

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUNGER RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS

2020 PRELIMINARY SURVEY RESULTS

MAY 2021

How did COVID-19 affect emergency food organizations in the U.S.? The Duke World Food Policy Center and WhyHunger asked food banks, anti-hunger advocacy groups, and frontline organizations working directly with people in need.

Survey Goals

Document the actions, needs, barriers, and successes of organizations during a pandemic

Assess potential long-term shifts in organizational policies, practices, programs, and purpose as a result of the pandemic

Identify recommendations for systemic change in the emergency food system highlighted by the pandemic

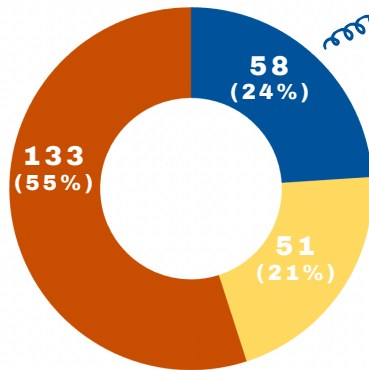
RESPONDENTS - BY THE NUMBERS

242

organizations took the survey during August-November 2020

FRONTLINE ORGANIZATIONS

Community-based or frontline organization providing food directly to people in need



ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

Anti-hunger organization that does not provide direct services but whose mission includes ending or lessening food insecurity

FOOD BANKS

Food bank procuring and distributing food for frontline food access organizations and/or providing direct food access to people in need

ORGANIZATION DEMOGRAPHICS

Participating organizations represented varying geographies, ages, and budgets.

- The majority operating for over 10 years and at the local or regional levels.
- Operating budgets varied across organizations, with frontline and advocacy organizations having much lower budgets than food banks.

TIME IN OPERATION

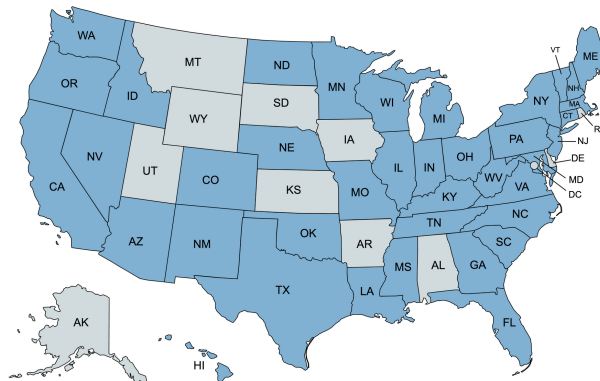


GEOGRAPHIC SERVICE AREA

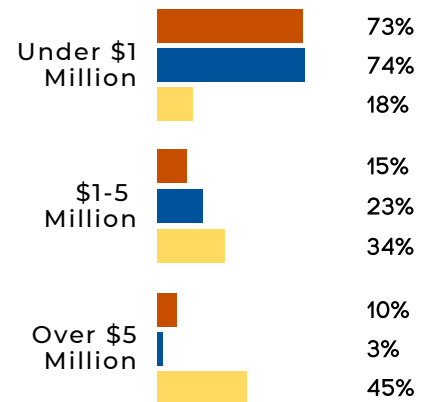


ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED

39 STATES



ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET



■ Frontline Organizations
■ Advocacy Organizations
■ Food Banks

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79%

of organizations saw an **increase** in demand for existing services

&

30%

of organizations were open with **additional** services

&

82%

of organizations saw **more** first time clients

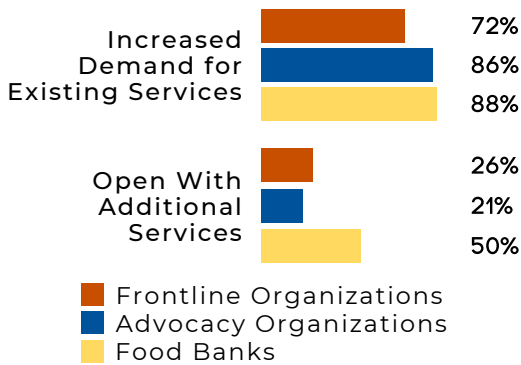
BUT

67%

of organizations had **fewer** volunteers

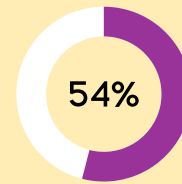
IMPACT ON SERVICES

ORGANIZATIONS EXPERIENCED CHANGES IN SERVICES



Organizations saw increased demand for services and some needed to start additional services, such as:

- Curbside pick-up
- Food delivery and/or drop-off
- Virtual services
- Pre-packed food boxes



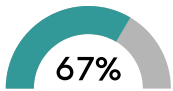
of organizations **suspended** some type of programming

Examples of suspended services:

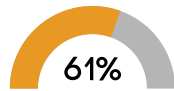
- Community meals
- Volunteer services
- In-person trainings
- School-related programming

IMPACT ON CLIENTS

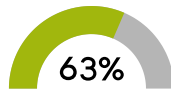
Organizations saw more clients experiencing the pandemic's effects on the economy, including more unemployed, housing insecure, and/or first time clients.



