



A Playbook for Localities: Inclusion of Food Security Metrics into Strategic Planning

Overview

The economic effects of COVID-19, like those of the Great Recession, will linger for years to come.¹ The food bank's [Hunger Report](#) projected a 48 to 60 percent increase in the number of residents struggling with food insecurity in our region by the end of 2020—meaning that close to 600,000 people are now uncertain where their next meal will come from. Given the need and the distress in our service area, state and local governments must begin strategically tracking and analyzing the various aspects of food insecurity to address the current crisis and to plan for future ones.

Why is it important to measure food insecurity at the county level?

As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, food insecurity is a “lack of consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.” Food insecurity is an inherently complex burden for those who must endure it. It is shaped by local and national policy, systemic racism, the efficacy of social welfare programs, physical activity and health status, awareness of and access to nutrition information, economic volatility, household wealth and composition, and much more.²

Inserting food security metrics into formal planning documentation puts the needs of the underserved people who are struggling with hunger and financial hardship at the forefront of policymakers' concerns. Municipal and deliberative bodies across our region should fully understand the state of food insecurity within their respective jurisdictions, as well as its lasting effects on vulnerable populations.³ This document is intended to guide municipalities step-by-step through the process of incorporating food security metrics into strategic planning on the road to hunger alleviation.

Step 1: Evaluate the Number of Food Insecure Residents; Identify Hunger Hotspots and Affected Populations

The first step in understanding the problem of food insecurity within a jurisdiction is to evaluate how many residents are struggling to access their next meal. Additionally, it is just as important to identify the locations of food insecurity hotspots and the specific populations affected.

Step 2: Assess the Current Performance Measurement Process and Identify Actors Responsible for Evaluation

The food bank believes each jurisdiction must survey whether current planning metrics are sufficient to quantify and address the problem of food insecurity. When evaluating the processes in place, leaders should consider:

¹ Emmanuel Saez, “U.S. Top One Percent of Income Earners Hit New High in 2015 Amid Strong Economic Growth,” *Washington Center for Equitable Growth*, July 1, 2016, <https://equitablegrowth.org/u-s-top-one-percent-of-income-earners-hit-new-high-in-2015-amid-strong-economic-growth/>.

² Andrew Jones, et al., “What Are We Assessing When We Measure Food Security? A Compendium and Review Of Current Metrics,” *Advances in Nutrition*, September, 2013, <https://academic.oup.com/advances/article/4/5/481/4557948>.

³ Emilia Istrate et al., “Building Trust Performance Metrics in Counties,” *National Association of Counties*, February, 2018, <https://www.naco.org/sites/default/files/documents/Building%20Trust%20-%20Performance%20Metrics%20in%20Counties.pdf>.



- How are the current performance metrics tracked?
- Who is responsible for monitoring trends related to food insecurity within the government?
- What metrics are used in formal planning documentation?
- Who is responsible for the success of food assistance programs and policies?
- What aspects of food security are not incorporated into planning processes?
- Are decisions related to the allocation of resources tied to programmatic or budgetary line-items?

A critical step is to take inventory of all of the metrics that are being tracked—whether formally through planning, or informally through departmental processes. For example, many localities already informally monitor the number of residents enrolled in anti-hunger programs or the number of food deserts within a given area. This will equip policymakers with the data and information necessary to identify areas that should be considered for tracking, measurement, and evaluation.

Step 3: Establish and Empower a Coordinating Body, and Ensure the Entity Has an Active Role

Food policy councils or task forces are essential for facilitating coordination, communication, and collaboration among stakeholders within and outside of the government. These councils tend to have closer ties to the community and can be important mediaries between public actors, advocates, providers, and, ultimately, residents in need.

This entity does not necessarily have to be funded by the local government. It should, however, have clear access to policymakers who have the authority to leverage resources and make decisions. If such an entity already exists, both the legislative and executive arms of deliberative bodies should empower the food council's authority through resolutions, public releases, involvement in legislative and public proceedings, and the usage of governmental space. These actions will add significant value and legitimacy to the entity's conclusions and findings.

