

A high-angle, black and white photograph of a large warehouse. The floor is covered with numerous stacks of cardboard boxes, some on pallets. Several workers in hard hats and safety vests are visible, moving boxes and operating equipment. The background shows tall industrial shelving units filled with more boxes.

Convening Connecting Collaborating

Two Food Banks. 80+ Pantries. One Intention.

Working together to reduce the meal gap in Denton County.

The Project

North Texas Food Bank, Tarrant Area Food Bank & Southern Methodist University MADI working together to understand and shrink the meal gap

- What do we know about the scope of food insecurity and hunger?
- How well are food insecure people being served?
- How are other human related needs being met by pantries and their networks?

The study focused on **extending reach and capacity** of the food bank and pantry distribution network.

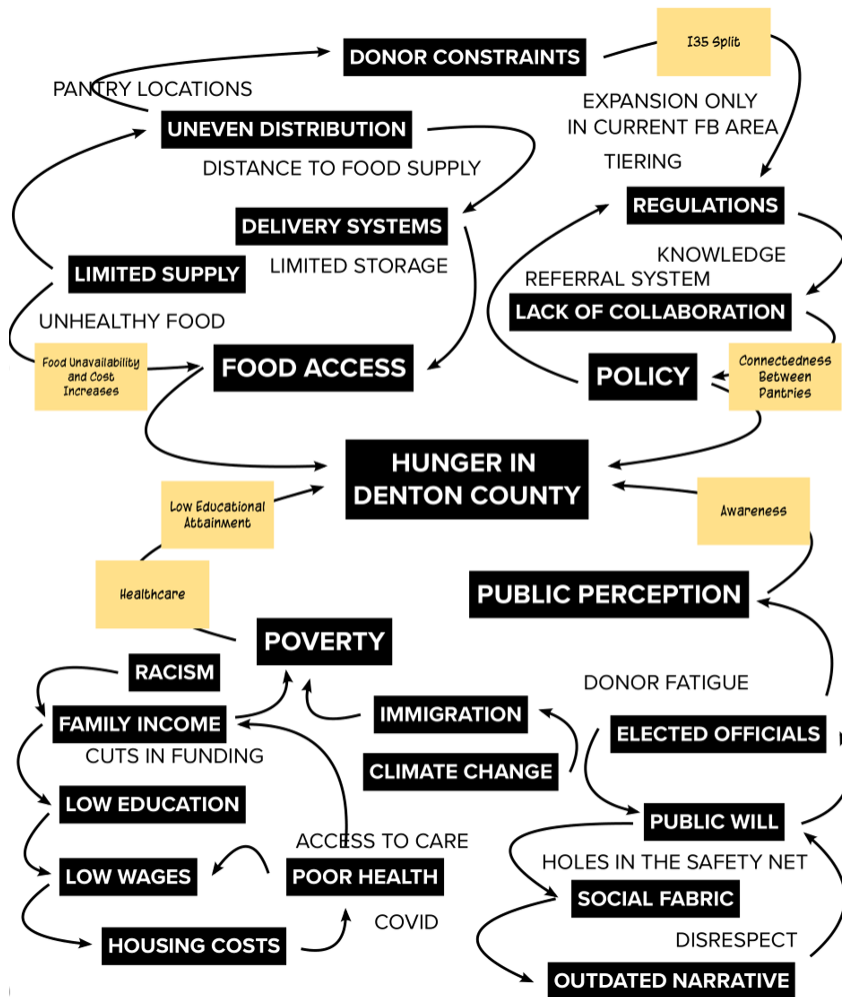
Accomplishing this objective will require **expanded collaboration** between the food banks and pantries, between the pantries themselves, and between pantries and their customers.

Four-Part Approach

- Approach poverty as a **systemic challenge**;
- Remain **focused on food distribution** and food insecurity;
- Look for opportunities to **work with customers** to meet immediate needs **and address their root causes**; and
- Collaborate with allied anti-racism and anti-poverty efforts including advocacy, education, healthcare and employment to **develop a social safety net** of resources focused on poverty reduction.

The Approach

Addressing food insecurity as part of a larger system of poverty related issues



Hunger is a Wicked Problem

Wicked problems are made up of issues within multiple different and connected systems, many of which are outside the control of the people trying to address the problem.

They do not have “solutions”, only steps to be taken to reduce their impact.

Feeding America's Approach to the Problem

"Feed the Line" i.e., feed people who are hungry;

"Shorten the Line" i.e., reduce the number of food
insecure people; and

"Engage the Community" to improve their
understanding of the nature and impact of
persistent food insecurity.

The Research Question

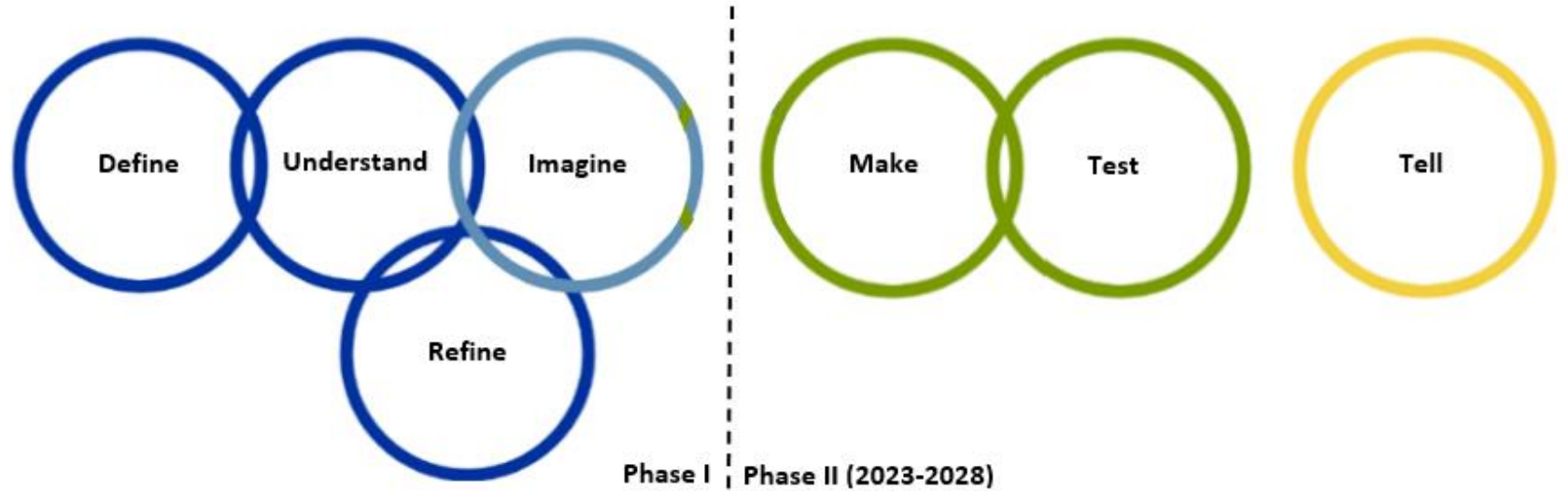
Defining our focus to understanding the meal gap in Denton County

***How might we increase our
collaboration to close the meal gap
in Denton County?***

The Research Process

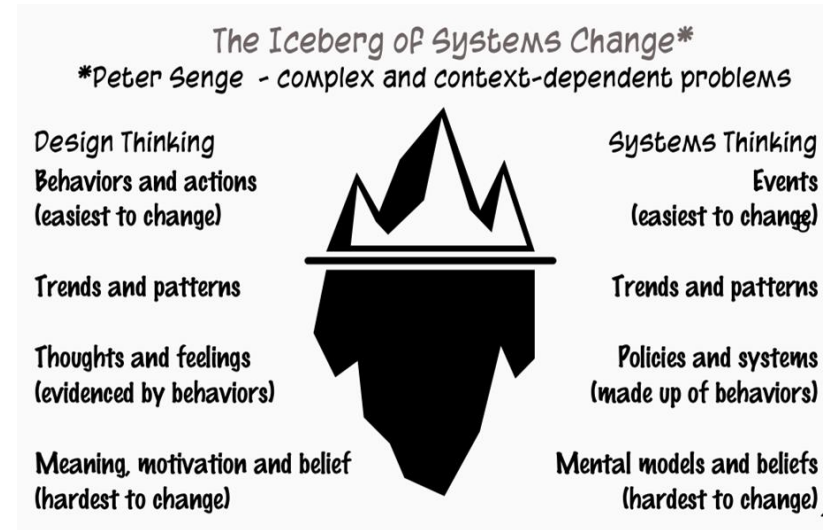
Mapping the food distribution ecosystem

Human-Centered Design



Primary Frameworks & Assumptions

- Address hunger and related issues from within the context of persistent poverty
- Remember change happens through relationships
- Take a systems approach
- Strive for poverty reduction



