Status of Social Safety Net Utilization Efforts in Montgomery County, Maryland:

A Summary of Findings

October 25th, 2021

Contents

Why this Report?

From July through late September 2021, the Capital Area Food Bank conducted a series of interviews, surveys, and focus groups with 55 Montgomery County social service providers, benefit enrollment organizations, and actors and clients who actively engage in or are the target of efforts to increase enrollment in social safety net programs (known as "utilization"). **The goal of these interviews was to collect and share information that helps area policymakers ensure that all Montgomery County residents are enrolled in the social safety net programs they need and deserve.**

Alongside numerous social service providers and community-based organizations responding in unprecedented fashion, the Capital Area Food Bank provided 10.3 million pounds of food to Montgomery County residents in FY21 (122 percent greater than the prior year). Although this extraordinary amount of food supported the lives of our clients, more than 113,000 residents in the county still struggle to access their next meal, and thousands of others face housing insecurity, health crises, financial despair, and other challenges. Thus, governments and community-based organizations at every level have an essential role to play in reducing inequities and increasing access to resources for those who need them. This role is especially critical when downturns and crises expose pre-existing weaknesses in social support systems. But, even outside of those situations, the greatest opportunities for addressing systemic barriers at scale can often be realized through policy solutions.

Food Insecure Clients Demonstrate Demand and Need to Leverage Social Safety Net

Similar to the Great Recession, the disproportionate burden of the pandemic will fall on lower-income Americans and people of color across numerous dimensions — including health, unemployment, food insecurity, and wealth — worsening inequities that predated this crisis.[1] To identify areas where we can best support clients in recovery and rebuilding, the food bank conducted a client survey.[2] The survey, including 234 food insecure residents from Montgomery County, highlighted two main findings that have implications for our clients' ability to maintain food security: [3]

- **1 out of every 5** food insecure clients in the county is not receiving any governmental social safety net benefits.
- **22 percent** of food insecure clients in the county indicated "help accessing government benefits" would be one of the most useful, additional services outside of hunger relief efforts.

Underutilization Leaves Millions Unused

The variance in client understanding and awareness of the social safety net program(s) of which they are eligible is significant, and so too are utilization rates of those programs. The disparity in utilization across programs carries significant costs and puts outsized burdens on community-based organizations and the county government.

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[1] Signe-Mary McKernan, "Impact of the Great Recession and Beyond: Disparities in Wealth Building by Generation and Race," Urban Institute, April 2014, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/413102-Impact-of-the-Great-Recession-and-Beyond.PDF.

[2] Spring of 2021, nearly 2,000 clients across our service area participated in an online survey. Further information can be found at: https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/2021-client-survey-data/.

[3] Our client survey used the USDA Household Food Insecurity Survey model to determine food security status. The USDA survey questions replicated: https://www.ers.usda.gov/media/8282/short2012.pdf.

- The SNAP utilization rate is 60 percent in Montgomery County, leaving an estimated **$60 million** going unused annually.[4] [5]
- It is estimated that "**between $13.5 million and $34.5 million** in federal and Maryland EITC remains unclaimed in [in Montgomery County]."[6]
- The American Rescue Plan significantly expanded the Child Tax Credit, yet it is estimated that nearly 59,000 Maryland children will miss out on these benefits.[7]

The Role of the Social Safety Net

The pandemic has prompted one of the greatest near- and long-term expansions of the social safety net in recent decades. This degree of investment can place administrative burdens on state and local governments to ensure that resources are fully utilized by those in need and are administrable by social service providers and community-based organizations. Lower levels of government should begin to adapt to the administration of a social safety net that is, historically, more generous, inclusive, and impactful.

In July 2021, the Urban Institute estimated that the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan's safety net enhancements **reduced the poverty rate by "67 percent, keeping nearly 50 million Americans out of poverty in 2021**."[1]

Key Terms

Social Safety Net: Social welfare programs which provide cash or other in-kind support to individuals strictly based on need.[8] Social safety net programs are designed to allow low-income households to afford or provide necessities such as food, healthcare, or energy assistance. For purposes of this report, programs included in this definition are: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, free and reduced school meals, the Earned Income (EITC) and Child Tax Credits (CTC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Medicaid, the Medicare Savings Program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and the Low-Income Housing and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). These programs are provided to eligible populations, and largely, are not limited in scope due to funding constraints.