Step 4: Identify Specific Metrics to Include

Deciding what performance measures to adopt should be dependent upon the needs and insight of community members, and the comprehensive review of the current metrics used to measure hunger alleviation efforts. With the limited funds a local government has at its disposal, it is important to be selective in the identification of context-specific performance measures.

It is vital to ask:

- What component(s) of food security should be measured?
- What type of data are most useful?
- What outcomes will be enabled by certain data collection activities?
- How often will data be collected and reviewed?
- Can the state or federal government help with access and utilization?

The table below highlights ten metrics that the food bank suggests municipalities incorporate into planning processes. This list is not meant to be exhaustive. The food bank recommends starting with indicators that address the highest priorities, and then beginning to track others of secondary importance



in medium- to long-term planning phases.⁴ See *Appendix A* for a more extensive catalog of metrics that includes over 60 measures aggregated from localities across the country.

FOOD SECURITY – A CATALOG OF PRIORITY METRICS	
<u>ACCESSIBILITY</u>	
Initiative	Performance Measures
<i>Nutrition assistance programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of residents not enrolled in SNAP and WIC who are eligible • % of students utilizing free breakfast and lunch
<i>Transportation gaps</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of mobile food markets to underserved areas
<i>Access to healthy foods</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of residents within food deserts
<u>AVAILABILITY</u>	
Initiative	Performance Measures
<i>Diversion of food waste to food rescue programs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of pounds diverted through use of federal, state, or local programs
<u>UTILIZATION</u>	
Initiative	Performance Measures
<i>Health and well-being</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rates of obesity and other chronic diseases
<u>STABILITY</u>	
Initiative	Performance Measures
<i>Economic strength of food sector</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average wages of food sector jobs in the county
<i>Emergency preparedness</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of pounds of food in county food reserves that can withstand feeding population for two to three months in an emergency
<u>THE PROVIDER ENVIRONMENT</u>	
Initiative	Performance Measures
<i>Resident-driven processes to guide equity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of residents engaged in food security programs, policymaking, and allocation of resources
<i>Food policy council influence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # of policies introduced based on the county’s food security plan or priorities

⁴ These performance measures were aggregated from the city and county strategic comprehensive planning document “Moving Beyond Hunger: Comprehensive Food Security Plan and Action Manual for Wake County,” *Wake County, North Carolina*, 2017, <https://capitalareafoodnetwork.files.wordpress.com/2016/12/2017-05-01-foodsecurityplan-compressed.pdf>.
 “Healthy Food Environment Strategy,” *Baltimore Department of Planning*, (n.d.), <https://planning.baltimorecity.gov/baltimore-food-policy-initiative/healthy-food-retail>.
 “Eating Here: Greater Philadelphia’s Food System Plan,” *Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission*, February 2011, https://s30428.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/09/PhiladelphiaFoodSystemPlan2011_1.pdf.
 “City of Seattle Food Action Plan,” *Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment*, October, 2012, http://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OSE/Seattle_Food_Action_Plan_10-24-12.pdfhttp://www.seattle.gov/Documents/Departments/OSE/Seattle_Food_Action_Plan_10-24-12.pdf.
 “Montgomery County’s Local Food Promotion Strategy,” *Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission*, March 2018, <https://www.dvrpc.org/Reports/18006.pdf>.
 “Urban Agriculture Plan, Chapter 5,” *Minneapolis, Minnesota*, (n.d.), http://www2.minneapolismn.gov/www/groups/public/@cped/documents/webcontent/convert_281459.pdf.



Step 5: Create an Inclusive Public Input Process to Consider Community Needs and Perspectives

Each county must deliberately take into account the voices of stakeholders, food providers, and members of communities disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. Each jurisdiction will have a unique set of items to deliberate throughout the revision stage, but public input should be heavily weighted at each juncture of the process. The food policy council can facilitate the collection of input through participatory workshops and breakout sessions; public hearings; panel discussions with academics and anti-hunger experts; and consultation with other jurisdictions. Food security across neighborhoods, populations, and jurisdictions will change in volume, form, and complexity. Thus, we recommend soliciting public input on a biannual basis.

