

# ***Supporting Jefferson FOOD***

**Grant Program Evaluation**

Prepared for the  
Community Action  
Coalition of South Central  
Wisconsin

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## Introduction

Supporting Jefferson FOOD, a two-year project of the Community Action Coalition of South Central Wisconsin (CACSCW), has engaged the Jefferson County Food Pantry Coalition and area food pantries and feeding sites to build capacity and better respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. With funding from the Greater Watertown Community Health Foundation, the Supporting Jefferson FOOD project was designed to work with up to 15 area feeding organizations in a 12-month quality improvement process. The process was two-fold: 1) assessing and improving *agency capacity*, in key areas like compliance, client satisfaction, accessible hours, and use of evidence-based/informed practices; 2) enhancing *training competencies* of staff and volunteers, in such areas as budgeting and food handling skills, cultural competency, and knowledge of required policies and procedures. Additionally, participating feeding organizations applied for and received mini-grants that offered funds for equipment, supplies, and other supports to enhance their operations and capacity.

The Center for Community and Nonprofit Studies (the CommNS) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison is a hub for faculty, students, and community partners to collaborate on research, practice, and evaluation that examines the well-being of communities and the civic and nonprofit sectors. The CommNS Co-Create team provides applied research, evaluation services, and technical assistance for mission-driven partners to advance their goals. The Co-Create team worked with CACSCW to evaluate the Jefferson FOOD project, especially the short-term outcomes for participants and the medium-term outcomes for feeding organizations, and to provide lessons learned and recommendations for CACSCW's future endeavors.

## What We Did

To determine the short-term outcomes for participants and medium-term outcomes for feeding organizations, we drew upon several sources of information:

- Review of participants' self-assessments of their feeding organizations' capacity, at baseline and post-participation
- Review of feeding organizations' mini-grant proposals
- An end-of-project focus group with participants, with verbal and written responses

For the organizational self-assessments, we utilized basic descriptive analysis to compare scores overall, within particular modules, and change pre- and post-participation. For the mini-grant review and the focus group, we utilized a content-based and thematic qualitative analysis.

## Who Was Involved

Six feeding organizations have been involved in the Jefferson FOOD project and the evaluation. These six operate in different areas of the region, and four are food pantries and two are meal

sites. Four are associated with faith institutions. See Table 1 for a listing of the participating feeding organizations.

Table 1. Participating Feeding Organizations

Organization	Location	Meal Site or Food Pantry	Reach
Bread & Roses	Watertown	Meal site	Open to all
Bread Basket	Watertown	Food pantry	Residents of the Watertown area
Helping Hands	Johnson Creek	Food pantry	Residents within Johnson Creek School District
Jefferson Food Pantry	Jefferson	Food pantry	Residents within Jefferson School District
Loaves & Fishes	Watertown	Meal site	Open to all
Sunshine Reach	Lake Mills	Food pantry	Residents within Lake Mills Area School District

The organizational self-assessments and mini-grant proposals were completed by the participating organization representatives with assistance from CACSCW. CACSCW shared this data with Co-Create. Representatives participated in the focus group in the final Jefferson FOOD summit in June 2023. Co-Create prepared questions for the focus group and CACSCW facilitated the conversation. CACSCW then provided Co-Create with images of representatives' written responses and an audio recording of the conversation or transcription.

**What We Learned**

*Organizational Self-Assessments*

The organizational self-assessments were prepared by CACSCW to help participating feeding organizations and CACSCW staff to identify organizational strengths and challenges and to target their capacity-building efforts. These assessments broke down the capacity of feeding organizations into five domains or modules: *Agency Capacity, Volunteer Outreach, Food Policies, Cultural Competency, and Effective Outreach to Clients*. Each module breaks down into a set of items (31 in total) for more detailed assessment and each of these items were rated on a scale of 1-4 (1 for "least capacity" to 4 "highest capacity"). The modules and assessed items are presented Appendix A, along with average ratings at baseline and post-participation.

In conversation with the CACSCW coaches, the six feeding organizations completed these self-assessments at the beginning of the project (Spring 2022). Table 2 presents the average assessment of items within each domain at the beginning of the project.

