NON-PROFIT AND PUBLIC FOOD SECURITY SYSTEMS: THE POTENTIAL FOR COORDINATING ACCESS TO SAFETY NET PROGRAMS

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Abstract

The nutrition safety net provides critical support to millions of food insecure households, but many still fall through the cracks, and need for assistance has only increased during the country's recent economic downturn. Outreach efforts to facilitate uptake into public programs is one strategy to address this problem. Emergency food providers (EFPs), such as food pantries and soup kitchens, are promising candidates to provide outreach services, but reservations exist about EFP capacity and interest to do so. Using a mixed-mode survey of EFPs in eastern Massachusetts, this study shows that outreach is common among EFPs, but only a small subset of agencies provides complex outreach services, such as prescreening and application assistance. Secular agencies and those housed within larger organizations are significantly more likely to conduct outreach. Opportunities for EFPs to adopt activities beyond food distribution shed light on the untapped potential of EFPs to strengthen safety net programs.

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Non-Profit and Public Food Security Systems: The Potential for Coordinating Access to Safety Net Programs

Chapter 1. Introduction

The nutrition safety net in the United States is broken. Millions of Americans seek assistance every year to help meet their food needs, but millions more still are in need of support. In 2011, 15.0% of US households fell below the federal poverty line (US Census Bureau 2011), and 14.9% of US households experienced food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2012), meaning they had "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways" (USDA 2009). Rates of food insecurity today show no sign of decreasing (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2012), further highlighting the importance of this issue.

Individuals and families facing hardship across the nation can turn to two main sources of food aid: public nutrition assistance programs and private, charitable food providers. Both systems are essential components of the domestic nutrition safety net, providing a network of resources to prevent households from falling into poverty, or to mitigate the effects of poverty. The network is not seamless, however, allowing many to still fall through the cracks; limited resources and gaps in participation leave too many households hungry or food insecure. The federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provide financial assistance to supplement household food purchases. Such programs are intended to tackle food insecurity

(Metallinos-Katsaras et al. 2001; Ratcliffe, McKernan, and Zhang 2011) and can help low-income households move out of the cycle of poverty (Tiehen, Jolliffe and Gundersen 2012; Jolliffe et al. 2004). Charitable emergency food providers (EFPs), on the other hand, distribute supplemental, in-kind food to individuals and families in urgent need of short-term assistance. Food pantries and soup kitchens commonly distribute food not only to clients facing temporary struggles or emergency situations, but to those seeking long-term assistance, as well (Briefel et al. 2003).

The target populations for the two systems overlap, which calls for efforts to coordinate service delivery between public and charitable nutrition assistance providers. Insufficient levels of strategic coordination, however, have led to negative repercussions for assistance providers and recipients alike. Many EFP clients are eligible to participate in government nutrition assistance programs, but do not receive benefits. Low rates of uptake into public safety net programs in turn impact the success of other food programs. The participation gap is particularly problematic because families that cannot access comprehensive sources of assistance increase their reliance on EFPs as a source of food. EFPs ultimately take on a larger share of the food assistance burden than they would if greater numbers eligible households received assistance from public programs. Resources for emergency assistance become spread thin, and the programs strain to keep up with demand. This is a problem of disconnect between the public and non-profit systems of food aid.

Coordination between EFPs and public assistance agencies may offer an opportunity to not only increase public benefit program participation and reduce strain on the emergency food system, but also to more effectively address hunger and poverty in the United States. As the USDA argues, "the emergency food assistance system and the public sector may work in tandem to provide more comprehensive food assistance than either could provide by itself" (Ohls et al. 2002). Unfortunately, our understanding of whether this opportunity has been capitalized fully is limited.

At first glance, the task of coordination with federal agencies may seem daunting for EFPs, particularly food pantries and soup kitchens, who are often volunteer-run, underfunded and understaffed. Taking on additional programming activities in an effort to coordinate with public agencies may extend beyond the capacity of most EFPs (Greger et al. 2002). However, the fact that some food pantries and soup kitchens have expanded programming beyond food distribution to include outreach for public assistance programs points to the potential for coordination.

Previous studies of EFP operations provide a foundation for exploration of organizational capacity to take on outreach activities. However, these studies have only assessed a small subset of possible outreach efforts. EFP literature often focuses exclusively on the presence or absence of institutionalized benefit application assistance programs, disregarding the broad range of possible outreach activities that could be adopted by agencies. Outreach services can be provided in many ways beyond formalized application assistance, for example, ranging from

something as simple as distributing program flyers, to prescreening clients for eligibility, or providing information about documentation requirements. Little research has described the full range of outreach mechanisms that EFPs may perform. Questions regarding the pervasiveness of such activities remain unknown, and few studies have explored the types of agencies more likely to take on outreach activities.

This study seeks to examine the potential for EFPs to play a broader role in addressing the holes in the public nutrition safety net. It aims to elucidate how food pantries and soup kitchens may act as valuable partners in broader poverty-alleviation efforts in addition to providing an important source of food. This project specifically investigates the following questions:

1) In what ways do EFPs provide outreach for public assistance programs?
2) What types of agencies have currently adopted outreach programming?
3) Do EFPs have the organizational capacity and interest to adopt or expand outreach activities?

A mixed-mode survey of food pantry and soup kitchen staff in eastern Massachusetts is used to describe the types of coordination that occur between charitable EFPs and two federal nutrition assistance programs, SNAP and WIC, and the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. The

study also characterizes the EFPs that are more likely to adopt outreach activities as a means to guide capacity development within the emergency food system.

Survey findings demonstrate that a subset of EFPs currently incorporate outreach activities into standard operations, and often have institutionalized assistance programs. Almost two-thirds of agencies provide outreach, often using diverse approaches or tools to connect their clients to outside resources. This finding suggests that outreach is more common than previously acknowledged. Secular agencies and agencies housed within larger organizations are more likely to conduct outreach, than faith-based or agencies not part of a parent organization. In general, EFP staff support organizational efforts to meet their clients' needs, whether for emergency or non-emergency situations. EFP capacity to conduct outreach programming is limited most greatly by a lack of information about programs and training for staff or volunteers.

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Extending our knowledge about the emergency food system can help public administrators, EFP directors, and anti-poverty advocates to improve coordination, leading to a stronger safety net system that better meets both short- and long-term food security needs. An understanding of the range of current inter-sectoral collaboration and examples of successful models can be used to improve program outreach efforts for both emergency food agency staff and public administrators, and improve outcomes for clients. Efforts to address specific limitations to organizational capacity may facilitate future coordination between emergency food providers and public agencies.

The chapters that follow first review literature about the current nutrition safety net in the United States, the challenges it faces, and what we already know about coordination between emergency food providers and governmental programs. Methods and study population are described, followed by survey results. The report then discusses implications of the study's findings, including the role that emergency food providers currently play in public assistance programs, and how they may be incorporated into future outreach programming. The report concludes with study limitations and questions for future research.

Chapter 2. Emergency Food and the US Safety Net

This chapter presents an overview of the nutrition safety net in the United States, with a focus on the role that the emergency food system currently plays in relation to public assistance programs. The literature review begins by describing the evolving relationship of public assistance food programs and charitable food providers. It then briefly characterizes the nutrition safety net today and points to the problem of under-participation in public subsidy programs. The remainder of the chapter reviews the still preliminary research about non-profit emergency food providers' role in connecting users of their services to public subsidy programs. Public administration theory and organizational capacity literature provide a framework for assessing the potential and limitations for more extensive involvement in the broader domestic safety net.

Food Assistance in the United States

The nutrition safety net is comprised of two main sources of food assistance: non-profit emergency food providers (EFPs) and public assistance programs sponsored by the federal or state government. While both systems seek to fill the unmet food needs of food insecure households, public and charitable food programs employ different methods of food distribution and function on different scales. The two systems operate independently of one another, but share

an interconnected history. This section provides historical context for the relationship between the public and non-profit systems, followed by a characterization of each system today.

Co-Evolution of Non-Profit and Public Food Security Systems

Assistance for the poor in the United States has transitioned over the past century. The roles of both non-profit, charitable organizations and government agencies in addressing food insecurity among American households have evolved, and the account of this evolution underscores the interconnected relationship between the two systems.

Non-profit, charitable organizations have long formed the backbone of the social safety net in this country. Historically, needy families and individuals turned to charitable agencies, most often run through religious institutions, for food, clothing, and shelter. The federal government first became involved in the provision of food aid in the 1930's through the purchasing and distribution of surplus commodities (Clarkson 1975). Even then, government aid programs continued to rely on community organizations to act as the local delivery network and point of contact with families. Surplus food was distributed to relief agencies, which were then responsible for allocating food to the poor. At the same time, an experimental and small-scale federal Food Stamp program was piloted in 1939 to provide funds directly to low-income households for the purchase of specific commodities (Clarkson 1975). It wasn't until 1964, stemming from President Johnson's War on Poverty, and building from several iterations of voucher-based

food assistance programs, that the Food Stamp Program was eventually authorized by congress, and finally mandated nationally in 1974 (Daponte 2006).

In the 1980's, the federal government again partnered with charitable and non-profit agencies to distribute food through the new Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) (Daponte 2006). According to Daponte and Bade (2006), the establishment of this program led to significant changes in the size, quantity, and operations of food pantries across the country. Using non-profit agencies as the vehicle for federal food distribution increased their level of accountability in providing food assistance. Moreover, TEFAP food was abundant and reliable, which offered opportunities for new food charities to open, for agencies to serve a greater number of people, and for non-food charities to begin food distribution activities. This partnership marked the beginning of a significant expansion of emergency food providers as major contributors to the nutrition safety net (Daponte 2006).

This complementary relationship between the non-profit and public systems continues today. A significant portion of the emergency food system's resources still comes from the federal government; 54% of food pantries and 34% of soup kitchens receive food through TEFAP, and many also receive food through state distribution programs (Mabli et al. 2010a). In turn, the federal government relies on emergency food providers as local distributors of TEFAP foods. Both systems serve millions of households every year, often with overlap in who they serve; many recipients of federal assistance programs are also clients of the emergency food system.

Despite the interconnected relationship and overlapping target populations, the two sectors continue to operate independently, as I describe below. Both sectors work towards comparable goals of support for low-income households, and together create a safety net for families at risk of food insecurity or poverty. Public and private food assistance programs have always complemented each other, but neither is sufficient on its own. The following sections provide further description of the current state of affairs for public and private food assistance programs.

Emergency Food Providers

A network of non-profit charitable organizations distributes food to approximately 37 million individuals every year (Mabli et al. 2010a). Poverty rates are particularly high among clients of emergency food providers; 79% of EFP clients live below the federal poverty threshold, and 76% are food insecure (Mabli et al. 2010a). Food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other organizations make up a system of emergency food providers that distribute 2.9 billion pounds of food each year (Ohls et al. 2002).

The flow of food in the emergency food system (Figure 1) typically starts with food banks, which procure food through in-kind, food rescue, and government commodities programs. Food banks then redistribute food to a regional network of emergency food providers, which includes food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters, and non-emergency food providers, such as afterschool programs, senior centers, other community organizations, which in

turn distribute directly to households and individuals. While the majority of EFP food is supplied through food banks, agencies often receive direct food donations from food drives, charitable groups or religious institutions, and local merchants or retailers (Mabli et al. 2010a). Food pantries and soup kitchens make up approximately 90% of all EFPs (Mabli et al. 2010a), and as such are the focus of this study. Food pantries generally distribute food to clients intended for preparation and consumption at home, while soup kitchens offer cooked meals available for consumption on-site.

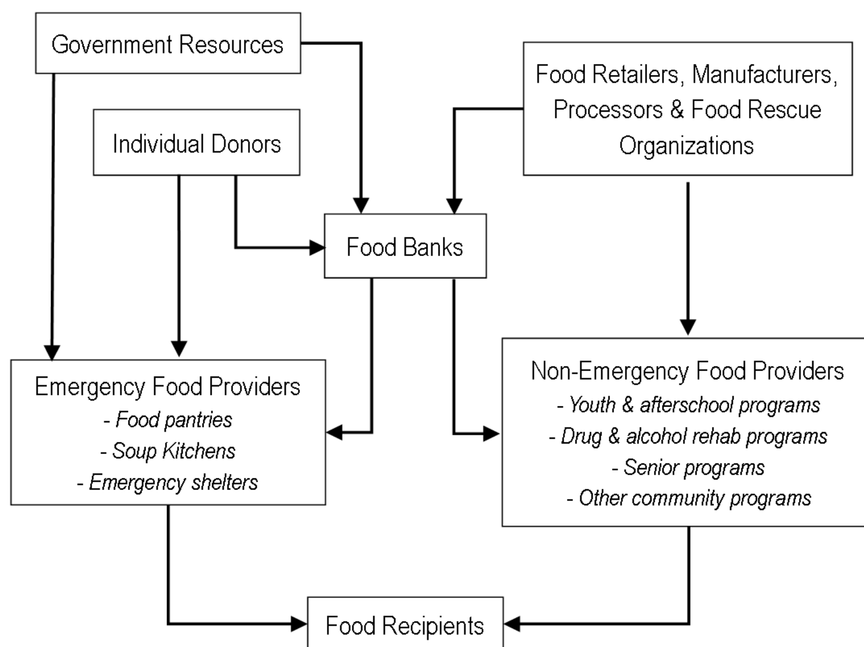

Figure 1. Flow of Food in the Emergency Food System.
(Adapted from Mabli et al. 2010a).

EFPs serve diverse populations, including families with children, working individuals, the elderly, and homeless individuals. EFPs also vary greatly in size and client load. The amount of food distributed ranges from a few pounds to

thousands of pounds a week. Some emergency food providers serve only a handful of clients each week, while others distribute food to hundreds of people every day of the week (Mabli et al. 2010a). Organizational structure is another important characteristic of EFPs. Almost 70% of food pantries, for example, are run entirely by volunteers, while others have multiple paid staff (Mabli et al. 2010a). Similarly, some agencies require documentation to verify client income, while others have a "no questions asked" policy (Daponte 2000).

In spite of their name, EFPs not only provide food for clients facing "emergencies," but also for clients facing long-term economic hardships and chronic food insecurity. Several studies have shown that many families rely on EFPs for sustained periods of time, often longer than one year, to meet their household food needs (Daponte et al. 1998; Derrickson et al. 1999). Thirty six percent of pantry clients, for example, are "recurrent" users, meaning they use the pantry at least once every month, and the average length of consecutive pantry use for these recurrent clients is 28 months (Echevarria et al. 2011). Senior populations are even more reliant on pantry resources for their food needs, with 56% of senior pantry clients classified as recurrent users. Recurrent pantry use suggests that many clients rely on EFPs for long-term food needs.

Emergency food providers now serve clients who seek temporary support, as well as those who seek support for long periods of time. This persistent demand places strain on the emergency food system because EFPs do not have the capacity to meet the entirety of their clients' food needs. Furthermore, the need for food assistance has recently increased due to escalating unemployment

levels. Limited food resources has led 25% of pantries nationally to reduce the quantity of food distributed to each household and 12% to turn clients away (Mabli et al. 2010a).

Public Nutrition Assistance

The public domestic nutrition safety net provides in-kind transfers, financial assistance, and support services to low-income households. Two of the most significant federal food security programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). These two federal programs provide cash transfers to supplement household food purchases. Although not a nutrition-specific program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is an additional important source of income for low-income households. Additional social protection and safety net programs, such as unemployment benefits, Social Security, and Medicaid, also supplement household income and consequently food security level. This study focuses on SNAP and WIC, which provide cash transfers specifically for food purchases, and TANF, one of the few national programs that provides unrestricted cash transfers for the general population. As such, these three programs are likely to be most relevant to the general population of food pantry and soup kitchen users. The three transfer programs have distinct structures, eligibility requirements, transfer type, and transfer size, but all comprise part of the larger safety net.

SNAP

SNAP, the largest public food assistance program in the United States, currently serves approximately 46 million individuals nationwide (USDA 2012a). Administered through the US Department of Agriculture, the program provides monthly cash benefits for food purchases to individuals and households with incomes at or below 130% of the federal poverty guidelines. The average monthly benefit per household in 2012 was $278.48 (USDA 2012a).

Much evidence has shown the positive effects that SNAP participation can have on household food security. Rates of household food insecurity are found to be higher for SNAP participants than for low-income non-participants (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2012). However, rates of food insecurity, on average, decrease after households receive SNAP benefits (Nord and Golla 2009). Ratcliffe, McKernan and Zhang (2011) showed that SNAP participation decreases the incidence of food insecurity by about 30%. Other studies have also pointed to the economic and community-level impacts of the program. When a SNAP participant redeems their benefits at local grocery stores, corner stores, or farmers markets, those funds go straight into the local economy, essentially providing a “fiscal stimulus” for the community (USDA 2011). The USDA estimates that for every $1 billion spent on the program, there is a $1.79 billion return in economic activity (Hanson 2010).

WIC

The federal WIC program currently serves nine million low-income pregnant and breastfeeding women, infants, and children up to the age of five nationwide (USDA 2012b). The WIC program, administered by the US Department of Agriculture, provides supplemental foods, nutrition education, and healthcare and social service referrals. Eligible participants must be deemed "nutritionally at-risk," and have incomes at or below 185% of the federal poverty guidelines.

Evidence of WIC's impact is mixed, but generally is positive towards participant diet, health and wellbeing. WIC participants are more likely to consume a greater variety of foods and have higher iron intake than non-participants (Colman et al. 2012). Research has shown that WIC participation is associated with increased access to prenatal care, decreased preterm birth, increased birth weight, and decreased rates of iron deficiency anemia in children (Abrams 1993; Fox, Hamilton, and Lin 2004; Owen and Owen 1997; Rush et al. 1988). The Government Accountability Office (GAO1992) estimated that for every one dollar spent, WIC participation can lead to $3.50 in health care savings among pregnant participants, making WIC widely cited for its cost-effectiveness (Oliveira and Frazão 2009; Rosenbaum and Neuberger 2005).

TANF

Although not specifically a food or nutrition program, TANF is the federal government's income and work support program, which attempts to address

broader issues of poverty in the United States. Administered by the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Family Assistance, the program serves approximately 4.4 million individuals each month (TANF 2012). Federal administrative guidelines are very broad, so programming and benefits differ widely between states (Schott 2012). Generally, participants must be working or looking for work, and are limited in the length of time they can receive benefits.

Food insecure households can also benefit from TANF, even if the program does not specifically address food needs. Income transfers to participating households increases the total assets available, which reduces financial strain. Increased income allows households to purchase goods and services they would not be able to otherwise afford, which can include food.

The non-profit and public food assistance systems provide essential resources for low-income and food insecure households, but they have not reached everyone. Non-profit emergency food providers face the strain of insufficient capacity to meet increasing demand. Public programs, on the other hand, are limited by low rates of uptake and barriers to program participation. These structural issues present challenges to addressing food insecurity, but may also provide an opportunity for increased collaboration between the two systems.

Holes in the Public Safety Net

A gap exists in federal assistance programs between those who are eligible for assistance and those who actually receive assistance. This section first highlights trends in participation rates with a focus on the SNAP program, and

then provides insight into possible explanations for limited program accessibility for those who are eligible. The discussion concludes with policy changes and outreach campaigns that can, and have, affected program accessibility and uptake.

Low Participation Rates among Eligible Populations

Millions of households receive SNAP, WIC and TANF benefits each year, but high poverty and food insecurity rates attest that millions more remain in need of assistance. Understanding the program's ability to target and enroll eligible households is an important way to evaluate the program's success. It is important to note that many low-income, poor, or hungry households do not qualify to receive SNAP benefits, so any changes to program uptake will not eliminate all food insecurity. Improving program accessibility is only relevant to those who meet the eligibility standards.

Eligibility to receive SNAP benefits is based on the household's monthly income, the number of individuals in the household, and various other factors, such as housing costs and utility bills. Due to the program's mandatory funding structure, any household deemed eligible is entitled to receive benefits. SNAP participation rates, or the percentage of eligible individuals who participate in the program, have increased over time since the program's inception, from approximately 38% participation in 1974 (MacDonald 1977), to 72% in 2009 (Cunnyngham 2011). Despite this increase, almost 18 million low-income individuals are eligible for SNAP but do not receive assistance (USDA 2012a). Recent attention has highlighted the disproportionately low SNAP participation

rates among certain populations. Latinos and non-English speaking populations, for example, have particularly low access rates (USDA 2012c). Participation rates are the lowest among seniors, with an average of 34% of all eligible seniors participating in the program in 2006 (Cunnyngham 2010).

Barriers to Accessing Public Resources

Explanations for low program uptake among people who are eligible for assistance address both individual behaviors and programmatic factors. The most significant reason cited for not applying for SNAP benefits is not being aware of eligibility requirements, even among populations that would most likely be eligible (Daponte, Sanders and Taylor 1999; Martin et al. 2003; Mabli et al. 2010b). Other limiting factors include not knowing how to apply for benefits, complicated and burdensome application processes, and language barriers during the application process. Some eligible households are nonparticipants by choice; stigma associated with receiving government support is commonly cited as a reason for choosing to not apply, as well as a desire for independence from external support (Algert, Reibel, and Renvall 2006; Bartlett, Burstein and Hamilton 2004; Gabor et al. 2002; Kaiser 2008).

Certain regulations negatively affect participation rates. For example, the frequency with which participants are required recertify for SNAP strongly correlates with lower participation rates (Kabbani and Wilde 2003). Lower participation rates are also seen in states that require fingerprinting as part of the application process, and in program offices with limited office hours (Barlett,

Burstein and Hamilton 2004). Several changes to program policies and procedures have been made at the state and federal level in an attempt to make SNAP more easily accessible to eligible households (Bartlett, Burstein and Hamilton 2004; Gabor et al. 2002). For example, many states now allow program applications to submit applications and verification documents through the mail, online, or over the phone, which significantly facilitates the application process (GAO 2007). Overall, policy and program management decisions can have significant impacts on the experiences of SNAP participants, and much work continues to ensure equitable access to benefits.

Outreach Efforts to Promote Program Access

Much attention has been given to SNAP outreach efforts as a means to decrease barriers to participation. Two recent initiatives have promoted program access on a national scale. Firstly, the USDA Outreach Grants for community partners were available from 2001 through 2009 (USDA 2012d). More recently, the AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger and Opportunity Corps (AHOC) was started in 2011, which seeks to increase SNAP participation rates through partnerships with local community organizations (National AmeriCorps Anti-Hunger Program).

Despite the recent attention to promoting outreach, efforts are still needed to further increase participation rates. Opportunities to expand outreach efforts and to engage a wide range of partners are thus warranted. The remainder of this review specifically addresses the potential for coordination between public

nutrition assistance programs and a promising, but often overlooked partner, emergency food providers.

Emergency Food Providers as Outreach Partners

This section explores the potential for emergency food providers to help address the problem of low participation rates among households who are eligible for public food security programs. It examines the rationale for increased coordination between EFPs and public agencies as well as arguments for EFPs' limited interest and capacity to expand their primary roles as providers of emergency food. I then point to examples of EFPs that have adopted outreach activities as evidence that some degree of coordination is feasible. The review focuses primarily on outreach for nutrition programs, but can similarly be applied to other public assistance programs. Opportunities for coordination with other programs include fuel and utility assistance programs, housing assistance, childcare, summer food programs, and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

The value of coordination between public and charitable food programs as a potential strategy to reinforce the nutrition safety net has often been promoted. Peter Eisinger, in his seminal book, *Toward an End to Hunger in America,* wrote that one approach to reduce food insecurity in the United States was precisely that "the federal government must use charitable feeding programs as vehicles for enrolling clients in public programs" (Eisinger 1998, p. 128). He goes on to say, "by playing a role in the delivery process, non-profit organizations serve to leverage the resources provided by public programs, thus extending the research

of government” (p. 107). Furthermore, Janet Poppendieck’s book, *Sweet Charity?: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*, has long been a call to action, challenging policy makers and advocates to capitalize on the emergency food network’s existing resources to “bring about a future in which ‘emergency food’ can be reserved for true emergencies” (Poppendieck 1998, p. 19). Moreover, coordination between non-profit and faith-based EFPs and public programs is consistent with widely held principles in public administration. Public management scholarship has found that more integrated referral networks are associated with better client outcomes (Provan and Milward 1995).

On the other hand, others have expressed reservations about emergency food providers as capable partners. Collette Young (2004) explains that "emergency feeding programs are indeed uniquely positioned to serve as conduits of income transfers and services to under-resourced persons, but it is not clear whether these organizations are willing or able to shoulder the burden.”

The Debate about Potential for EFP Outreach to Public Programs

To date, only a few studies have described examples of EFP efforts to connect users of their services to public assistance programs. Descriptions of EFPs that provide SNAP eligibility information to pantry or soup kitchen clients mention posting promotional posters, or offering on-site application assistance (Eisinger 2002; Greger et al. 2002; Young 2004). Anecdotal evidence suggests that pantries have adopted additional innovative strategies to conduct such outreach. The type of outreach activities currently conducted by EFPs and the

level of institutionalization vary widely. Based on preliminary interviews with pantry staff, for example, a food pantry housed in a human service agency in Cambridge, MA provides clients with contact information and instructions for how to apply for SNAP benefits. In Springfield, MA, one pantry has offered on-site SNAP benefits screening and application assistance since 2006.

Currently, only 22.2% of food pantries and 13.8% of soup kitchens in the United States provide SNAP eligibility screening for their clients (Mabli et al. 2010a). Very little data exists to document additional outreach activities conducted by EFPs other than eligibility screening, and little is known about how many agencies engage in such activities. Low incidence of eligibility screening among EFPs suggests that such extra tasks may be prohibitively onerous for EFPs.

Evidence of EFP Capacity to Engage in Outreach Efforts

While anecdotal evidence indicates that EFPs engage in outreach efforts, little research has systematically examined food agencies' capacity to take on such tasks. Eisinger's (2002) study of EFPs in Detroit, Michigan is one exception. His study sought to explain the capacity of food providers to engage in application assistance. It found that 17% of the sampled agencies provide public benefit application assistance to their clients. Three factors were associated with whether the pantry offered application assistance, including the number of paid pantry staff, whether the agency regularly conducts intake interviews with clients, and whether the agency maintains electronic client files. However, Eisinger

focused exclusively on formalized application assistance as a measure of outreach. He did not examine food agency capacity to engage in other forms of outreach assistance identified above. The extent to which EFPs engage in a more holistic outreach approach is still unclear and no studies to date have explored the factors that may influence the capacity of EFPs to engage in this this larger range of outreach activities. This gap in the literature leaves many questions unanswered about what types of EFPs are interested in and have the capacity to help their clients access federal programs, and what activities are used to do so.

The question of whether EFPs are interested and have the capacity to act as outreach partners in service delivery warrants further exploration. Many organizational factors influence whether coordination between non-profit and public assistance programs is feasible, including goal compatibility, resource availability, trust between partners, and the beliefs of individual staff members. These indicators may be important characteristics to predict whether an EFP helps connect its clients to public resources.

EFPs may be positioned to connect those who use their services to public resources because they have largely similar client populations. This includes many of the people who are eligible for public programs yet do not receive benefits. In a 2010 survey of Boston-area emergency food providers (Mabli et al. 2010b), 77% of respondents from food pantries and 87% of respondents from soup kitchens reported income levels at or below the SNAP eligibility cutoff, but only 54% of all pantry clients and 55% of kitchen clients were participating in SNAP. Similar patterns are seen for other government assistance programs: 70%

of pantry clients with one or more children under three years of age participated in WIC. More dismally, only 20% of all pantry clients and 24% of kitchen clients participated in TANF, welfare, or general assistance at any point during the previous two years (Mabli et al. 2010b).

Despite assumptions about low EFP capacity and interest in outreach efforts, upon closer examination we find that food pantries and soup kitchens do show promise to act as effective points of referral to other services, and have valuable resources to offer. Albeit often unskilled, the charitable sector is rich in volunteer labor, able to replenish itself and committed to serving their community. A wealth of eager bodies is available to perform assigned tasks, which could include referral activities. EFPs, moreover, are often attractive sources of aid for populations that hesitate to seek public assistance, or are unable to visit welfare offices. They often require little, or no, paperwork or documentation from clients, creating a less intimidating environment. These community-based organizations are capable of reaching audiences that often are unable or unwilling to access public assistance, but which have the greatest need. They are run locally, offering an opportunity to interact directly with clients and to provide specialized assistance to meet each client's specific need, in contrast with public assistance offices, which may serve a larger geographic area and often require documentation of need (Daponte 2000), and are well-connected to other local social service providers (Daponte and Bade 2006). It should also be noted that a vast majority of EFP funding currently comes from government sources such as the United States Department of Agriculture (Ohls et al. 2002), suggesting that

indirect forms of public partnership are not new, and that a high degree of trust in each other's capacity exists. This also indicates that a line of accountability already exists between government agencies and EFPs receiving government funds, making additional forms of coordination likely.

Service integration literature further provides a theoretical framework for understanding the benefits of public-private partnerships in nutrition assistance programs. Service integration theory has been used to explore the ways in which effective inter-sectoral partnerships can help all parties better achieve their missions. Provan and Milward (1995) argue that the state plays an important role in managing effective networks of service providers, such as emergency food agencies. Agranoff and McGuire (1998) have also argued that higher levels of coordination between partners are associated with more successful client outcomes. One framework for public-private partnership is the "hollow state," in which government administrations contract private or non-profit agencies to implement public services (Milward and Provan 2000). Hollow state systems are applicable to coordination in the emergency food system; although EFPs do not normally form official contracts with public agencies, they are, in a sense, implementing a public service. Theoretically, such partnership scenarios have the potential to provide higher quality and more effective services to those in need than the government agency alone.

Whether through official contract of public services from government agencies to private and non-profit organizations, or as part of informal service integration, public management literature has identified several criteria that are

associated with effective coordination. Examples include building partner capacity and a commitment to a shared mission (Agranoff 2003), all of which are relevant to coordination among food assistance providers.

Overall, some EFPs may be more likely to form public-private partnerships, whether formal or informal, and this may depend heavily on the type of organization and environmental context. While many characteristics of EFPs make them ideal outreach partners, several questions arise as to their ability and interest in taking on this role.

Limitations to Organizational Capacity and Interest

Under a different lens, pantries and soup kitchens do not appear to be likely candidates to take on a role of coordination with public agencies. Several EFP characteristics imply that agencies in the emergency food system may lack the organizational capacity to effectively engage in outreach activities. EFPs are notoriously underfunded and understaffed (Eisinger 2002; Greger et al. 2002). They tend to rely heavily on volunteer labor, often utilizing volunteers for many, if not all, aspects of agency operations (Edlefsen 2000). Only 32% of pantries and 58% of soup kitchens in the United States have paid employees (Mabli et al. 2010a). The workforce has a high turn-over rate and is usually only trained to perform activities related to basic food distribution (Eisinger 1998). Furthermore, inconsistent funding is a major challenge for EFPs; taking on new activities beyond food distribution logically seems impractical for EFPs that are already extended beyond capacity.

Certain characteristics of some EFPs may also present difficulties if trying to adopt activities outside of food distribution. On the surface, both EFPs and public food assistance work under similar goals of reducing hunger and food insecurity, suggesting a high potential for partnership between these two actors. A study of food pantries in New York City, however, found that agency directors' beliefs regarding hunger heavily influenced the range of services and activities offered through the pantry, regardless of the organization's stated mission (Young 2004).

Religion may be another key aspect to understand in exploring mission alignment. Approximately two-thirds of EFPs in the United States are run by faith-based organizations (Ohls et al. 2002). Eisinger warns that collaboration between public agencies and religious organizations may lead to mismatched missions. "Any system of welfare assistance that relies heavily on religious institutions to supplement state assistance or to implement public programs thus risks a high level of civil and religious entanglement" (1998, p. 118), specifically a discordance between distributing food as a means to serve the food insecure versus a means to serve the congregation.

Religious affiliation is not applicable to food aid agencies alone, but is relevant for any agency that provides human services. Some studies show that partnership between public agencies and faith-based organizations in particular has been problematic, despite the prominent role that faith-based organizations play in the provision of human services. A review by the General Accountability Office (GAO 2002) found that faith-based organizations faced many obstacles in

government partnership. The report identified several factors that have hindered collaboration between faith-based organizations and government agencies, including limited staff or volunteers and organizational capacity, which can lead to difficulty in the grant bidding process, or grant administration. Additionally, the study found that some faith-based organizations fear that partnership will influence the agency's mission, or that agency staff have mistrust of government in general.

Whether religious or secular, the organizational culture of EFPs may present challenges to coordination with bureaucratic public agencies with standardized operating procedures. Efforts to standardize operating procedures in EFPs may be difficult to implement for organizations that have an informal operating structure or inconsistent staff to employ procedures. Additionally, the public and private food assistance sectors traditionally have operated independently, with little opportunity for close collaboration. The rise of the private, charitable food sector has even been described by some as a strategy to fill in for insufficient government programs that were unable to meet the needs of its constituents (Poppendieck 1998; Daponte and Bade 2006). The historical relationship between the two sectors may hamper direct coordination through a lack of confidence. Overall, this suite of organizational and environmental challenges may pose significant challenges to coordination efforts.

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Public agencies and non-profit, charitable organizations together form an expansive network of critically needed nutrition assistance, but holes still exist in

the nutrition safety net. Families struggle to put food on the table, and hunger and food insecurity are major social problems in the United States today. Efforts to reach households that are eligible to receive nutrition assistance but who do not receive these important benefits are ongoing, and are an essential part of expanding the impact of public resources.

The notion that emergency food programs have the potential to play a role in strengthening the public safety net may come as a surprise, even to those within the domestic food assistance network. Based on the literature presented here, arguments can be made both for and against the potential for coordination between public and private food assistance providers as one strategy for improving food assistance. Although we have reason to suspect that EFPs may be limited in their capacity and interest to conduct outreach for public programs, empirical evidence has yet to corroborate this assumption. A large gap in our understanding of the role that the emergency food system plays in larger poverty alleviation efforts still remains.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between EFPs and public assistance programs. The study identifies the ways in which EFPs coordinate with public programs, the types of agencies that have adopted outreach programming, and the level of organizational capacity and interest to expand operations beyond food distribution. Furthering our understanding of opportunities to promote program outreach can lead to improved program effectiveness, stronger communities, and increased welfare for the US population.

Chapter 3. Methods

This study uses qualitative and quantitative methods to explore the potential role that emergency food providers can play in connecting their clients to public assistance programs. A mixed-mode survey of directors of soup kitchens and food pantries was used to assess the types of coordinating activities that currently occur, factors that influence coordination, and strategies to overcome obstacles to adopting such activities. All study methodologies were approved by the Tufts University Institutional Review Board.

Preliminary Data Collection

In an effort to collect preliminary information about this topic, and as part of the Tufts University graduate Survey Research and Design course, a focus group was hosted by the author and two other graduate students in April 2012 to learn about the strategies that staff of EFPs in the Boston area currently use to help connect clients to SNAP. A group of six EFP staff members met to share their insight from working in emergency food distribution agencies. Focus group participants indicated that referring clients to outside resources is common, but the scale and frequency with which this happens is highly variable, both between and within organizations.

The focus group participants also provided information about the challenges to engaging in these activities. Surprisingly, a lack of financial

resources was not a main priority. The main challenges to agency capacity were a lack of staff and volunteer time, or needing to spend time monitoring volunteers, not being familiar with Massachusetts systems and program application procedures, and a lack of knowledge about SNAP, including how to apply, and general information about how the program works.

Semi-structured phone interviews were held with two key informants in the Massachusetts emergency food system. The first interview was conducted on May 12, 2012 with a staff member from the Western Massachusetts Food Bank, familiar with regional SNAP outreach efforts. The second interview was held on June 8, 2012, with the two staff members from a large food pantry in western Massachusetts that manage a well-established public benefits outreach program. The interviews provided background for design of the survey instrument.

Survey Instrument

Building upon the focus group and interviews, a self-administered mixed-mode survey instrument was designed to collect data on characteristics of EFPs in eastern Massachusetts, and the range of their outreach programming. The survey was partially designed in spring 2012 by the author and two other graduate students as part of the Tufts University Survey Design course, and was amended significantly for this project. The survey was pretested by EFP staff in western Massachusetts and staff from the Greater Boston Food Bank (not part of the population for this study). In response to feedback from pretesters, the instrument was shortened in length, and several changes were made to survey questions. The

top categorical range of number of clients served each month was increased to from "200 or more" to "400 or more" to accommodate larger agencies. Additionally, respondents were given a new option of reporting quantity of food distributed per week not only in pounds, but also in number of bags, a common metric for food pantries (Mabli et al. 2010a). As a way to more precisely understand the role of the Greater Boston Food Bank in agency operations, respondents were no longer asked how helpful support from the food bank would be in general, but rather this question was divided into two different components: material resources and guidance from the food bank. Finally, an additional category was added to the list of possible outreach activities – whether agencies ask clients if they are already enrolled in SNAP, WIC, or TANF.

The final instrument contained fourteen questions divided into three sections: Agency Operations, Program Referral Activities, and Role of Emergency Food Providers (Appendix A). Participants were given the choice of completing the survey electronically or on paper. Directors of soup kitchens and food pantries were asked to respond as representatives of their food distribution agencies. The survey included questions about agency operations, organizational characteristics, and any activities currently performed to help connect their clients to SNAP, WIC, or TANF. The following independent variables were measured for each agency: type of organization (food pantry, soup kitchen, or other), agency size (based on number of clients served and quantity of food distributed), religious affiliation, whether the agency is housed within a larger organization, client monitoring activities, organizational mission, and personal beliefs about

hunger. The survey also asked respondents to score various resources according to their level of potential utility for expanding organizational capacity. The list focuses on resources that may be necessary for conducting program outreach.

Study Population

The population of this study consisted of the 298 food pantries and 48 soup kitchens served by the Greater Boston Food Bank in eastern Massachusetts. This region consists of nine counties: Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Essex, Middlesex, Nantucket, Norfolk, Plymouth, and Suffolk counties. According to the Greater Boston Food Bank, food pantries and soup kitchens are defined as charitable organizations (IRS 501c3) that provide food or meals to those in need. Pantries "provide groceries, at least monthly. . . for home preparation and consumption," and soup kitchens "prepare and serve on site meals regularly" (GBFB FAQ's). Agencies that require money or services in exchange for food are not included in this category. Although many other organizations, such as daycare centers, afterschool sites, and long-term residential sites often provide food to low-income individuals and may be served by GBFB, these are classified as Non-Emergency Food Distributors, who serve snacks or meals as part of other programming. Therefore, this study exclusively surveyed food pantries and soup kitchens.

Because not every pantry and soup kitchen in eastern Massachusetts is served by GBFB, some agencies were not captured in the sampling frame for this population. Findings from previous emergency food agency studies, however,

suggest that this may not be cause for concern. Collette Young's (2004) preliminary research guiding EFP sample selection in New York City concluded that food pantries unaffiliated with the regional food bank were extremely unstable and temporary, often only distributing food a few times a year. She ultimately excluded non-food bank EFPs from her sampling frame. It is important to acknowledge that temporary or seasonal pantries or soup kitchens are not represented in this population, and could have important impacts on collaborative activities with public agencies. Extending data collection to find and include provisional or impromptu organizations, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

The study's population additionally is limited geographically. Implementation, regulations, and administration of public assistance programs vary between states, so sampling is restricted to Massachusetts. This avoids comparing public-private coordination activities across states that vary simply due to elements of state-level program design and public administration, but similar questions may be pertinent in other areas of the country, as well. Conducting this research in Massachusetts in particular offers a unique opportunity to understand the conditions in which coordination may be more likely to happen. A national survey of EFPs in the United States found that that 27.9% of pantries in the north east offered SNAP or WIC eligibility counseling, compared to only 17.2% on average across the county (Ohls et al. 2002). SNAP participation rates in Massachusetts are on-par with national average rates (Cunnyngham 2011), making any findings potentially relevant to other parts of the country, as well.

Survey Administration and Response Rate

Electronic surveys (hosted on Survey Monkey) were first distributed to all 346 agency directors on October 19, 2012, with two follow up emails to nonrespondents one week and two weeks after the initial contact. A printed copy paper survey was mailed to the remaining nonrespondents on November 9. Follow up phone calls were made to the five agencies whose emails bounced. The survey closed on December 19, with a total of 242 agencies responding, a 69.9% response rate. Most agencies responded to the survey online (87.2%), with a smaller group responding to the paper survey (12.8%). Unfortunately, and unintentionally, the survey was distributed at the same time that a large anti-hunger organization distributed its own survey to Boston-area food agencies. This caused some confusion for participants, and perhaps prevented some agencies from responding.

The response rate is comparably better than that of similar surveys. Young's study (2004) of pantry directors in New York City received a response rate of 71%, while Eisinger's (2002) was lower, at 56%. Efforts to increase response survey rates for this study were based on Young's methodology, and drew from Dillman et al.'s survey guidebook (2008). These included a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study, offering mixed survey methods (paper or electronic response options), personalizing materials with respondent names, sending follow up notes, making phone calls, and using the Tufts University logo.

