EQUITABLE BOSTON FOOD ECOSYSTEM PROJECT EBF
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
COVID-19 HAS CONFIRMED WHAT WE HAVE KNOWN FOR GENERATIONS. COMMUNITIES OF COLOR ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED AND HARMED BY HUNGER AND OTHER SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH.

This pandemic has intensified both this on-going crisis and the need for timely, bold, and transformative community-led solutions. It is for these reasons the Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem (EBFE) working group was formed within the Boston Food Access Council (BFAC). In that same collaborative spirit, the community voiced that any plan to move forward with recommendations from this report should include them in its planning, implementation, and review.

People are hungry. Children are hungry. Boston is suffering right now, and the two months of assessment has verified what we all know. The programming we currently have available is not sufficient for the extreme need. In fact, the programming was not sufficiently-funded pre-pandemic. Our entire food ecosystem (farming, distribution, access, quantity, quality, cost, policy, etc.) is due for a redesign. The urgency COVID has provided is something we hope to use in our favor as new and improved systems are long overdue.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from this report is that we did not learn anything new about Boston residents’ persistent struggles facing food insecurity and hunger, but Covid-19 has certainly exacerbated this crisis. Food insecurity and barriers to consistent access to safe, affordable, and nutritious food are not new to Boston, particularly to its communities of color. Indeed, the solutions look very much the same for 2020 and beyond as they did in 2019, with the need to implement them perhaps more intense than ever in our city’s history.

“WHENEVER WE ARE ASKED FOR FEEDBACK, WE FEEL LIKE PEOPLE IN ‘HIGHER’ POSITIONS, TAKE OUR FEEDBACK FOR THEIR OWN IDEAS. IT FEEL LIKE A CYCLE OF EXPLOITATION AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL.”

Core to community members’ equitable engagement is honoring their expertise and seeking to protect their intellectual property. Like every organizational member contributing to the work, each resident with lived experience deserves to be compensated for their time and sacrifices and needs the assurance that their ideas will not be stolen and carried out by others without their knowledge or consent. In addition to being invited to participate in EBFE working group (comprised of more than 100 Boston community residents; community-based organizations, health systems, academic institutions, and local government) meetings throughout this process, residents were recruited to participate in one of three design sessions or more in-depth one-on-one interviews with the community-based organizations with whom they are connected.

In each design session and many of the interviews, participants expressed the compounded trauma of not having enough to eat amid a pandemic. A trip to the grocery store could put their lives and those of their loved ones at risk. Participants noted issues they struggle with are now amplified due to multiple changes in monthly budgets and the added stress of students participating in remote learning. Participants also saw a link between affordability and demand since the onset of the pandemic. Examples included the high demand and increased scarcity of nonperishable foods, increased food cost, and the persistent struggle to find fresh produce outside of the farmer’s market network.
Recommendations were built based on these various engagements throughout this 2-month project that were categorized into the following themes:

- ‘ACT NOW’
- DIGNITY
- CHOICE AND ACCESSIBILITY
- AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY
- COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SOLUTIONS
- COMMUNICATIONS
- INSUFFICIENT RESOURCES

Despite our best efforts and the richness of ideas throughout this report, we acknowledge that we would not fully capture a comprehensive viewpoint from all of the richness that is the diversity of the Boston community in such a short period of time. Further investments are needed to ensure more voices are at the table when walking out these recommendations and hopefully, helping to repair the trauma within communities under-resourced prior to the pandemic and remain so to this day.

As Covid-19 caused the city of Boston to shut down in the spring of 2020, food access systems and programs began to buckle under the pressure of increased need and restrictions placed on us by the pandemic and resulting economic fallout. Across the state, food insecurity has doubled amid the pandemic -- from 8% to 16% Massachusetts households. Calls to Project Bread skyrocketed from 1,731 calls in July 2019 to almost 10,000 in July 2020.

In October 2020, the EBF, a project under the BFAC umbrella, was proposed to the City of Boston as an opportunity to:

- Review and reassess the goals (short- and long-term) of the Mayor’s Food Access Agenda.
- Identify the role of the City on the new goals (City catalyzed, City-owned, City-led).
- Identify emerging priorities and gaps during the COVID-19 epidemic.
- Provide community-led recommendations that help the Office of Food Access shepherd its implementation strategies.
- Provide recommendations for systemic reforms that would better align the system to meet current needs, given the changed conditions in a post-COVID-19 environment.

The BFAC brings community and stakeholder voices together to create access to affordable, just, culturally-connected, healthy, and sustainable food in Boston. The work of the BFAC includes initiatives working toward this goal in areas such as improving access to healthy and affordable foods, reducing the amount of food wasted in homes and restaurants, and supporting local food producers and food businesses.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

THE NEED FOR LARGE-SCALE, CITY-WIDE COLLABORATION HAS NEVER BEEN MORE CRITICAL THAN DURING THIS CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

While new and valuable partnerships developed at and since the onset, early attempts at this streamlined coordination were challenging to launch with the uncertainty of the extent of the shutdown and the sheer weight of navigating through such unprecedented times and complicated barriers.

"WE COMMITTED TO AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS THAT VALUES AND CENTERS THE VOICES OF THOSE WITH ‘LIVED EXPERTISE.’"

-- AS DESCRIBED BY BFAC STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBER DIANE SULLIVAN.

This approach helped rally partner individuals and organizations to scale up their recruitment and retention of community residents, front line workers, and the volunteers delivering food and hope to their neighbors. It is important to point out that many residents in need of food are also doing the work of feeding their neighbors through formal and informal networks.
ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

In August 2020, an ad hoc group of providers and volunteers, including Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), health centers, and mutual-aid programs, came together. The group established that a cohesive and coordinated Boston-specific strategy was needed to access and distribute food resources equitably — and particularly to communities of color where resource availability was limited or sporadic.

Around that same time and on a similar path, the City of Boston’s Office of Food Access (OFA) was in discussions with the Boston Food Access Council (BFAC) to assess their capacity to provide a comprehensive assessment of food resources across the city. As a newly formed, unfunded council made up of 100% volunteers, council members themselves were also inundated with the immediate, ongoing food crisis.

OFA helped foster a linkage between the BFAC through its steering committee and the ad hoc group. It was decided that this body of work would be embedded in the working group structure of BFAC. Health Leads would serve as primary convener and lead the proposal development and needs assessment. Along with other community stakeholders, BFAC members contributed to the research design and analysis.

Weekly meetings averaging 25–35 participants ensued to discuss the Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem (EBFE) project design; share new learnings and resources, and hear from the various voices of those advocating for different aspects of the Boston food ecosystem. These meetings have included more than 25 social service organizations actively addressing Boston residents’ emergency food needs, including mutual-aid networks, health care systems, community-based organizations, academia, and faith-based organizations.