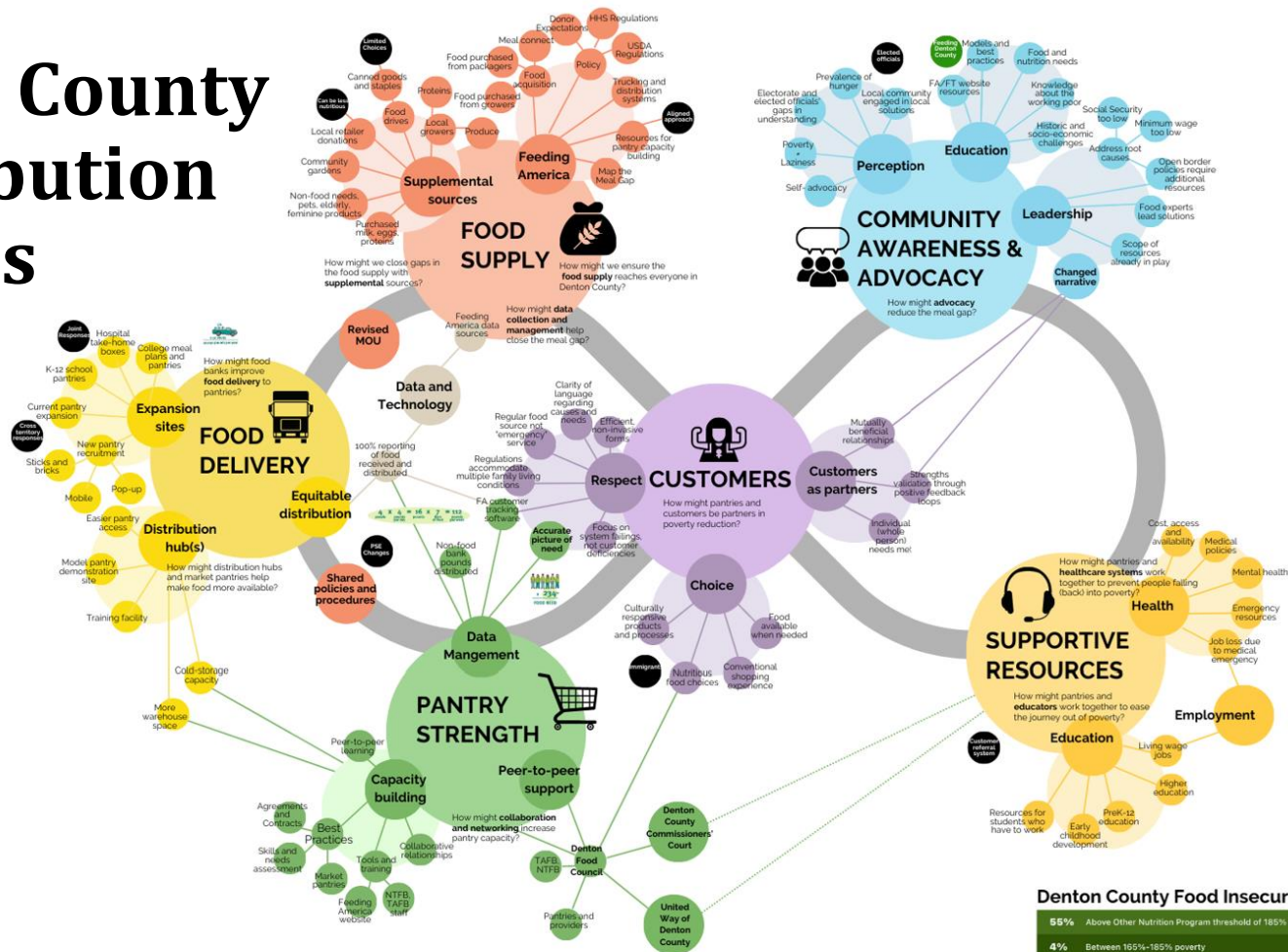
Data Collection

- Literature review to familiarize ourselves with food insecurity, food bank operations, and related issues
- 20+ interviews with food bank and pantry staff
- In person-site visits: 10 pantry tours, TAFB main warehouse and distribution center tour
- Multiple community stakeholder meetings
- Census data to determine need by municipality
- Discussion with large pantries to determine where they access food supplies (food bank and non-food bank sources - retail, rescue, donations)
- Data from NTFB and TAFB staff re food supplies distributed to pantries

The Research Findings

The meal gap appears to be a distribution issue, not a supply side issue

The Denton County Food Distribution Ecosystem is Complex

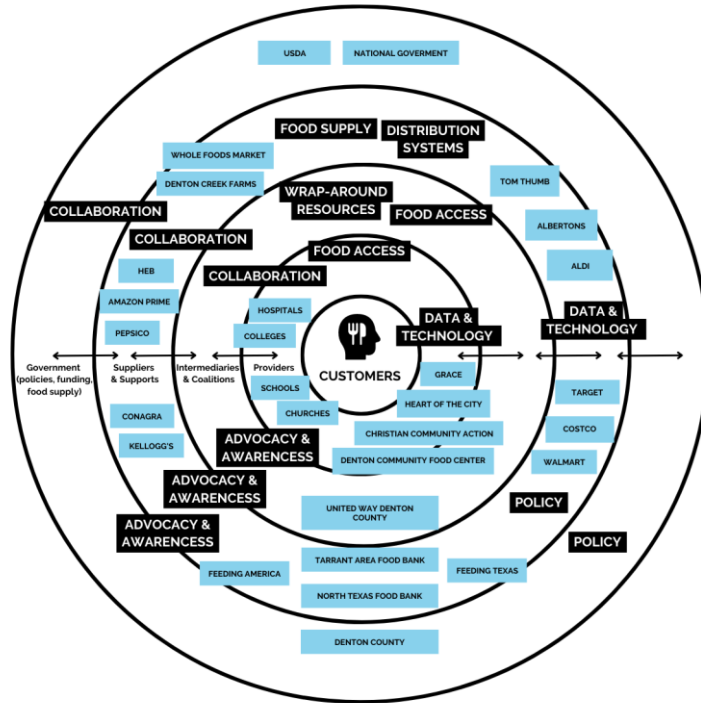


Denton County Food Insecurity

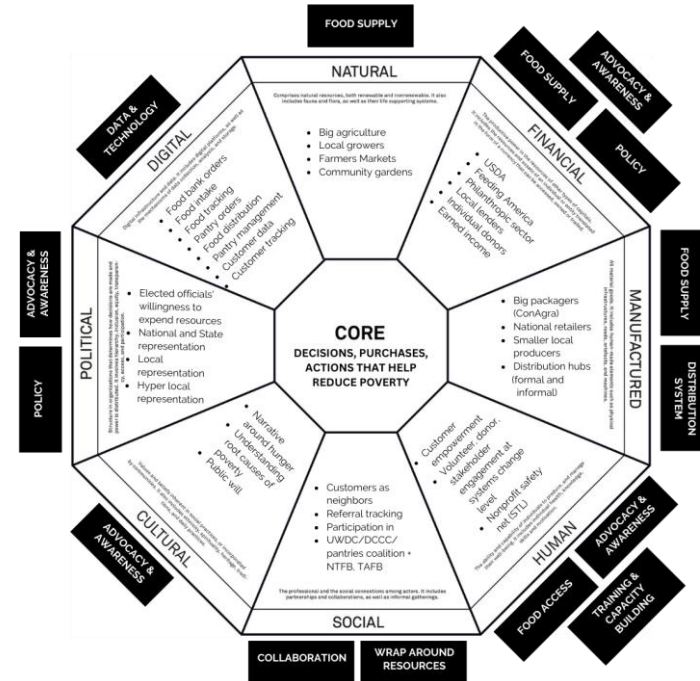
55%	Above Other Nutrition Program threshold of 185% poverty
4%	Between 165%-185% poverty
41%	Below SNAP threshold of 165% poverty