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[4] "Hunger Report 2021," Capital Area Food Bank, June 2021, https://hunger-report.capitalareafoodbank.org/.
[5] This is much lower than the national utilization rate and that of neighboring Prince George's County, both at 82 percent.
[6] "Faces of Poverty 2020: Montgomery County, MD," Montgomery County Community Action Board, July 2020, https://bit.ly/2Y3Fl5M
[7] "Where Are Families Most at Risk of Missing Out on the Expanded Child Tax Credit?," Tax Policy Center, May 27, 2021, https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/feature/where-are-families-most-risk-missing-out-expanded-child-tax-credit?utm_source=urban_EA&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=CTC_Expansion_Products&utm_term=ibp&utm_content=safety_net_advocates&&utm_source=urban_EA&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Families_During_COVID_CTC_Insights&utm_term=ibp&utm_content=safety_net_advocates
[8] Maddalena Honorati, Ugo Gentilini, Ruslan G. Yemtsov, "The state of social safety nets 2015," The World Bank, June 29, 2015, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29115/9781464812545.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y.

Utilization: The percentage or number of individuals or households who qualify for a social welfare program and are also enrolled in that program. For example, the national SNAP utilization rate was 82 percent in FY18, as 82 percent of those who were eligible were also enrolled in SNAP.[9]

Under-Utilization: The percentage or number of individuals or households who qualify for a social welfare program but are not enrolled in that program. For example, the SNAP under-utilization rate was 18 percent in FY18, as 18 percent of those who were eligible were not enrolled in SNAP.

Utilization Efforts: Activities conducted by community-based organizations or governmental actors with the intention of increasing programmatic enrollment, understanding, or awareness of the social safety net. These activities include, but are not limited to, enrolling households or individuals, screening for eligibility, providing information about benefits, and conducting outreach campaigns.

Inter-Programmatic Utilization: Utilization efforts become inter-programmatic when enrollment or outreach activities are conducted for multiple social welfare programs at once. For example, a screening for eligibility of SNAP, EITC, and Medicaid in one intake or setting would be an inter-programmatic utilization effort.

Clients: Individuals or households who rely on the services of community-based organizations or utilize the social safety net to access necessities such as housing, healthcare, or food.

Community-Based Organization: A nonprofit or social service provider that helps to provide necessities to clients. This definition includes the Montgomery County Service Consolidation Hubs.

Utilization Partner: A community-based organization which conducts utilization efforts.

Methodology

Based on the findings and conclusions laid out in the "Why This Report?" section, the food bank conducted a study of Montgomery County stakeholders and clients to better understand the efforts, practices, and approaches to ensure residents are receiving all the social safety net benefits they need and deserve. From July through late September 2021, the food bank conducted a series of interviews, surveys, and focus groups of 55 county actors and clients who actively engage in or are the target audience of utilization efforts, serve within community-based organizations, or implement governmental guidance or policy to support the administration of the social safety net.
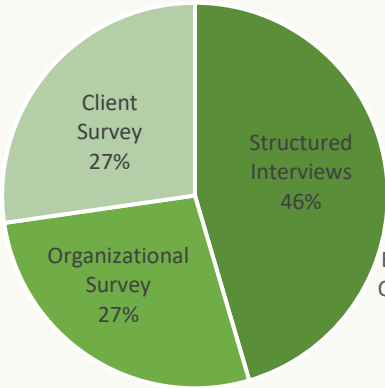
Participating Organizations, Alphabetically Listed