A constant reminder in these meetings was the need to ensure that the voices of those experiencing food insecurity are center in this work. A recruitment process was developed. Ten grassroots organizations were identified to recruit and support more than 90 community members to engage and contribute to this process, particularly with overcoming technology barriers. Each of these ten organizations was paid $1,500 for the time and efforts put forth.

“THE FOLKS I RECRUITED FROM THE GRASSROOTS BASE STATE THAT NO ‘AGENCY FOLKS’ EVER ACCEPTED THEM ‘WHERE WE ARE AT’ AND ... SUPPORTED US TO GROW.”

FOR SOME OF THESE ORGANIZATIONS, THIS WAS THE FIRST OUTSIDE FUNDING THEY HAD EVER RECEIVED AT THIS AMOUNT. THE UNRESTRICTED FUNDS WERE USED FOR VARIOUS THINGS, INCLUDING REPLACING A BOILER FOR THE WINTER MONTHS, PURCHASING FOOD AND DIAPERS FOR THEIR FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM, AND PAYING STAFF.

ZAKIYA ALAKE, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST AT HEALTH LEADS

Now, these organizations can point with pride to accomplishments documented in this report. For some, it is the opportunity they needed to be more competitive in their development efforts. Several are exploring collaborating with a Roxbury church to open a food pantry and help neighbors with SNAP applications and other issues.
RECRUITING ORGANIZATIONS

Recruiting Organizations recruited participants for design sessions, ensured technology barriers were eliminated, and conducted in-depth interviews for over 90 community members:

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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BOSTON LESBIGAY URBAN FOUNDATION</td>
<td>B.L.U.E’s mission is to increase the awareness of Black pride within Boston’s Urban LGBTQ community. While helping to improve the social &amp; entertainment life B.L.U.E plans to build self-esteem, foster healthy relationships, and build a stronger understanding of their networks needs.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>BRAZILLIAN WORKERS CENTER</td>
<td>The Brazilian Worker Center has supported immigrants in defending and advancing their labor and immigrant rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CHINATOWN MAIN STREET PROGRAM</td>
<td>Chinatown Main Street is a Non-profit organization, our mission is to foster the Chinatown community, ensure safety and provide the tools and information for businesses and residents to succeed</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>HAITIAN WOMEN OF BOSTON</td>
<td>To create a community that enables, promotes and supports professional Haitian Women to be self-empowered and to thrive in all areas of their lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>MARY B. LOMAX-PAM HEALTH &amp; WELLNESS BY DESIGN</td>
<td>The mission of the organization is to effectively provide resources to address the immediate needs of those we serve. While identifying the underlying issues that can be addressed in the short term, as the needs of the individuals and families will be considered on a long term basis.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>MATTAPAN FOOD AND FITNESS COALITION</td>
<td>The Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition (MFFC) is a collaborative organization, bringing together Mattapan residents, organizations and others to work towards improved food and physical activity environments in Mattapan.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>MAVERICK LANDING COMMUNITY SERVICES</td>
<td>We are a multi-service organization in the heart of the Maverick Square neighborhood responding to the emergent educational, employment, and socio-emotional needs of children, youth, and adults in East Boston.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>METRO BOSTON ALIVE</td>
<td>Metro Boston Alive is a substance abuse education and recovery center serving youth and families in need of health and life development services. We support all efforts to feed our needy communities especially the community of color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>NEW ENGLAND UNITED 4 JUSTICE</td>
<td>New England United 4 Justice (NEU4J) is an organization committed to promoting social, economic, and racial justice through a strong grassroots organizing approach and direct leadership in low-income neighborhoods.</td>
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PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Participating Organizations provided input at weekly meetings, answered surveys, brought their experience to the conversations and learned from community members:

ABCD
About Fresh
Action for Equity
Brookside Health Center
Boston Medical Center, Pediatrics
Boston Missionary Baptist Community Center, Inc
Brockton Public Schools
Brigham and Women's Faulkner Hospital
CAFE
Center for Community Wellness @ Sportsmen's Tennis & Enrichment Center
Chinatown Main Street
East Boston Neighborhood Health Center
Eastie Farm
Everett Public Schools
Farmers Collaborative
Food Link
FoodCorps Americorps Service, Member with the Office of Food Access
Health Leads
In The Vine Ministries Church International
JP/Roxbury Mutual Aid network
LivelyHood
Lovin' Spoonfuls
Maverick Landing Community Services
Mutual Aid Eastie (East Boston)
Northeastern University, Office of City and Community Engagement
Partners in Health
Project Bread
Roslindale Community Fridge
Southern Jamaica Plain Health Center
The Greater Boston Food Bank
Ucbapp.org NOAH
YMCA of Greater Boston

COMMUNITY MEMBER PARTICIPANTS

“"I GAINED SUCH AN AWARENESS REGARDING AN ISSUE THAT IS MORE COMPLEX THAN MOST REALIZE. I FOUND OUT I DIDN’T KNOW AS MUCH AS I THOUGHT I KNEW ABOUT HUNGER.”“

Community members expressed a strong desire to be included in the design, development, implementation, and evaluation of this report and any resulting work that arises from it. Community members with lived experience noted their self-efficacy and desire and ability to make decisions about the conditions that impact their well-being, particularly around their ability to access safe, affordable, nutritious food.

There was also a strong desire among the group to ensure that those with lived experience not otherwise compensated for their participation in this process (through working with a social service agency) were paid for their time and expertise. Payments at the rate of $25/hour were made in the form of gift cards so as to not negatively impact eligibility or the amount of public benefits they might be receiving.

In addition to participation in the design sessions, 1:1 interviews, and weekly group meetings, participants added value to this process by:

- Advocating for themselves and one another
- Assisting with proposal development
- Sharing their org’s data collected during COVID for use in this project
- Connecting their contacts to the convener for further exploration
- Developing communications materials (flyers, report, etc)
- Facilitating the group in building community agreements
- Developing the interview guide
- Recruiting for focus group participants
- Interviewing other community members
- Analyzing the design group notes to find themes
- Designing the visuals for an emerging program
- Supporting the recruitment process for December BFAC mtg
- Providing feedback and/or confirming the analysis of the interviews and focus groups data
- Writing and editing the report
RECOMMENDATIONS
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT OCCURRED THROUGH THREE DESIGN SESSIONS, ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS, A SURVEY SENT TO BOSTON-SERVING FOOD PROGRAMS, AND WEEKLY PROJECT MEETINGS, FOSTERING THE IDENTIFICATION OF SYSTEM BARRIERS AND IDEAS FOR SOLUTIONS.