Response rates for individual questions were also high, ranging from 76% to 100%. Due to data limitations, the percentages of agencies reporting each outreach activity are calculated as a proportion of all agencies in the survey, rather than as a proportion of agencies that answered each question. For agencies that did not fully complete the outreach section, it is impossible to know if they actually do not conduct any outreach, or if they chose to skip the section. Consequently, the percentage of agencies conducting each activity may be biased. Due to this inaccuracy, all percentages presented here potentially under-represent the actual incidence of outreach due to possible omitted responses, or possible over-calculation of non-response. Two observations suggest that outreach question response rates are high, and non-response is low, validating the total responses presented: 1) Among paper responses, for which omission rates are calculable, none of the respondents skipped the outreach question; 2) Response rates for other questions among all respondents were above 75%.

Data Analysis

Characteristics of respondent and non-respondent agencies were compared to assess the degree to which the sample is representative of the larger population. The GBFB categorizes each agency as either Food Pantry or Soup Kitchen, depending on the types of activities and operations performed. Agencies in the survey were asked to self-identify as a food pantry, soup kitchen, or other type of food distribution agency. Other agency categories included health clinics or hospitals, mobile outreach vans, and food salvage organizations. For these

respondents, GBFB categorizations were used to reclassify as either food pantry or soup kitchen. This categorization was used to analyze the types of agencies that responded to the survey and those that did not. The percentages of food pantries and soup kitchens in the larger population are quite similar to the participant sample (Table 1). Overall, 88.0% of responding agencies are categorized as food pantries, and 12.0% are categorized as soup kitchens.

The study's total response rate was high (almost 70%), but the total distribution of responding soup kitchens and food pantries is unequal. Approximately 72.1% of all food pantries responded, either online or on paper, while only 56.3% of all soup kitchens responded. Because soup kitchens make up a much smaller portion of the total population and had a lower response rate, any conclusions drawn from this sample may more appropriately represent food pantry operations, compared to other types of food agencies.

Soup kitchens were underrepresented in the online survey but overrepresented in the paper survey; a greater percentage of soup kitchens responded on paper (24.1%), compared to the percentage of food pantries that responded on paper (11.3%). This suggests that offering electronic and paper mixed-mode options is an important step for capturing both food pantry and soup kitchen populations.

Comparing the amount of food distributed by agencies can be complicated, given the inconsistent forms of monitoring used by different agencies. Agencies were given the option of reporting food distribution in pounds, bags, and/or meal units. Bags of food and meals, although subjective measures,

are widely used metrics by EFPs, and often the only measurement available to document the amount of food distributed to clients. For this study, number of bags of food was converted into pounds using a conversion of 10 pounds per bag. This is based on weight and bag comparisons of agencies that reported both units (average weight/bag = 12.3 pounds; SD = 5.7). Meal units were converted to pounds using the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan's estimate of 1.3 pounds of food per meal on average (Carlson et al. 2006). Although discrepancies between "take home" weights and purchased weights exist, this conversion is commonly used in the emergency food system. Some agencies reported distributing both unprepared food and meals, so one total value was calculated for such agencies.

Table 1. Study population and sample, based on agency categorization and response method.

	Population	Study Sample (respondents)		
		Online	Paper	Total respondents
Food Pantry	298 (86%)	189	24	213 (88%)
Soup Kitchen	48 (14%)	22	7	29 (12%)
All agencies	346	211	31	242

Fifteen outreach activities performed by agencies were grouped into three categories: information dissemination, prescreening assistance, and application assistance. Descriptive statistics were calculated for each category and for individual outreach activities.

Bivariate analysis was used to compare organizational factors that are associated with the level of outreach conducted by agencies. Pantries and kitchens were categorized into two groups, according to the number of different outreach activities the agency currently engages in for SNAP, WIC, or TANF. The two

categories, “high outreach agencies” and “low outreach agencies,” were compared with six organizational factors, and were analyzed for association with level of outreach: type of organization, religious affiliation, whether the agency is housed within a larger organization, client monitoring activity, number of pounds distributed each week, and number of clients served each month (see Table 2 for variable definitions).

A logistic regression model was used to analyze the relationship between the explanatory variables and the binary outcome variable, *outreach* (Table 2). The model identified any agency characteristics that were significantly associated with performing outreach activities. Regression results were tested for heteroskedasticity, collinearity, and normality to determine appropriate statistical tests. Robust standard errors were used to adjust for presence of heteroskedasticity. All analyses were performed using STATA version 12.1.

Regression equation:

$$outreach = \beta_0 + \beta_1(kitchen) + \beta_2(faithbased) + \beta_3(housed) + \beta_4(monitors) + \beta_5(pounds) + \beta_6(numclients) + u$$

Descriptive statistics for questions regarding organizational mission and personal beliefs about hunger were calculated. The list of potential resources needed for initiating or expanding outreach programming was ranked according to the mean score provided by respondents. Higher score resources are considered to be most valuable or useful, and lower score resources to be considered less

valuable. Organizational mission, personal belief, and resource ranking scores were compared for high and low outreach agencies.

Table 2. Regression model variable definitions and corresponding item number on survey questionnaire.

Variable name	Definition	Corresponding questionnaire item
outreach	0 = does not conduct outreach, or reported only 1 activity (low outreach) 1 = conducts 2 or more of the 15 outreach activities listed (high outreach)	8
kitchen	0 = food pantry 1 = soup kitchen	1
faithbased	0 = secular 1 = faith-based	2
housed	Agency is housed within a larger organization, such as a religious institution, human service agency, or health center	3
monitors	Agency does one or both of the following: 1) monitors the frequency of client visits; or 2) monitors the length of time clients receive assistance	7
pounds	Number of pounds distributed each week	5, 6
numclients	Number of clients served each month 1 = 1 to 100 2 = 101 to 200 3 = 201 to 400 4 = more than 400	4

Chapter 4. Results

This study explores various characteristics of emergency food agencies in eastern Massachusetts, and compares these features for agencies that currently conduct outreach for three public benefits programs, SNAP, WIC, and TANF, to agencies that do not. An exploration of necessary resources to expand organizational capacity is also provided.

Study Sample Characteristics

Descriptive statistics for responding agencies are provided in Table 3. Agency size varied greatly, and was assessed by two indicators: the number of individuals served each month, and the amount of food distributed each week. Most agencies (54%) served at least 200 clients per month. Approximately 24% served 100 clients or fewer, and 24% served between 101 and 200 clients. Agency caseload did not vary between food pantries and soup kitchens. In total, 76.3% of food pantries served more than 100 clients each week, comparable to 75.9%% of soup kitchens. Similarly, 32.7% of pantries and 27.6% of kitchens served over 400 individuals each month.

The average weight of food distributed each week, including meals and unprepared food, was 2938 pounds per agency. This metric varied greatly between respondents; some agencies distributed less than 10 pounds on average per week, while some distributed over 30,000 pounds on average per week. Food

pantries tended to distribute more food (mean = 3067 pounds/week; SD = 4943) than soup kitchens (mean = 1965 pounds/week; SD = 3489).

Approximately half of responding agencies reported religious affiliation. The distribution is similar among type of agency; 53.2% of food pantries and 50.0% of soup kitchens self-identified as faith-based. This is comparable to a Feeding America survey of EFPs in eastern Massachusetts, which found that 52% of pantries and 43% of soup kitchens were faith-based (Mabli et al. 2010b). Faith-based agencies in this study also tended to be smaller than secular agencies (mean pounds of food distributed weekly are 2590.6 and 3254.4, respectively).

About one-third of responding agencies were independent, stand-alone agencies, while almost two-thirds were food distribution agencies were housed within a larger organization. Umbrella organizations listed by respondents included human service agencies, hospitals, health centers, schools, detox centers, and senior centers or councils on aging. Independent agencies, on average, were larger, distributing 3313.4 pounds of food each week, compared to those housed within an umbrella organization, distributing 2748.7 pounds on average each week.

As a measure of tracking client dependency on food assistance, agencies were also asked if they monitor the frequency or duration for which each client visits their organizations. The majority of respondents (77.4%) reported measuring and documenting such information.

Table 3. Emergency food provider study sample descriptive statistics.

	n	%
Agency type:		
Food pantry	213	*88.0*
Soup kitchen	29	*12.0*
Affiliation:		
Secular	109	*47.2*
Faith-based	122	*52.8*
Organizational structure:		
Independent agency	78	*35.3*
Housed within any larger organization	143	*64.7*
Housed within a human-service organization	38	*17.2*
Monitor client use:		
Yes	168	*77.4*
No	49	*22.6*
Individuals served/month:		
1 to 100	57	*23.8*
101 to 200	54	*22.5*
201 to 400	52	*21.7*
More than 400	77	*32.1*
Pounds distributed/week:		
Less than 200	41	*19.1*
200-1000	59	*27.4*
1001-5000	80	*37.2*
5001-10,000	24	*11.2*
More than 10,000	11	*5.1*

Outreach Activities

Outreach activities were categorized into three different categories, Information Dissemination, Pre-screening, and Application Assistance (Table 4). These categories are adopted from the USDA's definition of SNAP outreach activities (Zedlewski et al. 2005), and broadly characterize different approaches or strategies to outreach efforts.

1. Information Dissemination

Table 4 shows the percentage of all agencies in the sample that reported each type of outreach activity. The most commonly reported activity was providing clients with information about where to apply for benefits, or where to get more information about the programs, such as the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance or Project Bread, a Boston-based food assistance hotline and outreach agency. Approximately 60% of all respondents in the survey engaged in this type of information dissemination. Many agencies (59.5%) reported that they provided clients with general information about SNAP, WIC, or TANF, such as through posters hung on-site, flyers, or pamphlets distributed to clients. Although less common among responding EFPs, agencies also reported providing clients with information about income requirements for program eligibility, and providing clients with information about program documentation requirements to prove eligibility (35% and 32%, respectively). Among agencies that conduct any outreach, 92% utilized at least one information dissemination activity as a type of outreach (Table 5).

2. Prescreening

Approximately half of responding agencies, or 55%, prescreen clients by asking clients if they are already enrolled in benefit programs. Other types of prescreening activities, however, are less common (Table 4). Prescreening clients for possible program eligibility, for example, was reported by 18% of agencies. Similarly, relatively few agencies provided applications to clients; 21% provided

paper applications, and 19% provided access to online applications. Among those who report any outreach, 76% prescreen their clients for eligibility or participation in at least one of the four activities, and 14% do all four types of prescreening activities (Table 5).

3. Application Assistance

A relatively small number of agencies provided assistance to clients in the process of applying for public benefits, measured through six different activities. Among agencies that conduct any outreach, approximately one-third provide any application assistance and 3% utilize all six application assistance activities (Table 5), suggesting a comprehensive approach to outreach for this subset of agencies. Looking at each activity separately (Table 4), 23% of agencies report that they provide in-person help to clients when completing applications. Similarly, 20% provided help with the verification documents necessary as part of the application process. A smaller percentage, 14%, delivers or submits program applications for clients, either electronically or on paper. Several agencies reported assisting clients in other aspects of the application process. Some agencies (17%) assist clients with follow up with the DTA, such as making calls on their behalf to inquire about application status. A small number (3%) provide transportation for clients to the DTA office, and 5% accompany clients to the DTA office. Among agencies that provided application assistance, 100% and 83% also provided other outreach services through information dissemination and prescreening assistance, respectively. This pattern corroborates the finding that

the likelihood of performing an activity decreases in relation to the intensity of the task and the capacity it requires.

Some agencies reported that they assist clients if asked for help, but do not have the time or resources to provide such services regularly. Similarly, some EFPs have volunteers who are familiar with such programs and are able to assist clients when feasible, but outreach activities are not institutionalized in agency operations. Finally, 19% of agencies provide training to staff or volunteers regarding program outreach. Other outreach efforts mentioned by respondents included implementing client needs assessments as part of EFP intake processes, making referrals to other social service agencies, or having SNAP representatives visit the agency during distribution hours.

Diversity of Outreach among Agencies

Agencies varied widely in the number of distinct outreach activities they reported performing. A total of fifteen outreach activities were listed as possible options. Most agencies (76.5%) reported engaging in at least one outreach activity, for any of the three benefit programs (SNAP, WIC, or TANF), while 23.6% did not report conducting any of the listed outreach activities. Two percent of all agencies reported all 15 types of activities. Of those that conduct any outreach, the average agency conducted 4 different outreach activities. Table 4 presents the number of agencies that reported each activity for SNAP, WIC, and TANF, as well as the number that reported all three programs.

For all activities, efforts are consistently made to connect clients to SNAP benefits more often than for WIC or TANF benefits (Table 4). Outreach for SNAP may be most common because the program not only specifically addresses food needs (similar to WIC) but is also available to a wider population, compared to WIC and TANF which target narrower populations. A few agencies mentioned conducting outreach for other programs or services, such as fuel and heating assistance, housing, legal services, and MassHealth. Some agencies conduct outreach for all three programs, but this is much less common. For example, approximately 92.4% of reporting agencies provide referral information in any form for SNAP, 85.4% for WIC, and 57.3% for TANF, while 55.1% do this for all three programs.

Overall, outreach is a regular component of operation activities for many emergency food providers. The types of outreach performed vary in frequency, and for different programs. Information dissemination is reported more often than prescreening or application assistance. This most likely is an accurate representation of outreach activities, but survey fatigue may have also influenced the affirmative response rates for each activity. Positive responses are lower for categories that are ordered later in the survey. In general, outreach activities are a noteworthy aspect of operations among emergency food providers. As one agency director reported, providing outreach services can “help our families make the right connections for further assistance and empowerment.” Exploration of the types of agencies that perform outreach will be discussed in the next section.

Table 4. Outreach activities performed by emergency food providers.