*Feeding America Map the Meal Gap Database

It Is Resource Rich



Contributors to the Food Delivery Ecosystem



Resources Available (Community Capital Wealth)

Pantry Observations & Findings

Strengths

- High functioning food banks
- 80+ pantries
- Three very high capacity
- Established data collection
- High-capacity staff
- Legions of volunteers
- Relationships with customers and commitment to food equity

Challenges

- Not supply side: **plenty of food in the county**
- Geographic in nature: **no or few nonprofits in northeastern and northwestern quadrants limits delivery system**
- Need to build **infrastructure for collaboration** - supply, delivery, pantry learning community

The Meal Gap: Need

- 96,610 people at-risk of food insecurity county-wide (Feeding America 2022)
- 22.6M pounds total meal gap @ 234 lbs/year/person
- 45% (estimated) covered by participation in SNAP (10M pounds)
- 12M pounds needed across Denton County

The Meal Gap: Supply

- 12M pounds needed after SNAP across Denton County
- 6.5M pounds distributed by TAFB and NTFB
- 3.5M pounds distributed by DCCCC *Feeding Denton* program using CARE Funds (COVID) during 2022 @ \$35/25lb box; County has extended the program through 2022 but does not have funds to make it permanent
- At least 1.7M pounds sourced from donated food and funds (retail)
- 11.79M pounds accessed and distributed in 2022
- Remaining gap after all food distribution .6M pounds or 3,000 people still at risk of food insecurity in 2022 (much greater without *Feeding Denton*)

By Location: Meal Gaps and Food Sources

POINT-IN-TIME SNAPSHOT: ANNUAL DENTON COUNTY MEAL GAP BY DISTRIBUTION AREA (MUNICIPALITY)

Data Source: ACS Poverty Status https://data.census.gov/table?q=poverty+pilot+point+texas&tid=ACST5_22606762.7

Note 1: Texas is one of eight states with a significant undercount in the 2020 decennial census, this may account for the difference between FA numbers and census

Note 2: 45% of SNAP eligible Texans are enrolled in the program <https://www.fns.usda.gov/usamap>

0.55

234

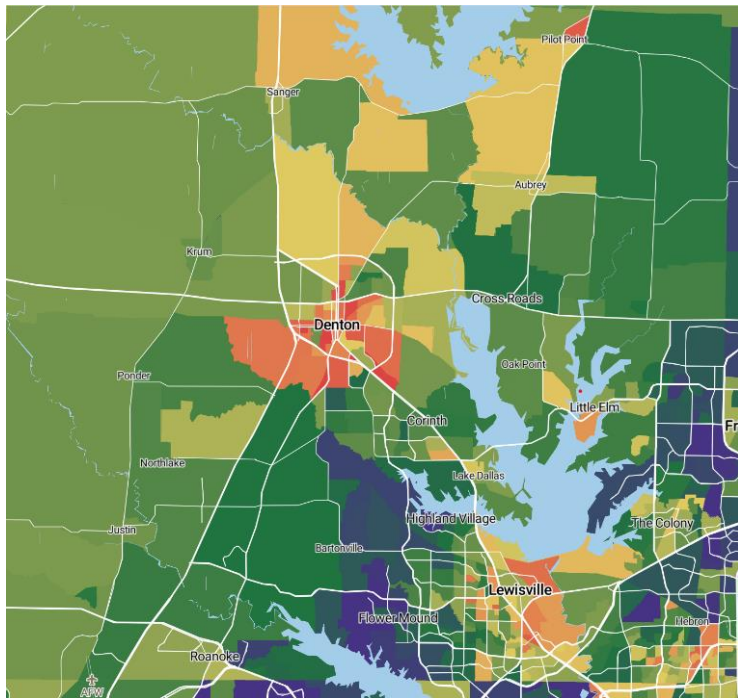
4,912,215

1.40

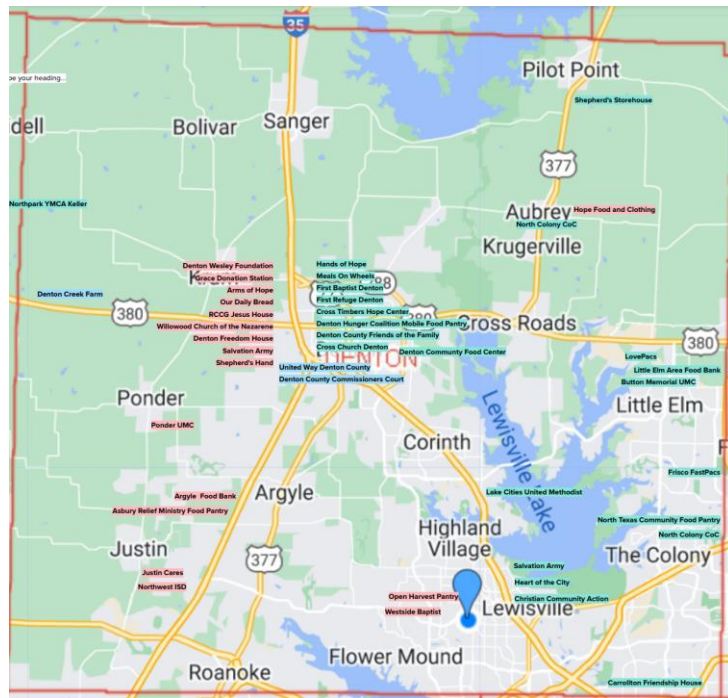
per pound

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Meal Gap and Pantry Locations