Table 2. Average Self-Assessed Organizational Capacity (Baseline)

<b>Module</b>	<b>Self-Assessed Module Average</b>
Agency Capacity (6 items)	2.9
Volunteer Outreach (5 items)	3.3
Food Policies (8 items)	3.4
Cultural Competency (4 items)	3.4
Effective Outreach to Clients (8 items)	3.5

These assessments suggest that feeding organization representatives generally assessed their baseline capacity as moderate, ranging from 2.9-3.5 by module. The module of lowest capacity on average was *Agency Capacity*. On the item level (see Appendix A), the average lowest assessment was for the item, “The agency has written policies/procedures to handle conflict of interest, reports of harassment, and client complaints” (average rating of 1.8). By comparison, two items within the *Cultural Competency* module had an average rating of 4 (one related to accessibility for those with disabilities and the other related to respect for religious differences) as did one in the *Food Policies* module (related to the display of healthy foods).

Given this range of self-assessed capacity, CACSCW chose to focus much of the capacity - building activities of the Jefferson FOOD project on topics of *Agency Capacity*, including policies and procedures, financial management, and organizational planning.

After the Jefferson FOOD project completed in June 2023, five of the six feeding organizations<sup>1</sup> repeated the self-assessment to gauge their organizational capacity after their participation. Table 3 presents the average assessment of items within each domain at the completion of the project (for the five organizations) and how these compare to the average baseline assessment.

Table 3. Change in Average Self-Assessed Organizational Capacity, Baseline to Post

<b>Module</b>	<b>Self-Assessed Module Average – Post</b>	<b>Change from Baseline</b>
Agency Capacity (6 items)	3.4	+0.5
Volunteer Outreach (5 items)	3.8	+0.5
Food Policies (8 items)	3.6	+0.2
Cultural Competency (4 items)	3.9	+0.5
Effective Outreach to Clients (8 items)	3.8	+0.3

The results of this comparison suggest that participating feeding agencies perceived increased organizational capacity in all five domains. For three of these domains – *Agency Capacity*, *Volunteer Outreach*, and *Cultural Competency* – showed an increased average of a half rating (0.5) from baseline, while other average increases were smaller. One of these, *Agency*

<sup>1</sup> The Bread Basket was not able to complete their self-assessment by the time of the writing of this report.

Capacity, CACSCW identified as a priority for capacity building activities given baseline assessments. This notable increase suggests that this focus was effective for increasing organizational capacity in this domain, while also perhaps bringing benefit to organizational capacity in other domains or overall.

On the item level (see Appendix A), 20 of the 31 items demonstrated increases from average baseline self-assessment to post-participation, ranging from an increase of +0.1 to +1.4 (for the item, “The agency has clear and visible signage advertising hours of operation in multiple languages,” from 2.4 to 3.8). Only 6 items showed decreases in average self-assessments from baseline to post-participation, with a range from -0.1 to -0.7 (for the item, “Clients have an authentic voice in the selection of available food,” from 3.5 to 2.8). The remaining 5 items showed no change, but these were generally for items already assessed at the highest level (i.e., average of 4). Together, these item-level results affirm the impact of the Jefferson FOOD project on feeding organizations’ perceived organizational capacity.

*Mini-Grants*

Participating feeding organizations had the opportunity to apply for and receive mini-grants from the Jefferson FOOD project to further support their organizational capacity. Five organizations applied for and received grants ranging from \$5,656-10,000 (see Table 3). In these grants, organizations most often requested funds for new pantry equipment and supplies (e.g., a refrigerator, shelving, food thermometers) and marketing and communications purchases (e.g., signage, printers and ink). One organization, Sunshine Reach, was still in the process of preparing their mini-grant application at the time of this report.

*Focus Group*

During the final summit of the Jefferson FOOD project on June 20, 2023, CACSCW facilitated a focus group of participating feeding organizations to gain their perspectives of the project’s impacts. The Co-Create team worked with CACSCW to develop the questions for the focus group (see Appendix B). These questions sought to understand the perceived impacts for participants themselves (e.g., increased knowledge), for their organization’s capacity, and for the communities that they serve. Participants responded verbally and/or in written form on post-it notes. The focus group conversation was audio-recorded and transcribed to help capture participant quotes.

Table 4. Feeding Organizations Mini-Grant Requests

<b>Feeding Organization</b>	<b>Amount Requested</b>	<b>Planned Uses</b>
Bread & Roses	\$7,828.78	Various supplies and equipment for safety and efficiency; signage and promotional materials

Bread Basket	5,656.12	Supplies and equipment for food safety and improved service; printing and marketing materials
Helping Hands	8,458.57	New refrigerator, flooring, and shelving; communications and marketing materials including a tablet computer and printer
Jefferson Food Pantry	10,000.00	Contribution towards a larger pantry upgrade effort with these funds going to equipment like refrigeration units
Loaves & Fishes	8,500.00	Equipment and associated labor for a convection oven and enhanced storage

On the *participant-level*, organizational representatives reported impacts related to:

- Personal connections they made with one another and the organizations they represented
- Access to policy and procedure templates, examples, and other shared resources
- Increased awareness of community needs
- Increased awareness of information (e.g., related to marketing), best practices, and how to find additional resources

As one participant wrote, “a huge benefit has been feeling part of a larger collective versus being an isolated one-off nonprofit.” This participant noted that the shared resources and “tips and tricks” were also helpful.

On the *organizational-level*, participants reported impacts such as:

- New supplies, equipment, and/or facilities through the mini-grants (e.g., printers, stove, flooring, shelving)
- Greater collaboration between feeding organizations
- Time-saving through example and template policies and materials
- Increased food safety and efficiency in their practices
- Capacity to implement new models of service (e.g., meal kits, more fresh food, large quantity ordering and service)
- Improved documentation and data management

In part due to the Jefferson FOOD project, “I think over the past year, everything has changed,” a participant said, “this foundation helped a lot, provided some money to replace the walk-in cooler and freezer, which then allows the food pantry to focus more on fresh food, which has been really important.” They further noted that they have been able to secure additional volunteers and acquire additional equipment that further built their capacity.

On the *community-level*, participants reported that the Jefferson FOOD project has:

- Increased organizational reach and the numbers of people served in the area

- Increased food options and availability of fresh food in particular
- Improved client experiences at feeding organizations from cleaner environments and better interactions with staff
- Improved volunteer training, experiences, and morale

With the changes they have been able to make at their organization, one participant reported they had been able to double their reach and offer more options through a choice pantry:

*Since we started this, we've actually doubled our community impact. And we're gearing up to expand our food services, we're going to start offering a choice pantry, twice a month... And the reason that we've been able to have this progress is because... the shared resources from this has enabled us to free up our time to dedicate elsewhere, to actually directly impacting the community.*

Additionally, we asked participants for their recommendations to CACSCW for a future effort like the Jefferson FOOD project. They suggested:

- Trainings on social issues to support understanding and larger-scale efforts to support community members in poverty
- More mini-grant funding
- Hands-on time during the workshops to implement ideas
- Shorter, but more frequent and topic-focused workshops
- Training related to grant writing and information on grant opportunities
- Consider training on additional topics, like food waste, financial practices, and technology

### **What It Means**

Altogether, these results suggest that the Jefferson FOOD project has successfully identified capacity-building needs of local feeding organizations and responded to them in ways that organizations recognize as impactful. Feeding organizations' self-assessed organizational capacity showed considerable increases from baseline to post-participation and in domains targeted by CACSCW's activities as well as others.

Individual participants also reported increased awareness of community issues and resources to address them, access to useful policy and procedure materials, and personal connections they made with other organizations. For feeding organizations, participants identified several notable impacts, including acquisitions of key equipment and supplies, increased food safety and efficiency, and other changes that allowed some to add new models of service and increase their client reach. In total, participants believe these changes have created a more collaborative system of feeding organizations in the area that are able to provide more food offerings, reach more community members, provide a better service experience, and find information and resources to respond to new challenges as they arise.

## What's Next

Going forward, CACSCW may seek to build from the success of the Jefferson FOOD project to reach additional feeding organizations in the region and/or provide training and support to respond to organizations' other capacity-building interests. For such future efforts, CACSCW should consider the feedback of these organizations regarding additional topics and associated resources (e.g., about social issues influencing food insecurity, grant writing), timing and frequency of workshops, hands-on activities within workshops, and further mini-grant funding. Integration of this ideas may result in an even more impactful effort for local feeding organizations and the community members they serve.