	Individual programs						Any program[a]		All programs[b]	
	SNAP		WIC		TANF					
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION										
Referral information	130	*53.7*	114	*47.1*	71	*29.3*	146	*60.3*	65	*26.9*
General program information (posters, flyers, pamphlets, etc)	133	*55.0*	113	*46.7*	66	*27.3*	144	*59.5*	60	*24.8*
Program income requirements	80	*33.1*	53	*21.9*	41	*16.9*	84	*34.7*	36	*14.9*
Program documentation requirements	74	*30.6*	49	*20.2*	38	*15.7*	78	*32.2*	34	*14.1*
PRESCREENING										
Ask if already enrolled	128	*52.9*	108	*44.6*	71	*29.3*	134	*55.4*	68	*28.1*
Prescreen for eligibility	41	*16.9*	23	*9.5*	20	*8.3*	44	*18.2*	17	*7.0*
Paper applications	45	*18.6*	24	*9.9*	19	*7.9*	51	*21.1*	16	*6.6*
Electronic applications	43	*17.8*	20	*8.3*	14	*5.8*	46	*19.0*	12	*5.0*
APPLICATION ASSISTANCE										
In-person help completing applications	52	*21.5*	26	*10.7*	24	*9.9*	56	*23.1*	19	*7.9*
In-person help with verification documents	45	*18.6*	24	*9.9*	25	*10.3*	49	*20.2*	20	*8.3*
Deliver or submit applications	34	*14.1*	12	*5.0*	13	*5.4*	34	*14.1*	9	*3.7*
Follow up	36	*14.9*	16	*6.6*	24	*9.9*	41	*16.9*	14	*5.8*
Transportation	6	*2.5*	4	*1.7*	6	*2.5*	7	*2.9*	4	*1.7*
Accompany clients to the DTA office	10	*4.1*	5	*2.1*	9	*3.7*	12	*5.0*	5	*2.1*
OTHER										
Train staff/volunteers in outreach	42	*17.4*	21	*8.7*	21	*8.7*	46	*19.0*	15	*6.2*

Note: n = 242. Percentages based on total number of agencies in sample.
[a]Agencies that reported performing activity for any of the three programs.
[b]Agencies that reported performing activity for all three programs.

Table 5. Outreach activities performed by category of activity.

	Any activity[a]		All activities[b]	
	n	%	n	%
INFORMATION DISSEMINATION	171	92.4	63	34.1
PRESCREENING	141	76.2	26	14.1
APPLICATION ASSISTANCE	61	33.0	6	3.2
All categories of outreach	185	100	4	2.2

Note: n = 185. Percentages based on number of agencies conducting one or more activities.
[a]Agencies that reported performing any of the outreach activity for any of the three programs under the corresponding outreach category. [b]Agencies that reported all outreach activities for any of the three programs under the corresponding outreach category.

Organizational Factors Associated with Outreach

Bivariate Analysis

Bivariate analysis was used to explore whether any organizational factors are associated with the level of outreach conducted by agencies. Agencies were categorized as either "high outreach" or "low outreach" agencies. Determining the appropriate cutoff point to distinguish high and low level outreach categories was based on the frequency distribution of the number of outreach activities reported for each agency (Figure 2) and a sensitivity analysis for three different cutoff points options (1 activity or more, 2 activities or more, and 3 activities or more).

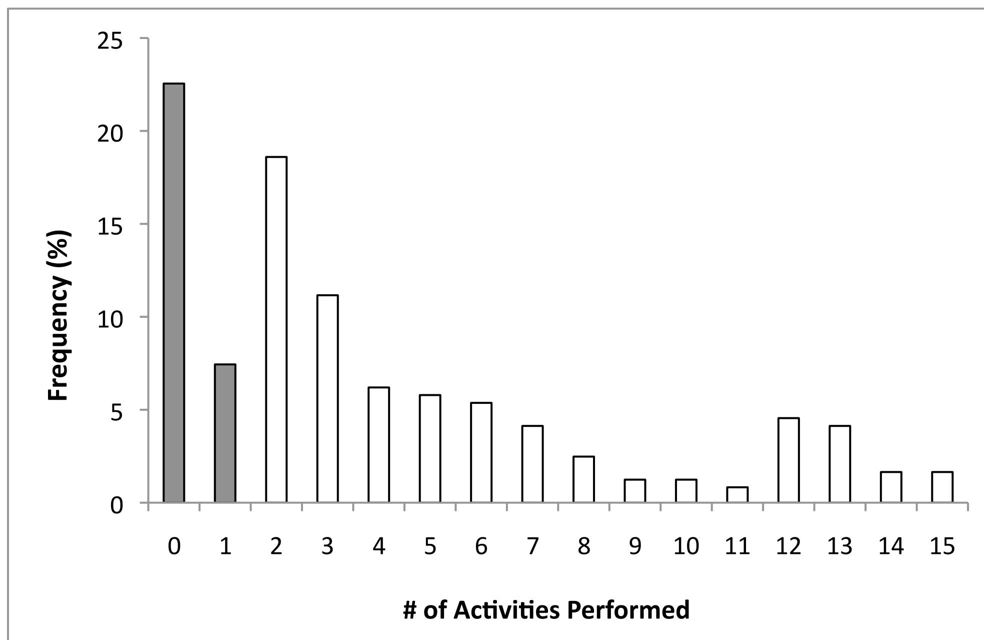

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of outreach activities performed by responding agencies. Agencies that report no outreach or one type of outreach activity are defined as "low outreach agencies" (shaded). Agencies that report two or more of the fifteen activities are defined as "high outreach agencies" (white).

Chi squared and regression models were repeated using the three distinct "high outreach" definitions, but no major differences in patterns were seen. Ultimately, an agency that reports at least two of the fifteen activities in the survey questionnaire was categorized as a high outreach agency. For the purposes of this study, conducting two or more activities presumably indicates a degree of institutionalization of outreach efforts. Agencies that report only one activity, or none at all, are assumed to lack this level of integration into program operations. According to this definition, approximately two-thirds are considered "high outreach agencies."

Results from bivariate chi squared tests are shown in Table 6. Food pantries were more likely to be categorized as high outreach agencies (73%) than soup kitchens (41%). A somewhat greater proportion of secular agencies were categorized as high outreach (75%) compared to faith-based agencies (62%), but outreach was common in agencies of both affiliations. Organizational structure also correlates with level of outreach; independent agencies (64%) and those housed within a larger organization (78%) were likely to be high outreach. An even greater proportion of those housed within a multi-service agency (82%) were considered high outreach.

Monthly client caseload was not consistently associated with outreach activities, but agencies that served more than 400 people each month were more likely to be considered high outreach, than agencies that served 101 to 200 each month (75% and 54%, respectively). Similarly, agencies that distributed greater amounts of food each week were more likely to conduct outreach. For example,

agencies that distribute over 10,000 pounds each week were more likely to conduct outreach (90%) than those that distribute only 200 to 1000 pounds (71%). Finally, agencies that monitor the frequency of client visits were more likely to regularly conduct outreach (79%), compared to those that do not monitor client visits (51%).

Table 6. Level of emergency food provider outreach by agency characteristic.

	High Outreach		Low Outreach		P-value
	n	*row %*	n	*row %*	
Agency type:					0.001
Food pantry	155	*72.8*	58	*27.2*	
Soup kitchen	12	*41.4*	17	*58.6*	
Affiliation:					0.025
Secular	82	*75.2*	27	*24.8*	
Faith-based	75	*61.5*	47	*38.5*	
Organizational structure:					0.031
Independent agency	50	*64.1*	28	*35.9*	
Housed within a larger organization	111	*77.6*	32	*22.4*	
Housed within a multi-service organization	31	*81.6*	7	*18.4*	
Monitor client use:					0.00
Yes	133	*79.2*	35	*20.8*	
No	25	*51.0*	24	*49.0*	
Individuals served/month:					0.031
1 to 100	39	*68.4*	18	*31.6*	
101 to 200	29	*53.7*	25	*46.3*	
201 to 400	40	*76.9*	12	*23.1*	
More than 400	58	*75.3*	19	*24.7*	
Pounds distributed/week:					0.029
Less than 200	26	*63.4*	15	*36.6*	
200-1000	42	*71.2*	17	*28.8*	
1001-5000	60	*75.0*	20	*25.0*	
5001-10,000	20	*83.3*	4	*16.7*	
More than 10,000	10	*90.9*	1	*9.1*	

Note: High outreach agencies report regularly conducting 2 or more of 15 outreach activities. Low outreach agencies report regularly conducting only 1, or no, activities. P values indicate chi-squared results testing significance of association between outreach level and characteristic.

Regression Results

Six explanatory variables were measured to explore whether certain organizational characteristics significantly predict outreach activity among emergency food providers, while holding other variables constant. The six independent variables included in the final model were: type of organization (food pantry or soup kitchen), religious affiliation, whether the agency is housed within a larger organization, client monitoring activity, number of pounds distributed each week, and number of clients served each month (see Table 2 for variable definitions). The results of the crude logistic regression for each variable (Model 1) and the multivariate logistic regression on the binary outcome variable, *outreach,* (Model 2) are shown in Table 7.

In Model 1, which assessed the relationship of each explanatory variable independently to *outreach*, soup kitchens were 74% less likely to conduct outreach than food pantries (OR = 0.26). Similarly, faith-based agencies were 48% less likely than secular agencies to report engaging in such activities (OR = 0.53). The organizational characteristics that most substantially correlated with outreach were whether the EFP was housed within a larger organization (OR = 1.94), and whether the EFP monitors client visit frequency or length of support provided to clients (OR = 3.65). Agency size, using the amount of food distributed each week by agencies, did not significantly predict outreach.

When controlling for each confounding variable in the model, however (Model 2), the correlations to *outreach* change. In this model, no significant difference in outreach activity was seen between soup kitchens and food pantries.

In other words, agency type does not significantly correlate with level of outreach conducted. Whether an agency monitors client use was, similarly, not a significant predictor of outreach efforts among EFPs when controlling for confounding factors. The two variables that significantly correlated with outreach activity were religious affiliation and organizational structure. All else equal, faith-based agencies are 64% less likely to conduct outreach, compared to secular organizations (OR = 0.36). Among faith-based agencies, 62% conducted outreach, compared to 75% of secular agencies. Organizational structure also significantly predicts outreach efforts. Agencies that are housed within a larger organization are 2.7 times more likely to conduct outreach than those that are independent or stand-alone agencies. Interestingly, multi-service organizations are not more likely to conduct outreach than other organizations. This suggests that even among agencies that likely provide many outreach services for their clients, these activities operate independently from pantry or kitchen operations.

Table 7. Results of binary logistic regressions predicting outreach activity among emergency food providers.

	Model 1		Model 2	
Explanatory Variable	**Crude Odds Ratio**	***95% CI***	**Adjusted Odds Ratio**	***95% CI***
Organization type (Food pantry)				
Soup kitchen	0.264*	*0.119, 0.587*	0.462	*0.149, 1.433*
Religious affiliation (Secular)				
Faith-based	0.525*	*0.298, 0.927*	0.363*	*0.174, 0.757*
Housed within larger organization	1.943*	*1.058, 3.565*	2.660*	*1.273, 5.554*
Monitor clients	3.648*	*1.859, 7.159*	2.050	*0.821, 5.122*
Pounds distributed/month [1000's]	1.111	*0.999, 1.236*	1.045	*0.934, 1.169*
Clients/week (1 to 100)				
101 to 200	0.535	*0.247, 1.160*	0.708	*0.272, 1.841*
201 to 400	1.538	*0.655, 3.611*	1.308	*0.455, 3.759*
More than 400	1.409	*0.658, 3.018*	1.675	*0.563, 4.986*

Note: * indicates significance of $p<0.05$. Reference group for categorical predictors in parentheses. Sample size for adjusted model = 198.

Agency Mission & Personal Beliefs

Survey participants were asked four questions about their organization's mission, and four questions about their personal beliefs regarding hunger and food security. Likert scale response options ranged between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The percent of respondents that reported each option are reported in Table 8. Average ratings for each question were calculated by dividing the sum of weighted values for each response option by the total number of responses.

Average scores for high outreach agencies and low outreach agencies are provided in Table 9.

Respondents most strongly agreed with the statement that their agency aims to provide food or meals to clients as a temporary supplement to regular food needs (average score = 4.0). Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, with very few disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Similarly, respondents also agreed, on average, that it is part of their agency's responsibility to assist clients in achieving food security on a non-emergency basis (average score = 3.9; 70.8% agreed or strongly agreed). When asked through an opposite lens, respondents disagreed with the statement that their agency aims to provide food or meals to clients exclusively in emergency situations, with a majority of respondents strongly disagreeing with this statement.

Little variation is seen when respondents were asked about personal beliefs about who should be responsible for preventing hunger. The highest agreement scores were given to the government and non-profits or charitable organizations (average scores = 3.7), with religious institutions and individuals receiving similar but slightly lower scores (average scores = 3.5). There was widespread agreement that government, non-profit, religious organizations, and individuals should share responsibility for preventing hunger in their communities. Most respondents positively indicated that each actor should be responsible, while very few disagreed that any actor should not be held responsible (between 1.3% and 4.5%).

Anecdotally, respondents' comments about their mission varied widely. Some expressed interest or a sense of responsibility in expanding the support they provide to clients, while others were adamantly opposed. As one director noted, "We would love to do more to help the community," suggesting an interest in diversifying the agency's programming. Another director, on the other hand, expressed feelings of not being responsible for additional efforts, commenting, "We do enough to help our clients. I will not ask my volunteers to take on any more." In a similar vein, a third director reported a disinterest in agency modifications. [We are] "simply a small ministry, feeding hungry people. . . with no interest in changing our mandate."