Concentration of poverty found in Denton, Lewisville, Little Elm and Pilot Point



Pantries in Denton and south of Hwy 380; Food resource desert in NE and NW Denton County

The Recommendations

A systems approach informed by Human-Centered Design methods

Closing the meal gap - getting more food to communities where the meal gap exists - will require three things:

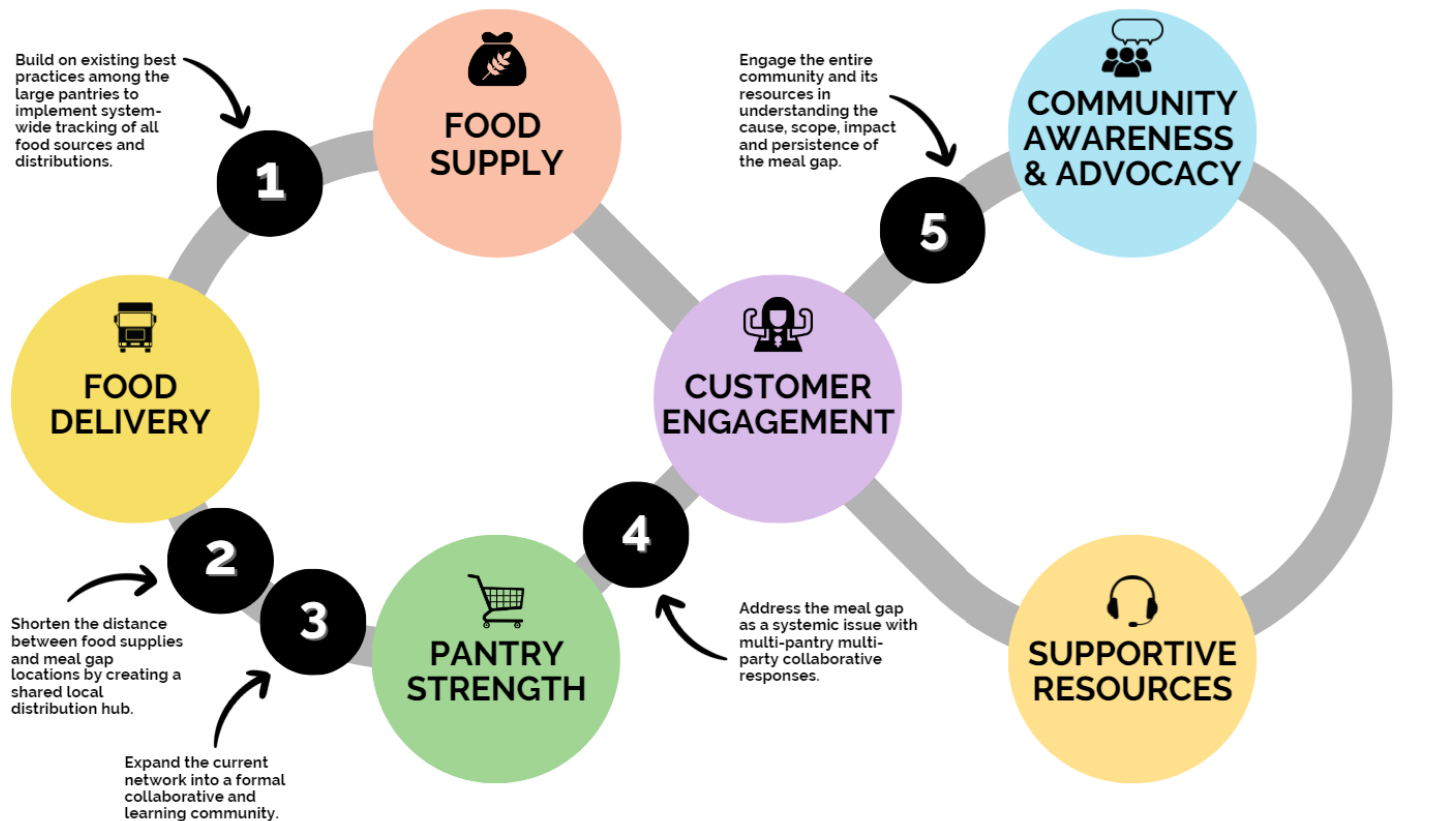
Close the food supply gap - **Accessing more food** for expanded operations, i.e., documenting the need and where food supplies are sourced; and, working collaboratively to minimize expenditures for purchased, rescued, donated or discounted food supplies;

Close the food delivery gap - Increasing capacity by **bringing food closer to where it is needed**; and

Close the connectedness gap - Assisting the existing network of food banks and pantries to **become a collaborative learning community**.