Over 60 recommendations emerged and were mapped into six themes:

1. DIGNITY
2. CHOICE AND ACCESSIBILITY
3. AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY
4. COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SOLUTIONS
5. COMMUNICATION
6. INSUFFICIENT RESOURCES

Recommendations were then categorized as either short-term (ST) (30–90 days for implementation) or long-term (LT) initiatives (1+ years). Approximately 175 people were invited to prioritize the recommendations, with a total of 59 surveys completed. Respondents categorized themselves as community members (n=22), employees of social service organizations (n=21), and volunteers with food programs (n=16). However, these categories are fluid, as many people working as essential employees within the city’s social service structure are also the same people struggling with food insecurity in such a high-cost city as Boston, deeming them eligible for the same services provided to their community.

When tasked with ranking the many short- and long-term recommendations within each theme that emerged, community members expressed discomfort with having to vote for one recommendation at the possible peril of another that felt equally important and impactful to them. The idea that these recommendations might act as competing interests because of a lack of funding or political will weighs heavily on the minds of those with lived experiences who understand that the required solutions to hunger in their City are as diverse as they, the residents themselves are.

Jay, an activist/advocate, engaged in the emergency response work in Louisiana after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, reflected,

"WHEN I WAS VOTING, IT BROUGHT ME BACK TO MEMORIES OF PRIORITIZING ‘CRISES WITHIN A CRISIS SETTING...AN APPROPRIATE PARALLEL, I THINK.'"
DIGNITY
“YOU HAVE TO KEEP COMING BACK TO PROVE YOUR LIFE HASN’T GOTTEN BETTER.”

Intentionally not included in the voting ballot was another theme weaved throughout interviews and design sessions that simply cannot be outranked: Dignity. Residents expressed being made to feel ashamed when applying for or accessing food assistance through some government agencies and local organizations. We believe this must be addressed across the board, including during program design, implementation, and improvements.

Further, SNAP recipients wondered why safety measures such as online grocery shopping or curbside pick-up were unattainable for local grocers, sending the message that they’re not worthy of the same protections of their well-resourced neighbors. While in theory, SNAP recipients have access to online shopping through corporate giants Amazon and Walmart, they are inaccessible to many for whom delivery is not available or is cost-prohibitive (e.g., $20 delivery fee) and with curbside pick up only available for those with a vehicle.

WHY IS IT [THAT] BECAUSE I'M POOR I HAVE TO GO IN THE STORE AND PUT MY FAMILY AT RISK [OF COVID 19]?! WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO USE OUR EBT CARD FOR DELIVERY AND CURBSIDE PICKUP, "--NOTED ONE PARTICIPANT.

The stigma associated with seeking government or charitable assistance itself is a barrier, especially when those seeking services are treated poorly. Community members stressed the importance of incorporating trauma-informed care practices throughout the entire food system. Some felt that eligibility processes were invasive, assuming a general lack of trust in participants and creating a feeling of having to put their trauma on display to be deemed worthy or not. Working to more equitably engage residents with lived experience in further identifying and implementing community-driven solutions to food insecurity is one way to improve their overall experiences and reduce trauma.

CHOICE AND ACCESSIBILITY
“I WAITED AN HOUR IN THE COLD FOR THE FOOD BOX, BUT AS I MADE IT TO THE FRONT OF THE LINE, THEY RAN OUT. THE WORKER SUGGESTED I WAIT AS THEY WERE HOPING FOR ANOTHER DELIVERY IN 1-2 HOURS. I COULDN’T WAIT ANY LONGER, I WAS SO, SO COLD.”

Community members highlighted the struggle of matching SNAP allocations (even at maximum benefit per household size) with food that meets their different dietary restrictions (medical, allergies, etc.) and cultural appropriateness. Typically, these foods cost more, which reduced the total amount of food that could be purchased. Additionally, residents called for increased access to healthy foods and direct access to farmers from whom they can purchase their food, whenever possible.
A lack of consistent program hours & services, along with a lack of hot meals, created additional accessibility barriers, particularly for those experiencing homelessness. Community members noted that seniors, people with disabilities, and those for whom English is not their first language additionally faced greater hardships. Some have underlying health conditions that put them at greater risk of contracting Covid-19, lack reliable transportation, struggle with accessing appropriate communications, or fear seeking assistance because of their immigration status.

Equitable transportation and delivery services, responsive to individual community members’ needs, were cited as specific challenges to be addressed. Residents indicate having to visit multiple grocery stores and service sites to obtain enough food for their families at affordable prices. An expanded delivery system could support community members struggling with transportation issues better access to food. Administrative and other barriers to applying for — and accessing — SNAP benefits were also mentioned.

A survey of three Boston neighborhoods conducted by the Expanded Jobs Action Network in 2020 documented increased food distribution to about 6,000 households a week in Dorchester, Allston, and East Boston. At the same time, smaller pantries closed, and few pantries were able to scale up to meet the new demand (Action for Equity/Expanded Jobs Action Network, July 2020). Accessibility was particularly squeezed in the areas with multiple pantry closures.

Participants also shared their concerns around limited availability. Many discussed worries about the seasonal closings of the farmer’s markets and reduced ability to access fresh fruits and vegetables, having a particular, negative impact on those with transportation challenges and those for whom it may not be safe to travel in the pandemic. Some participants noted challenges with the requirements for accessing and maintaining access to food assistance programs, like SNAP and through churches, saying that the eligibility process felt unreasonable and often dehumanizing.

Availability of food through supermarkets and convenience stores varies across the city of Boston. The map in Appendix A shows the distribution of food retailers by type across the city of Boston in 2019. As indicated in light blue, sections of Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Hyde Park, among other neighborhoods, are more than a ½ mile from a grocery store, a major barrier for those relying on public transportation, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
CHOICE AND ACCESSIBILITY THEME:
RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIZATION OUTCOME

Themes and recommendations were compiled from the design sessions and one-on-one interviews and were given to EBFE members for review. Members then individually ranked their top short and long-term recommendations related to each of the six major themes that emerged (Choice and Accessibility; Affordability and Quality; Community Support and Solutions; Dignity; Communication; and Insufficient Resources). The top-ranked recommendations were reviewed at the following weekly EBFE meeting to ensure all viewpoints were accurately reflected.

SHORT-TERM (NEXT 3-6 MONTHS):
TOP 5 CHOICES

A. Advocacy for SNAP adjustments as recommended in letter to Massachusetts Congressional Delegation. Includes hot meals, increasing the min/max amount, and much more.
B. Increase education on how to avoid misleading food labels, cooking recipes for the food provided, and budgeting to increase how food can be stretched
C. Allow people to pick up multiple days of food at meal site pickups (like BPS) within reason/safety guidelines. Supply 1 week of food needed to fill households’ food gap
D. Incentivize younger volunteers with high school and college credit to staff pantries and programs (because pantries have shut down due to understaffing). Have summer jobs program hyper focus on anti-hunger efforts
E. Provide a consistent delivery option from food pantries and services
F. Make curbside pickup and delivery services eligible for EBT purchases at grocery stores and farmers. Includes providing education, advocacy & TA to grocers and farmers to complete processes
G. Use existing transportation infrastructure, like school buses, to help with delivery when emergencies, lockdowns, and bad weather means food will often go to waste
H. Increase community refrigerators across the city
I. Include microwaves at the community refrigerator programs. Especially important in locations where more people experiencing homelessness can access
J. Open up GBFB resources for 6-12 months for temporary food programs and/or coordinate existing programs with newly developed pgms
K. Use FEMA/MEMA funding to partner with local restaurants to make culturally/diet appropriate meals
L. Incentivize businesses (e.g. restaurants, grocery stores, university, and hospital cafeterias) to reduce food waste and supply food rescue programs. Provide technical assistance to increase businesses donating, maximizing efficiency, and food donated
M. Emergency funding for organizations providing food for min of X+ households/week to ensure continued operations over the next 6 months
N. Power map resources with funding expirations, food resources (including newly developed food pgms), and populations impacted by end-point distribution organizations
O. Increase city spaces available for urban farming and community gardens, with particular attention to neighborhoods with higher food insecurity
**LONG-TERM (1+ YEAR):**

A. Provide delivery support for farmers that meets the needs of storage, packing, time and temperature requirements
B. Improve marketing/education re: P-EBT, SNAP & HIP program so more SNAP recipients utilize the dollars. Partner with community stakeholders to provide 1:1 education w/families
C. Help organizations, farmers, restaurants, bodegas, etc with the coordination needed to source culturally and diet appropriate foods
D. New funding and/or TA support to help farmers navigate funding systems. These newly acquired funds would support purchases of equipment for year-round growing
E. Incentivize grocery stores to open in areas of Boston with no quality grocery options.
F. Support efforts for food grown in NE region including incentivizing residents to enter farming and increasing support once they do enter the industry.

**AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY**

“THE BAD FOOD IS THE CHEAP FOOD.”

Food affordability has been a long-standing challenge for low income consumers. Participants receiving SNAP benefits noted that even while receiving the maximum benefit, their monthly benefit allotment was not enough to match actual food prices, which in April of 2020 saw the biggest increase in almost 50 years. For those who received additional financial support, such as the stimulus checks and unemployment insurance, they enabled them to make ends meet for a few months. However, still, many eligible for these benefits have yet to receive them, and others are simply not eligible.

In terms of access, community members mentioned a desire to connect with local farmers directly rather than finding them through vendors. The costs between farmer’s markets could also vary greatly and reduce one’s ability to buy much, even with the coupons. A group of participants discussed the price variance across neighborhoods and wondered if the city could offer businesses and markets incentives to charge the same prices across the city. Participants expressed a desire for community-driven food systems for greater affordability and sustainability, such as direct access to farmers enabled to accept EBT.

*Residents noted that in addition to food being affordable and good quality, it should also be culturally appropriate.*

“**FOOD BANKS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THEIR COMMUNITY AND PROVIDE FOOD THAT MAKES SENSE.**

--ADDS ANOTHER COMMUNITY MEMBER
AFFORDABILITY AND QUALITY
RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIZATION OUTCOME

SHORT-TERM (NEXT 3-6 MONTHS):
TOP 5 CHOICES

A. "What's the gap"? Finding out the amount needed to close the gap and providing food/grocery cards for that individuals/family's food gap.
B. Implement a voucher system for essential household items (e.g. cleaning supplies). Similar to Staples pgm w/BPS, but with stores more accessible to Boston.
C. CSA farm share subsidies
D. Define what 'culturally-appropriate foods' actually means as well as guiding grocers, GBFB and other food programs of the foods/spices/products that their customers want to have available. Also work with local farmers in producing these items

LONG-TERM (1+ YEAR):
PLEASE PICK ONLY YOUR TOP 3 CHOICES (ONE CHOICE / COLUMN)

A. Adjust limits and eligibility criteria for more to qualify for SNAP
B. Provide incentives for businesses and markets to charge the same prices across the city.
C. Develop a price comparison site where farmers market post prices
D. Develop a reporting system so consumers can submit complaint/report of spoiled, poor quality foods. The city/BFAC/etc responds. Tracking system so repeat offenders are "sited".
E. Work with Mass Food Association to understand (and tackle) barriers for larger grocers to work in Boston neighborhoods
F. Reducing the unhealthy restaurants/stores that are approved in neighborhoods. Rather, focus on BIPOC-owned/led healthier options.
G. Support restaurants to provide nutritional info of items served.
“IF I COULDN’T USE THE FOOD, I FORWARDED IT TO SOMEONE WHO COULD. I HAD A NEIGHBOR WHO WENT THROUGH COVID-19, THIS MADE A DIFFERENCE SO THAT THEY COULD RECOVER BETTER. I WAS GRATEFUL I WAS A RECIPIENT AND THAT MY NEIGHBOR COULD THEN BE A RECIPIENT AS WELL.”

The communities reported co-creating informal networks where they could support one another, such as transporting food and sharing information. One participant recalled making food from scratch to stretch the meal and share with neighbors and friends because ‘the fast food doesn’t last.’ Participants also value community-sourced solutions. In fact, the design sessions themselves became an information exchange space, ripe with resources, opportunity, and information sharing about restaurants, local services, and parenting support.

Other recommendations include helping residents in growing their own food, supporting local farmers, and increasing direct access to local farmers and vendors at farmers’ markets with their SNAP benefits. These types of connections help to foster the community drive to create opportunities that address both food insecurity and economic empowerment concurrently.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SOLUTIONS THEME:
RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIZATION OUTCOME

SHORT-TERM (NEXT 3-6 MONTHS):

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<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>First Choice</th>
<th>Second Choice</th>
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A. Address hunger and economic issues concurrently - create programs to hire individuals who are experiencing homelessness to grow, prepare or deliver food.
B. Address hunger and economic issues concurrently - pay restaurants to prepare meals
C. Strengthen established programs instead of creating new initiatives (expand programs within schools, churches, health centers, and adding more community refrigerators).
D. Fund farmers directly and indirectly (e.g. summer jobs for youth employment).
E. Advocate and require paid, equitable representation from every group of people, putting the most oppressed in the center and prioritizing those who have lived experience.
F. Increase the coordination between service providers to reduce duplication.
COMMUNICATIONS
“POLITICIANS CAN CONTACT US TO VOTE, WHY NOT DO THE SAME FOR FOOD?”

Community residents highlighted challenges with receiving consistent, reliable, and language-appropriate communication around food resources and suggested sharing resources through various platforms like neighborhood newspapers, Whatsapp, YouTube, printed and digital flyers, etc. A Chinatown resident noted, “More information should be given to let people know of the different food programs available - like advertising in the local Chinese newspapers.”

Furthermore, communication needs to be community-based. Several participants were wary of using a government website due to perceived hacking issues.

Organizations reported a lack of access to timely information, and at times throughout the pandemic, any at all, making it difficult to consistently serve residents. “Information has to be provided in a better way. Services need to be accessible to more of the people who are in need.”
This uncertainty contributes to community trauma and distrust, as residents grapple with the inability to access safe, affordable, and nutritious food, and the groups charged with filling the gap worry about their ability to access the steady food supply their communities need. Attaining stability and confidence will require the enhanced coordination across local, state, and federal government agencies required to design community-led, equitable, and sustainable solutions.

COMMUNICATIONS THEME: RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIZATION OUTCOME

SHORT-TERM (NEXT 3-6 MONTHS):

A. Raise awareness about 311 call services.
B. Maximize communication methods, like our politicians when they want your vote (text, paid ambassadors, mailers, social media, etc) including:
   - Central place to access all food assistance programs with multiple language options (hotline, website, etc.) Or better support/market existing HelpSteps database.
   - Monthly texts and phone calls to provide service updates: Use social media to share updates and information. Facebook, BNN, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram.
   - Multilingual, lived experience paid ambassadors to get the word out. Special attention to residents experiencing homelessness, to reach more transient residents.
   - Flyers or other offline resources (libraries, public spaces, community fridges, etc.).
C. Communication needs for P-EBT, SNAP and HIP. Making sure immigrant families are receiving information about how to use.
D. Encourage Gov Baker to open state offices that service low income people where safely possible, particularly the DTA, even if on a limited basis to administer EBT and P-EBT cards.
E. Setup programs with funding for six or 12 months (Jan-Dec 2021) to provide temporary sense of security for those with food need.

LONG-TERM (1+ YEAR):

A. Make procurement process more accessible for farmers, small businesses and grassroots orgs not already connected to the city.
   - Provide TA so that access and success with these opportunities is a real possibility.
B. Improve coordination across agencies, including clear and updated information about hours and consistent pricing.
INSUFFICIENT RESOURCES

“WE ARE NOW RELYING ON DONATIONS FROM OUR COMMUNITY AND ORGANIZATIONS.” FOOD PANTRY STAFF SERVING ROXBURY, MATTAPAN, AND SOUTH END.

Many organizational members have been working within community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), and grassroots organizations/programs that responded to the need for additional providers of food resources early on in the pandemic.

Many expressed the challenges they’ve faced with obtaining consistent funding -- and ultimately food. Some organizations weren’t sure they could replenish their resources with additional funding and were rendered unable to assure residents how long their resources would last. A food program delivering to Veterans and homebound communities in Hyde Park, JP, Mattapan, and other communities stated,

‘THE FUNDING IS ALMOST FINISHED, THE REST DEPENDS ON CHURCH FUNDING.’

To recover, it is known that support with the economic recovery will be needed for all of 2021. Funding for food must reflect this reality. Funding for more than 1-2 month increments is critical.

In addition to the need for funding, the need for space is imminent. Organizations require support with food storage capacity, and now that winter is upon us, programs indicate the need to bring their spaces back to their pre-pandemic states and be able to meet Covid-19 safety precautions and protocols. Increased coordination and the ability to address language barriers among them will aid in fulfilling the individual and collective resource needs of the EBFE group moving forward.

INSUFFICIENT RESOURCES THEME: RECOMMENDATIONS AND PRIORITIZATION OUTCOME

SHORT-TERM (NEXT 3-6 MONTHS):

- Invest in community-led and centered initiatives, including the support of BFAC
- Make a crisis plan: Include currently committed food, max food need at height of pandemic, when resource run out, gaps (food or funding)
- Food resources (food or funding) currently committed
- Estimated maximum food need at height of pandemic
- When committed resources are due to run out at end-point distribution locations
- Gap in food resources (food or funding)
G. Convene Boston funders to learn of the urgent need and possibility of new round of resiliency dollars and/or other funding. Put a fundraising plan together.
H. Convene end-point distribution players for coordination discussion
I. Develop a locally organized neighborhood location where staffing, delivery and food resources can be shared and coordinated. Create a locally run spot for someone to pickup food, apply for SNAP, receive assistance for eviction/rent, COVID testing and vaccine education, etc. All of the services/coordination/engagement is led and run by local orgs.
J. Provide best practices for food programs on proficient, safe ways to register/check-in clients and maintain safety precautions.
K. Map network of food boxes and see if there is redundancy or gaps in service. Have this lead to better coordination.
L. Provide iPads/interpreter lines for programs needing language capacity.
M. Access to mass telecoms opportunities (texting, robocalls) to enable pre-ordering

LONG-TERM (1+ YEAR):

No recommendations had come before the prioritization exercise. However, respondents wrote-in ideas, including:

- Ensure community members are represented in long-term crisis preparedness planning
- Convene food resource data and awareness to community on new resources
- Support significant increase in minimum wage
- Build a Community Hub (Literally a building or network of satellites that has the capacity to coordinate all of this, inviting and welcoming community to engage, receive the supports they have identified they need, and prosper.
- Continue to monitor and see what works and what doesn’t and make appropriate adjustments. This means there needs to be a funding source available for the quality improvement.

ACT NOW

Upon synthesizing the data collected to form this report and while in its final stages of edits and review, the EBFE working group chose to immediately share several time-sensitive recommendations to ensure movement while the report was finalized and until the group reconvenes again, three weeks from the release of the report. The following three actions; 1) federal advocacy, 2) state advocacy, and; 3) neighborhood-level community hub (name TBD) are bodies of work that we need to move forward immediately.

FEDERAL ADVOCACY

As anticipated, strong support emerged for the need to improve and expand the federal government’s SNAP, P-EBT, WIC, and Farmers-to-Families Food Box programs. When rank-voting its own recommendations, an overwhelming number were cast in support of those aimed at improving these programs and were found to align with those highlighted in this letter to Massachusetts Congressional Delegation signed by more than 90 Massachusetts organizations and includes specific recommendations for the Biden/Harris Administration that include:

- People with 'lived expertise' having seats at the table in setting policy priorities.
- Increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by 15% and raising the minimum to $30.
- Expanding SNAP to allow the purchase of hot meals and more.
The EBF group also urged Mayor Walsh to pen a letter co-signed by Boston-serving organizations urging the USDA Administrator Bruce Summers to extend the Farmers-to-Families Food Box Program, set to expire Dec 31, 2020. This program’s sunset translates to 25,000 fewer boxes, or one million pounds of food, that will no longer be available to residents who rely on this program to supplement sometimes non-existent food budgets. Additionally, the BFAC has mobilized its members and supporters by conducting a Call-To-Action and will continue their advocacy efforts to seek an extension. It is unknown if the food boxes were part of the funding approved by Congress on December 21st. Also, the SNAP increase by 15% was approved for six months. We would like to see this extended for a longer period, a minimum of one year.

STATE ADVOCACY

Because of the pandemic, state offices that serve low-income people have remained closed to the public, causing breakdown in communications and access to programs for those in need. While the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) continues to lead the nation in terms of accessing and implementing USDA waivers to help ensure MA residents have full access to the benefits for which they qualify, the fact remains that many residents do not have the necessary technology tools or other supports in place to navigate these sometimes complicated systems.

Throughout the pandemic, many residents have reported significant delays in receiving their USPS-mailed EBT cards that, pre-pandemic, SNAP applicants residents had the choice to go in-person to a DTA local office. Further, federal SNAP rules require states to ensure households with little or no income or shelter costs that exceed income get their SNAP benefits within 7 days of applying, but this is not happening right now. The EBF group recommends that mayor Walsh and other local leaders encourage Governor Baker to offer a range of options, including overnight mail of EBT cards, paying for free USPS post office boxes for pick up and/or safely open DTA offices on a limited basis. Opening DTA offices would need to ensure PPE and other safety protocols for its clients and staff.

It sends a confusing and conflicting message to the community amid a global pandemic and historic economic downturn for their leaders to assure them it is okay to deem essential one’s need to purchase, say, a diamond ring in a jewelry store; yet those struggling to eat somehow lack the worthiness of being able to access something so basic as a plastic EBT card with benefits loaded up on the card that would feed them.

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMUNITY-OWNED AND LOCALLY ORGANIZED FOOD NETWORK (NAME TBD)

“BUILD A COMMUNITY HUB- LITERALLY A BUILDING OR NETWORK OF SATELLITES THAT HAS THE CAPACITY TO COORDINATE ALL OF THIS, INVITING AND WELCOMING THE COMMUNITY TO ENGAGE, RECEIVE THE SUPPORTS THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED THEY NEED, AND PROSPER.”
The need for coordination and collaboration among the many groups, within and outside of the city, providing food resources to Boston residents is clear. As succinctly described by one EBFE group member, is the desire to:

“DEVELOP A LOCALLY ORGANIZED, NEIGHBORHOOD LOCATION WHERE STAFFING, DELIVERY AND FOOD RESOURCES CAN BE SHARED AND COORDINATED. CREATE A LOCALLY RUN SPOT FOR SOMEONE TO PICK UP FOOD, APPLY FOR SNAP, RECEIVE ASSISTANCE FOR EVICTION/RENT, COVID TESTING AND VACCINE EDUCATION, ETC. ALL OF THE SERVICES/COORDINATION/ENGAGEMENT IS LED AND RUN BY LOCAL ORGS.”

While these sites would take time and resources to develop, the process can begin with further efforts to ‘power map’ the food resources and leveraged partnerships throughout the city, paying particular attention to the social capital of its residents with ‘lived expertise’ and providing equitable compensation for their involvement. Meaningful community engagement would help to ensure ‘design justice,’ rallying Boston’s organizations, foundations, businesses, and city leaders to envision the co-creation of spaces aimed to include and go beyond emergency responses to the lack of food in the community, designed to support community-identified and -led pathways to economic empowerment.

Response to a fair number of the recommendations developed under the ‘insufficient resources’ theme could be housed locally, within neighborhoods, among an organized food network, and supported by city government and private foundations. The key to their success is in supporting those with ‘lived expertise,’ grassroots organizations, and other social service agencies (including health centers and faith-based organizations) as the core leadership of this initiative.

The city would play an important role in helping to overcome barriers of space, funding, and other coordinating needs, but there is a strong desire to maintain the community ownership that allows a more immediate, culturally appropriate, and nimble approach than what currently exists.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

TIME, LIKE FOOD TO MANY BOSTON RESIDENTS, IS A LUXURY WE CAN’T AFFORD. COVID-19 HAS PUT IN THE SPOTLIGHT WHAT MANY ENGAGED IN THIS PROCESS HAVE KNOWN, AND SOME HAVE LIVED FOR GENERATIONS.

“THE WEALTH IS HERE, LET US SHARE IT WITH EQUITY. I THINK ANYONE CAN ASSESS AND CONCLUDE WHAT IS STOPPING US FROM DOING THE RIGHT THING IS NOT NEW BUT A LACK OF CONSCIENCE AND EVEN FEAR.”

--SORAYA PRÉSUMÉ CALIXTE, PHD PARENT ENGAGEMENT SPECIALIST
This pandemic has added an intensity and uncertainty to this already existing widespread community trauma, encompassing more than just food access. Now, more than ever, all city leaders must capitalize on the political will to better understand how and solve for explicit and implicit systemic racism that has intentionally sought to subjugate communities of color for generations. Those in power can learn from the current momentum of the communities all across this country that is galvanizing, in this unique moment in history, to implement bold and fundamental changes from within these systems.

In full transparency, even the EBFES group grappled with not meeting its own community-set standards around equity. As noted by one community participant, “in a rushed effort to map inequities, usually the first thing overlooked is equity itself.” Despite exhaustive outreach efforts, we recognize the level of trauma and distrust that exists within a community that has so often, and for so long, been left on the sidelines in the policy discussions about them. The community needs reassurances, in terms of action and results, that honors their ‘lived expertise’ while, through economic empowerment, aims to protect and value their intellectual property -- the solutions and social capital they bring to the table -- particularly of Black and Indigenous People of Color and immigrant communities.

TIME TO RECRUIT NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING RESIDENTS

It is well documented that food insecurity has been a pervasive issue in Boston far prior to this pandemic. As demonstrated in the collaborative 2019 Boston Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) report, data show that a high percentage of survey respondents whose primary language spoken is not English reported worrying about running out of food before they had the money for more (Figure 1). While a small sample, those surveyed who spoke Haitian Creole, Spanish, and Portuguese/Cape Verdan Creole were disproportionately affected by food insecurity in 2019.