Responses were also compared between high and low outreach agencies, to assess whether organizational mission and personal beliefs about solving hunger are related to an agency's operations (Table 9). Among high outreach agencies, 62% reported missions that include providing long term assistance, compared to 51% of low outreach agencies. Furthermore, 75% of high outreach agencies reported missions to support non-emergency needs, compared to 60% of low outreach agencies. Only 25% of high outreach agencies and 17% of low outreach agencies, on the other hand, reported agency missions to provide food exclusively in emergency situations. Approximately 61% of high outreach agencies reported that government agencies should be responsible for ending hunger, similar to 59% of low outreach agencies. Furthermore, 68% of high outreach agencies reported that non-profit should be responsible, compared to 59% of low outreach agencies.

Table 8. Agency mission and personal belief scores.

	Likert Score Responses: n *(%)*					Average Weighted Score (SD)
Organization Mission:	1	2	3	4	5	
Agency aims to provide food or meals to clients in the following situations:						
▪ Exclusively in emergency situations	83 *(39.2)*	54 *(25.5)*	27 *(12.7)*	24 *(11.3)*	24 *(11.3)*	2.3 (1.4)
▪ As a temporary supplement to regular food needs	10 *(4.6)*	14 *(6.4)*	22 *(10.1)*	94 *(43.1)*	78 *(35.8)*	4.0 (1.0)
▪ As a long-term supplement to regular food needs.	13 *(5.9)*	26 *(11.7)*	52 *(23.4)*	72 *(32.4)*	59 *(26.6)*	3.6 (1.2)
It is part of agency's responsibility to assist clients in achieving food security on a non-emergency basis.	7 *(3.1)*	18 *(8.1)*	40 *(17.9)*	81 *(36.3)*	77 *(34.5)*	3.9 (1.1)
Personal Beliefs:	1	2	3	4	5	
▪ The government should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	3 *(1.3)*	24 *(10.8)*	62 *(27.8)*	94 *(42.2)*	40 *(17.9)*	3.7 (0.9)
▪ Non-profit or charitable organizations should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	3 *(1.3)*	27 *(12.1)*	48 *(21.5)*	110 *(49.3)*	35 *(15.7)*	3.7 (0.9)
▪ Religious institutions should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	7 *(3.1)*	28 *(12.6)*	64 *(28.7)*	89 *(39.9)*	35 *(15.7)*	3.5 (1.0)
▪ Individual people should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	10 *(4.5)*	25 *(11.2)*	61 *(27.2)*	92 *(41.1)*	36 *(16.1)*	3.5 (1.0)

Likert scoring: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

Many respondents provided additional comments on their personal views of the causes of hunger and food insecurity. Most responses described the transition they have witnessed in who seeks support from EFPs, and the various societal and economic factors that have contributed to this change. As one director commented, "It is no longer an emergency/non-emergency situation as it was twenty years ago. It is the reality of whether to buy food or pay the rent or pay a utility bill." Another EFP director observed similar changes: "We face the

changing profile of our guests. . . What used to be a one-time or short-term need has turned into longer-term needs. Many elderly on fixed incomes with rising costs of living and healthcare have relied on our assistance for several years." The overwhelming majority of respondents cited wages, employment, cost of living, and economic conditions as main contributors to the clients' situations. A small but vocal opinion on the other side was also expressed, which is worth noting. Individuals, instead of society, were held responsible for their lack of access to resources, and blamed for poor choices or values. One director expressed skepticism towards clients, saying "Clients of today are different. Priorities are different. Many have cell phones, tattoos, scratch cards, Dunkin Donut coffee. Food seems to be an entitlement and not their first priority."

Table 9. Agency mission and personal belief scores for high and low outreach agencies.

	High Outreach Agencies		Low Outreach Agencies		P-value
	Response Count	Average Score (SD)	Response Count	Average Score (SD)	
Organization Mission:					
Agency aims to provide food or meals to clients in the following situations:					
▪ Exclusively in emergency situations	154	2.4 (1.4)	58	2.1 (1.2)	0.164
▪ As a temporary supplement to regular food needs	157	4.1 (1.0)	61	3.8 (1.2)	0.139
▪ As a long-term supplement to regular food needs.	159	3.7 (1.2)	63	3.5 (1.2)	0.243
It is part of agency's responsibility to assist clients in achieving food security on a non-emergency basis.	160	4.0 (1.0)	63	3.7 (1.1)	0.031*
Personal Beliefs:					
▪ The government should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	160	3.7 (0.9)	63	3.6 (1.0)	0.461
▪ Non-profit or charitable organizations should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	160	3.7 (0.9)	63	3.5 (1.0)	0.045*
▪ Religious institutions should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	160	3.6 (1.0)	63	3.4 (1.1)	0.371
▪ Individual people should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	161	3.6 (1.1)	63	3.5 (1.0)	0.619

Likert scoring: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly Agree. Statistically significant t-tests ($p<0.05$) between average scores for high outreach and low outreach agencies are indicated by *.

Resources for Expanding Capacity for Outreach

Agencies were asked to score a list of resources according to their potential utility for initiating or expanding operations to conduct outreach for public assistance programs (SNAP, WIC, or TANF). Respondents scored each

resource as either “not helpful,” “somewhat helpful,” or “very helpful.” Overall, these resources were reported to be very useful, with few resources being considered not useful (Table 10). The most helpful resources, according to average scores assigned by responding agencies, would be increased financial resources, information about program eligibility or program enrollment, and training for staff or volunteers. According to respondents, the least useful resources in expanding organizational capacity would be communication resources, such as printers, fax machine, and internet access. Even so, 20% reported that Internet access would be somewhat useful, and 55% said it would be very useful. Utility scores showed that most respondents consider all resources to be useful at some level.

Respondents also offered additional resources that would be necessary to adopt outreach activities. Many agencies reported that larger space or facilities would be necessary, especially for being able to meet with clients. Other resources listed included support or approval from other stakeholders, specifically from supervisors or larger organization, and from volunteers, who must be willing to perform outreach tasks. One agency specifically mentioned that their large population of limited English speakers often miss out on important resources due to language barriers. No significant differences were found in resource scores between high outreach agencies and low outreach agencies (Table 11).

Table 10. Utility scores for resources needed to initiate or expand outreach programming.

	Not Useful	%	Somewhat Useful	%	Very Useful	%	Average weighted score (SD)
Increased financial resources	12	*6.4*	30	*15.9*	147	*77.8*	2.71 (0.58)
Information about program eligibility or enrollment	12	*6.0*	46	*23.1*	141	*70.9*	2.65 (0.59)
Training for staff or volunteers	12	*5.9*	49	*24.1*	142	*70.0*	2.64 (0.59)
General information about public assistance programs	15	*7.4*	54	*26.5*	135	*66.2*	2.59 (0.63)
Material resources from GBFB	16	*8.2*	60	*30.6*	120	*61.2*	2.53 (0.64)
Additional volunteers or increased volunteer hours	28	*14.0*	50	*25.0*	122	*61.0*	2.47 (0.73)
Guidance from GBFB	20	*10.3*	65	*33.5*	109	*56.2*	2.46 (0.68)
Computer/laptop access	35	*18.0*	43	*22.2*	116	*59.8*	2.42 (0.78)
Additional staff or increased staff hours	33	*17.1*	49	*25.4*	111	*57.5*	2.40 (0.77)
Internet access	47	*25.1*	37	*19.8*	103	*55.1*	2.30 (0.85)
Printer	40	*21.3*	53	*28.2*	95	*50.5*	2.29 (0.80)
Fax machine	53	*29.0*	54	*29.5*	76	*41.5*	2.13 (0.83)

Scoring: 1= Not Useful; 2 = Somewhat Useful; 3 = Very Useful. Percentages calculated across rows.

***

In sum, outreach among emergency food providers in eastern Massachusetts is common. Secular agencies and those that are housed within a larger organizations are the most likely to conduct outreach. Outreach efforts include information dissemination, prescreening, and application assistance, ranging from institutionalized programs to ad hoc support for clients. Relatively few agencies are engaged in higher intensity activities, such as prescreening clients for eligibility, providing access to program applications, or following up with program staff on behalf of the client. Organizational capacity for all

emergency food providers is most often limited by a lack of information-based resources, such as information about program enrollment criteria or training for staff. The following section provides an interpretation of these results, and policy and management implications for the study's findings.

Table 11. Utility scores for resources needed to initiate or expand outreach programming: high and low outreach agencies.

	Average Score (SD)		P-value
	High Outreach Agencies	Low Outreach Agencies	
Increased financial resources	2.74 (0.53)	2.64 (0.69)	0.129
Information about program eligibility or enrollment	2.63 (0.60)	2.70 (0.58)	0.605
Training for staff or volunteers	2.68 (0.57)	2.54 (0.64)	0.308
General information about public assistance programs	2.58 (0.61)	2.63 (0.66)	0.226
Material resources from GBFB	2.54 (0.65)	2.51 (0.64)	0.887
Additional volunteers or increased volunteer hours	2.50 (0.73)	2.39 (0.72)	0.168
Guidance from GBFB	2.46 (0.70)	2.47 (0.62)	0.321
Computer/laptop access	2.44 (0.76)	2.36 (0.83)	0.683
Additional staff or increased staff hours	2.46 (0.72)	2.24 (0.87)	0.055
Internet access	2.31 (0.84)	2.27 (0.87)	0.931
Printer	2.30 (0.78)	2.26 (0.86)	0.451
Fax machine	2.13 (0.83)	2.11 (0.86)	0.876

Scoring: 1= Not Useful; 2 = Somewhat Useful; 3 = Very Useful

Chapter 5. Discussion

This study paints a portrait of emergency food providers in eastern Massachusetts as important, but often overlooked, contributors to the larger safety net. Using a mixed-mode survey of EFP staff, an exploration of the nature and extent of outreach for public assistance programs conducted by food agencies is provided. Organizational characteristics and an assessment of agency goals and mission offer insight into the types of agencies most likely to take on this task. Opportunities to expand EFP organizational capacity are also elucidated.

Emergency Food Providers Contribute to the Nutrition Safety Net

This study counters the prevailing notion that emergency food providers are unable or unwilling to expand their role in poverty alleviation efforts. Even though EFPs are widely recognized as logical partners for outreach efforts, emergency food providers were assumed to be unable, or unwilling, to do anything other than food distribution. Little effort had explored the extent to which outreach occurs among EFPs, and little was known about the resources needed to capitalize on this relationship.

From the results of this study, emergency food providers contribute significantly to government program outreach efforts, in more widely varying ways than previously acknowledged, and potential for future collaboration is high. Previously, the frequency of outreach among EFPs was only measured through one type of outreach, formalized application assistance programs, significantly

limiting our knowledge of EFP outreach operations. This study uses a wider lens to explore a more holistic approach to outreach often adopted by community organizations, not just limited to application assistance. The types of outreach activities range from efforts as simple as distributing brochures or posting flyers, to providing transportation for clients to local program offices. This characterization of outreach captures a more comprehensive set of methods to link clients to public subsidy programs that have yet to be explored in emergency food literature.

Findings based on this broader characterization suggest that coordination between emergency food providers and public assistance programs is more common than previously assumed. The majority of agencies in this study provided some sort of information or assistance to their clients about public benefit programs, and over two-thirds offered assistance to clients in multiple ways. This observation alone suggests that EFPs do much more than distribute food; they are central sources of information for food insecure populations and seek to provide aid to their clients beyond emergency situations.

The vast range of types of outreach employed by EFPs further highlights their vital role in safety net programs. In general, less intensive activities were the most commonly performed, and also were the activities excluded from prior research. EFPs most often attempt to connect clients to SNAP, WIC, or TANF by simply providing information about the programs, eligibility requirements, or details about how to apply for benefits (referred to as information dissemination). Conducting eligibility screens and offering application assistance were much less

common among agencies. This may be because providing information about programs does not require significant staff training, infrastructure, or resource acquisition. The resources necessary for dissemination of information are perhaps similar to food distribution operations that are already in place; informational flyers, posters, handouts, and even verbal communication can be passed to clients quickly, discreetly, and informally. Prescreening and application assistance, on the other hand, necessitate a different type of interaction with clients, requiring a more thorough intake process or needs assessment. This level of interaction may slow down food distribution operations, and require additional staff training. Additionally, general information about programs is often readily accessible to EFPs through collaboration with other area organizations. Several agencies reported the convenience of being able to distribute materials from other organizations, such as the Department of Transitional Assistance and Project Bread, which further simplifies the information dissemination process.

Although less common, a group of EFPs do regularly provide prescreening and application assistance. The prevalence of application assistance was found to be higher than findings from previous research. EFPs not only provide information about programs, but also help clients determine if they are eligible to receive benefits, complete and submit applications, and guide clients through follow up processes once applications are submitted.

Many EFPs are capable of institutionalizing outreach efforts, and seek creative solutions to meet the varying needs of their clients. Some reported collaborating with DTA staff or local human service agencies to provide onsite

trainings for EFP staff, or to screen and assist clients during food distribution hours. Others have formal intake procedures, during which clients are asked to identify any food or non-food resources they may need. On a more basic side, one agency reported maintaining a database with local resources for agency staff to reference or share with clients. Another strategy is making sure that referral resources are in an easy location for clients to see. Even if agencies do not conduct their own outreach, many reported established referral networks with other social service agencies, health centers, city departments, or government agencies for assisting clients to make connections.

Partnership with local hunger organizations was also an important strategy for many agencies. Project Bread and the Greater Boston Food Bank, both Massachusetts anti-hunger organizations, were mentioned repeatedly as providing valuable material resources for EFPs, but no mention was made of training opportunities for volunteers or staff. The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance, responsible for administering SNAP benefits and many other public assistance programs, was also cited as an important partner. For those operating outside of Massachusetts, similar hunger advocacy or state-level government agencies may likewise be useful collaborators for outreach efforts.