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[9] Karen Cunnyngham, "Reaching Those in Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2018," USDA FNS, May 2021, https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/resource-files/Reaching2018.pdf.
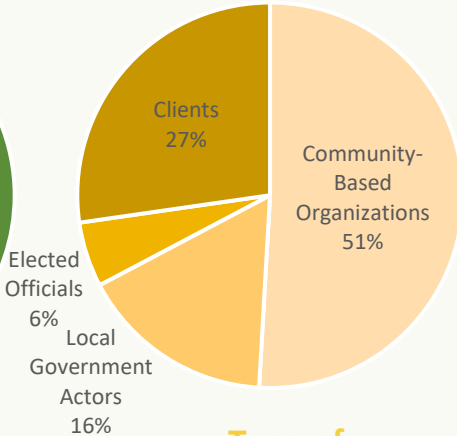
Nonprofit Organizations	Adventist Community Services of GW, Benefits Data Trust, Bethesda Help, CHEER, Crossroads, First Baptist Church of Ken Gar, First Baptist Church of Silver Spring, Guru Nanak Foundation of America, Harvest Gleaners, Manna Food Center, Maryland CASH Campaign, Maryland Hunger Solutions, Meals on Wheels of Takoma/Silver Spring, Montgomery County Food Council, Montgomery County Muslim Foundation, Montgomery County Service Consolidation Hubs (8), Nonprofit Montgomery, Primary Care Coalition, Silver Spring Reformed Church, St. Jude Catholic Church, Wells Robertson House, Yad Yehuda of Greater Washington.
Governmental Administrators	Community Action Agency, Community Action Board Members, Food Security Task Force, Minority Health Initiative Representatives, Montgomery County Council Staff Members, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Montgomery County Office of Eligibility and Support Services, City of Rockville Human Services Representatives.
Elected Officials	All members (3) of the Montgomery County Council Health and Human Services Committee.

Study participants (including clients with lived experience)[10] were identified in consultation with the food council, policymakers, and community-based organizations based on longstanding understand and experience with utilization of the social safety net, direct proximity to communities in need, or innovative approaches to engaging in inter-programmatic efforts. [11] [12]

Snapshot of Methods and Participants:

Research Methods Employed

Structured Interviews 46%
Client Survey 27%
Organizational Survey 27%

Type of Participant

Clients 27%
Community-Based Organizations 51%
Elected Officials 6%
Local Government Actors 16%
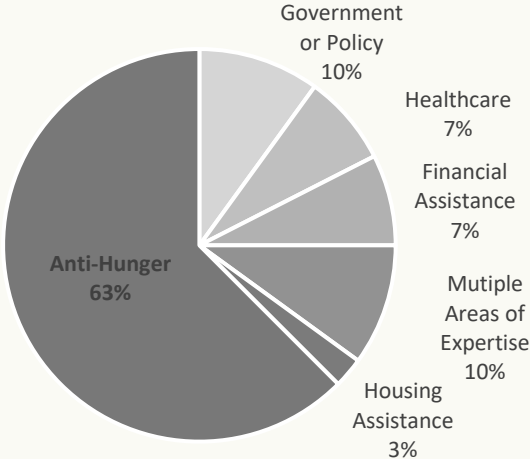
Participant's Area of Expertise

Government or Policy 10%
Healthcare 7%
Financial Assistance 7%
Mutiple Areas of Expertise 10%
Housing Assistance 3%
Anti-Hunger 63%

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[10] 15 clients completed the survey administered in four languages: English, Spanish, French, and Amharic.
[11] See Appendix A for key questions asked in structured interviews, the online survey, and focus groups.
[12] See Appendix B for a summary of research of methods.

Key Findings

Utilization Efforts Tend to Align, Singularly, with Primary Operations of Community Organizations

Our research indicates that most utilization partners focus on the program(s) which most closely align with their existing field of work. For example, organizations operating food pantries are more inclined to singularly focus utilization efforts on safety net programs that work to eliminate hunger, such as SNAP.[13] This trend indicates there is a significant opportunity for community-based organizations to increase or diversify utilization efforts for their clients.