Step 6: Identify Existing Data Sources and Utilize Expertise in the Region

Inevitably, an inclusive input process will illuminate the need for data that either may not exist or are difficult to aggregate and track at local levels of government. Also, conducting research and collecting new data can be time and labor intensive. Academics, think tanks, providers, and advocates are willing to assist with information related to agriculture, food distribution, marketing, retail, food insecurity, poverty, health, and social welfare.

Step 7: Establish a Governmental Component to Monitor Activities and Track Performance

Local governmental departments can play a critical role in the planning process. Efficient and effective administration of anti-hunger efforts requires collaboration among the departments of planning, health and human services, community and economic development, housing, parks and recreation, education, and transportation.⁵ It can be challenging to identify one department that is accountable for the performance of all programs related to food assistance, especially when anti-hunger programming is often administered through numerous funding sources. Local governments can synergize these efforts by naming an intergovernmental entity tasked to work with leaders in each relevant department.

Step 8: Develop a Food Security Plan

Once all necessary parties have been engaged and heard, it is time for the development of the food security plan.⁶ The plan should include defined strategies, time frames, funding sources, and performance measures reflective of all the information gathered in the first seven steps. The entity appointed to coordinate efforts can partner with community groups, nonprofits, academic institutions, and the food policy council to:

- Determine the most effective strategies to achieve objectives;
- Decide on timeframes for implementation (e.g., ongoing, short term, midterm, or long term);
- Determine funding sources and programmatic needs; and
- Identify the appropriate agencies or organizations to lead the implementation of actions and strategies.

⁵ Kimberly Hodgson, "Planning for Food Access and Community-Based Food Systems: A National Scan and Evaluation of Local Comprehensive and Sustainability Plans," *American Planning Association*, November, 2012, https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/Planning-for-Food-Access-and-Community-Based-Food-Systems.pdf.

⁶ This plan, for purposes of the playbook, refers to the documentation recommended being inserted into the County's comprehensive plan to address food security.



For examples of food insecurity plans, please refer to the plans created by Wake County, North Carolina, and Seattle, Washington.^{7 8}

Step 9: Incorporate the Food Security Plan into the Comprehensive Strategic Plan

Once the food security plan has been finalized, it is incumbent upon the strategic planning department to ensure the plan has been properly included in the comprehensive plan, and all responsible governmental actors agree with the actions and steps needed to administer. The county should map out an annual schedule, including recurring public hearings, to review progress within the goals and measure the efficacy of governmental response.

Conclusion

This playbook is designed to support municipal jurisdictions in the food bank's service area through the process of holistically tracking and planning for long-term hunger alleviation. As noted previously, this is a complex problem, and municipalities must be able to understand the issue from all possible angles and to set targets within areas of need before strategically engaging various stakeholders and levers necessary for hunger alleviation. Many municipalities will begin the renewal and deliberation of comprehensive planning over the coming year, and the time to start on this recommendation is now.

⁷ "Moving Beyond Hunger: Comprehensive Food Security Plan and Action Manual for Wake County," *op. cit.*