Figure 1. Percent Boston CHNA Survey Respondents Reporting That They Worried That Their Food Would Run Out Before They Got Money to Buy More in Past 12 Months, by Primary Language Spoken, 2019

However, reaching communities that are non-English speakers—and understanding their unique needs—can be challenging and takes time. For example, multilingual interpretation services for the Design Session were provided along with outreach to different networks. The EBFES project group recognizes the cursory efforts were understandably not enough, and more time was needed. The sparse communications across different communities resulted in this project only seeing pockets of engagement with speakers of languages other than English.
There was a notable gap with residents who spoke Cape Verde Creole, French, and Vietnamese for this effort (Figure 2). As food assistance models are further developed in the coming months and years, additional engagement of multilingual groups can help understand the nuances of barriers to services and what service components might resonate with different groups.

**Figure 2:** Language(s) Spoken at Home (N=89*)

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**DATA SOURCE:** Equitable Boston Food Ecosystem Project, A Boston Food Access Council Working Group Interviews and Focus Groups, Nov 2020. NOTE: Asterisk (*) indicates that interview participants may have specified more than one response; therefore, percentages may not add up to 100

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**TIME TO BUILD PARTNERSHIPS AND TRUST**

The EBFE project group has made remarkable progress in two short months. The introduction of individuals and organizations that once never knew one another and ensuing networking has been inspiring, despite the work happening primarily in virtual settings. Recognizing more people were able to contribute because travel across the city was not required; we also know many others could not be included because of technology barriers.

As the work and learnings continue, further and intentional efforts will develop aimed at fostering genuine and trusting relationships to help improve efforts to meaningfully and equitably engage the most impacted and marginalized groups. We acknowledge that this work must be guided by those with ‘lived expertise,’ as they often have the most genuine and trusting relationships with their own communities. Particularly, the group aims to engage more people experiencing homelessness, youth, seniors, Indigenous Americans, and Asian communities.
GRASSROOTS RESPONSE AND COLLABORATION

The small, grassroots response programs that emerged to fill the gaps in service early on in the pandemic (e.g., Mutual Aid Networks, CBOs, etc.) remain essential in providing emergency food services for tens of thousands of households in Boston. Many of these programs have been working at high velocity with minimal funding and reliant on a lean staffing structure and the sporadic schedules of volunteers. There is little time for collaborations or efficiency measures to be taken as the demand remains so high. While this is also true for more established food distribution organizations, the absence of a food network and new learning of food safety measures, along with COVID precautions, for the newly-created food program is taxing.

Across all of the food providers, there is a sense of pride in reflecting on all they’ve been able to accomplish mixed with a hefty dose of reality, knowing their distributions are simply not enough to meet the full needs of their communities. On collaborations, questions and reservations were raised around how these newly-formed, smaller groups could work in partnership with the larger entities, like the City of Boston’s OFA, the Greater Boston Food Bank, local hospitals, and others. While grassroots organizations are often far more nimble and able to shift operations as the food supplies and funding rapidly shift, the challenges outlined above persist.

Natural to collaborative work is the need to assign responsibility and to ensure that each partner understands its role, whom they are targeting, and to whom it can look to for support. In this time of crisis, residents may engage with several different groups or organizations and still come up short on their ability to feed themselves, complicating efforts to solve for efficiencies and, ultimately, this crisis. A complete resource mapping exercise will help collaborators further understand and document the gaps in service and assign ownership to fill them.

DEMOGRAPHICS & DATA COLLECTION METHODS

THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC, NUMEROUS SURVEYS, LISTENING TOURS, AND DATA ANALYSES HAVE BEEN COMPLETED TO UNDERSTAND FOOD NEEDS WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS.

A collection and analyses of different data sources reinforced that food insecurity has long been an issue across Boston and varies widely by neighborhood. For example, of 455 respondents to the Maverick Landing Community Services survey, more than 75% reported needing more assistance with food. Similarly, BMC surveyed 4,720 families and found that 40% of families had trouble affording groceries or were worried their food would not last. We see this need reflected in service demands; data from 3 Boston neighborhoods (Allston–Brighton, Dorchester, East Boston) from the Expanded Jobs Action Network documented an increased food distribution to approximately 6,000 households a week. The Expanded Jobs Action Network also unveiled that two food access systems developed during the pandemic; 1) established pantry networks and; 2) grassroots, community-based programs. They found for the grassroots programs; they faced criteria that made it difficult to enter the established food access system. Many of these programs have partnered with food rescue programs that have proven to be more nimble in the ever-changing supply and demand across neighborhoods during the pandemic.
ROOT CAUSE METHOD

The EBFE led a root cause analysis during one of the weekly meetings. The goal was to gain a shared understanding of the cause and effect of food insecurity in Boston by bringing together the diverse perspectives, both lived and professional, represented in the EBFE. Root cause issues identified during the analysis were cross-walked against the background research assembled by HRiA and proposed solutions to inform prioritization.

See Appendix B.

DESIGN SESSIONS AND INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of 92 residents identified as food insecure or receiving health or social services were interviewed by the 10 recruiter organizations of the EBFE or participated in one of three design sessions in November 2020. Participants represented 14 neighborhoods across the city, with the majority residing in Dorchester (22%), Mattapan (16%), and Roxbury (14%). Most interview participants identified as women (77%), were between the ages of 25-54 years old (61%) and identified as Black or African American (61%).

Approximately one in three participants were unemployed at the time of the interviews, and 35% identified as disabled. Of the participating Boston residents, 78% had experienced a change in their financial situation amid the pandemic, and 63% had sought food via programs before the pandemic. When asked about whether they had applied to programs (like SNAP or pantries) but were informed they were ineligible, 31% replied ‘yes,’ and 19% indicated they never tried to apply. For the full demographic information, see Appendix C.

DESIGN & ANALYSIS

Health Resources in Action (HRiA) developed an interview guide reviewed and revised by the EBFE workgroup. Volunteers conducted semi-structured interviews with residents, and two facilitators ran three 2-hour design sessions with Boston residents via Zoom in November 2020. Discussions explored residents’ experiences accessing food services across the city and aimed to identify areas of opportunity to address community needs related to the food ecosystem more effectively. EBFE members, facilitators, and HRiA reviewed the qualitative data from the interviews and the design sessions to identify themes. Themes were vetted by EBFE project team members and the BFAC. For additional information about the data collection and analysis, please see Appendix D.
APPENDIX
Appendix A. Access to Food Retailers, by Type and Boston Neighborhood, 2019
Appendix B: Root Cause Analysis

Method

The EBFE used an Ishikawa or fishbone diagram (Figure 1A.) to visually sort the input from participants. The goal of the root cause analysis was to gain a shared understanding of the cause and effect of food insecurity in Boston by bringing together the diverse perspectives of the EBFE that represent lived and professional experience. The tool organized input into themes with deeper roots being extended through the diagram. Root cause issues in the background research conducted by HRiA have been crossed-walked against the diagram, and duplicate issues have been bolded in the Figure 1A diagram. The diagram can be an input to prioritization of solutions and recommendations.