High Impact Measures to Develop

1. Amp up understanding of the need: Develop shared food intake and distribution tracking systems.
2. Amp up food supplies to meet the need: Shorten the 'distance' between food and pantries by creating a distribution hub.
3. Amp up human capacity to meet the need: Create a networked learning community with goals, activities, and impact metrics.
4. Amp up human capacity to share each other's strengths: Undertake a few multi-party, multi-pantry initiatives.
5. Amp up resources to meet the need: Conduct a county-wide awareness campaign.



1

Establish shared food intake and distribution tracking systems

2

Construct a shared local distribution hub with cold storage and packaging capacity

3

Formalize and strengthen the current informal county-wide pantry network to become the Denton County Food Distribution Network

4

Move from independent localized responses to a shared understanding of trends and multi-party / multi-pantry collaboration

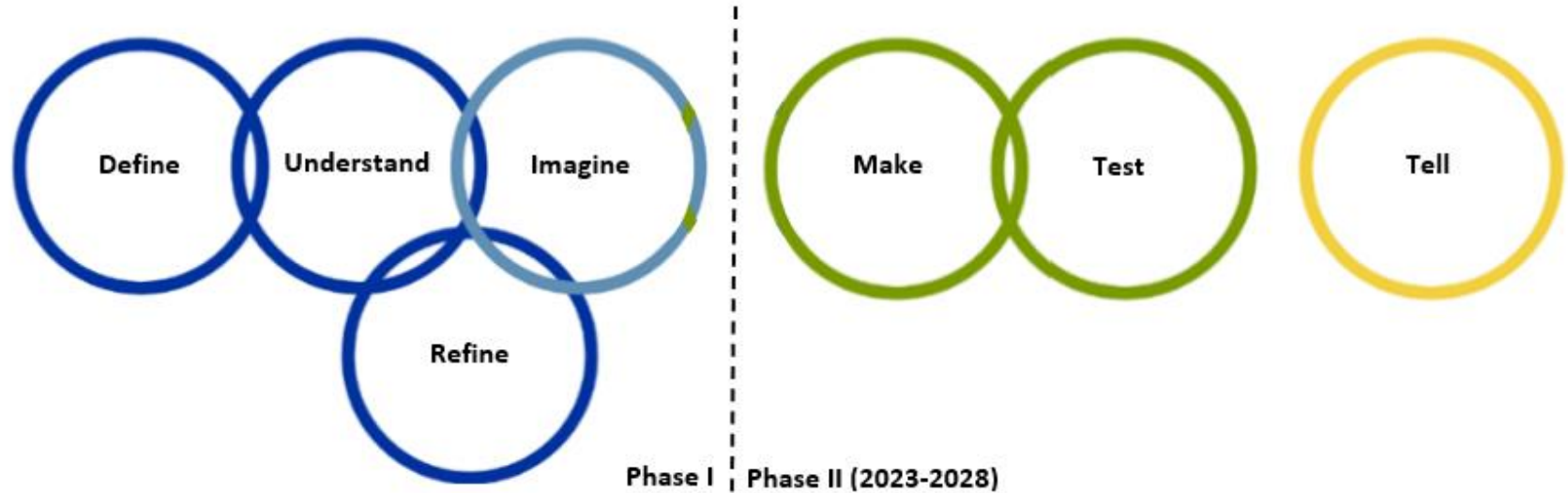
5

Participate in a 'neighbors helping neighbors' public awareness campaign regarding poverty and food insecurity.

Prototyping

Learning by doing

Human-Centered Design (a reminder of the process)



About Prototypes & Prototyping

- Prototypes are a way to do and learn at the same time.
- They are meant to make room in high-pressure situations for thoughtful design processes. If what you are trying works, do more. If it doesn't work so well, ask questions and refine it (make and test).
- Prototypes can be small.
- They can be a product, a service or an experience.
- They are meant to answer questions and gather feedback.
- They are not meant to be the perfect or “right” solution from the start.

Prototyping the Recommendations

Road Maps to equip Denton County food providers to work together

Remember the Four-Part Approach

- Approach poverty as a **systemic challenge**;
- Remain **focused on food distribution** and food insecurity (for now);
- Look for opportunities to **work with customers** to meet immediate needs **and address the root causes**; and
- Collaborate with allied anti-racism and anti-poverty efforts including advocacy, education, healthcare and employment to **develop a social safety net** of resources focused on poverty reduction.

Prototype Road Maps

Purpose: To equip members of the food distribution network to begin implementing and testing the recommendations.

- Planning guidelines (“Considerations”)
- People, information and projects to bring into the process (“Include”)
- Additional considerations (“While considering the following”)
- Potential leadership and working group members

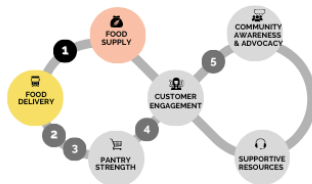
PROTOTYPE 1.a: FOOD INTAKE DATABASE

1.a REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Establish **shared food intake and distribution tracking systems**.

2023-24 OBJECTIVE

30% of pantries reporting all intake by EoY 2024



PROTOTYPING CONSIDERATIONS

- Data entry demands for pantries operating in lo-fi or no wi-fi environments
- Volunteer experience level for data entry requirements
- Public access to dashboards; public portal
- Interoperability with other databases and reporting systems
- Feeding America and USDA reporting requirements for food banks

BE SURE TO INCLUDE

- Food acquired through Feeding America's **Meal Connect** store donations
- Food acquired through local donations (retail, faith community, Scouts etc.)
- Food acquired through local purchases (retail, produce from growers (DCF)
- Relevant aspects of how pantries like Denton Community Food Center, Christian Community Action and Heart of the City use their data to understand food intake patterns and trends
- Denton County Public Health Office WIC and other supportive resources
- Data from cross-functional organizations that also provide food (schools, medical facilities, etc.)
- Providers that are not part of a food bank network (Meals On Wheels, Metrocrest)
- Municipal governments and staff, especially Denton County Commissioners Court
- Local colleges and universities pantries and information management divisions

WHILE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING

- Begin by merging all applicable data currently collected by the two food banks.
- Add all non-food bank donations and purchases, tracking both food and non-food products (diapers, pet food, feminine hygiene products).
- Use the database to accurately assess food intake and the insights it provides re food insecurity; communicate the food network's impact on reducing the meal gap.
- Move toward equitable distribution of food received from Feeding America
- Exercise caution regarding implicit biases and equity in data collection

POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

- Backbone organization leadership and NTFB/TAFB leadership (update them regularly)
- Faculty and students from UNT Computer Science and College of Visual Arts and Design (Interaction Design)
- Trent Smith, CCA; Tom Newell, DCFC; David Swain, NTFB; Nate Starmer, TAFB; Anne Readhimer, NTFB

Prototype 1a: Food Intake Source Tracking System

PROTOTYPE 1.b: FOOD DISTRIBUTION DATABASE

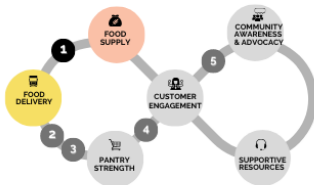
1.b

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Establish shared food intake and distribution tracking systems

2023-24 OBJECTIVE

50% of pantries using Service Insights by EoY 2024



PROTOTYPING CONSIDERATIONS

- Data entry demands for pantries operating in lo-fi or no wi-fi environments
- Volunteer experience level for data entry requirements
- Customer access to technology and experience level for data entry requirements
- Using technology to promote personal agency
- Public access to dashboards; public portal
- Interoperability with other databases and reporting systems

BE SURE TO INCLUDE

- Opportunity to test Feeding America's **Service Insights** software (NTFB volunteered to conduct demos of software capabilities and use)
- Early adopters especially Button Memorial UMC
- Municipal governments and staff; Denton County Commissioners Court
- Local colleges and universities
- Other organizations focused on anti-racism, anti-poverty efforts
- Equipping customers and pantries with cards and QR codes
- Feeding America and USDA reporting requirements

WHILE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING

- Meeting client needs and keeping questions simple (and limited)
- Using the database to accurately assess food insecurity and communicate the food network's impact on reducing the meal gap.
- Grant opportunities for improved data collection (opportunity to seek county-wide master grant)

POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

- Backbone organization leadership and NTFB/TAFB leadership (update them regularly)
- Denton Community Food Pantry, Button Memorial UMC, Salvation Army, WIC
- Advertise demos of software at monthly pantry gatherings of the two food banks and at bi-weekly DCCC calls

Prototype 1b: Food Distribution Tracking System

PROTOTYPE 2: SHARED DISTRIBUTION HUB

2

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Construct a shared local **distribution hub**

2023-24 OBJECTIVES

Conduct design research, complete architectural programming, secure funding, begin construction by BoY 2024



IMPORTANT PROTOYING CONSIDERATIONS

- Moving from 'split' model to 'shared' model (with FA approval for revised local agreement)
- Reducing travel time for pantries (food banks deliver, additional intake requires trip to FW, Plano)
- Pantries' transportation and loading equipment varies; pallets may be too big for small pantries
- Schedule and volunteers determine pantry capacity to participate in MealConnect
- Smaller producers' connections to food banks
- Funding for construction and for ongoing operating costs; value engineer net savings

BE SURE TO INCLUDE

- Leadership from large, medium and small food pantries
- Municipal and county elected officials
- Local county producers, growers and community gardens
- Food bank staff who interact with national retailers and manufacturers

WHILE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING

- Engage with pantries to determine the location (possible DCFC addition; DCFC cannot staff; also consider location in county and unserved NE and NW quadrants where growth is happening; does distribution hub need to be located at current or future epicenter?)
- Potential distribution center models
 - Hub and spoke (ex. TAFB West)
 - Retail hub
 - Affiliate Food Bank or Branch Food Bank
- Refrigerated storage and 'Right-sizing' capacity to transform bulk quantities into family-sized packs
- Additional sources: produce, protein, Denton County retail distribution centers
- Reductions in higher-priced one-off purchases
- Dual use tracking

POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKING GROUP

- NTFB/TAFB CEOs
- DCCCC contact for funding
- NTFB/TAFB senior staff, Serve Denton, Denton Creek Farms, pantry leadership
- Engage Brian Greene, Houston Food Bank for consult re his experiences with distribution hubs

Prototype 2: Shared Distribution Hub

PROTOTYPE 3: FORMALIZED COUNTY-WIDE NETWORK

3

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Transform the current informal county-wide pantry network into an **action-oriented formal network of food providers**.

