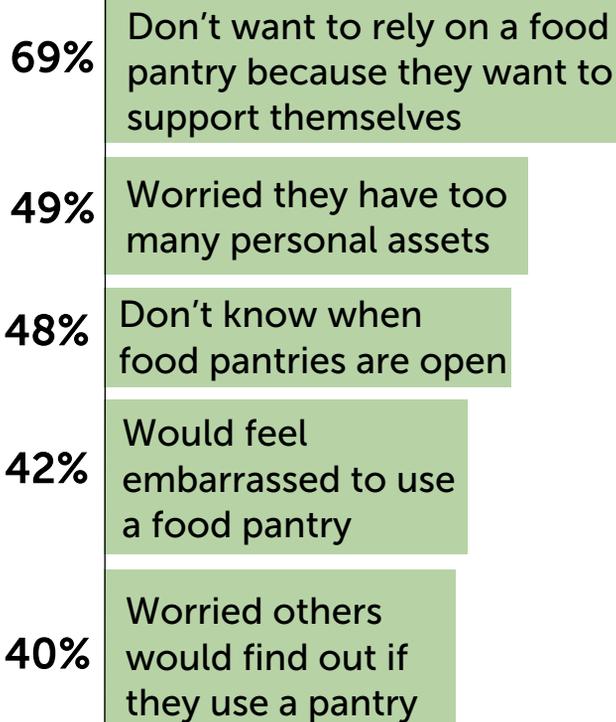


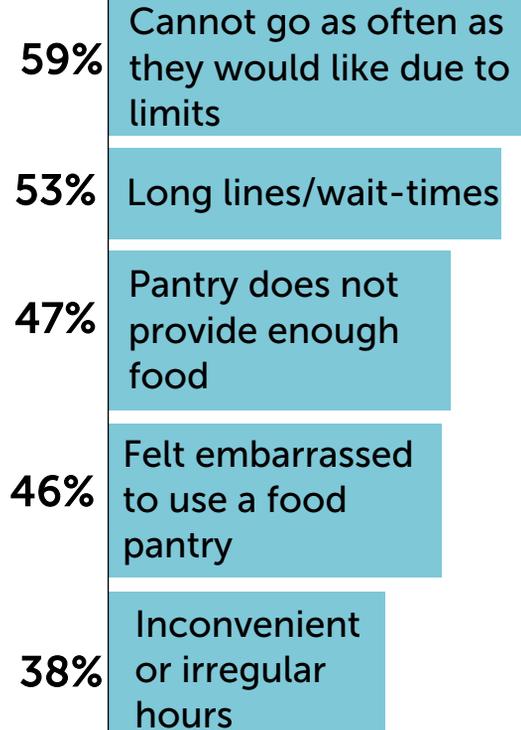
Creating a Dignified & Welcoming Environment in Food Pantries

We surveyed over 1,000 Connecticut residents to ask about their challenges with getting enough food one year after the COVID-19 pandemic began. While people appreciate receiving charitable food, we found that our neighbors have many concerns about using food pantries and face barriers to receiving food from pantries.

Concerns about Using Pantries

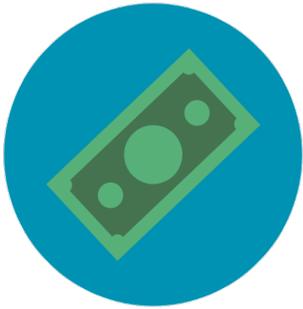


Experiences while Using Pantries



93% of pantry users would recommend food pantries to others in need of help getting food, and 83% say the pantry made them feel welcome.

Who is more likely to worry others would find out if they used a food pantry?



Higher Income

Households with an annual income of \$75,000 or more are **almost 2x more likely**.



Higher Education

People who attended some college or more are **almost 2x more likely**.



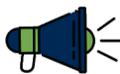
Younger

People 34 or younger are **about 1.5x more likely**.



Anxious or Depressed

People who scored higher on an anxiety and depression scale are **over 1.5x more likely**.



Recommendations

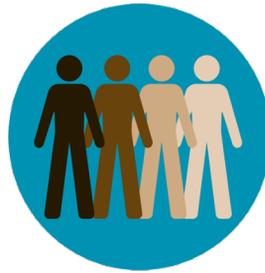
- To reduce the stigma of using food pantries, it's important to use empowering and person-centered language. Instead of "client," we suggest "customer," "guest," or "neighbor." Instead of "feeding the hungry," we suggest "providing food for people who need it."
- Promote your program on social media and through community news outlets and let people know that all are welcome.
- To prevent embarrassment, avoid having guests wait in line. Consider appointment times or using a lottery system.