Who

Participants were asked to describe who are the people they mean when they say, “people in Boston don’t have access to healthy food? Those experiencing food insecurity included broadly defined groups including people with low economic status; black communities, LatinX communities, and the LGBTQ+ community. Homing in, other people identified as experiencing food insecurity included people experiencing homelessness with youth further called out; the disabled community, particularly those with mobility and the blind and deaf; people with school age children; homebound seniors and seniors with language barriers; and people struggling with addiction.

What

Information has been organized into six themes: transportation, policy, SNAP/WIC, availability and access, utilization, and people:

- **Availability & Access:** These ideas relate to barriers to accessing food and include restrictions on days and hours that food pantries and other resources are open to the lack of grocery stores in communities. It also recognizes the limited availability of delivery services and the impact of COVID on people who rely on caregivers to obtain groceries or prepare meals.

- **Policy:** This theme hi-lights system level barriers and limitations to food access including restrictive policies to using leftover food and creating new pantry locations; the lack of support for local farmers, especially black and immigrant farmers; and the lack of funding to support current and/or new initiatives.

- **Transportation:** This theme explores the challenges and reasons why transportation is a barrier to accessing healthy food. It raises the issue that accessing healthy affordable food
requires public transportation that can be costly with multiple trips to complete shopping, time consuming and limit what can be carried.

- **People**: This theme defines barriers as it relates to populations and personal challenges including stigma and safety concerns for specific groups; fear of COVID or quarantined due to COVID; the lack of financial stability; and, that the people power of volunteers impacted organizations ability to operate.

- **SNAP/WIC**: SNAP and WIC were two benefits that were specifically called out as a theme because of their role in food security. The theme details cumbersome enrollment issues; restrictions on eligibility, what can be bought and where; and the limitation on the amount of support.

- **Utilization**: This theme explores issues around food quality and type as it relates to the consumer as well as the limitations for usage by transient populations. It raises the issues of poor quality or spoiled food and culturally inappropriate food, leaving consumer unable to eat provided food. It also identifies the difficulty for transient populations to reliably and regularly access hot meals.

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**Figure 1A.**

Original Root Cause Analysis completed 11.18.2020
Individual input documented during the discussion on 11.12.2020 and included in the diagram above (page 1)
Appendix C: Demographics of Community Resident Participants

A total of 92 Boston residents participated in either a 1:1 interview or a design session. Three participants did not submit their demographic information.

Table 1. Neighborhood Representation (N=87)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allston/Brighton</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlestown</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinatown</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorchester</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downtown</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Boston</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyde Park</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica Plain</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mattapan</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roxbury</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Boston</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South End</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West End</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Roxbury</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside of Boston</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Asterisk (*) indicates that interview participants may have specified more than one response; therefore, percentages may not add up to 100. Participants from “Outside Boston” were from Brockton, Lowell, Malden, Waltham, and Wareham.

Table 2. Self-Identified Race/Ethnicity of Community Residents (N=89) *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbadian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verdean</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haitian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity Option Not Listed</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidadian</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Asterisk (*) indicates that interview participants may have specified more than one response; therefore, percentages may not add up to 100.

### Table 3. Gender (N=89)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender male</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender female</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genderqueer</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Gender category</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Asterisk (*) indicates that interview participants may have specified more than one response; therefore, percentages may not add up to 100.

**Table 4. Age Range (N=88)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>0%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75 or older</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantonese</th>
<th>8%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verde Creole</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haitian Creole</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguese</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Spanish 19%
Vietnamese 1%

NOTE: Asterisk (*) indicates that interview participants may have specified more than one response; therefore, percentages may not add up to 100.

Table 6. Household Composition (N=87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household Composition</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 person</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 people</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 people</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 people</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 people</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 to 10 people</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 to 15 people</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15 people</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7a. Would you say you have a disability? (N=84)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to share</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7b. Categorization of Disability (N=30)* (if selected yes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development/Cognitive</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not listed in the options</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to share</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Asterisk (*) indicates that interview participants may have specified more than one response; therefore, percentages may not add up to 100.

### Table 8. Employment Status (N=87)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FT employment</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PT employment</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed since COVID</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (before COVID)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Employed</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable to work</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay at home parent</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9. Has your financial situation changed since, or during, COVID? (N=88)
Table 10. Did you seek out free food (pantries, food delivery program) or food public benefits (SNAP, WIC) before COVID? (N=89)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11. During COVID, did you try to apply but told you were not eligible (SNAP, Pantries, etc)? (N=85)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never tried to apply</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to share</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix D: Design & Analysis

Health Resources in Action (HRiA) developed an interview guide that was reviewed and revised by the EBFE workgroup. Volunteers conducted semi-structured interviews with residents and submitted detailed notes to Health Leads in November 2020. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Discussions explored residents' experiences accessing food services across Boston and aimed to identify areas of opportunity to address community needs related to the food ecosystem more effectively.

Facilitators from Health Leads, Inc. and Loftis Partners drew questions from the interview guide for three 2-hour design sessions with Boston residents in November 2020. The sessions were conducted via Zoom and focused on food assistance programs. The design sessions posed three questions to participants:

1. What works well in the food access programs that you access?
2. What hasn’t worked well? Where are there opportunities to improve food assistance programs?
3. If you had 3 wishes to change the food service programs that you or people you know access, what would they be?

The sessions were designed to maximize participants’ interaction with each other, honor the lived experiences of the participants, and center them as the experts. Participants spoke in small and large groups with a facilitator and a note taker. The session was facilitated primarily in English and there were 7 interpreters on hand to assist with language interpretation needs.

Participants completed an optional demographic form. It included questions about changes in their financial situation since the start of COVID-19, whether they had tried to apply for programs, and whether they had sought out food via programs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the design sessions, the facilitators organized the notes and the written chats from the design sessions to organize the main themes from the discussions. The facilitators and EBFE members reviewed the design session data to contribute high-level themes. Themes were vetted by EBFE project team members and the BFAC through feedback sessions.

Then, analysts at HRiA reviewed the interview notes and coded them using NVivo qualitative data analysis software to identify themes that emerged across interviews. Selected paraphrased quotes without personal identifying information are presented in the narrative of this report to further illustrate points within a topic.