Of organizations with utilization efforts:

61.1% have a singular-focused utilization effort that aligns with their field of work

33.3% have inter-programmatic utilization efforts

5.6% have a singular-focused utilization effort that does not align with their field of work

Organizational Desire and Client Demand to Expand Utilization Efforts, but Barriers Exist

22 of the 25 utilization partners that participated in this study expressed a desire to expand existing utilization efforts. Additionally, one out of every three clients indicated that expanded utilization efforts, both in terms of information sharing and enrollment assistance, would be helpful to securing necessities for themselves and households. Organizations identified barriers to leveraging the social safety net:

Staffing Capacity

Nearly 70 percent of organizations that expressed a need for expanded utilization efforts indicated that staffing capacity was a barrier. Importantly, these organizations frequently indicated that current staff devotion to utilization efforts was not meeting the needs of clients in their community, and that adding additional staff members or increasing time spent on utilization would allow them to serve clients.

"We really need to have a case worker here every day. We could keep her busy all day long and still not reach all the people that want to talk with her."
- Anonymous Utilization Partner

Funding

8 of every 10 organizations interested in expanding utilization activities indicated that funding is a prohibitive barrier. In scenarios where additional funding were provided to increase utilization efforts, organizations offered a wide array of potential uses, including but not limited to:
- o Expanding inter-programmatic focus;
- o Adding to physical space for staff and clients;
- o Engaging in outreach campaigns through texting, flyers, or other means; and
- o Hiring translators to help with application and enrollment processes.

Training or Education

Nearly 60 percent of organizations interested in expanding their utilization activities indicated lack of training was a barrier, or that specialized training would be beneficial. Notably, more than half of

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[13] Analogously, those who work in the healthcare field tend to have a singular focus on Medicaid enrollment, just as those who work in the financial assistance sphere singularly focus on utilization of the EITC and/or CTC.

utilization partners outsource their efforts – meaning they work with the county or other community-based organizations to bring in an enrollment specialist, rather than having an in-house staff member or volunteer position dedicated to utilization. With most utilization partners that want to expand efforts citing the benefit of training or education for their staff, opportunity may exist to increase the number of organizations that can provide utilization efforts in-house.

Distrust of Government, Skepticism of Safety Net in Immigrant Households

In Montgomery County, it is estimated that 32.3 percent of the population is foreign born and about 7 percent of the population is undocumented.[14][15] Given the complexities of immigration, work authorization, and naturalization processes — immigrant, mixed-status, and undocumented households often refrain from enrolling, inquiring, or engaging with social safety net programs. Organizations and clients alike acknowledged that fear and misinformation (related to deportation, family separation, barriers to citizenship, among others) plays a significant role in low utilization rates, and namely, much greater need in these households.

89%

*of utilization partners noted that **distrust, fear, or misinformation** regarding the social safety net **dissuaded clients in immigrant, mixed-status, or undocumented households** from using the social safety net.*

Communication of Safety Net Enhancements & Eligibility Rarely Reaches Local Organizations

84 percent of utilization partners indicated that they did not receive any guidance from local governmental entities as it relates to the social safety net or enhancements through the CARES Act or American Rescue Plan. Specifically, organizations expressed a need to understand better—vis-à-vis the county government—the nuance of enrollment, administration, eligibility, and ongoing revisions or waivers of social safety net programs. The pandemic brought significant demands on community-based organizations, governmental entities, and individuals alike, but it also presented opportunities to capitalize on key expansions, waivers, and flexibilities enacted at all levels of government.

Policy Recommendations for Montgomery County Council and Food Security Taskforce

Create Workload or Full-Time Position Designated to Inter-Programmatic Utilization Efforts

The food bank recommends the county improve upon current utilization efforts by creating a permanent workload or full-time equivalent position to work across county, state, and federal agencies. Specifically, this position could be tasked with the following activities:

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[14] "QuickFacts: Montgomery County, Maryland," United States Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/montgomerycountymaryland#.

[15] "Profile of the Unauthorized Population: Montgomery County, MD," Migration Policy Institute, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/county/24031.

