

FOOD INSECURITY REPORT

A look at the food system on Nantucket, starting with Food Insecurity.



20
22



made possible by



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Process First was tasked with researching the food insecurity landscape on Nantucket, focusing specifically on social service organizations and the food insecure community they aim to support. During informal research (2 years) and focused formal research (2 months), insights gained point to a handful of solvable problems that, if addressed, could drastically impact the health of the community, resilience of the economy, and efficiency of the food system.

With community support, there is a unique opportunity to build a food secure Nantucket by capitalizing on aligned social services and food system stakeholders.

DEFINITION

FOOD INSECURITY: the disruption of food intake or eating patterns because of lack of money and other resources

Key insights that will be expanded upon in this report include:

URGENCY AND NEED

- Food insecurity impacts thousands of Nantucket residents. Rising cost of living and Covid-related supply chain challenges impact reliable access to healthy food for many.
- Our research shows a lack of clear data to measure food insecurity on the Island.
- Our research was conducted to understand - not measure - food insecurity; however our findings indicate that rates are higher than many understand.

GAPS

Our research showed that food insecurity is impacted by the following: missing programs and services, eligibility gaps and barriers to enrollment, limited access to quality food, and challenges in the coordination of service.

CONCLUSION

- Nantucket food insecurity levels are greater than the current program capacity.
- The rate and characteristics of food insecurity are inadequately measured.
- Addressing food insecurity is critical to support a healthy community and grow the year round economy.
- Filling gaps will improve food security outcomes, and coordinating services will improve efficiency.

A FOOD SECURE NANTUCKET NEEDS

- Better access for customers to the programs they need
- Identification and filling of program gaps
- Systematic coordination of services
- Clear quantification of food demand
- Effective use of food supply

REPORT OBJECTIVE

ReMain Nantucket is interested in learning about inefficiency and inequality problems in the food system, and understanding food use on Nantucket. Process First was hired to research food security challenges and to understand and answer the high-level question of what the Island needs.

This report summarizes the food security research performed with the food insecure population as well as the social service organizations that currently exist to help that population.

PROJECT GOALS

- Research social service Enrollment Partners (EP) and Food Security Partners (FSP)
- Identify the needs of food insecure individuals in relation to food, and pinpoint where those needs are unmet on the Island
- Identify the main goals of food insecure individuals
- Uncover the barriers to enrollment and participation in a food security program
- Discover the motivations for participating in a food security program
- Understand the views and attitudes toward food security programs by the people who participate in them

PROCESS & METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH OF SOCIAL SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Informal conversations with Referral Partners and Food Security Partners on Nantucket occurred from Fall 2019 to Winter 2021. During that time the Process First had conversations with ~40 organizations.

From November 2021 to January 2022, food security program research was run via structured and informal interviews with representatives from organizations including: Health Imperatives, Family Resource Center, Fairwinds, Community School, Nantucket Public Schools, A Safe Place, Our House, and Nantucket Food Pantry.

This research was used to understand specific operational information from the social service organizations to see if and how the partners could participate in a coordinated food security program. The other aim of these interviews was to understand the services provided by each program, and to comprehensively map their roles within the food security landscape.

RESEARCH OF FOOD INSECURE INDIVIDUALS

Preparation for formal generative research interviews with individuals experiencing food insecurity began in December 2021 with the intentional recruitment of 10 such individuals, including English, Spanish, and Portuguese speakers. During that time, the team's research experts designed an interview guide for 60-minute interviews with a focus on implementing best practices in researching vulnerable populations.

Generative research consisting of one-on-one interviews were conducted over the course of 2 weeks in January 2022, and were subsequently transcribed. Relevant, poignant, and repeated qualitative data points were carefully selected and formed the informational basis of a half-day synthesis session. During that session a multi-disciplinary team of 6 collaborated in highlighting the most salient stories and distilling them into the key findings detailed in the FINDINGS section.

INFORMING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A REFERRAL TOOL

This body of research coincided with the development of a referral tool by Process First. This tool coordinates organizations that have a role in food security. Its need was determined at a meeting of Nantucket food system and food security stakeholders hosted by Process First and its partners at the Dreamland Theater on November 17, 2021. The referral tool fulfills key needs such as:

- Providing a single point of entry for food security programs
- Identifying gaps in food security programs while protecting customer privacy
- Simplifying the enrollment process and removing redundancy for food security partners
- Coordinating both the programs and the way customers receive services

FINDINGS

Findings from the research are first summarized by organization type.

We initially provide information about Food Security Partners, then go into detail about the Referral Partners, whose participation is required to build a food secure community.

Finally we compile our findings from the food insecure community, including the larger system issues they are affected by.

TERMS USED

- **CUSTOMER:** Individuals experiencing food insecurity. This term reflects the relationship between individuals and their food that is most dignified, and does not stigmatize the way in which customers feed themselves or their families.
- **FOOD SECURITY PARTNER:** An organization that directly provides food security programs
- **REFERRAL PARTNER:** An organization that works with food insecure individuals and makes referrals to food security programs on their behalf


FINDINGS FROM FOOD SECURITY PARTNERS

Nantucket's food security programs range from free groceries to delivered meals, with some gaps in service including medically tailored meals, income eligibility, and language or transportation barriers for customers.

Many programs have eligibility requirements from parent organizations which dictate funding or are based on a historic mission. For example, SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) eligibility requirements are not adjusted for local cost of living. We theorize most programs could serve more customers with greater support or infrastructure that would allow for the expansion of eligibility and lower barriers to access. Additionally, an improved system of communication could identify and enroll more customers.

While most programs routinely connect with other social service organizations, communication is mostly at the individual level and referrals are made primarily via a pamphlet handout or untracked introductions.

as many as **4 in 10** students on Nantucket experience food insecurity*



* based on free or reduced lunch eligibility data, November 2021.

FINDINGS FROM REFERRAL PARTNERS

GOALS & NEEDS

- Refer customers to a program that addresses their needs and support customer progression through programs
- Provide a warm hand-off of a customer to a trusted FSP
- Make and track referrals of customers
- Support customers who have a broad range of needs that cannot be effectively addressed in a silo
- Support customers' changing needs throughout the year



I would want to know that I referred the customer, and they are all set with the organization, or got lost, or the program isn't working for them.

Referral Partners know their customers, feel a responsibility to them, and want the ability to effectively get them all the services they need.

CHALLENGES

- Often limited by the administrative requirements of referral
- Work with clients who are hesitant to share personal information
- Lack necessary facilities
- Have no system level support to encourage communication and operational collaboration between entities

FINDINGS FROM FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

Findings fell into five general categories: treatment, better food, knowledge, tangible barriers, and psychological barriers.

TREATMENT

When accessing social programs, a meaningful positive experience for an individual must include opportunities for dignity, comfort, community, and optimism. These feelings are often promoted by pleasant interactions with program employees, transparent conversations, a shared sense of community, and a shared sense of responsibility to help others. When this fails, trust in a program or organization is lost.



I would rather have a good treatment but disorganized. Because bad treatment stays in your brain, it stays in your spirit.

BETTER FOOD

People experiencing food insecurity want and need fresh food (produce, meat, dairy, and other healthful items) instead of the shelf-stable food they most often receive. This is because they value dietary health, taste, and quality, despite feeling like they should be grateful and accept what they are given.



My son is 15 years old and says, 'Mom I want to lose weight.' I can't give him that kind of food.

KNOWLEDGE

The ability to find programs that meet the needs of food insecure individuals is hindered by limited access to information about what programs are offered and the services they provide. Individuals seeking services do not know where information can be found and what is the most important information to know in order to gain access.



I don't even know about those programs.

TANGIBLE BARRIERS

It is not simple for individuals to enroll, access, and actively participate in food security programs because of a number of barriers that often interact and compound. These include language barriers, limited access to technology, lack of reliable transportation, limited program knowledge, and program constraints.



I can't go on my lunch break because I don't have a ride... a taxi is too expensive. Also I'd have to take that time off from work.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Psychological barriers that prevent food insecure individuals from seeking help include feelings of shame, discomfort, judgment, and risk which correlates with highly valuing privacy and anonymity. Other psychological barriers include the perception that food provided by security programs is of low quality and that the programs and the food offered are not made for people like them.



I'm ashamed. I don't want people to see me.

LARGER SYSTEM ISSUES

Though not directly pertaining to project goals, we know that food insecurity does not occur in a vacuum, but is influenced by other systemic issues. In this research, we heard about a number of additional factors that contribute to food insecurity, such as

- **Expensive housing** - money is spent first on rent and bills; food is lower priority.
- **Shared housing** - because of the expense and limited supply, many people share houses with up to 9 others, complicating the use of a kitchen.
- **Inability to save** - low income and the culture of sending money to other family members living elsewhere means that this community cannot build capital.
- **Tangible and intangible costs of childcare** - time and opportunities to take advantage of social programs can be limited by lack of or cost of childcare, especially for single-parent families.
- **Transportation** - lack of car, use of shared vehicles, and reliance on public transport make it difficult to grocery shop.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERVIEW

Addressing food insecurity on Nantucket is critical to creating a healthy community and resilient economy. The significant gaps and barriers that currently exist between need and support result in hungry families, diminished health, and impossible financial decisions. The community depends on people who do not get the support and care they need. Filling gaps, removing barriers and coordinating services to make the best use of available resources ensures that individuals have healthy food and that they are valued as members of a thriving community.

Though the impact of inaction grows as people continue to struggle, there is a long history of hard work and support for the whole community on the Island. Significant momentum has grown over the last few years, which provides an opportunity for sustainable system change right now. With the continued partnership of social services and food system stakeholders, Nantucket has a clear path to a food secure community.



A commitment to create a food secure Nantucket not only ensures that our community can eat the food they need to be healthy, but will grow the year-round economy and strengthen the local food system.

Hundreds of conversations with Island businesses, human service providers, food system employees and concerned individuals has inspired confidence that there is a clear path forward, and willingness to put in the work required to create a better food future on Nantucket.

We are at a unique moment where all that is left to achieve change is to act.

Matt Haffenreffer
Founder, Process First

FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMS & REFERRAL PARTNERS

Our research confirmed our understanding of gaps related to food security on Nantucket:

PROGRAM GAPS

Existing programs on the Island do not meet all customer needs.

ELIGIBILITY & ENROLLMENT GAPS

Customers who are in need of a program are not eligible for the program or fail to enroll or participate.

FOOD GAPS

Programs lack adequate quantity, quality, or types of food to create food secure outcomes.

COORDINATION GAPS

Communication and operations between individual organizations are siloed and there is a lack of easy ways to track customers.

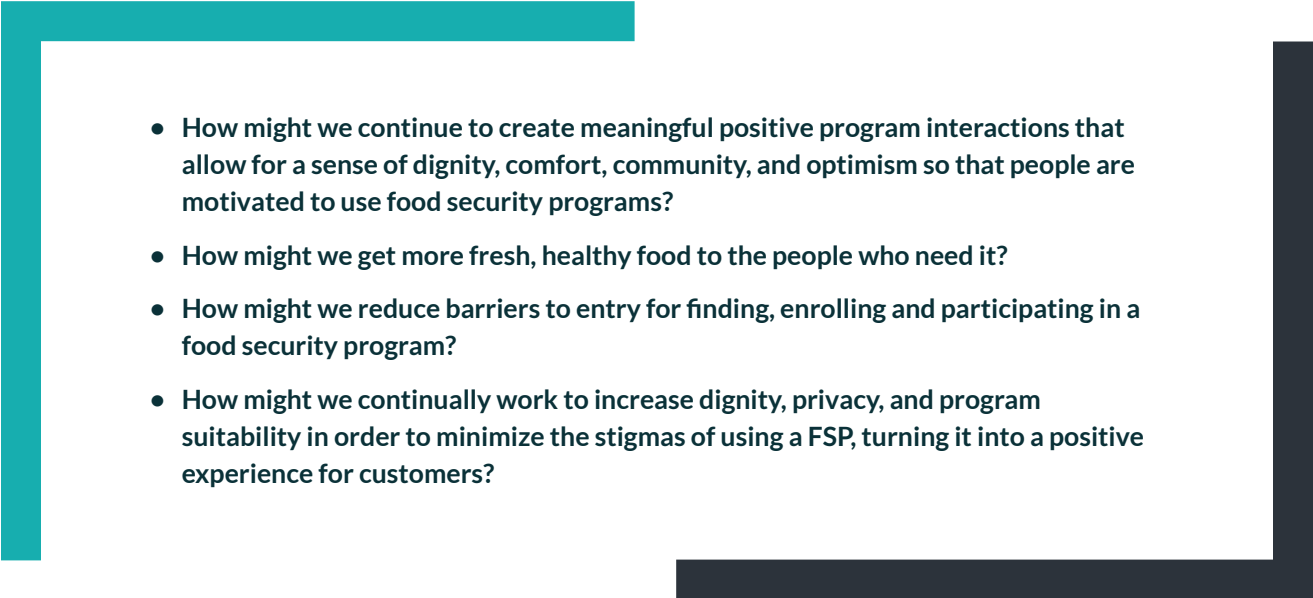
Standardizing evaluation and coordination of program operations could help address these challenges. There is an opportunity for a new role in the community whose responsibility is to ensure coordination and delivery of food security programs. Successfully finding and implementing solutions to these challenges will allow:

- more effective and reliable referral of customers to programs and better support to those who navigate various programs to address multiple challenges
- identification and accurate measurement of the gaps between and within programs and the food system
- informed support of new programs or expansion of current programs to fill gaps

- overcoming various barriers which exist between the food insecure community and the programs intended to serve them
- improved measurement of food demand, which helps to improve access to the quantity and quality of food that would more fully meet customers' needs

FOOD INSECURE COMMUNITY

We have identified 4 opportunities that could raise rates of enrollment in Food Security social service programs, and increase their effectiveness.

- 
- How might we continue to create meaningful positive program interactions that allow for a sense of dignity, comfort, community, and optimism so that people are motivated to use food security programs?
 - How might we get more fresh, healthy food to the people who need it?
 - How might we reduce barriers to entry for finding, enrolling and participating in a food security program?
 - How might we continually work to increase dignity, privacy, and program suitability in order to minimize the stigmas of using a FSP, turning it into a positive experience for customers?

Focusing on human-centered solutions to these questions is recommended in order to increase use of food security programs on the Island.

REACTIONS

The Process First team felt it important to share some of their reactions to this body of research. When confronted with the truly astonishing stories of the respondents' challenges, difficult choices, and perseverance, it became clear that this population urgently deserves dignity and support as valued members of this community.

The team as a whole felt moved by the situations and cycles on Nantucket which keep this community in such precarious circumstances. This led to a more concrete desire and need to fix the system, to address those situations and cycles. It is the team's mission, hope, and intentional goal to support the individuals experiencing food insecurity.

We want to take a moment to offer sincere gratitude to the participants in this research who so bravely and

honestly shared their experiences, even when it was painful to do so. We hope that we and our partners can use this research and these stories to foment positive change within this community.

We ultimately don't know how many people are food insecure on Nantucket, but while getting a more exact number is being worked on, we are certain that people are continuing to suffer needlessly.



So long as our community members struggle to meet their basic needs, I hope that we will continue to uphold our longstanding community value of looking out for one another. Feeding our neighbors in need is an achievable first step on our journey to a sustainable Nantucket.

Nantucket has many challenges, but food doesn't have to be one of them.

Brooke Mohr
Treasurer, Nantucket Resource Partnership



PROCESS FIRST