For many agencies, efforts are made to connect clients to whatever resources they may need, even though this often goes well beyond the scope of food distribution operations. By broadening the resources available to their clients, EFPs contribute to efforts that address underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity. Finally, while many agencies engage in outreach activities, only a

smaller number of agencies actually provide training to staff or volunteers to do so. This may indicate a lack of institutionalization of outreach activities, or that assistance to clients is offered on an ad hoc basis. This is similar to findings from a study of EFPs in Detroit, in which only 23% of surveyed agencies had utilized technical assistance from area social service agencies, including training, nutritional information, start-up guidance, administrative advice, grant writing, or help with understanding government regulations and assistance programs (Eisinger 2002).

EFPs are more likely to adopt programming activities that connect their clients with food or nutrition programs, including SNAP and WIC, than the general assistance TANF program. This pattern may stem from more closely aligned missions between EFPs and SNAP and WIC to address hunger and food insecurity. The TANF program is not promoted under a nutrition assistance label, which may influence its perception among EFP staff as an important resource for clients. Program structure may also affect outreach for the TANF program. Both SNAP and WIC are administered through the USDA, while TANF is administered under the Department of Health and Human Services. The USDA has strong ties to, and is a major funder for, the emergency food system. The interconnected relationship between USDA and EFPs may facilitate collaboration efforts, compared to other federal agencies with fewer opportunities for involvement. Higher rates of outreach to SNAP may indicate a higher degree of support and resource availability to do so. For example, third party organizations often provide program materials or application hotlines for SNAP, facilitating the

use of such resources among EFPs. A lack of comparable resources for TANF outreach may explain why fewer EFPs have taken on the task of connecting their clients to the TANF program.

In general, EFPs positively contribute to outreach efforts for public assistance programs. This study provides new details on the broad range of activities employed, a topic that previously had not been explored. In diverse ways, these organizations help connect their clients to outside resources. This is particularly important for the client population that is eligible to receive public assistance, but do not participate in benefit programs. EFPs spread awareness of public programs, provide information, and help clients enroll. This finding highlights the role that EFPs play in increasing program uptake, which overall strengthens the broader nutrition safety net.

Characteristics of EFPs that Coordinate

As discussed in the previous section, many emergency food agencies contribute to public benefit program outreach efforts, which until now had not been characterized. Although common, the level of outreach conducted by EFPs is not consistent. Differences between agencies provide an opportunity to explore differences in agency ability or willingness to take on this expanded role. This study identified organizational characteristics that differentiate outreach agencies from those that do not conduct outreach. Understanding these distinguishing characteristics may provide clues as to what facilitates the process for some, but not all, EFPs to adopt programming beyond food distribution. Identifying such

attributes may furthermore be helpful to EFPs, or to those who wish to partner with EFPs, in future outreach expansion efforts.

Organizational Capacity

Various organizational characteristics suggest that some EFPs are more likely to conduct outreach, or to have greater capacity to initiate or expand such efforts. Religiously affiliated organizations are an important player in the provision of human services in the United States. This research affirms prior studies that faith-based and secular agencies differ in their capacity and willingness to partner with each other and with government agencies (GAO 2002; Kissane 2008). In this study, secular agencies are significantly more likely to conduct outreach for public programs than faith-based agencies. It is not clear if this observation is the result of different capacity levels between secular and faith-based organizations, or simply a difference in agency missions, which is discussed below.

This study found that several additional organizational characteristics influence agency capacity to conduct outreach. EFPs that are housed within larger organizations are more likely to engage in outreach activities than unaffiliated or independent agencies. Presumably, the parent or umbrella organization runs food distribution programs in addition to other types of programming. Such additional services could theoretically be easily coordinated with the food distribution program. A wider variety of resources and knowledge would perhaps be available to these EFPs, making outreach easier to conduct. Staff may also be more

interested in providing social services outside of traditional food distribution, as it may more closely align with broader agency goals. Such agencies may interact with government agencies on a regular basis, and thus already have the connections, information, and infrastructure to help food distribution staff.

One might predict that larger agencies are more likely to exhibit a wider range of programming. Two different measures of agency size, pounds of food distributed and client caseload, are positively associated with higher levels of outreach (Table 6). This may suggest that expanded operations, and presumably availability of resources, can enable, or constrain, additional programming. Interestingly, however, agency size does not significantly predict whether the organization engages in outreach activities when controlling for other agency characteristics (Table 7). Food pantries are also more likely to conduct outreach than soup kitchens (Table 6), but is not a significant predictor when controlling for other variables (Table 7). Food pantries and soup kitchens function in different ways and provide different services to their clients, which may influence their ability and interest in conducting outreach. Finally, monitoring client use of the pantry or kitchen does not correlate with outreach when holding all else constant, but is associated with outreach when analyzed independently. This suggests that knowledge of individual client circumstances or level of need does not lead to or prevent agencies from adopting outreach activities, but may facilitate outreach. These characteristics are important to keep in mind when looking to target future outreach partners.

It should also be noted that lack of outreach programming may not indicate a lack of capacity to do so, rather that the need to conduct outreach does not exist. Some respondents indicated that they did not provide outreach because they perceived this need to be addressed elsewhere, often by city agencies, Project Bread, or social service agencies. One director wrote, "Our agency is fortunate to be located in a community which offers many services to those in need. This allows us to focus on food distribution; other agencies are in place to provide information and help with SNAP, WIC, etc. We found after training some volunteers to help clients with SNAP applications at our Pantry, there was little interest since that need was met elsewhere."

Mission and Interest

Another aspect for understanding how well suited EFPs may be as potential outreach collaborators is how they view their own role in ending hunger. As their name implies, some EFPs may seek to exclusively provide hunger relief for emergency situations. Alternatively, other EFPs may aim to address the root causes of hunger, namely poverty and lack of access to important resources, such as a living wage, and quality, affordable housing, healthcare, and education. Finally, EFPs may also attempt to address client needs on both ends of the spectrum, providing food as both an emergency relief and as a supplement to long-term needs. Because public assistance programs, in this case SNAP, WIC, and TANF, are designed to provide supplemental income and in-kind support to low-income households regardless of the urgency of the situation, EFPs whose

missions include an aspect of non-emergency needs may make them more likely to help their clients access these resources. As shown in public management literature, closely aligned goals and missions between EFPs and public agencies may facilitate collaboration (Turrini et al. 2010). EFPs whose missions focus on short-term relief may view welfare outreach as external to their mission or beyond the scope of their work.

Interestingly, the results from this study found that most agencies seek to support clients in non-emergency situations, positively indicating a mission to provide food in both emergency situations and as a temporary supplement to regular food needs. However, they are less willing to support clients as a long-term supplement for regular food needs. The specific length of time agencies would be willing to provide food is unknown, and this question warrants further research. Despite the traditional name of *emergency* food provider, most agencies serve their community well beyond emergency situations. This finding may indicate that EFPs, despite the misnomer, are tuned into the underlying causes of poverty and food insecurity, which are often chronic and persistent. Incorporating non-emergency assistance into an organization's mission provides a form of support that is available to households in-need, regardless of the length of time support is needed. Surprisingly, little variation was seen in responses towards the actors that should be responsible for addressing hunger.

The degree of support for most questions about organizational mission did not vary according to level of outreach conducted by agencies. Two statements did produce significantly different results; high outreach agencies were more

likely to agree that it is part of their agency's responsibility to assist clients in achieving food security on a non-emergency basis, and were more likely to agree that non-profit or charitable organizations should be responsible for preventing hunger. Agreement with these statements is correlated with conducting outreach activities, suggesting that organizational mission and personal beliefs might influence organization operations. If an agency director believes that charitable organizations should be responsible, it logically follows that they are more likely to take on additional tasks to address this need.

Many agency directors provided additional comments about their interest in adopting outreach efforts, and the great range of opinions is worth mentioning. Some directors seemed very willing to take on additional tasks, while others expressed aversion towards such activities. For some, the idea of providing even more support to clients was unfathomable, citing overworked volunteers and limited resources. For others, capacity was not the limiting factor, rather that providing non-food services fell well outside their scope of services, with little desire to expand. On the other side, many directors saw great value in addressing the non-food needs of their clients, and incorporated this into their larger goals or mission. The wide range of willingness to connect their clients with outside benefits may be an important factor in the level of success of collaborations with the emergency food system.

This study also found that EFPs are generally very amenable, when possible, to adapt their organization's programming and goals based on the needs of their clients. Many EFPs directors reported observing shifts in the type of

support needed by their clients, and the length of support needed. They reported that clients now rely on emergency food for longer periods of time than previously observed, and that the underlying reasons for seeking emergency food have changed. EFP staff identify the nutrition safety net as providing support for two different contexts: for households that have undergone true emergencies, such as death of a wage earner in the family or job loss, and for households seeking basic assistance to supplement wages, often to working families and the elderly.

In general, EFP staff are acutely aware of the changing dynamics of social service needs in their communities. They are sensitive to the underlying causes of hunger and food insecurity, and are witnesses to the impact that the ups and downs of the economy has on their clients. Who better than EFP staff to advocate for and contribute to a stronger safety net in the United States?

Chapter 6. Recommendations and Future Research

This study shows great potential for the emergency food system and public agencies to coordinate efforts in order to increase participation in public benefit programs. The previous sections describe the type of outreach conducted currently by EFPs, and the various factors associated with agencies that do regular outreach. The results show that most food agencies seek to serve clients beyond emergency situations, but only about half of the sampled agencies implement programming to connect clients to government resources. The following section provides insight into resources most valuable for anyone wishing to initiate or expand outreach programming in the emergency food system, and provides a set of recommendations for practice. Limitations of this project highlight suggestions for future investigations to address unanswered questions.

Recommendations for Practice

This study sheds light on the type of resources needed to conduct outreach activities. Increased funding is, not surprisingly, the most important resource listed by agencies. Funding is an easy and versatile resource that can be applied to any organizational need. Other than financial resources, the most useful resources for agencies relate to staff development and information transfer (information about programs and training for staff or volunteers). Surprisingly, additional staff or volunteers, or additional staff hours, was not a main priority for agencies. This

may indicate that EFPs generally have the material resources and personnel capable of doing outreach, but require additional knowledge or technical assistance specific to do this new task. On the other end of the spectrum, internet, fax, and printers were not particularly useful, according to respondents. These are all resources that agencies may already currently have, and thus are not necessary to acquire, or are simply not necessary to perform outreach. It is likely that being able to process electronic public assistance applications onsite may require such technology. Most outreach activities, however, centered on strategies to share information with clients, which often is possible without on-site equipment or hardware. This also suggests that for any agency interested in initiating outreach programming, more successful efforts will perhaps focus attention on developing the knowledge base and informational resources for staff and the organization at large.

The survey findings suggest that efforts to coordinate information sharing or collaborative learning processes might be particularly valuable strategies for strengthening the emergency food system's role in the larger safety net. Cooperative training centers for EFPs, or other community outreach agencies, could provide staff and volunteers with information about program eligibility requirements, application procedures, and tips for providing services in food distribution agencies. Online libraries of information geared towards EFP staff or volunteers could be established for those seeking up-to-date and easy-to-use program information. As mentioned above, local anti-hunger groups often provide these resources, but are commonly underutilized by EFPs. Limited accessibility

and awareness of training programs, if they exist, is an equally important barrier that must be considered in any outreach efforts. Finally, providing resources in multiple languages is important; this should be a major concern for the development of any future programming or outreach efforts.

Some types of agencies may be more effective partners for those looking to fund or collaborate with emergency food providers. Because secular agencies and those housed within larger organizations are more likely to conduct outreach, one can assume that they are, in turn, also more likely to internally possess the resources and capacity necessary to take on this task. They have the potential to act as strong partners when looking for opportunities to expand outreach programming. These agencies may be more likely to adopt outreach programming with little outside support. Agencies that serve a greater number of clients also have the potential to reach a broader population through outreach and have a larger impact. This study shows that other types of agencies, conversely, including faith-based organizations, are just as likely to support the idea of outreach efforts, even if their operations do not currently include outreach. They may be less likely to already possess the resources necessary to conduct outreach, but could substantially increase their impact with the support of outside assistance. Similarly, most agencies reported comparable missions regarding food insecurity and hunger but many do not engage in such activities. This implies that many agencies desire to adopt outreach programming to address a wider range of their clients' needs, but lack the capacity to do so.

Collaboration with and investment in those EFPs that do not already conduct outreach, but who wish to do so, may be an equally valuable strategy for promoting outreach, and should not be overlooked. Such agencies are more likely to require external assistance to initiate such programming than agencies that have the capacity to adopt outreach on their own; partnering with those who would not do so otherwise may increase the impact of funding or partnership opportunities. It is important to remember, however, that every agency will require a different level of support, dependent on its particular context, which is not explored here. Further understanding the specific capabilities and mission of each agency would be recommended when forming partnerships.

Limitations of this Study and Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study may be useful to emergency food providers, public agencies, hunger relief, anti-poverty, and advocacy groups across the United States, as virtually no community is untouched by the effects of poverty and food insecurity. However, the findings from this study do not necessarily represent all emergency food providers in eastern Massachusetts. The survey's response rate was high, but not everyone in the population ultimately participated. Furthermore, not all results are necessarily applicable outside of eastern Massachusetts where emergency food systems and public assistance systems may operate in different ways. Additional research in other areas of Massachusetts and in other states would contribute to our understanding of emergency food providers as potential partners in outreach efforts.

This study assumes that low participation rates is universally problematic, and based on program data, this is generally true. However, some communities may have less need for outreach programs, which should not be conflated with lack of capacity to offer such services. Future research should investigate this hypothesis to determine where supports to facilitate EFP outreach efforts are most useful. Likewise, efforts to target outreach to populations with particularly low participation rates is warranted, including Latinos, limited-English speakers, and seniors.

It is important to remember that this study only assessed a limited number of possible outreach activities. Agencies may provide other services, both short and long term, to their clients, but which are not captured in this survey. Although this study categorizes agencies using simple definitions of “high outreach agencies” and “low outreach agencies,” only a narrow range of activities and efforts are reflected in this definition. Further investigation of this range would shed light on additional outreach efforts that are not addressed in this study.