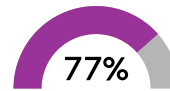
Saw More First Time Clients



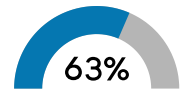
Saw More Housing Insecure Clients



Saw Clients More Frequently



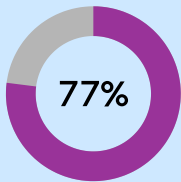
Saw More Unemployed Clients



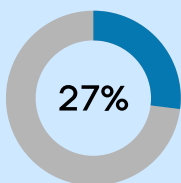
Saw More Clients from Different Demographics

IMPACT ON STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

PROTECTIONS AGAINST COVID

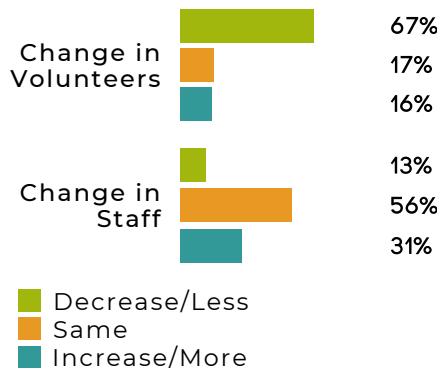


of organizations had **adequate** access to PPE



of organizations had staff or volunteers **contract** COVID

CHANGES IN VOLUNTEERS AND STAFF LEVELS



Organizations experienced substantial decreases in the amount of volunteers, which was a theme reiterated in subsequent questions.

In contrast, organizations did not see as many changes in staff levels, with the majority having the same levels of staffing.

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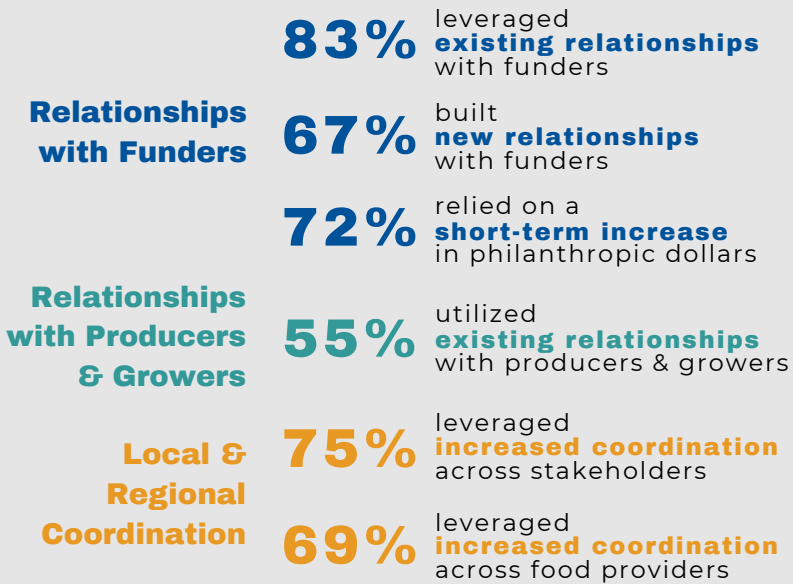
MAY 2021

The survey probed for insight into what helped organizations be successful during the height of the pandemic and what created barriers to addressing increased hunger and demand for services. Barriers may signal areas of concern for future response planning, or needed reform or policy change.

CONTRIBUTORS TO SUCCESS DURING COVID

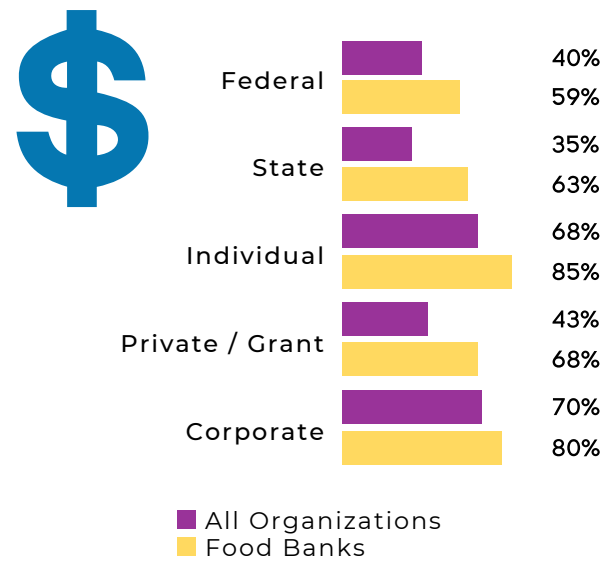
All organizations relied on relationships and coordination across stakeholders to meet increased demand for services during the pandemic.