⁸ "City of Seattle Food Action Plan," *op. cit.*



Appendix A: A COMPREHENSIVE CATALOG OF FOOD SECURITY METRICS

<u>ACCESSIBILITY</u>	
Initiative	Performance Measures
Impact of nutrition assistance and meal programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● SNAP and WIC enrollment ● % of residents enrolled in SNAP who are eligible to receive benefits ● % of residents enrolled in WIC who are eligible to receive benefits ● Enrollment and utilization of farmers market programs ● Utilization of SNAP benefits online ● # of EBT access points ● % of students utilizing free breakfast and lunch
Food affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of subsidized farmers market programs
Transportation gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of public transportation routes available for residents to access full-service grocery outlets ● # of partnerships with the transportation department and grocery stores to increase food access ● # of innovative strategies and organizations creating transit-related solutions ● # of mobile food markets to underserved areas ● % increase of neighborhood walking scores for historically neglected communities
Access to healthy foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of residents increasing skills to grow healthy food ● # of targeted schools reporting a dedicated food security resource ● # of neighborhoods within food deserts
Effects on the local economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of farmers markets and urban food stands in identified low-income neighborhoods ● # of participating farmers market vendors ● # of farmers market vendors from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities ● # of food distribution sites
Community gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of schools adopting community gardens in their curriculum ● # of students enrolled in farm-to-school programs ● # of residents involved in community and food revitalization initiatives ● # of community gardens in affordable housing communities
Supply chain innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of policies implemented that create structural change in supply chain and distribution ● # of Good Food Procurement standards adopted across the county government ● # of trainings to increase the capacity of local business bulk purchasing power ● # of routes identified and utilized for optimal food distribution within the county

AVAILABILITY

Initiative	Performance Measures
Meals needed and served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of meals needed by low-income households ● # of meals households can purchase themselves ● # of meals provided by food assistance programs
Expansion of urban and rural agriculture programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of new acreage enrollments for agricultural purposes ● # of policies created that encourage local food and farm production ● # of programs developed that foster pathways to long-term land tenure and/or ownership of agricultural spaces for historically marginalized groups ● # of pounds or % of food grown and distributed by county



Diversion of food waste to food rescue programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of pounds or % of food rescued and distributed in the county ● # of pounds diverted through use of federal, state, or local programs
Incentivization of grocery store development and construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of grocery stores constructed due to zoning revisions
Availability of healthy foods at small grocery, corner, and convenience stores (including liquor stores)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● % of corner stores meeting healthy food standards ● % of governmental funding allocated towards increasing healthy foods at corner stores ● # of retail models that generate wealth in historically marginalized communities ● % of residents living within a 10-minute walk of healthy food. ● % of households living within a half-mile of a full-service grocery store, fresh produce market, an ethnic market, or a convenience store that stocks fresh produce
<u>UTILIZATION</u>	
Community knowledge of healthy food purchasing and meal preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enrollment in food education programs ● # of food education initiatives
Community centers and entrepreneurial involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of partnerships ● # of cooking events or programs
Purchase of healthy foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● % of healthy food purchases at grocery stores
Health and well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rates of obesity and other chronic diseases among adult and youth populations
<u>STABILITY</u>	
Farm viability and natural resource preservations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of landscape professionals and farmers receiving education in the proper use of pesticides, market expansion, or improved production practices for plants or animals ● # of relationships resulting in increased participation in the local food system ● # of trainings that build skills in sustainable farming practices, business, and management
The economic strength of the food sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of food sector jobs (food production, transportation, warehousing, retail, and preparation) ● Food sector jobs as a percentage of the county workforce ● # of businesses started within the agriculture and food sector ● Average wages of food sector jobs in the county ● Increased tipped wage amount
Locally sourced food contracts for schools, government facilities, and community events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of policies in place to favor local and regional purchasing food sourcing of healthy foods ● # of government contracts with local fresh food businesses ● # of government-sponsored events with food sourced by local and/or regional businesses
Food security emergency preparedness plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of established partners for service provision in emergencies ● # of pounds of food in county food reserves that can withstand feeding the population for two to three months in an emergency
<u>THE PROVIDER ENVIRONMENT</u>	



Network of organizations addressing food security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of collectives involved in food security efforts ● # of connections between these collectives ● # of organizations doing food security work
Resident-driven processes to guide equitable food policy, priorities, and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of community residents involved in food security programs ● # of residents engaged in food security programs, policymaking, and allocation of resources ● County usage of participatory budgeting
Food policy council influence and involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● # of policies introduced based on the county's food security plan or priorities ● # of policies implemented based on the county's food security plan or priorities ● # of food providers and advocates formally involved in working groups and government committees