Who is more likely to worry about the paperwork required to enroll in pantries?



Anxious or Depressed

People who scored higher on an anxiety and depression scale are **3x more likely**.



Hispanic

Hispanic people are **over 2x more likely** than white respondents.



Younger

People 34 or younger are **over 1.5x more likely**.



Recommendations

- Minimize paperwork to avoid discouraging people from visiting.
- If you receive food from government sources, consult with your food bank to learn about the most up-to-date guidance on what information guests are required to provide.
- When asking guests to fill out paperwork, be sure to clarify the required fields and communicate how the information will be used.

Who is more likely to say they'd be embarrassed to use a food pantry?



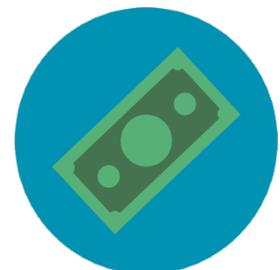
Higher Education

People who attended some college or more are **over 1.5x more likely**.



Anxious or Depressed

People who scored higher on an anxiety and depression scale are **1.5x more likely**.



Higher Income

Households making over \$75,000 are **almost 1.75x more likely**.

How do people of color experience food pantries differently?



One in three people of color (33%) report experiencing discrimination when visiting a food pantry.

- Hispanics are the racial and ethnic group most likely to express concerns that they would experience discrimination if they visited a food pantry, and Black respondents were the racial and ethnic group least likely to report this concern.
- 44% of Hispanic pantry-goers report experiencing discrimination while at the food pantry, compared to 6% of white respondents.

Pantry staff doesn't speak their language

Almost a quarter of people of color (24%), including almost 1/3 of Hispanic respondents (32%), report that pantry staff doesn't speak their language, compared to 4% of white respondents.



Given food they don't know how to prepare

People of color are **over 4x more likely** than white respondents to say the pantry gives them food they don't know how to prepare, with 41% of respondents of color reporting this.

Recommendations

- Engage with your guests to create a culture where all voices are heard and respected, and use guest input to inform program changes.
- Commit to prioritizing guest experience over volunteer tradition or convenience.
- Set up a committee of diverse staff, volunteers, and guests to create equity, diversity, and inclusion policies for your program.
- Engage with local experts in diversity, equity, and inclusion to facilitate conversations about structural racism with staff and volunteers and emphasize the connection between racism, trauma, and poverty.



Recommendations

Volunteers and Staff



- Emphasize the importance of customer service.
- Assign a volunteer to welcome and greet guests.
- Develop a group of volunteers and staff that culturally reflect your community.
- Promote trauma-informed care and an organizational culture of trust and transparency.

Wait Times



- To avoid lines, provide guests with appointment times and comfortable places to wait for their turn to shop.
- Display pantry procedures to inform new guests and communicate any changes clearly.
- Expand days and hours of operation to allow more time to shop.

Physical Environment



- Pick out bright colors as well as artwork and wall décor that is culturally representative of your community.
- Hang signage with pictures and in multiple languages.
- Create a bulletin board of additional resources, inspirational quotes, and client success stories.

Shopping Experience



- Use tables, shelving, and glass-front refrigerators to organize your pantry like a grocery store.
- Allow guests to select their own food.
- Encourage volunteers to build personal connections with guests while helping them shop and navigate the pantry.

Food Offerings



- Consult with guests to learn which foods they prefer.
- When ordering from your food bank, consider what items would be most culturally relevant to your patrons based on their feedback.
- Provide recipe cards or preparation instructions for foods that may be unfamiliar to guests.

Appendix

About the Survey

In April and May 2021, the Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions at Connecticut Foodshare surveyed over 1,000 people from all eight Connecticut counties with the goal of understanding changing food access during the COVID-19 crisis. We asked questions about food insecurity, food program use, and the food pantry experience. This study was conducted in collaboration with the National Food Access and COVID Research Team, a group of researchers around the country dedicated to better understanding food systems during this pandemic. You can read more from our series of reports at foodshare.org/institute or learn more about the project at nfactresearch.org.

Study Notes & Definitions

- The survey targeted low-income households and people of color in order to reach the people most at risk for experiencing food insecurity. Statistical methods were then used to adjust the data to be representative of Connecticut's population.
- **People of color:** Any respondent who identified as Asian, Black, Native American, or Hispanic.
- **Anxious or depressed:** Respondents who answered positively to screening questions for generalized anxiety disorder or major depressive disorder.

To learn more about creating a welcoming environment, promoting dignity, and reducing barriers to food access in your food pantry or program, visit foodshare.org/institute or email Brittney Cavaliere, Program Manager, at bcavaliere@ctfoodshare.org.

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With generous funding from:

