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Understanding Barriers to Attending Food Distributions

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**Abstract**

The Second Harvest Food Bank provides food access to all of the population through Santa Cruz County. Too many people in the community are suffering from food insecurity due to lack of healthy meals, financial instability, and other living expenses not allowing them to purchase healthy meals. This lack of healthy meals which is leading to people at risk of serious health issues, development, and poor academics amongst children. Distribution sites and nutrition programs are provided on a daily basis at different locations and times of the day at no cost to the community. However the number of participants has declined significantly over the past years. The Second Harvest Food Bank's mission is to end hunger and educate the community of Santa Cruz County, their vision is that Santa Cruz County will be a healthy community where no person goes hungry or has limited access to healthy meals.

*Keywords:* Nutrition, Hunger, Second Harvest Food Bank, Distribution, Santa Cruz County

### **Agency & Communities Served**

The Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County is a non-profit organization that gets its funding by grants, and donations. Their mission statement is to end hunger through healthy food, education, and leadership. Second Harvest has a vision that “Santa Cruz County will be a healthy community, where no person goes hungry or has their life opportunities limited due to malnutrition. (Second Harvest, 2010)

Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Cruz County was founded in 1972, as one of the first food banks in California and the second one in the nation (Second Harvest, 2010). The facility was first established by moving into a small shed and began distributing food bags in a hospital parking lot in Santa Cruz to groups operating the Breakfast for Kids Program. The Food Bank currently provides food to 55,000 residents; half of the population which are children. They collaborate and network with more than 200 agencies and programs and have approximately 3,000 volunteers who assist all year round, to distribute over 8 million pounds of food annually to working low income families, children, and seniors. With the collaboration of the community and agencies the Second Harvest Food Bank is able to provide 6 meals for every \$1 donated (Second Harvest, 2010). They purchase fresh produce for pennies per pound from local growers and receive donations from the local agricultural community, food industry manufacturers and retailers, federal food programs, food bank networks and community food drives.

The majority of the population served is Hispanic however the Second Harvest serves every population that qualifies for assistance and does not discriminate. The Food Bank serves low income communities whose income is below 150% federal poverty level (Second Harvest, 2010). The population that receives food assistance and other resources are children and their families, seniors, and the homeless. They receive USDA bags and boxes of fresh produce and

non-perishable items like beans, rice, cooking oil, canned food, bread, frozen meals and many more items through the nutrition programs distribution sites.

The SHFB doesn't only distribute food they also provide the food hotline and CalFresh outreach, they help assist the populations by filling out the application for CalFresh benefits. The food hotline is available to provide information on distribution sites from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm. There are 87 distribution sites per month, such as Food for Children and Passion, for produce throughout Santa Cruz County that provide bilingual peer nutritional education classes and healthy cooking demonstrations, with market-style produce distribution, similar to a farmers' market.

The primary goal for the food bank is to eliminate childhood hunger and instill lifelong healthy eating habits to ensure a bright future for our children. Also, they will reduce obesity by 10% in Santa Cruz County through access to good nutrition and education" (Second Harvest, 2010).

### **Problem Description**

Over the past four years SHFB staff have noticed a trend of declining participation. For example, the Food For Children Program served over 3,000 families in 2014, and now, in 2019, it is serving about 1,200 (Second Harvest, 2019). The staff is uncertain as to what is causing this decline in numbers. This project is about gathering door-to-door data and gathering data from the participants at distribution sites from the community, to understand how to reverse this trend and improve our sites to fit the needs of the population..

### **Contributing Factors**

At this point the agency only have assumptions of what the contributing factors are. Perhaps people are leaving the area because they cannot afford to live here anymore due to the high cost of housing. Perhaps they are afraid due to their immigration status and don't want to receive any type of public assistance for fear of deportation. Perhaps people don't have the transportation to get to the distribution sites. This activity will hopefully clarify these assumptions by collecting data through surveys.

#### Living expenses

Economically, the Public Policy Institute of California recently published its 2018 report showing that by factoring in the region's high cost of living, Santa Cruz County has California's second highest poverty rate (23.8%) behind only Los Angeles County (24.3%). In Santa Cruz County, our cost of living is 200% above the average U.S. cost of living ([www.bestplaces.net](http://www.bestplaces.net)). As a result, Santa Cruz County has the fifth least affordable housing market in the world (15th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey, 2019) and the least-affordable metro area in California (Out of Reach Report, 2017).

#### Fear of Deportation

An estimate of 18,000 undocumented immigrants are Santa Cruz County residents, and although they are a "Sanctuary city" many people still fear of deportation and will not seek any type of public assistance causing these families to live in poverty and have food insecurities, these children are going hungry and skipping meals ([Bestplace.net](http://Bestplace.net)).

#### Lack of Transportation

Another important factor is the lack of transportation. Is Second Harvest offering distribution sites in areas that are not a walking distance of their neighborhoods? Some

households don't have vehicles or share one amongst the whole family. Transportation issues hit hard amongst low income families and often time public transportation isn't reliable especially for those who are elderly, disabled, obese, or chronically ill. Riding the bus can be a challenge so as a result many people find themselves hungry with no means of transportation to these distribution sites. The Santa Cruz County Metro bus routes have had recent route cuts in the last few years to help resolve its structural deficit of 8.8 million. Students and many people with disabilities are being affected because they no longer have closer routes to the destination they want to go to. People will be forced to walk miles just to get to a bus stop, and will have a bigger impact on the low income population (Clark, 2016).

### Consequences

Some of the consequences that will impact the community of Santa Cruz County significantly is food insecurity that will lead to health issues and loss of grant funding and sponsorships for our distribution programs at the Second Harvest Food Bank. If people throughout the community are not attending and taking advantage of these services, it will not help us eliminate the issue of food insecurity impacting several families.

### Loss of Grant Funding

\_\_\_\_\_No matter how hard the Second Harvest Food Bank attempts to continue these services to the public in our community, if these services are not being utilized it will result in loss of grant funding. If the source of funding is lost it affects the non profit agency significantly. Funding for nonprofit agencies is like the fuel, and it is important that all programs are being used and continue to grow. As of June 2017, the SHFB has received \$18,268,506 in grant totals, losing this large amount of money will have a severe effect amongst our community and many families

will continue to suffer from food insecurity leading to health issues. The number of people suffering from food insecurity will increase instead of decreasing.

### Food Insecurity

Recently, Second Harvest Food Bank Santa Cruz County's constituent base showed that 32.1% of Santa Cruz County's population who are suffering from food insecurity (California Health Interview Survey 2017). The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as not having consistent, dependable access to enough food for active, healthy living. According to UCLA's California Health Interview Survey, in July 2016 in Santa Cruz County, 29.4% of the population were receiving CalFresh public food assistance. According to the California Department of Social Services, more than half of CalFresh participants are children. The Public Policy Institute of California also reports children in Santa Cruz County are disproportionately likely to be impoverished, with 27.2% falling below the study's poverty threshold. Likewise, Kidsdata.org states that in 2015 in Santa Cruz County, 53.3% of public school students were eligible to receive free or reduced price meals. If families don't take advantage of these services to healthy foods, the issue of food insecurity will continue to be on going.

### Health issues

When people do not have the adequate nutritious meals it becomes a health risk, they are being forced to skip meals and going hungry so their bodies miss out on all the nutrients they need. The food they can afford is often high in calories and low in nutrients leading to serious health issues. In Santa Cruz County 1 in 5 face the threat of hunger, and 1 in 4 children are going to bed hungry and the problem escalates as they grow (Second Harvest, 2019)

Often times reliance on less healthy foods can lead to toxic stress, poor nutrition, and chronic diet-related diseases such as diabetes and obesity. In turn, these chronic illnesses can



worsen existing disabilities or other illnesses, or result in an inability to work and increased healthcare costs, which further restrict the household food budget. In order to prevent and reduce health risks healthy meals should be consumed on a daily basis regardless of their income levels, everyone should be entitled to healthy food.

**Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Living expenses	Santa Cruz County residents are not accessing Santa Cruz Food Bank through current distribution sites.	Loss of grant funding
Fear of Deportation		Food Insecurity
No access to Transportation		Health issues

**Capstone Project Description and Justification**

**Project Purpose**

The Second Harvest Food Bank’s purpose of the survey was to understand the barriers to attending food distribution sites. The agency has implemented the surveys to see what positive changes can be made for easier access to healthy nutrition. Without participants utilizing the services at these sites the SHFB will begin to lose grant funding, if the source of funding is lost the mission of this non profit agency will be significantly affected. The declining number of families that do regularly attend and who have become dependant on this nutrition, will no longer have access to it. As a result they will suffer from food insecurities and face the possibility of associated severe health issues.

**Project Justification**

Research shows that getting direct community data is the best way to determine services for the community. The objective of the survey is to identify target demographics, traits and

recommendations that would enable us to outline and implement communication mediums, which would integrate with the objectives of the SHFB. The survey consists of 6 questions for clients to briefly fill out while attending distribution sites. The Second Harvest Food Bank collects surveys from participants about four times a year to see if involvement decreases or increases and know if participants have changed their lifestyle and eating habits. At the end of the survey every member will have the opportunity to express their feelings or concerns with regard to their involvement in the classes. The Agency will use the comments received for positive life changing testimonies and to implement new ideas during meetings that can be used in the future.

The survey will be a pilot study since it will be the first time that the survey will be handed out to people who do not participate or have any knowledge of these services throughout the community by going door to door. I will not only be used at the distribution sites and a study will be conducted. The idea is to have positive results and continue evaluating if participation increases through surveys and what barriers we can eliminate for successful attendance and hope that the services the Food Bank provides to reaching the mission goal to a large percentage of families.

### **Project Implementation**

The food bank gets enough funding and collaborates with several agencies to be able to provide awareness to the community; they have been conducting two programs for over a decade that target food insecurity with free nutrition classes and free produce and food products. The programs are called Food For Children (F4C) and Passion For Produce (P4P). Food for children goes out mainly to school sites and gives children and their families a bag full of food products and handouts with important information pertaining to nutrition, staying fit, and healthy. It is not

just open to children, also to the greater public. Both programs are available to the community. When participants call the hotline they get referred to any of the program locations that are available that day.

The biggest issue is that the number of participants has declined within the past few years and the services provided are not being used. The Second Harvest Food Bank has created a survey to get a better understanding as to why these distribution sites are not being used so they can find solutions to resolve the barriers the community is facing. The survey will be passed out in both English and Spanish at all distribution location sites, and by going door-to-door in the neighborhoods in our community, to individuals of all genders and different cultural backgrounds. The survey pertains to questions about their lifestyle and changes that will be beneficial to the community. Outreach will provide knowledge about services. SHFB provides to families by going door to door. The program will use the feedback to obtain evidence from the public for positive changes and implement ideas for easier access to distribution sites. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

### **Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes**

The SHFB has been offering nutrition services at no cost for over a decade throughout our community. In order to evaluate the success of the program, the program coordinator measures the number of participants and the changes through short surveys handed out a few times a year to know the demographics of each food bank participants. This basic information helps the SHFB get a better understanding on what needs to be improved and what is successful.

The survey is being conducted throughout the community because of the numbers declining, the consequences of food insecurity, and the health and wellbeing of people in the

county depend on continued access to nutritious foods. The main concern for the SHFB is that the services are being provided but not utilized, which raises the question of why?

Focusing on the public's feedback will help the SHFB get a better understanding of the barriers they are facing and making positive changes. For example, a large number of people in our community are unable to attend to the nearest site; perhaps moving it closer would create a positive change for them or perhaps the times being offered are not adequate because they are working throughout that time. So changing the time would make it easier. Going door-to-door and providing knowledge of these services provided will also raise the number of participants because many people are not aware. These individuals might think the food provided is for U.S. Citizens only but by informing them nothing is required and anyone can receive food can give them assurance to feeling comfortable in participating in these distribution sites.

### **Project Results**

The survey used in the implementation of this project brought participants through a short survey asking about their attendance at the nutrition program, what they like about the program, and what we can do to improve the site they attended.

A total of 605 participants were surveyed throughout Santa Cruz County at different distribution locations provided by the Second Harvest Food Bank. An estimate of 85% of participants were spanish speakers. The first question asked how often they participate in the program, 6.78% of the respondents were new participants, 10.41% attend a few times a year or only certain seasons. 39% of respondents attend once a month and 44% of participants regularly attend the program.

The second question asked was what they like about the program and what makes them keep coming back. The majority of the participants said it was very helpful in their households and they enjoyed the fruits and vegetables they received at no cost.

The third question asked was” what we could do to improve the program, and what they wished was different. A majority of the respondents said everything was great, however the majority of responses to the question of “What can improve the program and increase participation” implied that they could not attend the distribution times for various reasons. People surveyed asked for extended distribution times in order to attend more frequently, more variety of foods given such as proteins and breads, and recipes because they don't know what to use what their given.

Although a Passion for produce nutrition class is provided for participants to educate them on healthy lifestyles, meals, and recipes during the distribution sites, 51.40% said they do not attend, 1% said they don't know and 46% do attend the class. Alternatives need to be provided for those who don't attend the class to continue educating the community.

Based on the participants feedback gathered at each distribution site throughout Santa Cruz County the SHFB received, it has been proven that all participants who are accessing the distribution site are benefiting from the programs provided to its residents However the majority of results were from community members who already attend the distribution sites which did not give us much feedback from those who are not attending and the reasons why.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

Passion for Produce has been around for over 14 years and as long as the people continue to attend frequently, grants will be available and continue to educate the residents of Santa Cruz County, and have access to healthy foods at no cost.

With more community outreach and public involvement to help out at distribution sites the number of participants will increase and benefit from these services. Many of the community members are not aware that they can access these distribution sites without obligation or cost, anonymity. For this project, surveys were collected primarily by interviewing people at distribution sites. If the SHFB reached out to the community by going out to farmers markets, migrant worker job sites, and even local grocery stores, the number of participants could increase significantly.

Many participants' feedback mentioned that the hours of the distribution sites should last longer or begin at a later time because they are unable to make it due to their long work hours, which limits their access the SHFB distribution sites as often as they like. If the distribution sites lasted until approximately 7:30pm it would really benefit the participants. In addition, having distribution sites open one Saturday of the month, with the help of volunteers, would be highly beneficial.

Because a majority of those surveyed said that their food goes to waste too quickly, in part, because they do not always know what to cook with it, another suggestion would be to create a catalog of food recipes to use with the produce that is given to them at the distribution sites. This catalog of recipes would give participants options to what healthy meal to cook with the bags of produce, canned goods, etc. given to them rather than the food going to waste

because they don't know what to do, It would be great because the food isn't being thrown away as often.

Since over 50% of participants are unable to attend the Passion For Produce classes provided for several reasons, a nutrition pamphlet with information along with the recipe would be beneficial for those who do not attend the classes to become more knowledgeable of healthy lifestyles and meals. As suggested above, perhaps extending the times would allow participants time to attend nutrition classes because a lot of the times, they show up last minute just to receive the bags distributed at the site.

### **Personal Reflection**

Being placed at the Second Harvest Bank was an interesting experience, i came across a very supportive team of staff that helped me complete my capstone surveys and projects. A majority of the time I was involved with the food hotline and calfresh which helped me grow stronger with tools and knowledge to help out the community. I was also given an opportunity to be a part of the nutrition team which gave me a different outlook and experience at outreach and attending distribution sites, I was able to get a better understanding of our community's needs and what we can do to improve the agency. During my internship I was given the opportunity to collaborate with several agencies like schools, churches, apartment complexes, and students at universities. I was able to communicate with volunteers from these agencies and invite them to attend the scheduled distribution site. I learned how to interact with populations of diverse cultures and economic class in a respectful and courteous manner while attending the sites throughout Santa Cruz County. I do believe that I had several challenges throughout my internship, there was a lot of lack of communication and i felt that i should have been given the

opportunity to learn other things throughout the agency, i was very limited on the tasks and events I could join and be a part of to get the actual experience i needed. Overall I am very grateful that the staff at the Second Harvest Food Bank were supportive and helped me complete my capstone project despite the lack of communication and troubles I faced with the project.

I do believe that the SHFB will benefit from my capstone project because they are able to understand the needs of the community and the barriers to why the number of participants have declined. With this information provided by the participants from Santa Cruz County they will be able to make positive changes to benefit the participants.



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## Appendix A

## Scope of Work

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables</b>	<b>Timeline/Deadlines</b>	<b>Supporting Staff</b>
Schedule meeting with Rosario to determine which sites will be covered		Email October 10th	Rosario
Send detailed schedule for the rest of the semester to Rosario for approval	Organized schedule with dates and times on site	By Monday, October 14th	Rosario
Get trained on data entry for Survey Monkey			Julio
Distribute survey at distribution sites (50 surveys completed)		By November 8th	Rosario
Input data into the Survey Monkey		By November 8th	Rosario
Compile data from the survey (600 surveys) and descriptive analysis of the data		By November 22nd	Sarah
Email final draft of results and recommendations	Written analysis of data	Last week of November (by November 29th)	Rosario & Sarah
Meet with SHFB to discuss results and recommendations		First week of December (by December 6th)	Rosario, Sarah, Julio, and Sandy
Assessment - Determine if recommendations and analysis were accepted		First week of December (by December 6th)	Rosario, Sarah, Julio, and Sandy

Name of site:

Name of person administering survey:

Today's date:

### Nutrition Programs Participant Survey 2019

- 1) How often do you participate in this program?
  - <sub>1a</sub> I'm brand new or just started coming
  - <sub>1b</sub> A few times a year or only in certain seasons
  - <sub>1c</sub> About once a month
  - <sub>1d</sub> More than once a month
  
- 2) What do you like about this program? What keeps you coming back?
  
- 3) What could we do to improve this program? What do you wish was different?
  
- 4) Have you ever attended a Passion for Produce nutrition class?
  - <sub>4a</sub> No
  - <sub>4b</sub> I don't know
  - <sub>4c</sub> Yes
  
- 5) *If the answer is no or I don't know, give client a Nutrition Classes brochure.*  
*If the answer is yes, ask -- How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement:*

The information and education I have gotten at the Passion for Produce program has helped me make healthier choices:

  - <sub>5a</sub> Strongly agree
  - <sub>5b</sub> Agree
  - <sub>5c</sub> Disagree
  - <sub>5d</sub> Strongly disagree
  
- 6) (OPTIONAL) We have had such a great conversation and you have so many great ideas to share. Would you be willing to give me your phone number so I can call you to talk some more?

**Encuesta de Participantes de Programas de Nutrición 2019**

- 1) ¿Con qué frecuencia participas en este programa?
  - <sub>1a</sub> Soy nuevo o recién comencé a venir
  - <sub>1b</sub> Algunas veces al año o solo en ciertas temporadas
  - <sub>1c</sub> Aproximadamente una vez al mes
  - <sub>1d</sub> Más de una vez al mes
  
- 2) ¿Qué te gusta de este programa? ¿Que hace que vuelvas?
  
- 3) ¿Qué se podría mejorar de este programa? ¿Qué desearías que fuera diferente?
  
- 4) ¿Has asistido a una clase de nutrición de Pasion por Frutas y Verduras?
  - <sub>4a</sub> No
  - <sub>4b</sub> No se
  - <sub>4c</sub> Sí
  
- 5) *Si la respuesta es si o no se, entregue un panfleto de las clases de nutricion. Si la respuesta es si, preguntales -- ¿En qué medida está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo con la siguiente declaración?*

La información y la educación que he recibido en el programa Pasión por Verduras me han ayudado a tomar decisiones más saludables:

  - <sub>5a</sub> Totalmente de acuerdo
  - <sub>5b</sub> De acuerdo
  - <sub>5c</sub> Desacuerdo
  - <sub>5d</sub> Totalmente en desacuerdo
  
- 6) (OPCIONAL) Hemos tenido una gran conversación y usted tiene muchas ideas geniales para compartir. ¿Estaría dispuesto a darme su número de teléfono para que pueda llamarlo para hablar un poco más?