- o **Implementing data sharing practices for adjunctive eligibility and income support programs;[16]**
- o **Ensuring county agencies, actors, and contracts are designed to incorporate models of horizontal integration;[17]**
- o **Liaising between the government, task force, council, utilization partners, and state/federal utilization workgroups and coalitions; and**
- o **Supporting the benefits enrollment and eligibility aspects of MC311.[18]**

Over half of utilization partners indicated a more centralized approach to leveraging the social safety net would alleviate client and organizational demands.

80 percent of clients explicitly suggested that the county should streamline utilization services.

We believe the creation of this position would help to synergize and provide an inter-programmatic lens to several existing efforts already being undertaken by the County:

- Information sharing practices conducted by the Minority Health Initiatives embedded within the Department of Health and Human Services;
- Social safety net casework investments vis-a-vis the Food Security Plan Manager overseeing the service consolidation hub model;
- Application processing through the Office of Eligibility and Support Services;
- Technological and staffing enhancements to MC311;
- Creation of two, temporary (one-year) Human Service Navigator positions overseen by the Community Action Agency; [19]
- Organizational trainings and the creation of a Food Access Manager position by the Food Council.

This position dedicated to increasing utilization rates and inter-programmatic efforts would offer strategic and operational direction for these current, critical investments to ensure these programs are able to be fully activated in long-term recovery and crisis response efforts. Based on the food bank's research and understanding, this would be the first county or municipal level position created of its kind. Montgomery County has always been viewed as a leader in policy, and this would provide for an innovative template for other jurisdictions throughout the country to follow the lead of the county and fully leverage the social safety net.

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[16] Definition of "Adjunctive Eligibility" from https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/using-data-matching-and-targeted-outreach-to-enroll-families-with-young

[17] "State Innovations in Horizontal Integration: Leveraging Technology for Health and Human Services," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 24, 2015, https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-23-15fa.pdf.

[18] Due to the high volume and complexity of calls received at the MC311 call line since the onset of the pandemic, 21 percent of which have been for social services, the County Council recommended approval of funding for additional capacity related to DHHS calls in FY22: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2021/20210429/20210429_HHS1A-1B.pdf.

[19] As of September 2021, the Community Action Agency is planning to fill five, one-year term positions for Human Service Navigators to serve East County, Gaithersburg, Germantown, Long Branch, and Wheaton. These navigators will engage with DHHS, nonprofit partners and hubs. Navigators assure access by providing interpretation, translation, and education about systems; helping residents access basic and emergency needs; and initiating access to nonprofit resources or enrollment of public benefits.

Additionally, the Food Security Task Force is considering a recommendation to create an "Office of Food System Resiliency", and if created, we believe this position could be housed within this office, as utilization of the social safety net plays an inherent role in food security.

Enhance Community Organizational Reach & Service Hub Model by Investing in Utilization

We recommend policymakers take steps to further enhance community organizational and service consolidation Hub models by:

- **Increasing the presence of contracted enrollment specialists to meet the needs of the organizations (and Hubs) and demand from their clients; and**
- **Ensuring benefit specialists are equipped, trained, and prepared to enroll clients in a range of social safety net programs in an inter-programmatic fashion.**

Service Consolidation Hubs:

Throughout the development of this report, and in various council and taskforce sessions, policymakers have articulated a vision for Hubs of "one stop shops," where residents walk into any Hub and receive emergency provisions (food, shelter, diapers, etc.), and assess eligibility or enroll in safety net programs. However, Hubs identified two barriers to ensure this model is achieved as it relates to utilization:

16.5
Average weekly hours, per Hub, expressed by Hubs to meet client demand for social safety net.

1. The presence of caseworkers or enrollment specialists is not sufficient to meet the current demand of potential enrollees, and
2. Accessibility and understanding of up-to-date information related to arcane policy and programmatic information can be difficult to administer.

The Hubs have significant reach into the community, having served more than 150,000 households during the pandemic through emergency food distribution. However, an integral facet of the county's efforts to transition from response to recovery should include an investment in empowering Hubs to fully leverage the social safety net on behalf of clients.

