Food Bank For New York City

Evaluation of the Emergency Food Access Grant for BIPOC Clients

SUBMITTED TO

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Executive Summary

In May 2024, Food Bank For New York City (Food Bank) contracted with Metis Associates to evaluate its emergency food access grant for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) clients. To learn more about the pilot program's success in reaching and impacting target populations, Metis devised an evaluation plan that included a document review, an analysis of its client and non-client survey results, and focus groups with pantry clients and pantry leaders. Clients were individuals who regularly visited the pantry for their food needs, while non-clients were those who had either never visited the pantry or had only come once for food.

Key **survey findings** include:

- BIPOC client survey respondents managed larger households and were more likely to have a child compared to non-clients.
- On average, BIPOC clients needed more money weekly to buy enough food for their household than non-clients.
- Clients and non-clients alike reported having to choose between paying for food or utilities, rent/mortgage, transportation, and educational expenses. Clients were more likely to have to choose between paying for food or medical care than non-clients.
- BIPOC clients were more likely to have to travel more than 30 minutes to find sites for free meals or groceries that were open during convenient times.
- Clients and non-clients faced transportation challenges in accessing food.
- Non-clients were more likely to get their food faster, while BIPOC clients were more likely to get a better variety of food.

The following **focus group** findings underscore the overall positive experiences of BIPOC clients at the pilot food pantries.

- Most BIPOC clients learned about their pantries through word of mouth.
- BIPOC clients were consistently positive about their staff interactions at their pantry site, saying they felt respected.
- BIPOC clients were mainly satisfied with their interactions with other clients while waiting for services, describing a friendly and diverse atmosphere.
- BIPOC clients were also pleased with the quality, quantity, and variety of foods they received at their pantry. They were especially content to receive fresh meats and produce, which allowed them to try new foods and make healthier choices.
- Some BIPOC clients found their pantry lines to be too long, but most found the process to be efficient.

A summary of the key evaluation results and recommendations are provided below.

The evaluation yielded the following **recommendations** for the pilot program pantries and the Food Bank to consider moving forward:

- Continue offering culturally relevant foods, as well as fresh produce, meats, eggs, and dairy products.
- Expand access to holistic services, such as nutrition education and cooking classes and events across all pilot pantry sites
- Improve accessibility and inclusivity to support seniors and those with disabilities
- Ensure language accessibility by revisiting neighborhood regularly data frequently to ensure all materials and information are translated into relevant languages.
- Promote the use of the dignity model or client-centered models in food distribution
- Offer ongoing training on racial equity, cultural competence, and anti-racism for pantry staff and volunteers
- Continue facilitating opportunities for the food pantries to share lessons learned and best practices.
- Assist the participating food pantries with sustainability planning, such as grant writing training or conducting ongoing needs assessments.

Introduction

Founded in 1983, Food Bank For New York City (FBNYC) is an independent nonprofit organization that supports and oversees a network of more than 800 food pantries, soup kitchens, and campus partners in addressing food insecurity and inequity citywide. As the city's largest hunger relief organization, FBNYC has provided nearly 60 million free meals to New Yorkers in need (Food Bank For New York City, 2023). FBNYC uses innovative approaches to address the many complexities of food inequity, including collaborating among local agencies, founding the SNAP Task Force, implementing a Mobile Pantry, and providing financial management training to low-to-moderate-income families.

In May 2024, Food Bank For New York City contracted with Metis Associates to evaluate its emergency food access grant for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) clients. To learn more about the program's success in reaching and impacting target populations, Metis devised an evaluation plan that included a document review, an analysis of its client survey results, and focus groups with pantry clients and pantry leaders. The results of these efforts are detailed below.

Background Information

Food insecurity is a national reality that disproportionately impacts youth, older adults, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). In the United States, one in five of all children (18.5%) are food insecure compared to one in four of all children (23.5%) in New York City (Feeding America, 2024). Among NYC's five boroughs, child food insecurity is most significant in the Bronx (33%) and Brooklyn (25%) (Feeding America, 2024).

As of 2024, nearly 1.3 million New York City residents, or 15 percent of its population, are food insecure. This issue disproportionately affects communities of color, with 25 percent of Black residents and 26 percent of Hispanic residents experiencing food insecurity, compared to only 10 percent of White, non-Hispanic residents[1].

The root causes of food insecurity are complex. For example, while federal assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are available to some, it is estimated that roughly half of people facing hunger are unlikely to qualify, given slowly increasing income eligibility thresholds that do not keep up with inflation (Feeding America, 2024). Even for those who qualify for assistance, accessing stores and programs that provide enough high-quality

[1] Map the Meals Gap (2022). Feeding America. 2024.

food to fulfill an individual's dietary, religious, and cultural food requirements quickly becomes an additional barrier.

In 2022, Feeding America issued a Request for Applications for the Equitable Access Capacity Grant. This grant was designed to empower nonprofit community-based organizations to sustain, deepen, or develop new programs, initiatives, or activities directly impacting communities of color. The grant period, from July 2022 to June 2024, aimed to enable selected awardees to complete their initiatives, including subawards throughout their communities.

FBNYC received the Feeding America Equitable Access Capacity Grant in 2022 to oversee and administer a subgrant awarding process in the NYC borough of Brooklyn. During the first year of the pilot initiative, FBNYC undertook a planning and needs assessment phase involving client and non-client surveys to assess their network capacities and community needs in high-target areas serving BIPOC populations. Using this information, ten Emergency Food Programs from high-need communities in Brooklyn serving a large BIPOC population were invited to apply for this pilot grant program. Priority consideration was given to member agencies that contain BIPOC leadership and serve BIPOC communities.

Five pilot agencies were selected: Northeast Brooklyn Social Services, Church of God of Prophecy, Brooklyn Rescue Mission Urban Harvest Center, MUNA Social Service, Inc., and Christian Cultural Center. Awards totaled $75,000 across the July 2023 to June 2024 grant period, broken down evenly between Operational Support and credit lines with the Food Bank Online Ordering System (OOS). FBNYC managed additional client survey incentives. In addition to participation in survey administration, monthly and final reports, and ongoing meetings with FBNYC, the FBNYC Equitable Access Grant required the pilot program subgrantees to implement at least one of three program expansions to remove barriers to food access:

1. *Expand service hours during the grant period,*
2. *Add at least one evening and/or one weekend day, and/or*
3. *Provide home deliveries or expand current home delivery services.*

The Equitable Access Grant pilot project used a two-pronged approach. First, **Capacity Grants** sought to increase service access by supplementing additional costs to prioritize distribution efforts to BIPOC populations within an agency's membership. These operational subgrant funds are paid for extra staff, volunteer stipends, or storage and distribution costs. Applications and awards for the Capacity Grant took place in May 2023, with a grant period of June 2023 to June 2024. Capacity Grant subgrantees were required to distribute a survey among clients and non-

clients in the summer of 2023 to evaluate community needs and complete a midyear and final report.

Second, **Food Grants** sought to improve the personal experience of BIPOC pantry members by increasing food options aligned with the dietary or cultural preferences of the community. These awards required the same five subgrantees to engage their communities in determining more culturally relevant foods to prioritize food needs based on their member populations' cultural and dietary preferences. Food Grant subgrantees received a line of credit through Food Bank's OOS in the summer of 2023 and were encouraged to use funds on culturally relevant foods for their community. All Food Grant pilot agencies participated in a midyear evaluation and reallocation process in December 2023, followed by an end-of-year final report in June 2024.

Participating Clients

At the start of the grant, Food Bank surveyed food pantry clients and non-clients (e.g., those who attended a single food pantry event) to further understand the clients' backgrounds and food-related needs. Food Bank For New York City used preliminary survey results as baseline data and shared the findings with agencies to help inform the implementation activities associated with the grant. Metis analyzed the data, comparing the results of clients and non-clients. Below are key findings from this comparative analysis. Clients were individuals who regularly visited the pantry for their food needs, while non-clients were those who had either never visited the pantry or had only come once for food.

Demographics/Background Information

Most survey respondents (clients and non-clients) were female (60%) and responded to the surveys in English. Slightly more clients had larger households (e.g., five or more people) than non-clients (32% vs. 28%, respectively). Clients were also more likely to have at least one child in their household (59%) than non-clients (55%).

Food-Related Spending

- On average, clients needed more money weekly to buy enough food for their household than non-clients.
- For both clients and non-clients, utility and rent/mortgage payments negatively impacted available money for food. However, this was generally less true for transportation and educational expenses and even less likely for childcare costs.

- Over two-thirds of clients and non-clients alike were challenged to choose between paying for food or utilities (69%, 67%) or rent/mortgage (67%, 65%) in the past year. However, responding clients were more likely to have chosen between paying for food or medical care within the past year (46%) compared to 36% of non-clients. This may be related to clients being more likely to have children than non-clients.
- Proportionately fewer clients and non-clients had to choose between paying for food, transportation, or educational expenses in the past year - 59% and 61%, respectively). Similar percentages of clients and non-clients had to choose between paying for food or childcare in the past year than non-clients (20% and 17%, respectively).

Food Accessibility

- Clients had more trouble locating convenient and nearby food distribution sites than non-clients. Responding clients were more likely to be challenged in finding a site with free meals/groceries open during convenient times compared to non-clients (30% vs. 25%, respectively). As such, proportionately more clients traveled over 30 minutes to a site for free meals or groceries than non-clients (28% vs. 22%, respectively).
- Roughly one-third of clients (36%) and non-clients (34%) had transportation-related challenges accessing meals or groceries.
- When at the sites, proportionately more non-clients are getting their food faster (30 minutes or less) than clients (61% vs. 54%, respectively). In contrast, clients (63%) were more likely to get the variety of foods they need or want than non-clients (54%).
- Food distribution staff are generally judgment-free. Among both groups, small percentages of clients and non-clients felt judged by site staff, but this was more prevalent among clients (9%) than non-clients (3%).

Perceptions of Services

In June 2024, Metis conducted focus groups or individual interviews with clients from four participating Brooklyn-based food pantries that received the Emergency Food Access for BIPOC Clients Grant. Table 1 below summarizes the number of focus group participants by pantry site.

Table 1. **Evaluation Focus Group Participation**

Pantry Site	Number of Participants
MUNA Mobile	2
Christian Cultural Center	3
Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development	9
Brooklyn Rescue Mission UHC	5

A focus group was also conducted in June 2024 with agency leaders from these four food pantries. For both client and leadership focus groups and interviews, the questions asked for them to share background information on pantry clients, information about pantry outreach and recruitment, details about the pantry and its process, barriers they face to accessing the pantry, and the value and outcomes they experience as clients. As discussed in this section, many themes emerged across all sites, while others were particular to specific pantries and their communities (see Appendix).

Background Information

Focus group participants had a range of household sizes, from one to eight, with most having multiple individuals in their household, consistent with the client survey findings. Also, like the survey findings, the site leaders described their pantry clients as primarily female families and older adults from various religious, racial, and ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Muslims from South Asia).

Pantry leaders described many different outreach and recruitment strategies, including word of mouth, social media posts, website features, partner newsletters/communications, the Plentiful app, the 311 system, the FeedNYC platform, and interest generated by outdoor services. Most clients (N=10) learned about their respective pantries by word of mouth, including through recommendations from friends, family members, senior centers, or churches. Four others mentioned that they noticed the pantry while walking past it, with two noting that the long line outside especially piqued their interest. Two additional clients learned about their pantry by using the Plentiful app. When asked how long they've been coming to their respective pantry, most were newer clients, having joined in the last year or two, while a few have been coming as far back as 2018.

After learning about the pantry, most began visiting it because they needed extra support in light of rising household expenses, especially after the pandemic. Those with jobs noted that their income wasn't enough to make ends meet, while others described health issues or the need to care for family members as reasons they had to stop working. Unsurprisingly, clients expressed that they have had to choose between buying food and paying for other household or medical expenses. Clients recalled times when they had to spend less on food to pay rent or other bills. For many, the food budget was whatever was left after all other expenses were paid—meaning some only ate staples like white rice while having to forego buying fresh produce or meats. Pantries help them save money on food and balance their household budgets, especially towards the end of the month or pay period when cash is running low. One client noted, "If I'm lacking food, I know I can go once a month and get food because they're going to carry me on to my next payday." Further, some clients described allocating their salaries or social security benefits to pay bills and utilities, with the pantry helping to eliminate or reduce food costs.

"Something always seems to go wrong in the house, I don't know why, and you have to take money from here to pay for this, to pay for that. Going to the Christian Culture Center that month helps if something like that happens. We don't have to worry about going to the grocery store to buy that food. We can use that money to patch maybe the chimney that started to leak or whatever went wrong in the house."

-Christian Cultural Center Client

While 11 clients also reported getting SNAP benefits, some emphasized their limitations. A few participants noted the small amount of money they receive—around $50 per month, according to two clients—requiring them to find additional support in food pantries. As one Brooklyn Rescue Mission client expressed, individuals often have to carefully braid together income and resources, including their wages, SNAP, Medicaid, and food pantry resources, to make it all work: "If you budget right, for example, you go to the pantry and they give you meat or whatever…you get your SNAP, and you make it work. You get the stuff you need or your favorite and just put it together. It works out. It does."

"Ever since the pandemic in 2020, I have been utilizing pantries…I know that if I don't collect pantry this week for the next two weeks, I'm going to be tight with my budget, because that [food] money is going to come out of my pocket… I can save a whole lot of money, over $200 a month, if I constantly go every week to different pantries to collect food."

-Brooklyn Rescue Mission Client

Value Added

When asked about the Food Bank grant's most significant successes so far, the four responding leaders described many benefits or added value, including:

- *Expanded pantry services to new locations* – "The grant definitely increased the access to our programs." "This has been a very important piece of funding for us to increase access in a time of great need. [I'm]very grateful for that."
- *Increased client access to their food pantries* – "It helped us serve more people monthly through both the mobile pantry and the extra distribution."
- *Obtained client feedback from the grant surveys* – "It was a great learning experience, and it helped us connect to some of our clients and get some valuable feedback for our operations."
- *Helped the pantries better understand their client's specific needs* – "Through the client survey, I learned a lot about my clients and their needs. I think that was a learning moment for me."
- *Supported the "experimentation" the pantries needed to improve operations* – "[The grant] gave us a way to figure out how to reach the seniors that we were trying so hard to connect with. We thought we needed more days, hours, and nights, but people wanted to choose. We saw this as an opportunity to offer the best of both worlds."
- *Helped share best practices among the participating pantries, such as using pantry bags* – "I want to thank [Food Bank]. [The grant] was beneficial, and I learned a lot from the work of this grant."

Clients across sites elaborated on what they liked most about their respective pantries. The strongest recurring theme across sites is the value clients place upon their positive interactions with pantry staff. For many, this kept them returning to the pantry instead of finding alternative sites or resources. Clients described the staff and volunteers at their respective pantries as "polite," "respectful," "professional," and "friendly." Respect was fundamental, with many clients expressing the importance of not being made to feel "less than a person" or "like you're begging for something." Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development clients contrasted their experiences there with other pantries they've attended in the past—even those closer to their homes—that they won't return

"The people here are nice and very helpful. They have respect for the client, not just throwing food in your face like other places."

-Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Client

to because the staff were "nasty" and made them feel "so embarrassed." In contrast, clients across the participating pantries found respect in face-to-face interactions and appreciation of clear, two-way communications. For example, clients of the Brooklyn Rescue Mission expressed gratitude when the pantry sent them emails about closures, so "you don't have to be coming up here for nothing."

Across all pantries, clients also valued the quality, quantity, and variety of foods they received from their respective pantries. Clients of MUNA Mobile, for example, were pleased that they received a good variety of vegetables, fruits, and high-quality meats. Brooklyn Rescue Mission clients appreciated the freshness of the foods they receive, describing them as "fresh from the farm" and "looking better than the supermarket food." Others applauded the variety of meats that they carry. The variety and quality were also important to Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development clients, who enjoy the produce, cheeses, loaves of bread, and meats they receive; as one client noted, "You always get the five basic food groups whenever you come." Those attending the Christian Cultural Center also appreciated receiving bags containing "each food" group, with various fresh and canned goods. Almost all clients agreed that the fresh produce and meats were their favorite pantry items, preferring them over canned foods.

"I come here because I like the way they mixed the food together…it makes me choose the right thing to eat. Not just to eat and stuff my stomach, because I'm diabetic now and I need to eat the right thing, [so I don't] get sicker."

-Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Client

Several clients made the connection between fresh foods and their health and nutrition. This was especially true at Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development, where several clients attended nutrition classes. These classes and the healthy pantry foods provided empowered clients to make smarter choices. One client recalled that the nutrition program "was very helpful in knowing how to pick foods and read labels…Helping you when grocery shopping and being aware of what you're purchasing." Another explained that the nutrition class helped attendees "find that some of us were not eating properly. We were able to learn that this pantry was very helpful in us being able to sustain our five basic food groups because I was one of the people who realized, 'Oh my god, I'm only eating three things out of the basic food groups that I need potentially to help me be healthy.'"

Others learned to cook and even love vegetables they had never tried: "Some food, a lot of food, I don't know how to put them together, or I never ate some vegetables. I learned how to eat them in the right way…and [be] healthier…I attended two classes here, and it was great just making a salad." Another shared, "I didn't know cauliflower was that good. It was the first time I ate cauliflower, and I loved it." Christian Cultural Center also introduced its clients to new foods, with one participant explaining they received "different fruits that I didn't know. And when I asked them what type of food it is, they told me I could go online and find something to do with it—it's great."

Mostly, clients across pantries felt they received culturally relevant foods—or at least they had enough choice to select familiar foods. For example, when asked if the pantry provides culturally appropriate foods, a Brooklyn Rescue Mission client responded, "Actually yes, because, as we said, you can pick what you choose and don't accept what you won't want." A client from the Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development pantry felt the foods they receive are culturally relevant because "it's very diverse. They give you some of everything. It just depends on how you prepare it." Another client added, "Right, because you can have rice and put some curry in it." Others named specific foods, like a Christian Cultural Center client who mentioned plantains when asked if she receives culturally relevant foods. Another Christian Cultural Center client had a different perspective when asked the same question, responding, "No. Maybe that's a good thing because we eat some bad food...It's healthier to eat something different."

"I love the different fruits. They gave out papaya, which is something I never had or purchased. They gave out eggplant and zucchini. I actually went online and learned how to cook a meal with zucchini. It was the best with spaghetti!"

-Christian Cultural Center Client

However, MUNA Mobile clients noted unfamiliarity with some foods they received. One participant explained, "I'm Arab, so beans are part of my culture, but not the beans I get from Muna Mobile. I eat fava beans and other beans, but I got, for example, black beans from Muna Mobile. I'm going to figure out what I'm supposed to do with these. I also got a type of vegetable that I went to two or three of my roommates to ask what it was because I assumed people at Muna Mobile were Indians, Pakistani from Bangladesh, or something like that. I went to my Indian roommates and asked them what that was… I can use the beans and the arugula, but it's not necessarily what I have in my culture, but it's similar." Still, this client understood the difficulties of finding culturally relevant foods, going on to note, "This food is not very accessible here in America, so [the pantry] had to get the things that are more accessible, more popular, and maybe also affordable because you get a lot of quantities."

Finally, several clients across all focus groups liked that their respective pantry was convenient regarding distance and paperwork requirements. Living just a few blocks from their pantry was a significant draw, allowing people to run errands, pick up their food bags—especially if they were prepackaged and ready to go—and return home. Some clients, such as one from Brooklyn Rescue Mission, appreciated that "you don't have to do a long application process with them. Just provide your ID and they take some information, address, and maybe household count." Another client from MUNA Mobile liked "that it's easy," sharing that "you don't have to be residing in a specific borough, you don't have to provide documents. You come, you take a number, and it's fine."

The Pantry Experience

Beyond the positive experiences they highlighted, as shared in the previous section, clients from each pantry described their experiences getting food from their respective pantry, with attention to waiting times, efficiency, and interactions with other clients. While long lines were common across all sites, for the most part, clients felt that their pantry was efficient at serving everyone quickly. While waiting in line, many were positive about their interactions with other clients, which they described as friendly and a good way to interact with diverse populations. Some noted the need for vigilance to prevent line cutting, which sometimes made clients feel stressed. A more detailed description of clients' experiences at each pantry can be found in Appendix B.

Implementation Challenges

From the perspectives of the pantry leaders interviewed, the most prevalent grant implementation challenges included:

- *Insufficient resources (financial and food) to address the depth of the overall need* – "You want to serve as many people as you can, but then you only have that many people on your team that you can provide pay to, and then only have that amount of money for food and other supplies needed."
- *Lack of funding to incentivize volunteers (e.g., stipends)*
- *Volunteer burnout* – "We have all these volunteers, but it is taxing on the body. The same group of volunteers always show up to do this work."
- *Language barriers* – "I have a huge community of Asian people. We communicate with them barely. We have an Asian volunteer [to translate], and she's often overwhelmed." "It's frustrating to see Spanish-speaking people trying to communicate in Spanish to people who don't understand their Spanish. It's not as simple as finding a volunteer who

speaks their language." "For me, the language barrier is Russian. No one on my team speaks Russian."

- *Shifting demographics* – "We start out serving a community and then right up in the middle of the night that community demographic changes and the desires of those food change. It's a huge challenge always to keep the pulse on the community."
- *Client education on the distinction between soup kitchens and food pantries* – "The system of food pantry has some broken parts that we need to be able to communicate what we are here for and what we are not here for, and what benefits they can get from us, and what they can't get from us… I think clients need some clarity in what services they get where, which would make everybody's job a little simpler in our place."

"I'm able to stand in the line. But I remember the total time last time I was there was almost three hours. I was trying to get a group of the attendees to join me to find a person that I could speak [to] about seniors. You should have a time designated for only seniors because the waiting time is too long."

-Brooklyn Rescue Mission Client

Suggestions for Improvement

Though generally satisfied with their experiences, clients across pantries shared some suggestions for improvement. Several clients of Brooklyn Rescue Mission noted that the pantry closes earlier in the day than most other pantries, making it harder to get there on workdays. In addition to seeing longer hours, some also would like to know if the pantry is open more than two days per week, which they suggested might also cut down on the waiting time. Regarding the food itself, the main suggestion across pantries was to distribute fresh foods, as opposed to canned, as much as possible, including more fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats. Multiple clients mentioned eggs and milk as foods they especially want to see, but that is rarely given.

Across pantries, clients generally agreed that their respective pantries welcome and serve individuals of diverse races, ethnicities, nationalities, and ages. Still, they had suggestions for improving accessibility. One client from the Christian Cultural Center shared, "The neighborhood is diverse, so language accessibility for directions, rules, regulations, product names, etc., will improve accessibility and convenience for others."

Most suggestions related to accessibility, however, concerned better accommodating seniors and those with health problems. Most focus groups took place during a heat wave in June 2024, so dealing with extreme weather conditions was top of mind. Standing in line, outside, for hours can be risky for older adults or ill clients. Some clients suggested providing chairs, cold water, or sprinklers to keep people cool and comfortable. A Brooklyn Rescue Mission Client suggested

having designated hours for seniors or honor reservations to serve people on a clear schedule. A client and volunteer at the Christian Cultural Center had a similar idea, recommending that the pantry honor a schedule for serving different individuals or groups. This client also pleaded for flexibility when serving time begins, noting, "Not just for the hot weather but also for the cold weather…I know [the pantry] has its set time and hour. But sometimes, we should be able to bend the rules a little if we see the people out there for a long time. Because no one comes and stands on the line by seven o'clock if they don't need food."

Relatedly, one client from Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development noted that some clients could use help with transportation, suggesting, "Metro cards would help for some people who travel far…Or even getting back with the groceries because sometimes people have bags and they don't have carts, so sometimes just getting back up the block may be a little struggle. Even grabbing your items and getting a bus ride up the block to your home would help."

"While I was [at the pantry], I saw people in walkers and wheelchairs. I saw people who were having hearing issues… I saw migrants like me on the line. I saw Asian people there. Seniors were there. The pantry is not serving a specific racial group, it's serving everyone that's willing to come and participate."

-Brooklyn Rescue Mission Client

Other suggestions included providing bags in case people forget to bring theirs and sharing information on how to reach the pantries when needed, as one client of MUNA Mobile noted that no one answers when she calls their phone number. A client from the Christian Cultural Center also suggested it may be helpful to have someone monitoring the line to prevent people from cutting.

Finally, when the food pantry leaders were asked how they might spend an additional $3,000 from FBNYC to support grant implementation further, they mostly agreed they would purchase food. One food pantry leader said they would also use the funding for volunteer stipends, while another said they would pay their staff to support extended pantry hours.

Conclusions and Recommendations

FBNYC's Emergency Food Access for BIPOC clients grant has provided opportunities for participating pantries to expand the numbers they can serve. Client focus groups revealed that clients were generally satisfied with their food pantry experiences. The respectful and friendly staff, paired with the good quality and variety of foods, made them want to continue visiting their respective pantries. Clients are savvy budget managers, balancing their income, federal subsidies, and food pantry items to make ends meet from month to month. Food pantries

provide much-needed sustenance while offering nutritious, fresh foods that would otherwise be difficult for clients to access. While they had some suggestions as to how to improve accessibility, most participants found the pantries to be places that are welcoming to diverse populations.

Recommendations for the Pantries

- *Culturally Relevant Food Options*. The pilot pantries should continue offering the essential practice of stocking food that reflects the cultural preferences of the BIPOC communities they serve. For example, incorporating traditional foods like rice, beans, plantains, and specific spices makes the food services more meaningful and valuable to clients. They might also consider conducting surveys or focus groups to learn about the food preferences and needs of the different cultural groups in their communities.

- *Fresh Food Options*. To better accommodate clients' preferences and encourage healthier eating choices, it is recommended that the pilot food pantries continue offering fresh produce, meats, eggs, and dairy products whenever possible instead of canned or prepackaged foods. Clients also appreciate choosing which fresh proteins and produce they can take.

- *Holistic Services.* Expand access to nutrition classes and events across all pilot pantry sites to empower clients to use the pantry's food offerings in ways that resonate with BIPOC clients. Clients who have had access to such classes were highly optimistic about how the information they gained has empowered them to make smarter food choices. Further, including cooking lessons would be an effective way to teach clients how to cook unfamiliar foods and incorporate healthier ingredients into their daily meals.

- *Focus on Equitable Distribution*. The pilot pantries should address disparities in food access by ensuring that BIPIC communities receive equitable resources, making efforts to address barriers. For example, the pantries can undertake efforts to accommodate seniors and those with disabilities better while waiting in line for food. Examine the feasibility of providing water and chairs to such clients while waiting in line, especially during extreme weather conditions. To further accommodate these populations, consider creating special hours for seniors to reduce waiting time in line. For example, opening an hour or two earlier to serve seniors and disabled clients would result in shorter lines and less time for them to stand outside in potentially severe weather.

- *Language Accessibility*. The pilot pantries should continue to provide materials in the preferred languages of their clients. To this end, it is recommended that they revisit neighborhood demographic data regularly to ensure all materials and information are

translated into relevant languages. The demographics of many neighborhoods across New York City are changing rapidly due to migration and changes in the cost of living. Websites such as NYC Planning's Population Fact Finder (www.popfactfinder.planning.nyc.gov), which uses American Community Survey Data, and EquityNYC (www.equity.nyc.gov) allow users to explore numerous demographic categories at the neighborhood level. Pantries can also do informal outreach with staff and clients to gain more timely information about shifting neighborhood demographics.

Recommendations for the Food Bank

- *Client-Centered Approaches*. Consider promoting the dignity or "client choice" model among the next round of BIPOC grantees. These models would allow clients to choose their preferred foods rather than receiving pre-packed bags. Research has shown that these approaches give the people served a sense of dignity and control, limit food waste, and allow clients to tailor the help they receive to be the best possible fit for their situation.

- *Communities of Practice*. Continue facilitating opportunities for the food pantries to share lessons learned and best practices. The pilot pantries valued sharing information and providing mutual support to one another. With the demand for food in New York City rising, this collaboration around common interests will be critical to their individual success with their BIPOC clients.

- *Equity Training*. Offer the next round of Food Bank-supported pantries ongoing training on racial equity, cultural competence, and anti-racism for their staff and volunteers. This will help create an inclusive environment where BIPOC clients feel respected and supported. Food pantries could also be encouraged to assess and adjust their policies to eliminate barriers that may disproportionately affect their BIPOC clients, such as unnecessary documentation or stigmatizing processes.

- *Sustainability Planning*. Assist participating food pantries with sustainability planning, such as offering grant writing training or conducting ongoing needs assessments, so they can continue implementing BIPOC client-centered strategies.

Appendices

Appendix A Site and Community Descriptions

Brooklyn Rescue Mission Urban Harvest Center (BRM_UHC), located in Bedford-Stuyvesant, began a new scheduling initiative using Plentiful software to increase food distribution access for pantry clients in response to their schedules and divergent needs. In October 2023, BRM-UHC added supplemental hours to their monthly distribution schedule using the Plentiful app. The nature of its grant implementation allowed for continuous improvement in response to pantry client member needs. For example, they were able to serve 300 families in December 2023 through this new scheduling initiative, but that number was reduced to 45 pantry bags in January 2024 to 180 individuals. In February, BRM-UHC revised its scheduling to account for the feedback from working families, which they further amended in March based on member feedback on distribution wait times. Ultimately, they saw an increase to 397 individuals served in March 2024. Regarding challenges, Brooklyn Rescue Mission indicated that Spanish-speaking clients care for yellow shredded or sliced cheese, preferring white crumbly cheese and that having culturally relevant food is important for all of their clients.

Bedford-Stuyvesant (Bed-Stuy) has a longstanding history as a significant cultural center for Brooklyn's African American population. In recent years, the population has grown more diverse, with Spanish being one of the top languages spoken at home other than English (40%) and three-quarters of residents (75%) having Hispanic or Latino ancestry by the 2022 U.S. Census (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024). Now home to 166,380 people (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024), the neighborhood has experienced high levels of gentrification in recent decades. While the median income is $83,216, a staggering one in four residents (24.8%) and one in three children (33.6%) live in poverty, which is evidence of the overwhelming wealth disparity (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024). Because the area is heavily gentrified, grocery options become more expensive. They may not accept federal assistance programs like SNAP, creating barriers to food access for the neighborhood's most vulnerable residents.

Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development, located in Bushwick, used funds to implement a new Mobile Pantry program that visits various locations in the Crown Heights area starting in August 2023. The mobile pantry program is distributed every month to each location. Many of their clients do not eat pork for religious or cultural reasons, which requires adjusting the food supply to stock more chicken. However, a chicken shortage has created a barrier to food access and cultural relevance of food options for their members, leading NEBK to find other methods of procuring chicken, offsetting their food costs significantly. Due to these efforts, the program

has seen an increase from 60 families at the start of their initiative to nearly 150 households representing over 1,500 individuals in the spring of 2024.

Bushwick has experienced similar themes of gentrification in recent years. Bushwick, like Bed-Stuy, has a rich cultural history for Brooklyn's African American population. Known for its vibrant art and musical scene, Bushwick has recently seen significant changes in its neighborhood demographics, rental prices, and grocery and food options. The neighborhood is currently home to 94,423 residents, one in four of whom (25.2%) are under the age of 25 (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024). While the median income is $81,709 a year, one in five residents (19.9%) and children (20.7%) live in poverty, demonstrating the wealth disparity between those below the poverty threshold and those who are not (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024).

Church of God of Prophecy distributes food biweekly to resident members in East New York. Starting in September 2023, the Church of God of Prophecy used Equitable Access funds to increase home deliveries to once per week, focusing on reducing barriers for homebound seniors and disabled populations. Using grant funds, the Church of God of Prophecy has increased deliveries from 25 to 75 per week, providing 300 home deliveries per month with an increased variety of meat and vegetables in every serving.

The program has also used funds to expand partnerships, increasing home deliveries to reach more members. For example, in December 2024, the program secured a new partner, allowing them to increase the number of home deliveries from 75 to 99 a week for 396 home deliveries. By February 2024, the program served over 115 households and had partnered with HelpUSA to provide food to a local shelter of 24 single adults. Due to the demand, the program has also provided emergency distributions. One challenge for the Church of God Prophecy food pantry has been maintaining a steady volunteer force and food supply to keep up with expanding services. Nonetheless, by the spring of 2024, the program began to see an increase in teenage volunteers ages 12 to 18, demonstrating the community-level commitment to increasing food access for East New York residents with disabilities and seniors.

MUNA Social Service, Inc., based in East New York, runs a Mobile Food Pantry at Ozone Park. MUNA used grant funds starting in July 2023 to expand its mobile pantry program to include an additional distribution day once a month to serve more working-class families. As of February 2024, the program served roughly 300 families and around 1.200 individuals. Client feedback has indicated that they continue attending Saturday distribution to offset their monthly grocery budget and find the distribution time more convenient for communities. To ensure that the program offers the most culturally appropriate dietary options, MUNA has received feedback

from the predominantly Asian/Southeast Asian (95%) community that they should stock more halal protein and grains. One barrier facing the client experience continues to be distribution wait times, as evidenced by clients who arrive hours early to hold their place in line. MUNA hopes to use this feedback to increase its distribution from once to twice a month.

Christian Cultural Center, which operates out of several locations in East New York, has used grant funds to increase the number of home deliveries they provide to homebound seniors and their disabled member population, to increase from 25 deliveries a week to an additional 50 deliveries a week or 200 deliveries to new clients in the community across the life of the grant. With grant funds, Christian Cultural Center hired an additional staff member to support produce pickups from local farmer's markets, conduct additional home deliveries, and facilitate outreach at community events. They began implementation in October 2023, completing 189 home deliveries by late November 2023 and maintaining an average of 100 home deliveries monthly. A significant challenge is sufficiently stocking culturally relevant foods (e.g., Oaxaca cheese) and other pantry staples for their Central and South American members.

With a total population of 200,828, one-third (33.6%) of **East New York** residents are children or young adults under the age of 25 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). The neighborhood is home to almost an almost entirely BIPOC population, with Black residents making up the majority (49%), followed closely by Hispanic or Latino (40%), and then Asian or Pacific Islander (5%) (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024). While one in four residents (24.6%) in this Brooklyn neighborhood are in poverty, the same is true for more than one in three children (34.1%) (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024). Families have a median income of $51,251 compared to the estimated $159,188 required to raise a family with only two children in New York City in 2024 (Living Wage Institute, 2024). Most of the New York City cost of living can be attributed to recently skyrocketing rent prices, so it is no surprise that roughly one in three households (29.9%) is considered severely rent burdened and less than half (47.5%) of East New York residents enroll in post-secondary education (Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, 2024).

Appendix B The Pantry Experience

Clients from each pantry described their experiences getting food from the pantry, with attention to waiting times, efficiency, and interactions with other clients.

Brooklyn Rescue Mission

All participating clients from the Brooklyn Rescue Mission described the pantry line as long and having gotten longer more recently, which they attributed to spreading the word and growing immigrant populations in the neighborhood. Multiple clients reported spending up to three hours in line for food, with one noting that people start standing in line at 7:00 a.m. to be there for the 10:00 a.m. opening. While one client felt the process was efficient, a few others felt there was room for improvement. One noted that they'd used the app (presumably Plentiful) to make a reservation but weren't served at the selected time. Others were confused by the pantry's process, which involves two lines: "I find it tedious. If you get a person a number ticket, another table should be able to serve that ticket number because that person was already standing on the line. But the system needs to be upgraded or changed slightly to speed up the process… You stand in line for an hour and a half; then, you have to wait another hour and a half for them to call your number. Counterproductive. What's the purpose of being in those two lines?"

> ***"When [clients from other boroughs] come to Brooklyn, they go to all the pantries that they know of in Brooklyn and still come here and take a spot of somebody who only goes to this pantry that lives in Brooklyn."***
>
> ***-Brooklyn Rescue Mission Client***

Many pointed out additional challenges related to the long wait that hampered accessibility for seniors and those with health problems, especially on hot days. As one client explained, "During the heat hours, it just sometimes can be unbearable, especially for seniors, for those who are sick. That has to be my only turnoff, the only thing that deterred me from going every week. Because if it's too hot, I don't want to go. I'm afraid I'm going to get asthma attacks."

Two Brooklyn Rescue Mission Clients were generally positive about their experiences interacting with other clients in line. One noted, "It was fine. We were chatting. We make the best of it. 'How long you've been coming?' and 'What do they usually give out? How long is the wait?' Things like that we talk about [with] each other." This client explained how some people hold spots on the line for their friends, which can sometimes lead to accusations of skipping the line: "Everybody's alert, hyper-vigilant, making sure that you're not skipping anybody on the line." Another noted that many people in line know each other from the senior center, making the experience more enjoyable.

However, two other participants felt that many clients are taking advantage of the pantry, having also visited many other pantries outside the borough and taking from those who can only access the Brooklyn Rescue Mission. They described people arriving at the pantry in "expensive cars," making it harder for those needing food to access it.

While one client said they have sometimes stopped going to the pantry because of the line, others were undeterred. Four additional clients noted that if they stopped going to the pantry, their work schedules conflicted with the pantry hours.

Christian Cultural Center

The two Christian Cultural Center clients interviewed (a third provided written responses to questions) had differing opinions about the experience of waiting in line for the pantry. While one described the line as "not that long," "moving fast," and "very efficient," the other noted the line could be long, depending on when you arrive, and was especially trying on hot days: "The line timing could depend on what time you get there…The food pantry opens up around 9:30. By then, the line is probably around the corner. You could be on the line for a while…It's good on the days when the weather is cool and comfy. But it could be dangerous when it's very hot because you're standing in that heat for a long time." This client noted that people start lining up around 7:00 a.m.

Christian Cultural Center clients were generally positive about the interactions they have with others in line, describing the line as "welcoming" and "jovial" with people laughing and "fraternizing with one another" to pass the time. Another agreed that the line was generally a friendly and diverse place while noting it could also get stressful at times: "What's good about this culture is that there's a variety of all nationalities that come. So, you get to meet people from different places. Sometimes, it is friendly; people talk to each other, and you learn about different cultures. And then sometimes people just stress. I don't know if it's the weather or the situation; people come to the line and don't want to be bothered. Or sometimes you get people just to come and get in front of you…But overall, the community, the people are amicable on the line."

Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development

Clients at Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development were generally positive about their experience waiting in line at the pantry, describing it as fast-moving and "very efficient." The food is already bagged for them, which they agreed helps move things along while still providing space for them to make their food selections. As one client explained, "They are organized in a good way. They give you a bag of vegetables, somebody has the meat and chicken, and they ask you which one you prefer. And that's a good thing because they give you the stuff, you pick it up, and you leave. You don't have to be there for a long time." Participants were also positive about the staff's role in making the food collection process go smoothly, balancing efficiency with attentive and friendly staff.

"They're very efficient. They really try to help us not stand there. They had about 300 people for Thanksgiving…. And try to make you feel comfortable, even like for Thanksgiving. It was a long line, but they would come and check in and tell you, 'Listen, we're moving, it's moving.'"

-Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Client

Clients were also pleased with the pantry's home delivery option, with one just learning about them after a participating volunteer described the service. The volunteer explained that they have a form that clients can complete to share their address and phone number. The pantry then contacts individuals with mobility challenges and those at a local senior home to arrange to deliver the same bags of food distributed in person. Multiple clients were glad to know about the option; as one expressed, "I come by bus, I'm 84, but thank God I can still walk, and I come by bus with my little pushcart… I'm thankful right now. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow or the next day, but it's nice to know that they do make a delivery."

MUNA Mobile

The two participating MUNA clients did not have much to say about their experiences waiting for food. However, one participant noted, "The wait time is very organized. I like it. It's not bad." They were also optimistic about the staff and community, describing them as "really nice."