

Your Choice Survey Findings
Morgan Stanley Foundation Child and Family Choice Initiative
December 2022

In 2022, Feeding America selected 30 member food banks to participate in the second year of the Morgan Stanley Child & Family Choice Initiative to increase the amount of choice offered by their food distribution sites or return to offering choice. NORC at the University of Chicago and More Than Food Consulting collaborated with Feeding America to evaluate levels of choice and assess barriers and facilitators to offering choice among the partner program sites and the impact of offering choice on the neighbor experience.

In September and October 2022, we collected feedback from staff and volunteers from food distribution agencies, and from neighbors who visit these agencies. Here is what they shared.

Who Participated:

- 284 agency staff and volunteers from 127 sites completed surveys on pantry characteristics, barriers to offering choice and other information.
- 1869 neighbors from 89 agencies completed a survey to share their experience when going to these sites.

The following findings are based on a preliminary analysis of the data and will be expanded upon in future months.

How might you use these initial findings?

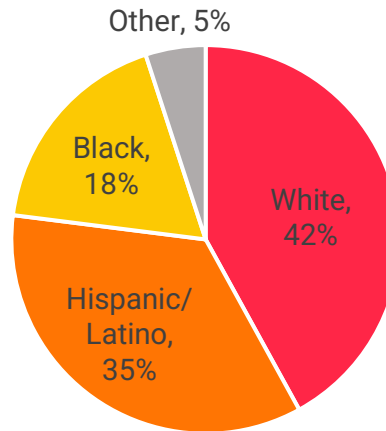
- ❖ Use as a conversation starter between agency/site staff or volunteers and food bank staff. What are needs that are being shared by neighbors and pantries and how can the food bank help meet those needs?
- ❖ You'll notice "reflection" points throughout this document. Consider if these apply to your site or partners and how you might use this feedback to make changes.
- ❖ Consider if there are differences between neighbor experience and what the survey shares. Are there additional ways to hear honest feedback from neighbors? Are there ways to improve the survey?
- ❖ Use the feedback and this [PDF Action Planning Tool.pdf](#) to discuss ways to move along the choice continuum, and develop a plan with measures and clear steps with defined roles or responsibilities.

Feedback from Neighbors:

Neighbors were asked to complete a survey using a QR code or shortened URL.


The neighbor survey included 28 questions about their experience at the distribution site, amount of choice offered, availability of foods, and some basic demographics.


Neighbor Demographics





 **Insights**
into neighbor responses

 **78%**
of participants were women

 **51**
years was the average age of participants

 **53%**
of neighbors said the pantry is designed with **no choice** compared to **22%** that said the pantry offers **full choice**

 **55%**
of participants had a child in the household under the age of 18

 **36%**
of participants had a senior in the household over the age of 65



Reflection: Who are we not hearing from in this survey? What methods, besides structured surveys, might be used to gather feedback regularly?

More Feedback from Neighbors



On average, neighbors visited between 2 and 3 pantries to get food

42%

said they sometimes or always received food they **do not need/want**

41%

said they sometimes or always **give food away**

Over half of respondents had at least one dietary factor in the household. The most common dietary concerns were:



Heart healthy (17%)



Low-carb (13%)



Allergen friendly (14%)*
*includes gluten-free

Ratings on satisfaction with the program were overall high (84% reported being very satisfied with their experience), but 15% of respondents indicated waiting over 1 hour to receive food and almost a third of respondents (32%) reported waiting more than 30 minutes.

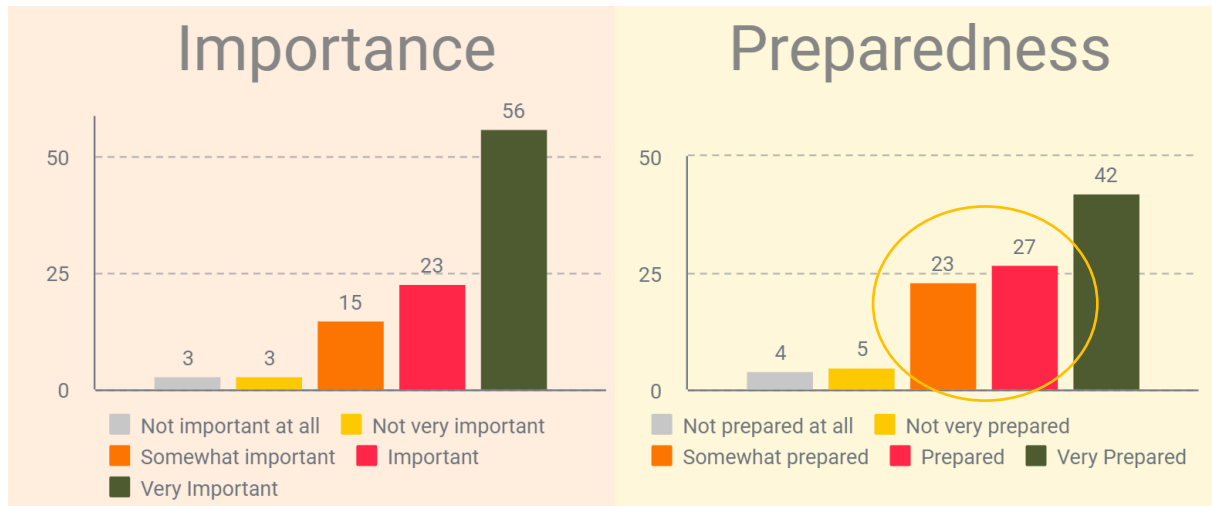


Reflection: How can we change the stigma around receiving charitable food so that people expect a better experience and can provide honest feedback?



Lorena Marroquin, FIND Food Bank's Director of Community Impact, shows recipes to a neighbor from the "Ancestral Recipes: From My Grandmother's Kitchen to Yours" cookbook.

Pantry-Level Takeaways:

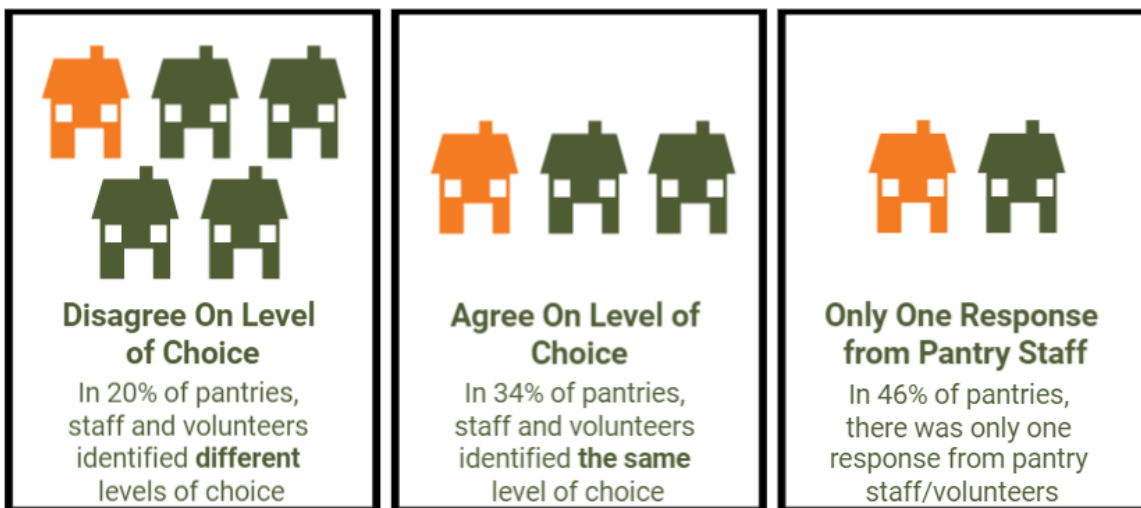


While staff/volunteers felt it was **very important** to offer choice and felt relatively confident about their ability to offer more choice, fewer respondents felt prepared to do so.



Reflection: How can food bank staff help agencies feel more prepared to offer choice?

Level of Choice:



While we would like to see agreement between all staff and volunteers regarding level of choice, this presents several opportunities for continued learning about how people define choice, and to dig deeper with trainings and technical assistance to provide more clarity about choice and to increase choice.

Top Barriers to offering more Choice

Staff and volunteers were asked to rank which of their self-selected barriers were among their top 3 barriers to offering choice. While 48% of respondents said neighbors preferred the convenience of pre-packed bags, only 11% ranked it as a top barrier.

1 We don't have enough volunteers or staff (36%)

2 We don't have enough space to allow neighbors to choose their own food (34%)

3 We want to give neighbors the same items for a fair/equal distribution (30%)

"We pre-bagged all groceries so that each family essentially gets the same. Also, this helps us be more efficient during distribution. [emphasis added]"



Reflection: How can you recruit a few new volunteers to help with distributions? Can you invite a few neighbors to also serve as volunteers?

Comments about Food Waste

- ❖ "We receive food from neighbors who have visited other local pantries that don't offer choices."
- ❖ "We get neighbors bringing food to us from other non-choice pantries."
- ❖ "Many repeat neighbors tell us their shelves and garages are stacked with can goods from not having client choice."

Quality and Type of Food

More than half of staff and volunteers (54%) said that the types of food being distributed could be improved.

"The items we can offer are so limited and are generally not healthy. I think this really prevents people from visiting us."

Almost half of pantry directors (50%) said that non-food items are rarely or never available. Almost one-third (31%) rarely or never offer dairy products and about one-quarter (24%) rarely or never offer fresh fruits and vegetables.**

**These numbers may change slightly when the last pieces of data are collected.

Next Steps

We appreciate all of the food banks, agencies and neighbors who participated in this evaluation. The research team will continue analyzing the data and sharing results with food banks and agencies. A follow-up survey will be conducted in spring of 2023 to measure changes over 6 months.