofits including Catholic Charities of Santa Clara County, The Health Trust, Loaves and Fishes Family Kitchen, Hunger at Home, FIRST 5 of Santa Clara and Team San José.

The City of San José in partnership with World Central Kitchen has been able to provide county-wide food and necessities distribution to meet the needs of vulnerable and at-risk populations.

World Central Kitchen is actively working with local restaurants to provide over 2,000 meals a day to over 1,085 at-risk seniors through the Great Plates Delivered Initiative. What makes this program special is by leveraging relationships with diverse restaurateurs culturally appropriate meals are able to be provided and delivered to seniors within the community.

Pre-pandemic, many non-profits modeled distribution sites similar to famer's markets where people could see and choose their own produce. However, to meet physical distancing rules to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and meet increased demand, drive-up centers now allow individuals to remain in the car while pre-boxes of produce are quickly and safely load pre-packaged boxes of produce into their cars. Modified walk-up services have been maintained to address populations that may not have access to transportation.

Mobile food pantries increased access for seniors, displaced individuals, and individuals who lack transportation. The CityTeam neighborhood program expanded its mobile operations from 13 to 24 mobile pantries. According to CityTeam, the initiative has served between 11,000 to 17,000 meals monthly through their mobile food pantries.[12]

[11] Second Harvest Silicon Valley. www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/News/News/1570/

[12] City of San José, City of San José Blog. CityTeam In The Neighborhood Helps Vulnerable SJ Communities Access Food and Necessities. (October 16, 2020). www.sanjoseca.gov/Home/Components/News/News/

Additionally, expanded home delivery options have been made available allowing many individuals who are elderly, home- bound, or at increased risk of COVID-19 to remain at home minimizing their exposure. Many of these new methods have also helped to overcome early barriers identified by Envision San José 2040 that food pantries and other food security program centers were located far from shelters and other affordable housing centers where the majority of residents depended on services.

LESSONS LEARNED & GAPS

There have been early lessons gained throughout the COVID-19 response to organize a multi-partner food system that effectively and efficiently provides emergency mass food distribution and services. Food security will remain an issue as the secondary impacts of economic loss such as loss of housing, dual/single-income families leaving jobs to take care of dependents, and difficult decisions to pay housing or put food on the table continue in the response and recovery phases of the pandemic.

Multiple methods were considered to identify distribution sites owned by the City of San José and other partners. These sites required ample square footage, refrigeration, truck/trailer equipment/supplies, and central access to help ensure resources to support the food system.

The majority of outreach to identify those in need of food assistance has been conducted by non-governmental and community-based organizations. At times food counts are not accurate leaving under/overages of meals and no centralized process to identify secondary sites to receive or coordinate redistribution and dispensing.

Once a centralized and refined procedure has been developed, education and training will be required of all partners to ensure efficiency throughout the entirety of the food system. Successful response actions have been supported by a combination of proactive policy development and commitment by the City of San José prior to COVID-19 to improve access to healthful foods through Envision San José 2040.[13]

However, it is critical for city government and local non-profits and CBOs to discuss funding strategy to support food service programs to address long-term mass food assistance needs within the community and strategy to meet the demand. Currently the one-time funding for select partners to provide food service programs for the San José's growing at-risk and vulnerable populations has mitigated a local food crisis and hunger for the thousands of individuals, families, and children served daily.

Partners at all levels of government should be convened as a best practice to identify resources that may be leveraged for cost- sharing and identify feasible solutions to add to the local, state, and national dialogue how to meet the growing need for food assistance as the pandemic continues.

Administrative Preparedness plans should include a mechanism for emergency contracting with non-profits and CBOs to quickly encumber funds for all-hazard incidents by Mutual Aid Agreements (MAAs) or Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs).

Engage local partners providing primary functions of food security programs. This can

[13] Health Trust. "Food for Everyone" healthtrust.org/advocate/food-for-everyone/

also be expanded to critical ancillary functions of food operations including translations, transportation, fleet services, volunteers, warehousing, security, and distribution.

Working with internal contracts and finance, develop a mechanism for rapid allocation and contracting for funds from state, to county, to city in order to ensure local partners can encumber funds quickly to provide critical emergency response operations without interruption.

These early lessons will help to shape the ongoing pandemic response and recovery strategy as the short/long-term economic impacts of COVID-19 continue to be felt by many in the community.

CONCLUSION

As in many cities across the Nation, food security could continue to dramatically grow as COVID-19 continues. While the City of San José has been able to rapidly develop and expand the established food system to meet the increasing demand for assistance, there are still critical barriers to overcome to ensure ongoing funding for organizations that are providing food operations and services for the community.

While challenges still exist, the city's ability to rapidly deploy volunteers, provide culturally appropriate food services, and tailor inclusive strategies to ensure access for individuals with access and functional needs has been a shared success among Whole Community partners.

As other jurisdictions approach food insecurity issues, the City of San José may serve as a model to directly fund non- profits, CBOs, and leverage partnerships with for-profit organizations to establish an expanded local food network that can be used as a larger safety net for those experiencing food insecurity. This infrastructure will be important as the likely impacts of COVID-19 will be long-term and highly depend on relief from the related economic crisis due to COVID-19.

CITY OF SAN JOSE
CAPITAL OF SILICON VALLEY

CONSTANT ASSOCIATES

COVID-19 PRELIMINARY OPERATIONAL ASSESSMENT REPORT (OAR)

SAN JOSÉ OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT