

## Washington State Food Insecurity Collaboration

*“In spite of our small space we are serving our food insecure population and meeting their needs to the best of our ability. We have strong Community support as far as food donations go. But money is very slow to come in. We are an all volunteer food bank with a 501c3 status and a board of directors that work diligently towards our goal for a stand alone facility. When the pandemic hit it soon became apparent we needed extra support from our Distribution Center and they came through. Thank you!” – Cashmere Food Bank*

*“There has been so many people that have given their thanks, and told me how much they appreciate this program. All of the people in the community donating items to the children. When people are in need, you can really see Pacific County rally to make sure that everyone is taken care of, warms you heart.” – Pacific County School District*

*“This is the largest scale we have ever operated our food service program. It is amazing to see how the staff & community have embraced this change. It's truly heartwarming to know that youth are being served nutritious meals.” – Community Organization Operating a School Feeding Program in Skagit County*

## Statewide Highlights

Food banks, schools, and community organizations across Washington rapidly responded to the challenges of COVID-19. Programs reported changing their service models and programming virtually overnight to serve more people than ever before. A number of new programs and cross-sector partnerships between food banks, schools, and community organizations.

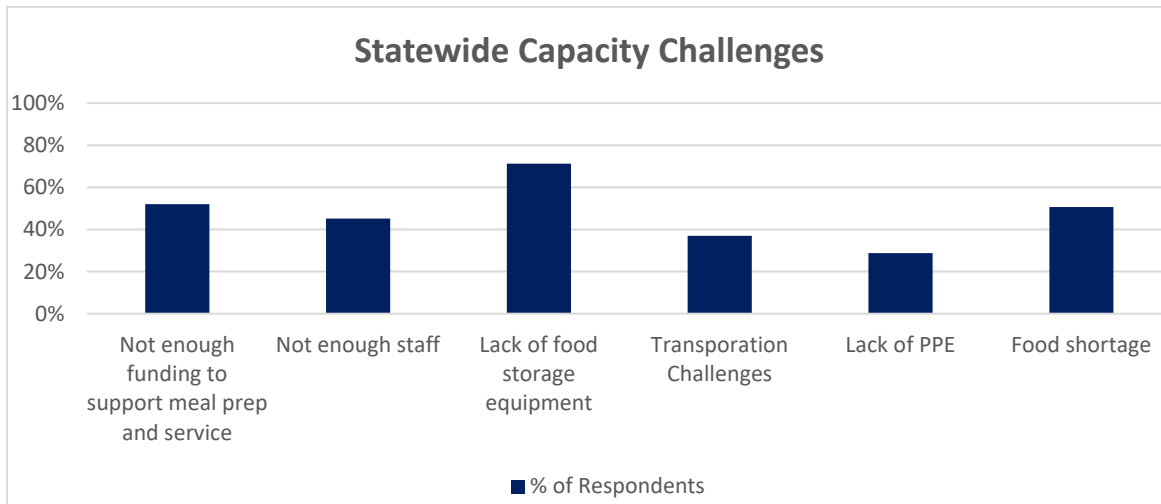
## Coordination Opportunities

Coordination efforts vary widely between counties. Over 40% of survey respondents reported they are not coordinated across their county however some regions have become increasingly coordinated since March. There are distinct differences in reported needs between rural and urban counties and variations between the type of organization reporting (i.e. food bank, school, or community organization). Despite this, there are a number of key themes that emerge across counties that require investment and collaboration.

1. Funding for Program Capacity and Staff: More than **50% of the programs do not have enough funding** to support their food distribution and many are facing a need for funding to cover refrigeration, storage, transportation and building infrastructure. Additionally, more than 45% of programs report their volunteers and/or staff are stretched beyond capacity.
2. Low-Barrier Funding Opportunities: There is a consistent theme that funding should be provided directly to **community-based organizations** in order to have the most equitable impact on the many and diverse populations living within Washington state.

Respondents also reference that **funding needs to have less restrictions**, less paperwork, and to broaden eligibility requirements, all of which pose barriers to individuals and organizations.

3. Support for Multi-lingual Communication and Cross-Cultural Services: Many organizations referenced the desire **to increase services for all communities** in their respective counties and reported a **need for culturally relevant food items and multi-lingual signage on-site**. Interestingly, about half the respondents skipped the questions referencing which populations they are serving which may indicate that many programs are not focused on the specific needs and demographics of the populations they are serving or do not feel comfortable reporting it.

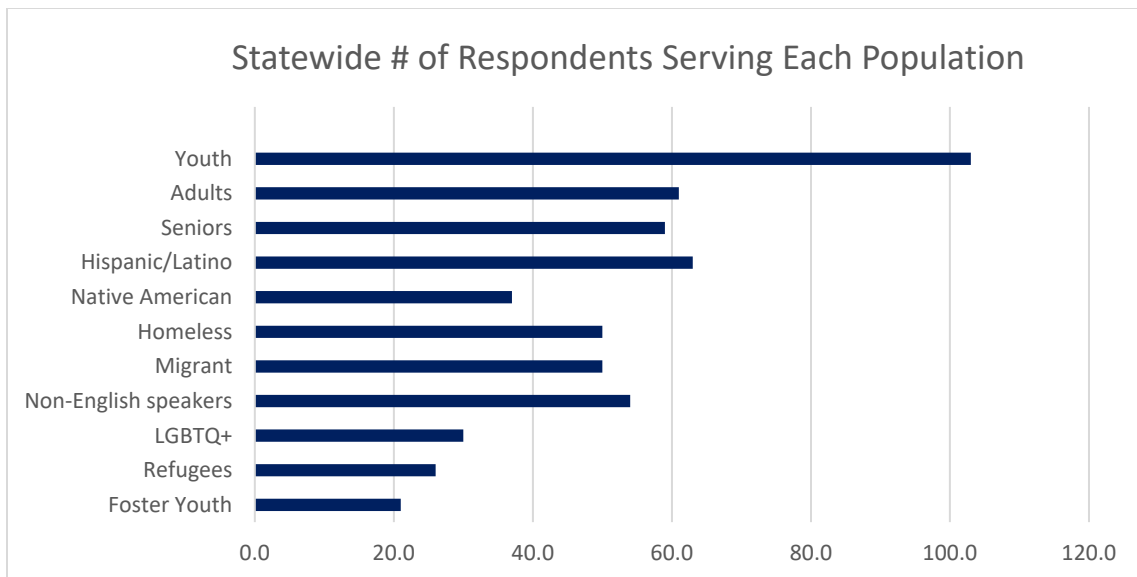


### About The Data

162 organizations responded to the Coordinated Community Food Insecurity Survey from across Washington State. The majority of the respondents were school district staff, 43 of the respondents were food banks, and 45 were community organizations. Many of the community organizations are directly providing food to their communities through partnerships with OSPI or through a partnership with a local food bank or food distributor.

The survey response rate varied considerably by county. 33 of Washington’s 39 counties responded to the survey. More than half of the counties had only 2 or less responses and the majority of the programs that responded were school districts. Unsurprisingly, the counties with the most respondents are generally the higher populated counties such as King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Yakima and these counties had the highest percentage of respondents who identified as food banks and community organizations.

When asked to rate their current need on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest), schools had an average ranking of 2, community organizations had a ranking of 2.5, and food banks had an average rating of 3.



**Sector Spotlights:**

**Executive Summary:**

Unsurprisingly, the needs of each sector are often unique from one another as are the opportunities for coordination. When asked to rate their current need on a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest), schools had an average ranking of 2, community organizations had a ranking of 2.5, and food banks had an average rating of 3.

The overarching recommendation for all organizations is to increase multi-sector collaboration. While many organizations are strong internally, there is a clear opportunity to couple services and support in ways that would benefit both organizations and the community. The top opportunities for each sector are:

1. Food Banks: invest in low-barrier, flexible funding to support capacity and staffing.
2. School Districts: partner with additional organizations to lessen the burden on staff and internal resources.
3. Community organizations: need low-barrier funding to support equitable services.

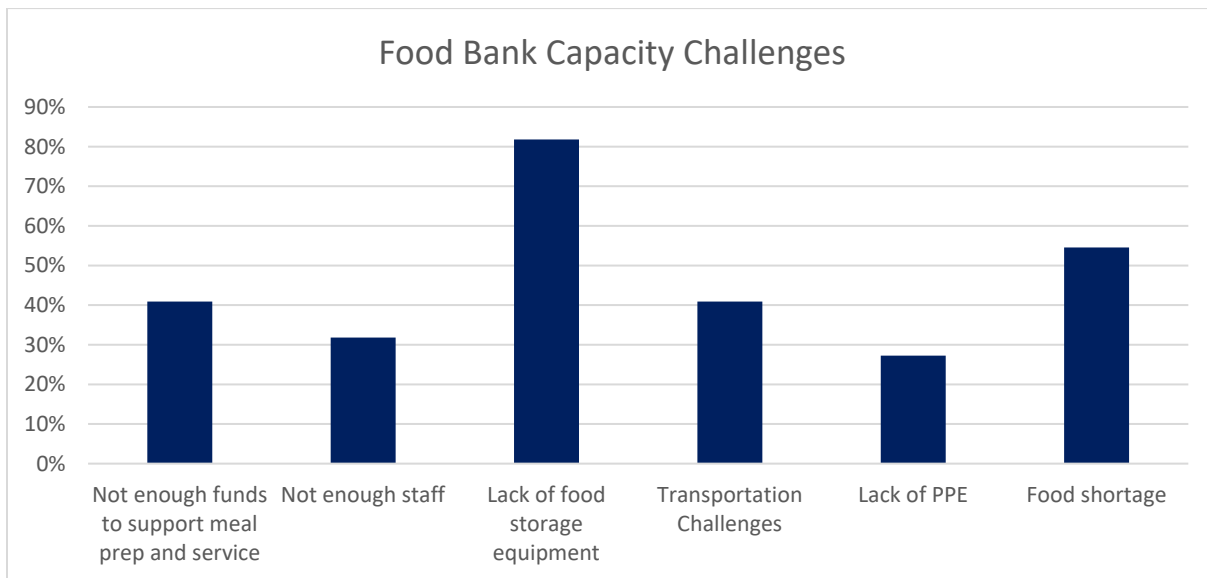
**Food Banks:**

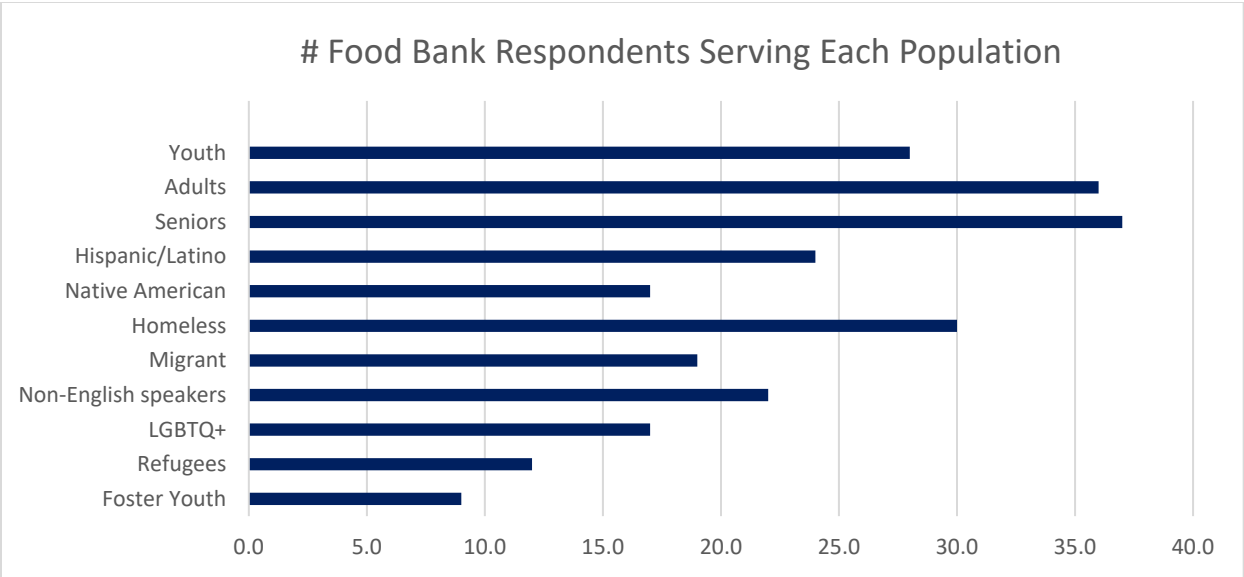
*“We are giving between 140 and 340 hot meals per week to people in need. Our bike shop also continues to serve people in need by fixing and maintaining their much needed transportation. I also love the collaboration between all our organizations to serve Lewis County.” – Hub City Mission*

43 food banks responded to the survey from 17 counties across Washington state. The responses varied widely between counties and whether programs were rural or urban.

However, there were some common themes across all responses. Programs took great pride in being able to switch their distribution models extremely quickly and highlighted that their communities were incredibly supportive. The most common challenge across the board was that many programs are struggling with capacity, particularly in regards to cold storage, transportation, and challenges with physical locations being inadequate. Many programs reported that they needed support with volunteers and/or staffing. Rural programs discussed that their volunteer crew is stretched as many regular volunteers have been unable to come in during COVID-19 while urban areas stressed the need for support with staffing and flexible funding to help cover increased costs.

In the area of collaboration with other organizations and other sectors, there was a wide variety of responses. Some regions clearly stand out for their high levels of collaboration, particularly South King County and Snohomish. However, many programs reported they are not collaborating with other entities and that there is no countywide collaboration effort. In some cases, this is obvious by the lack of responses to other survey questions, however in other cases, programs reported conflicting information by stating in their comments or other survey responses that they have been collaborating with other organizations. Regardless, it appears that there is an opportunity to increase awareness of collaboration opportunities in almost every area of the state.

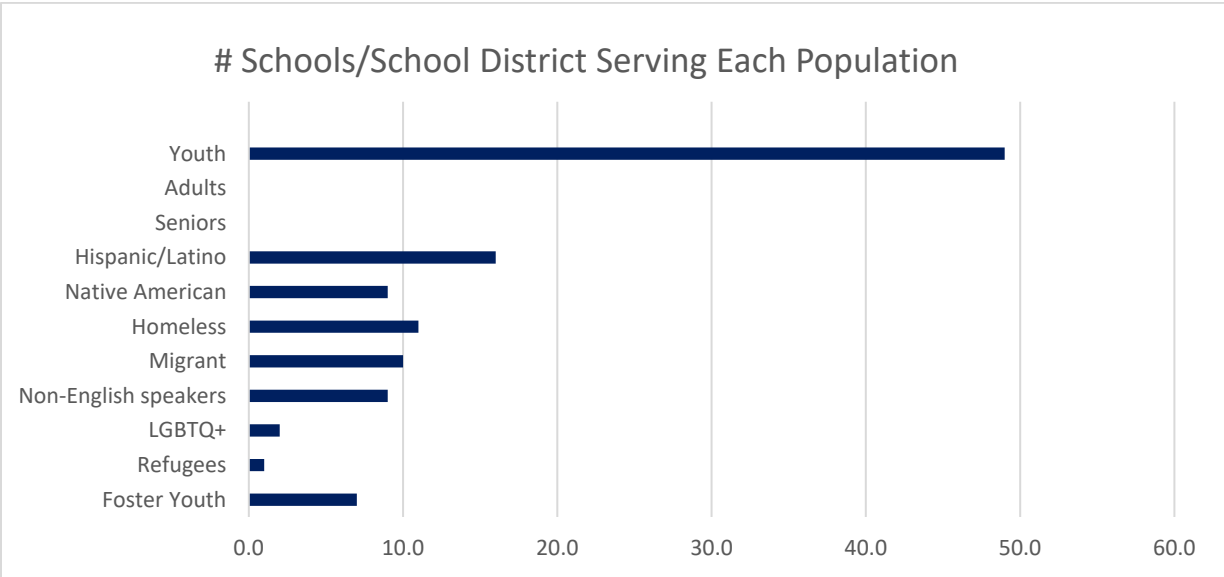
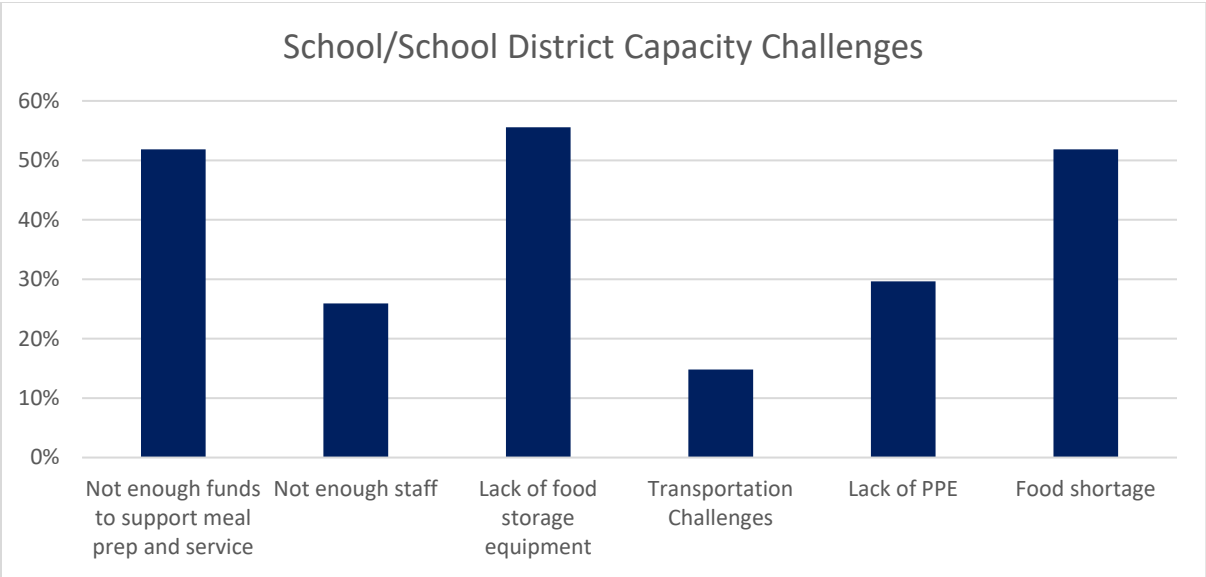




### Schools

*“Our program has mostly been a success! There were a few bumps in the road in the beginning. But our team is amazing and has really come together with a common purpose (to feed kids!). We believe in what we are doing. And the district/community support has been very rewarding and encouraging.” – Ellensburg School District*

The majority of the survey respondents identified as school district staff, particularly nutrition services staff. There was a higher level of consistency in the responses from schools regardless of the county than in the other responding sectors. This is likely a result of working within the structure of OSPI. The number one reported success from schools was that different departments within the same district worked together for the first time to provide children with food in new ways. This internal collaboration was particularly true between school transportation and nutrition departments. Schools also shared similar challenges with one another. Most schools had difficulty sourcing food and working with vendors in the Spring but reported that this issue has largely been resolved. However, ongoing challenges include stretched staff and stretched financial resources making programs unsure of what level of service they will be able to offer. Interestingly, schools rarely reported collaborating with local organizations and non-profits whereas food banks and community organizations often reported working with their local school district.



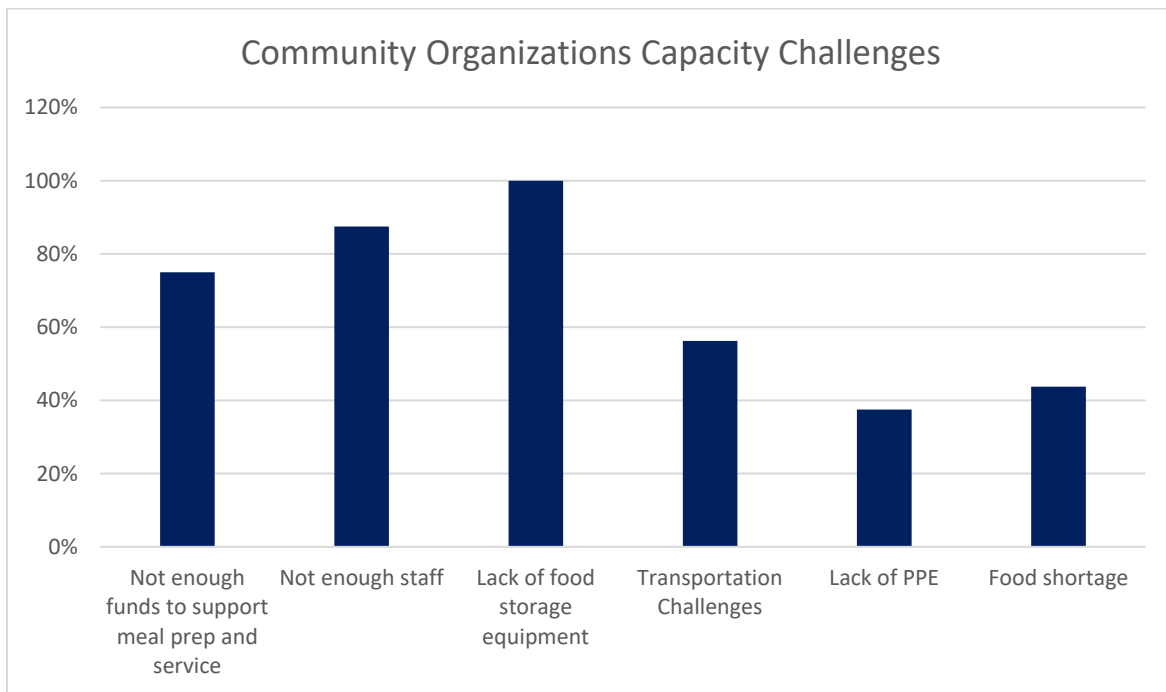
**Community Organizations**

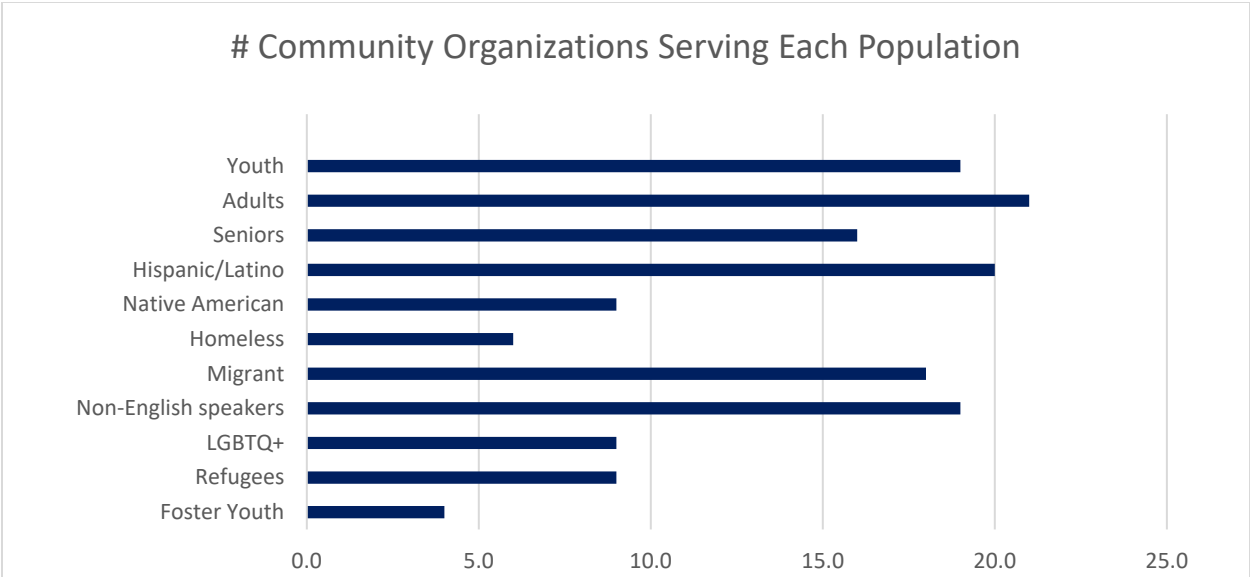
*“I am proud of the staff who come in every week to make this program happen. They have been there since the day schools closed without fail. They come in and make homemade muffins, granola, trail mix, spaghetti sauce, and roll hundreds of burritos to make sure our children are getting delicious and nutritious food. The parents have been so appreciative of the efforts of our nutrition staff. They regularly leave Thank You cards at the door for their drivers and cooks. It has been heart warming to see the community that is being built between staff and families. One of our drivers even made friends with the attack goose at one home.” - Community Organization serving meals to school children in Thurston County*

45 of the survey respondents identified as community organizations from 11 counties in Washington. Community organizations are the most diverse set of respondents and can range from meal providers partnering with a school to funders, statewide organizers, or public health. At least half of these organizations appear to be distributing food by either working with OSPI

or by working with a local food bank or food distributor to give food out thru their organization. As a result, the challenges for those working with OSPI tend to mirror the challenges that schools are having while the programs working with the local emergency food system tend to share the same challenges as food banks. It is unclear how many of these organizations provided food prior to the pandemic.

There are two unifying themes within this group of respondents. First, community-based organizations had a number of capacity and funding challenges similar to those faced at food banks. These organizations are strapped for resources and are struggling with having enough physical capacity to do their work and enough financial support for staffing. As a result, community organizations were vocal proponents for low barrier funding that is given to local community-based organizations. Second, many of the community-based organizations are focused on serving a small geographic region or specific populations. These respondents were the most vocal about the need for equity and for ensuring that all communities are being served, particularly people of color and non-English speaking communities.





**Contact Information for Coordination**

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