Many questions about the role of charitable food agencies in strengthening the public safety net are still left unanswered. The activities explored are only relevant to addressing gaps in uptake for EFP clients who are eligible to receive public benefits, but who do not participate. Expanding outreach efforts does not directly address the needs of the segment of clients who do not meet the eligibility criteria, but who still are in need of assistance. The indirect effects of increased program uptake on this population should thus be explored. Questions include whether increased referral to public assistance programs leads to increased

participation rates, and whether this translates to decreased client use of EFPs. Similarly, understanding whether this would decrease overall strain on pantry and kitchen resources is an important next step.

The effectiveness of outreach is not explored in this study, but should be considered when considering future collaborations. This study does not posit whether the outreach activities included here will lead to successful enrollment of eligible clients, but would be an interesting question to pursue. Conducting outreach can help to decrease barriers to enrollment, but does not necessarily guarantee the client will ultimately participate in the program.

This study focuses exclusively on EFP operations and the experiences and opinions of agency staff, but does not address the viewpoints of EFP clients. Incorporating client input is outside the scope of this study, but any efforts to adopt or expand outreach programs would benefit greatly from client input regarding their specific needs and desires. Similarly, the study did not examine opinions from SNAP, WIC, or TANF agencies. Future research should incorporate public agency staff attitudes regarding coordination with EFPs, and explore strategies for more intensive collaboration beyond referrals and application assistance.

Furthermore, the relative success of EFPs in contributing to program outreach, compared to other actors, is unclear. This study focused exclusively on food pantries and soup kitchens, but many other entities, such as schools, grocery stores, community development corporations, local government, or other community-based organizations, likely play important roles in welfare program

outreach, but are not included in this study. A broader range of anti-poverty programs, such as employment development or financial training institutions, may also be valuable partners.

Moreover, this study does not address whether outreach programming, or the benefit programs with which they work, are effective means of reducing hunger or food insecurity. The preferable type of aid, such as cash versus in-kind food aid, and ideal methods of distribution are widely debated in public assistance and development literature, but not tackled here. To some, the emergency food system is not only ineffective, but actually detrimental to broader hunger-relief efforts. For example, "Handouts are not the most appropriate way of addressing the hunger problem. . . It is difficult to convince people that food banks are a step backwards because they seem to combine humanitarianism with good common sense. . . Food banks distract attention away from programs that work and thus the pressure on government to stop cutting those same programs" (Berry 1984, p. 151). On the other hand, some argue that charitable food organizations are not only increasingly playing a major role in serving our communities, but even go so far as to replace a government-based system that may be falling short. According to Daponte & Bade (2006), "private food assistance substitutes for an inadequate public food safety net." Finally, some argue that charitable food aid organizations complement public sector efforts by providing services where government agencies have been unable, but do not substitute for public assistance programs. Evaluating the effectiveness of public or private sector programs is beyond the scope of this investigation; the study similarly does not attempt to value one

sector over another. Whether as an alternative or an amendment to public services, understanding the dynamics between EFPs and the social safety net is an essential first step to improving the overall system.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Hunger and food insecurity are complex social problems that are not going to be solved anytime soon. Fortunately, the nutrition safety net in the United States provides a fundamental network of resources to support the millions of households in need every year. Public assistance programs and non-profit, charitable food distribution agencies provide financial support and in-kind aid to prevent struggling families from falling even further into poverty. Without these programs, rates of food insecurity would be even higher. A lack of alternative resources, however, has changed the dynamic of emergency food. Food pantries and soup kitchens often supply a primary food source for households, rather than exclusively in emergencies. Because emergency food programs are not designed, and do not have the capacity, to support clients for long periods of time, the system's resources become depleted.

Many EFP clients are eligible to receive public assistance benefits, but do not participate in the programs. Reliance on sources of emergency food and strain on the system could be decreased by transferring some of this need for support to public benefit programs. Simply switching from one source of aid to another is not always straightforward, however; many barriers exist to enrolling and participating in government programs. Moreover, some clients distinctively prefer non-profit over public agencies as service providers.

One strategy to increase participation in safety net programs is through outreach efforts. For those EFP clients who are eligible to participate but who do not currently receive benefits, food aid organizations are logical partners in helping to increase the accessibility of public assistance programs. Food pantries and soup kitchens form an expansive network across the United States, allowing them to serve the most isolated and hard-to-reach populations that few other organizations can access, such as limited English-speaking populations, seniors, and homeless individuals. Furthermore, EFP and nutrition assistance programs are compatible partners with closely aligned goals and missions, both working to address poverty and hunger issues.

Previously, little was known about the extent to which EFPs provided outreach services, let alone the details of such activities. The results from this study shed light on the important role that many EFPs play in making connections for clients with the nutrition safety net. EFPs, moreover, are highlighted as much more than bandage solutions to complex problems; agency staff are committed to long term strategies that address hunger and food insecurity, and are, most often, more than willing to adapt operations to meet the changing needs of their clients.

While this study only addressed increasing uptake into public programs for those who are eligible, expanding access to both sources of emergency food and to public assistance programs can provide comprehensive support for many low-income households, and decrease strain on emergency food providers. Even though outreach in the emergency food system is not new, there is still substantial potential to expand outreach efforts through partnerships with EFPs. There is also

potential for EFPs to act as partners not only for outreach efforts, but also to play a role as advocates for expanded eligibility guidelines, and to inform program policies. It is important to be cognizant of the heterogeneous nature of this field; each organization has a unique set of resources and assets to contribute to partnership. Efforts should focus on encouraging and supporting intra-sector coordination that seeks to capitalize on these assets and bridge gaps in service delivery.

At the end of the day, emergency food providers work tirelessly and graciously to serve our communities. The need for food or a warm meal never ends, but food pantry and soup kitchen staff and volunteers continually support us when times are tough. They are an indispensable component of food aid in the United States, but are not only a source of food. Within the emergency food system lays an opportunity to expand this passion and dedication, even further increasing their impact on the domestic safety net, and on our communities.

Appendix A: Survey Cover Letter & Questionnaire

Director's Name
Address
City, MA Zip

DATE

Dear _____________,

I am writing to ask for your participation in a study about emergency food providers in eastern Massachusetts. The project hopes to learn about any strategies that your food pantry and/or soup kitchen uses to combat food insecurity and hunger in your community, with a focus on the feasibility of coordinating with public assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called Food Stamps).

I am asking for your help because, as a director of a food distribution program, you have unique insight into the operations of the emergency food system and the needs of its clients. Ultimately, the project will provide recommendations for how emergency food providers and public agencies, such as the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), can work together to help address food insecurity in Massachusetts. Your input is very valuable and will influence the project's final recommendations.

A pre-addressed, pre-paid envelope is enclosed to return the completed survey. The questionnaire should take no more than fifteen minutes to complete.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND CONSENT:

Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and the answers that you provide are confidential. Neither your name nor your agency name will be disclosed without your written consent. The results of this study will be used for academic purposes, and may be shared with emergency food programs, public agency staff, or advocacy groups. A summary of results from the study will be sent to you upon completion of the project. If you have any questions about this project, you may contact Blake Roberts, blake.roberts@tufts.edu, at any time.

Thank you for your assistance.
Sincerely,

Blake Roberts
Master's candidate, Tufts University
Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your responses are extremely valuable. Please fill out the survey as completely as possible. The survey has three sections and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. If your food distribution agency is housed within a larger organization, please answer questions for the food agency only, not the entire organization except where otherwise noted.

Section A. Agency Operations

1. Type of organization: *Please check one.*

☐ Food pantry ☐ Soup kitchen ☐ Other: _______________

2. This organization is: *Please check one.*

☐ Faith-based ☐ Secular

3. Is your food distribution agency part of a larger organization?

☐ No, emergency food assistance is the sole focus of our organization

☐ Yes, we are housed within: (*Please check one below*)

☐ A church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other religious institution

☐ An organization that offers other human/social services (such as job search assistance, financial counseling, shelter assistance, clothing distribution, child care services, etc).

☐ A hospital or community health center

☐ Other: ____

4. How many unique individuals does your agency serve each month (unduplicated)? *Please check one.*

☐ Fewer than 25 individuals ☐ 25 to 100 individuals

☐ 101 to 200 individuals ☐ 201 to 400 individuals

☐ More than 400 individuals

5. During a typical week, what is the average number of pounds of food intended for home preparation distributed by your agency? *Please write in response.*
__________ pounds/week

If you do not know how many pounds of food are distributed, please instead indicate how many bags of food are distributed each week:
________________bags/week

6. During a typical week, what is the average number of meals served on-site by your agency? *Please write in response.*
__________ meals/week

7. Does your agency monitor the frequency of visits each client makes to your food distribution agency, OR the length of time clients have been receiving assistance? *Please check one.*

☐ Yes ☐ No

Section B. Program Referral Activities

This section asks about the ways that your clients may be connected with public assistance programs. These programs include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF).

8. Does your food distribution agency currently do any of the following on a regular basis to connect your clients to public assistance programs? *Please check one response for each activity and each program.*

INFORMATION DISEEMINATION			
	SNAP	**WIC**	**TANF**
Provide clients with information about where to apply or get more information (such as DTA office, Project Bread)	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide clients with general information about public food assistance programs (posters, flyers, pamphlets, etc)	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide clients with information about program income requirements	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide clients with information about program documentation requirements	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes

PRESCREENING			
	SNAP	**WIC**	**TANF**
Ask clients if they are already enrolled in program	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Prescreen clients for program eligibility	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide clients with paper applications	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide clients with access to on-line applications	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
APPLICATION ASSISTANCE			
	SNAP	**WIC**	**TANF**
Provide in-person help completing applications	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide in-person help with verification documents	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Deliver or submit program applications (paper or electronic)	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Assist clients with follow up with the DTA (such as making calls on their behalf)	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Provide transportation to the DTA office	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Accompany clients to the DTA office	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
OTHER			
	SNAP	**WIC**	**TANF**
Provide training for staff or volunteers on program outreach (such as eligibility guidelines, how to help clients apply, application follow-up procedures, etc.)	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Other: ________________	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Other: ________________	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes
Other: ________________	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes	☐ No ☐ Yes

9. Imagine that your agency plans to expand outreach programming for SNAP, WIC, or TANF for your clients. Please rank each of the following resources according to how helpful they would be in order to achieve this goal. *Circle one number for each resource listed.*

	Not helpful	**Somewhat helpful**	**Very helpful**
Additional staff or increased staff hours	1	2	3
Additional volunteers or increased volunteer hours	1	2	3
Training for staff or volunteers	1	2	3
Computer/laptop access	1	2	3
Printer	1	2	3
Fax machine	1	2	3
Internet access	1	2	3
General information about public assistance programs	1	2	3
Information about program eligibility or enrollment	1	2	3
Guidance from the Greater Boston Food Bank	1	2	3
Material resources from the Greater Boston Food Bank	1	2	3
Increased financial resources	1	2	3
Other: ____________________	1	2	3
Other: ____________________	1	2	3

10. Imagine that your agency plans to start, or expand, nutrition education for your clients. Please rank each of the following resources according to how helpful they would be in order to achieve this goal. *Circle one number for each resource listed.*

	Not helpful	**Somewhat helpful**	**Very helpful**
Nutrition education materials (such as pamphlets, posters, and flyers)	1	2	3
Nutrition education class materials	1	2	3

Train-the-trainer sessions for volunteers or staff	1	2	3
Space for food preparation	1	2	3
Supplies for taste testing	1	2	3
Other: ____________________	1	2	3
Other: ____________________	1	2	3

Section C. Role of Emergency Food Providers

The next questions ask about your agency's overall mission or goal, and its role in providing food assistance.

11. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. *Please circle one response for each statement.* 1= Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

This agency aims to provide food or meals to clients in the following situations:	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
▪ Exclusively in emergency situations	1	2	3	4	5
▪ As a temporary supplement to regular food needs	1	2	3	4	5
▪ As a long-term supplement to regular food needs	1	2	3	4	5

12. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement. *Please circle one response for each statement.* 1= Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
It is part of our agency's responsibility to assist clients in achieving food security on a non-emergency basis.	1	2	3	4	5

13. According to your personal beliefs, please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. *Please circle one response for each statement.* 1= Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The government should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
Non-profit or charitable organizations should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
Religious institutions should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	1	2	3	4	5
Individual people should be responsible for preventing hunger in my community.	1	2	3	4	5

14. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your organization's efforts toward combating hunger or food insecurity?

____

____

____

Thank you for your help!
Please return the completed survey to:

Blake Roberts – Food Agency Survey
21 Quincy Street
Somerville, MA 02143

For questions or inquiries, please contact Blake Roberts:
blake.roberts@tufts.edu
610-675-6036

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

Office of the Vice Provost

Social, Behavioral, and Educational Research
Institutional Review Board
FWA00002063

Title: Investigationg the Role of Emergency Food Providers in Stengthening the Domestic Nutrition Safety Net

October 10, 2012 | Notice of Action

IRB Study # 1210008 | Status: EXEMPT

PI: Blake Roberts
Faculty Advisor: Laurie Goldman
Review Date: 10/10/2012

The above referenced study has been granted the status of Exempt Category 2 as defined in 45 CFR 46.101 (b). For details please visit the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) website at: http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html#46.101(b)

- The Exempt Status does not relieve the investigator of any responsibilities relating to the research participants. Research should be conducted in accordance with the ethical principles, (i) Respect for Persons, (ii) Beneficence, and (iii) Justice, as outlined in the Belmont Report.
- Any changes to the protocol or study materials that might affect the Exempt Status must be referred to the Office of the IRB for guidance. Depending on the changes, you may be required to apply for either expedited or full review.

IRB Administrative Representative Initials: ________

20 Professors Row, Medford, MA 02155 | TEL: 617.627.3417 | FAX: 617.627.3673 | EMAIL: SBER@tufts.edu

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