**Appendix A:**  
**Organizational Self-Assessment Average Ratings, Baseline and Post-Participation**

<b>Module</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Average Rating – Baseline</b>	<b>Average Rating – Post</b>
<b>Module 1: Agency Capacity</b>	The agency has written policies/procedures to handle conflict of interest, reports of harassment, and client complaints.	1.8	2.8
	The agency has a posted safety plan for emergency situations (active shooter, extreme weather, fire).	2.2	2.6
	The agency has clear and visible non-discrimination policy ensuring equitable treatment for all. The policy is consistent with all federal, state, county, and municipal statutes.	2.8	4
	The agency maintains clear financial records. Financial records are audited, reviewed, and reported on a regular basis (at least annually).	3.5	3.4
	The agency has a clear vision, mission, and strategic plan. The plan is known by key players and drives agency decision-making.	3.5	4
	The agency solicits funds from diverse sources (donations, in-kind, grants).	3.7	3.6
	MODULE 1 AVERAGE	2.9	3.4
<b>Module 2: Volunteer Outreach</b>	Staff and clients have access to and are aware of (above) written policies/procedures.	2.7	3.8
	The agency has a clear plan to train and orient new staff.	3	3.2
	The agency assesses and improves staff trainings on a regular basis.	3.3	3.8
	The agency trains staff on core operations (such as food safety, ServeSafe food handling, equipment handling, client intake).	3.7	4
	Leadership team members and staff reflect the community served or have lived experience in poverty. This includes individuals who speak multiple languages.	3.8	4
	MODULE 2 AVERAGE	3.3	3.8
<b>Module 3: Food Policies</b>	The agency has written policies/procedures for food distribution, purchasing, and sourcing. Policies are equitable and assure ample and desired food is freely available to clients.	2.3	3.4
	The agency has written policies/procedures on food safety and handling.	2.8	4

	(Meal Sites Only) Clients have choices of prepared foods that accommodate health concerns, cultural and religious values, and personal preferences (vegan/vegetarian).	3.3	4
	Clients have an authentic voice in the selection of available food.	3.5	2.8
	Healthy food options and educational materials are available for staff and clients.	3.7	3.8
	(Pantries Only) Clients have free choice to shop and select as many free products as they need.	3.8	3.3
	The agency has a diverse and predictable food supply for the next 6 months (ordering, food drives, gleaning, growing).	3.8	3.5
	(Pantries Only) Healthy food is prominently and attractively displayed to clients.	4	4
	MODULE 3 AVERAGE	3.4	3.6
<b>Module 4: Cultural Competency</b>	The agency has clear and visible signage advertising hours of operations in multiple languages.	2.4	3.8
	The agency ensures services and printed materials are easily available in multiple languages (bi-lingual staff, language lines, posters).	3.2	3.6
	The agency follows ADA requirements and is accessible to individual with physical disabilities.	4	4
	All eligible activities are administered in a manner which is free from religious influences and does not discriminate or give preference based on religion.	4	4
	MODULE 4 AVERAGE	3.4	3.9
<b>Module 5: Effective Outreach to Clients</b>	External communications engage clients and partner agencies on a regular basis (newsletter, closure updates, social media posting, website information)	3.2	4
	The agency has written policies/procedures related to client intake and confidentiality. The intake process is done in private.	3.2	3.5
	The agency regularly solicits, reviews, and makes changes based on client feedback.	3.2	4
	The agency's hours of operations, address, and information is easily available in multiple places (google, social media, website, 2-1-1).	3.3	4
	The agency has free parking and bike racks for clients.	3.7	3.8
	Active partnerships with other agencies allow staff to provide a range of warm	3.8	3.8

	referrals to other local services, including other feeding organizations.		
	Clients provide regular feedback on agency hours, services, and communications.	3.8	3.6
	(Pantries Only) The agency collects only essential data or information from clients. Aggregate data collected by clients is shared anonymously with the community (clients, public, funders, donors)	4	4
	MODULE 5 AVERAGE	3.5	3.8

## Appendix B: Jefferson FOOD Participant Focus Group Questions

1. Now that this program is wrapping up, what are one or two things that **you've personally** gained from this experience? These could be things you learned, skills you've developed, or something else.
2. How do you think **your pantry/meal site** is different now after participating in this program? This could be related to your coaching experiences, your mini-grant, or something else.
3. How do you think the **community you serve** may be different now because of your pantry/meal site having participated in this program? You might think about the number of people you serve, the service they experience, or otherwise.
4. If CAC was to do a program like this again, what suggestions or recommendations would you make for that program?