FACTORS FOR ORGANIZATION'S SUCCESS



Both funding and donations increased for a majority of organizations. Food banks had the largest increases.

INCREASES IN FUNDING & DONATIONS



BARRIERS TO SUCCESS DURING COVID

During the pandemic, organizations struggled with various barriers to meeting the increased demand for services.

→ Biggest challenges: loss of a reliable volunteer base and a lack of refrigeration space

ORGANIZATIONS FACED OPERATIONAL BARRIERS IN TRYING TO MEET NEED



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Organizations were asked to identify weaknesses in both the emergency food system and the broader food system. Organizations could select more than one option and write in their own responses. The write-in response data is still being analyzed.

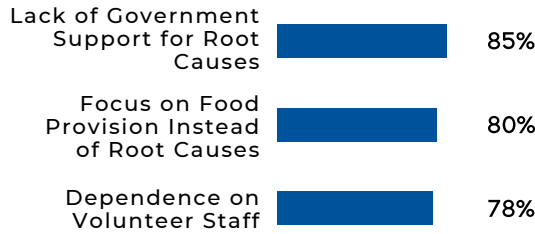
WEAKNESSES IN THE EMERGENCY FOOD SYSTEM

Despite differences in organizational purpose and function, respondents generally identified the same weaknesses in the emergency food system, including dependence on volunteers and donations. The top responses from each organization type are shown below:

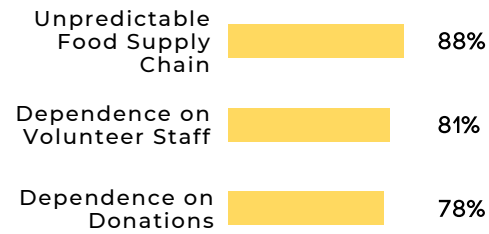
FRONTLINE ORGANIZATIONS



ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

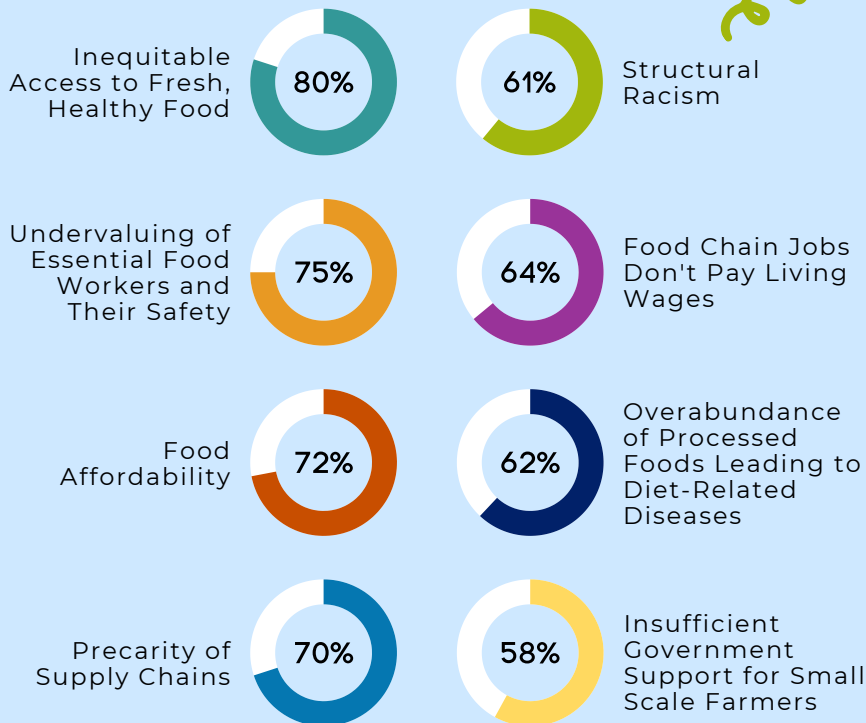


FOOD BANKS



WEAKNESSES IN THE BROADER FOOD SYSTEM

ORGANIZATIONS CITE THESE PROBLEMS WITH THE FOOD SYSTEM



STRUCTURAL RACISM

Structural racism refers to the ways in which social structures (policies, practices, norms, and values), reproduced by institutions (governments, the emergency food system, educational system, etc.) perpetuate and create cumulative and durable race-based inequities. These inequities occur even in the absence of racist intent on the part of individuals, as such we need to take an anti-racist approach to addressing inequities at all levels. For more learning, click [here](#) and [here](#).

ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES



■ Frontline Organizations
■ Advocacy Organizations
■ Food Banks

Even though over 60 percent of organizations identify structural racism as a weakness in the food system, only half shifted any programming to address racial inequities during the pandemic

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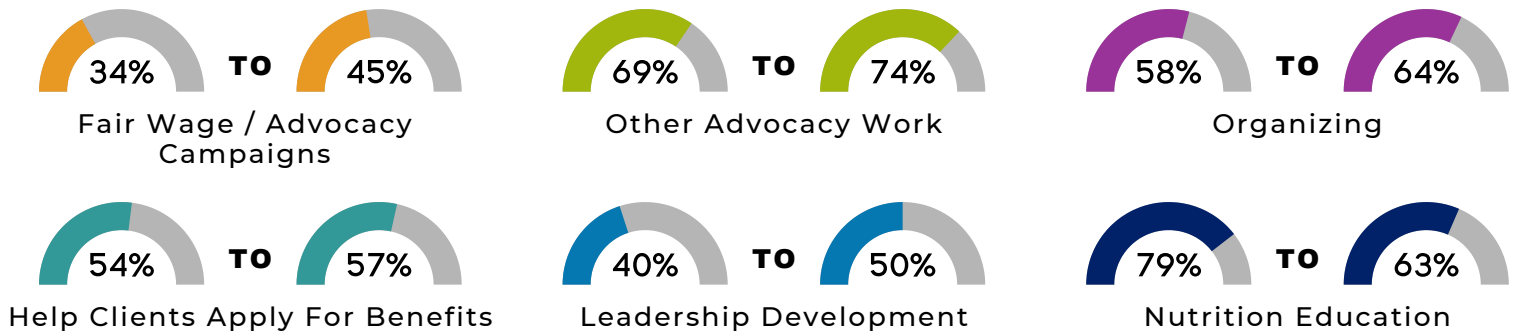
MAY 2021

MOVING BEYOND THE PANDEMIC

The survey asked organizations how much time they spent on the following activities **before** the pandemic and how much time they plan to spend **after** the pandemic.

- On average, organizations plan to spend **more** time on advocacy work, organizing and leadership development activities, and helping clients get food assistance.
- Organizations plan to spend **less** time on nutrition education.

CHANGES IN TIME SPENT ON ACTIVITIES PRE- AND POST-COVID



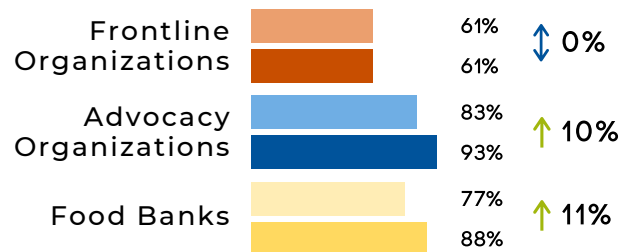
A FUTURE WITH MORE ROOT CAUSE WORK?

The root causes of hunger are broadly understood to be persistent poverty due to systemic social inequities, such as racial and gender injustice. In the U.S. this looks like low-wage jobs, wage theft, underemployment, and/or jobs without benefits. For those working in the anti-hunger space, root cause work includes activities to organize and advocate for structural and policy change. Below, green arrows indicate an increase in root cause programming pre-to-post pandemic; blue indicates no change; and orange signals a decrease.

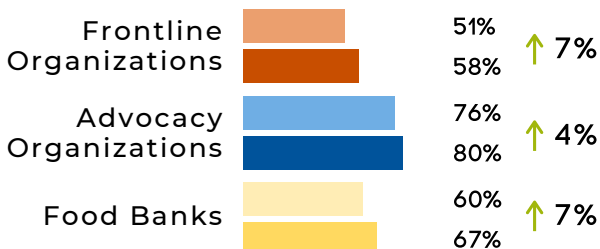
FAIR WAGE ADVOCACY CAMPAIGNS



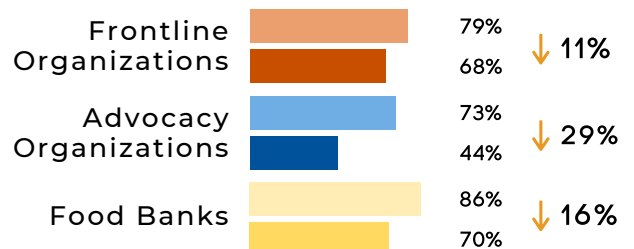
OTHER ADVOCACY WORK



ORGANIZING



NUTRITION EDUCATION



light Time Spent Pre-COVID
dark Will Spend Time Post-COVID