Community Based Organizations:

Hubs are just one service model representing the need for utilization enhancements. Community-based organizations, across a variety of service models and areas of expertise, have been integral in supporting Montgomery County residents throughout this pandemic. However, 80 percent of participant organizations with utilization efforts, excluding Hubs, indicated that they would benefit from increased staffing capacity for utilization activities, and/or that benefit enrollment specialist or staff understanding of frequently changing programmatic nuances is a hurdle. Investing in benefit enrollment specialists at community-based organizations, alongside the Hubs, will ensure social safety net resources are leveraged alongside immediate, emergency provisions.

Administer Campaign to Assuage Immigrant Community Fear of Social Safety Net Eligibility

We recommend that the county engage in an information campaign designed to tackle disinformation, and provide reliable, accurate resources regarding the eligibility and impact of social safety net programs on immigrant communities. Based on insights from community-based organization in this report, the campaign must:

- **Provide truthful and accurate information about eligibility guidelines for immigrant communities;**
- **Inform of social safety net programs' potential impact on citizenship or immigration status;**
- **Disperse in linguistic affinity with immigrant populations;**
- **Explore digital campaign opportunities; and**
- **Administer through trusted community-based organizations.[20]**

Importantly, information campaigns and community outreach targeted at immigrant communities are most successful when trusted community-based partners serve as the liaison between clients and the government.[21] [22] This provides a level of comfortability and trust to clients and allows for the county government and community-based organizations to leverage the social safety net among clients.

Best Practices to Leverage and Activate Utilization Efforts – For Organizations, by Organizations

Throughout this study, utilization partners suggested several best practices that could be integrated by community-based organizations in Montgomery County seeking to initiate, re-activate, or build upon utilization efforts. The list of organizations that provided the insights and information in this report possess a wealth of information, client familiarity, and understanding that is unmatched. The food bank, based on these insights, is developing, and assessing its own framework to support Montgomery County residents with accessing, understanding, and enrolling in these programs to ensure they are receiving all the benefits they qualify. Best practices articulated by the community organizations already engaged in this work, include:

Leverage Trust in Immigrant Communities

Utilization partners noted the critical nature of building their relationships as trusted community partners among immigrant communities. These organizations suggested utilization efforts can best be successful if trusted relationships are built through other operations (ex. food distribution, tax preparation, financial consultation, etc.). Then, approaches to utilization can reach much further into communities. A tactic that numerous utilization partners suggested is a 2Gen approach, meaning an engagement approach toward utilization that targets both children and adults or caregivers in the same

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[20] Over half of utilization partners indicated they have entrenched, trusted relationships with immigrant communities, and the county should leverage this existing dynamic to outreach to immigrant communities.

[21] Christine Brenner, "Structures and Strategies of Immigrant Integration: Evidence from Local Governments in the New Latino Destinations of the United States," 2009, https://bit.ly/3ywOr7F.

[22]"2018 Local Government & Immigrant Communities Survey," International City/County Management Association, February 2019, https://icma.org/2018-local-government-immigrant-communities-survey.

household. Utilization partners noted the importance of outreaching to both parents and children of immigrant families who may be eligible for social safety net programs, and research indicates (as well as, community partners), "immigrants lead an increasingly large proportion of families with youth and young children in poverty."[23] Especially given differing eligibility requirements granted to children of immigrants born in the US versus their parents, a 2Gen approach can increase utilization while also building trust for entire households.

Strengthen Education, Awareness, and Presence

Organizations indicated that information gathering is an integral step in building utilization efforts. By taking steps to learn real-time, nuanced programmatic information, community-based organizations can best inform and serve their clients. This includes, but is not limited to, participating in training sessions or other educational opportunities offered by governmental actors, researching other community-based organizations' approaches to client referrals, keeping up to date on policy changes that may impact social safety net programs, and joining utilization-oriented workgroups and coalitions.[24] [25]

Connect with Clients Digitally

Multiple utilization partners noted that digital campaigns, such as text, video, or social media, have proven successful in reaching vulnerable populations. From sharing information about services to dispelling myths about government programs, communicating directly with the community is advantageous in building trust and promoting utilization efforts. Social media offers a cost-effective opportunity for community-based organizations with limited resources to reach a wide audience. Organizations noted that digital messaging aimed at clients works best when it is digestible and relatable; content should not be full of jargon, but rather simple facts, anecdotes, and information. When messaging can be interactive – a two-way text, direct messaging, or a response to comments on social media – organizations noted a clear level of trust and understanding from their clients.

