



*OUTREACH
PROJECT
REPORT*

DIANA M. ALVARADO

EMILY CHO



OVERVIEW

For the past five years, we at Boulder Food Rescue (BFR) have conducted an annual survey of the No Cost Grocery Program (NCGP) participants in the communities where we deliver food. The feedback we receive helps us better understand how the program works, the possibilities for improvement, and the benefits our recipients receive. By actively soliciting participants' feedback and trying to understand participants' experiences, this project advances three primary goals of BFR:

- Advocating for a more inclusive and holistic understanding of our food systems and the impact on community access to food.
- Increasing participation and improving existing services.
- Promoting the active role of the participants in their own food redistribution systems.

This year, BFR collaborated with the Geography department at the University of Colorado, Boulder to diversify our data collection methods to include both qualitative interviews and self-guided toolkits. These data collection measures were funded by a Community Impact Grant from the Office of Outreach and Engagement at CU Boulder. This expansive approach to surveying NCGP participants has given us the chance to deeply listen to the community, and ultimately better understand what BFR's role is and can be within the Boulder food system.

In this summarize document, we mention a brief BFR description, our methods of data collection, the participant feedback and insight we received, and our analysis of how BFR can incorporate this insight moving forward.



DESCRIPTION

Boulder Food Rescue specializes in the sustainable redistribution of surplus fruits and vegetables to communities in Boulder. No Cost Grocery Programs (NCGP) are the local recipient sites, senior homes, preschools, low-income housing, shelters, and food pantries. The main objective of BFR is to facilitate a juster and less wasteful food system. Working together with residents to outline the needs of each community is a key element of the organization. Community leaders help ensure that the food is being distributed in the best way possible. The report and findings are based on data collected from participants in the NCCP.

METHODS

We designed our qualitative methods to capture NCGP participants' experiences and to foster opportunities for participation and engagement in shaping BFR programming. Two primary methods were employed: semi-structured interviews and toolkits. BFR's community outreach manager first recruited interested participants through snowball sampling at NCGP sites. All participants utilize NCGP services, and many participants were also NCGP coordinators known as Grocery Program Coordinators (GPCs).

FINDINGS



1. COVID-19 Context

This data collection was conducted in October 2020, eight months into the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, in addition to the pandemic shaping how, and why, we designed data collection as we did, the pandemic has been responsible for exacerbating food insecurity nationally and locally. We recognize that the pandemic shapes peoples' food experiences, but also their time and energy to devote to their communities, to BFR, and even to the process of our data collection. Aside from documenting some of the difficulties, we also were inspired to learn how participants demonstrated resilience, ingenuity, and mutual support in lifting up one another in their food needs.

There is no doubt the pandemic has been difficult for everyone. For BFR, it was difficult to quickly create security protocols and communication channels to accommodate rapid changes in the food transportation and delivery system. It was challenging for participants as well, as they had to adapt to new protocols within communities, which for some, generated frustration and change.

2. Participant Feedback on the No Cost Grocery Program

By far the most common comment about the NCGP was that produce is often spoiled-- it was mentioned around thirty times across the toolkits and the interviews. The feedback on the NCGP also included a high quantity of enthusiastic, grateful comments for the program, particularly about the delivery aspect of the program and the consistency of deliveries from couriers regardless of the weather.

3. BFR Vision and Active Involvement in Shaping Food System

"Communities have autonomy within their food systems and the resources they need to thrive."

95% of the toolkit participants (38 people) agreed with the BFR Vision and believe that what we are doing is aligned with the statement. The other 5% (2 people) consider that the vision is not clear, or that it is not entirely true. One participant said no because due to their health and nutritional conditions, they need specific foods. Others said they would prefer to go to the grocery store to get what they need to have true autonomy, or that "autonomy" as stated in the vision was not achieved since they do not have much choice in which foods they receive. Most participants were pleased with the BFR and the vision statement.



ANALYSIS

Covid-19 has brought forward new challenges and new ways to the function of each of the communities within the NCGP. As seen in some quotes from the Covid-19 section, individual bagging has posed new problems for some, as people feel they don't have as much of a choice in the food they are receiving. The necessary reforms of distribution have become more complex due to the pandemic. The delivery process had to shift in many ways including social distancing, food being delivered outdoors instead of within homes or community centers, and having GPCs package food before participants picked it up. The GPCs had to ensure that the participants were not around when the food arrived, and the couriers also began to deliver to an empty space instead of directly to the GPCs. This has had an impact on the role of the GPCs, who feel they have to encourage participants to follow safety standards, some of whom do not wear masks or practice distancing. The most common issues revealed in the feedback, such as spoiled food and a lack of variety of foods, can be somewhat addressed by increased communication on multiple levels. Spoiled produce has been a battle BFR has struggled with since its beginning. We hope spending even more time training the couriers may help address this matter, as they are the ones who typically sort the food before distribution, although we recognize this has not solved the problem in the past. In addition to these efforts, we intend to increase communication between GPCs and couriers so the couriers are clear on the needs of the GPCs and vice versa. The respondents had a great desire for local and organic foods as well as gardening. It is our hope to connect with more organizations that can assist the communities with growing and maintaining their own gardens.

CONCLUSIONS

The feedback of the No Cost Grocery Program (NCGP) participants is essential for realizing the vision and purpose of the program and more broadly Boulder Food Rescue. The participants offered important feedback, which we compiled from BFR and CU Boulder's categorizations. Evidenced by numerous quotes taken both from the interviews and the toolkits, we were able to hear detailed perspectives from participants. From the issues they face within the food system at large, to the needs and hopes they have with BFR and the No Cost Grocery Program, we had the chance to more thoroughly explore their dreams, issues, and recommendations.

It is our genuine interest to continue with this outreach project and its subsequent phases in order to have a more accurate idea of the impact and contribution of the BFR program in the communities of Boulder County.

The data collected for this report is one of three planned phases in a broader BFR participatory process. The second phase will focus on developing BRF's strategic plan by involving selected participants from the first phase. The third and final phase, Mesas de Trabajo, will be a series of workshops in different communities with participants from the initial data collection phase.