Conclusion

Montgomery County is a leader in innovative, local policy. Nationally and in the food bank's service area, it is consistently on the forefront of leveraging resources and ingenuity to serve those in need. This study provides policymakers an opportunity to implement cutting-edge practices and policy to fully leverage federal and state resources, build upon county investments, leverage the extraordinary work by community organizations, and proactively take steps to administer an expanded safety net on behalf of those in need.

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[23]"Building Trust with Immigrant Families: Spreading and Adapting 2Gen Working Practices," Aspen Institute, August 12, 2021, https://www.aspeninstitute.org/events/buildingtrust/.

[24] "Virtual trainings for Hub Leaders and Food Assistance Providers," Montgomery County Food Council, https://mocofoodcouncil.org/trainings/.

[25] "Current Trainings," Maryland Hunger Solutions, https://www.mdhungersolutions.org/training-and-outreach/current-trainings/.

Appendix A: Sampling of Questions by Collection Method

	Structured Interviews & Survey for Community-Based Organizations	Client Survey	Focus Groups
Programmatic Reach	*What programs do you specialize in terms of outreach and enrollment?*	*What programs do you currently receive benefits from?* *What programs have you previously received benefits from?*	*Hubs: What do you see as the main goal of the Hubs (when they first started, now, 10 months from now)?*
	Describe your efforts to increase the utilization of the program you specialize in?	*Are there programs which you think you may be eligible for but are not receiving benefits from?* *If yes, why are you not participating?*	*Hubs: What do you see as the main goals of the Hubs that have been communicated to you, and do you feel information was adequate? What should be included in long-term planning?*
	Describe your efforts to increase the utilization of other programs, outside of the program in which you specialize?	*How or where did you enroll in benefits?*	*Utilization Partners: What are your "best practices" that you would recommend to other organizations looking to initiate or expand utilization efforts?*
Opportunities for Improvement	*What could the Montgomery County government do to increase utilization efforts across a range of social safety net programs?*	*Did you have the option to apply for multiple benefit programs at once? Would it have been of help/was it of help to do so?*	*Utilization Partners: How could the county government better support organizations who are entering the utilization space/unsure of how to increase inter-programmatic utilization?*
	What could the state of Maryland to do support utilization efforts, both in the program in which you specialize and inter-programmatically?	*What suggestions do you have to ensure those who are eligible for various programs are receiving all the benefits they qualify for?*	*Utilization Partners: Would the creation of a designated county workload/position dedicated to streamlining utilization be of help? Are there recommendations you have for how this office can best work within the community?*
Barriers	*What barriers do you see to increase utilization of social safety net programs among all individuals and households who qualify?*	*Did you experience any difficulties/barriers during the enrollment process? If so, what?* *What barriers to enrollment do you see for yourself or others?*	*Hubs: How many more hours of caseworker presence each week do you think would be sufficient to adequately to meet the need for ongoing utilization efforts?*

Appendix B: Research Methods

	DESCRIPTION
Interview	Structured interviews designed to understand participants' role in utilization efforts or policymaking, and recommendations to build upon leveraging the social safety net.
Online Survey	Google surveys provided to community-based organizations to illuminate how trusted social service providers can activate utilization efforts, and to clients to understand their needs.
Focus Groups	Two separate focus groups with community Consolidation Hubs and utilization partners to assess how Hubs can be leveraged and how inter-programmatic utilization practices can be built out into common practice and county policy.
Literature Review	Review conducted on existing utilization efforts in the county, and best practices as it relates to building trust in immigrant communities.