2023-24 OBJECTIVES

Agreements to participate, roles and responsibilities, meeting cadence, key action items by EoY2023



IMPORTANT PROTOYPING CONSIDERATIONS

- Include following the Collective Impact model as part of the prototype
- Collective unifying vision and language
- Shared goals, objectives and success metrics (reporting to govt. agencies) to prioritize action
- Previously established agreements, partner investments, and patterns of cooperation
- Ways to involve end-users and collectively document and share learnings
- Prior networks such as the Denton County Hunger Coalition.
- Current offerings and gaps (including trauma informed practices)
- Ownership, trust building, tools (toolkits, guidelines)

BE SURE TO INCLUDE

- Formation of a backbone organization for network leadership (UNT, DCCC, UWDC, food banks)
- Decision makers and staff at: food banks, pantries, Denton County, United Way
- Local producers, growers and community gardens
- Food bank staff who are responsible for national retailers and manufacturers and local retail distribution centers
- Denton County Public Health Office WIC and other supportive resources
- Data from cross-functional organizations that also provide food (schools, colleges, universities, medical facilities, etc.)
- Providers that are not part of a food bank network (Meals On Wheels, Metrocrest)
- Municipal governments and staff

WHILE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING

- Ensure the reach is county-wide and includes staff from food banks, pantries and cross-functional agencies (Shiloh Field Garden, faith-based orgs, pantry leadership, refugee services, universities, hospitals, PreK-12 schools, homeless coalition, faith-based and civic orgs, SNAP, WIC, childcare/child development centers, landlords, AgriLife, other CBOs, local government)
- Identify roles and responsibilities and establish a backbone agency

POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKING GROUP

- NTFB/TAFB staff
- DCCC, UWDC, NTFB/TAFB senior staff, Serve Denton, Denton Creek Farms,
- Interfaith Ministries of Denton, Texas Health Resources, Lovepacs, TWU, UNT

Prototype 3: Action-Oriented Network of Providers

PROTOTYPE 4: MULTI-PANTRY COLLABORATION

4

REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Move from independent localized responses to a shared understanding of trends and **multi-party / multi-pantry collaboration**

2023-24 OBJECTIVES

Create a coalition to work together to address under-served and unserved quadrants of NE and NW Denton County



IMPORTANT PROTOYPING CONSIDERATIONS

- Connecting stakeholders to one another formally and informally (smaller pantries and informal distribution networks exists but are under-the-radar and do not know about resources available); include call for partners in county-wide awareness campaign
- Making sure the need is understood (scope and causes)
- Recognizing and honoring that stakeholders and pantries are underpinned by a variety of cultural / organizational models and paradigms
- Equalizing pantries' access to larger more powerful stakeholders
- Leveraging individual pantry resources for collective impact
- Are formal documents and procedures required? What are the barriers to participation?
- What passions and resources exist in the two quadrants that might help address needs?
- Are there jurisdictional restrictions?

BE SURE TO INCLUDE

- Pantry and food bank staff; peer-to-peer mentorship
- Municipal and county elected officials, government staff, health and social services, school districts, faith communities, local leaders (formal and informal), adjacent CBOs
- Food insecurity, food justice, and health experts and advocates

WHILE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING

- Explore partnerships between pantries to expand coverage to underserved areas.
 - Demonstrate that resources and support are available to local organizations
- Address challenges for larger pantries associated with the 135 split
 - Make better use of current opportunities
 - Resolve intra-food bank impediments to decision making across service areas.
 - Resolve impediments to expansion across food bank service areas.
- Explore opportunities for cross-agency collaboration for poverty reduction.

POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKING GROUP

- NTFB/TAFB and pantry staff
- Local organizations and leadership - North Texas Collegiate Academy, Denton County, Metrocrest Services, Foundation Communities, Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Prototype 4: Multi-Party, Multi-Pantry Collaborations

PROTOTYPE 5: PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

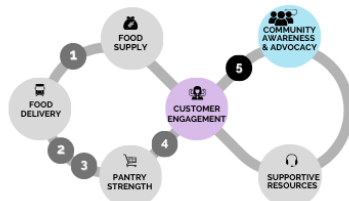
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REPORT RECOMMENDATION

Participate in a 'neighbors helping neighbors' **public awareness campaign** regarding poverty and food insecurity

2023-24 OBJECTIVES

Identify objectives, determine messaging, select media and media markets, conduct campaign by EoY 2023



IMPORTANT PROTOTYPING CONSIDERATIONS

- Including perspectives of the food insecure; taking care to not disempower customers
- B-Including best practices in public communications
- Reframing unhelpful dominant mental / cultural models
- Utilizing a mix of online and offline communication modalities and channels
- Growing existing nonprofits - landing page for volunteers, donations, and resource sharing
- Strengthening media relationships
- Will increased awareness help Denton County residents be inspired to act? (Denton County helping Denton County)
- How does the collaborative want people to give - donations? Money? Time? What is needed?
- Making a call to action
- Understanding of root causes and putting a 'face' on hunger in Denton County
- Consider "Someone cares...it's you."
- Providing templates, logos, captions to local pantries
- Data tracking - reach, shared social media networks, zip codes reached, volunteer increases

BE SURE TO INCLUDE

- Municipal and county level officials
- Adjacent nonprofit service / resource providers
- School districts, colleges and universities
- Food insecurity, food justice, and health experts and community advocates

WHILE CONSIDERING THE FOLLOWING

- Engage and inform elected officials.
- Engage and inform food bank customers and supporters.

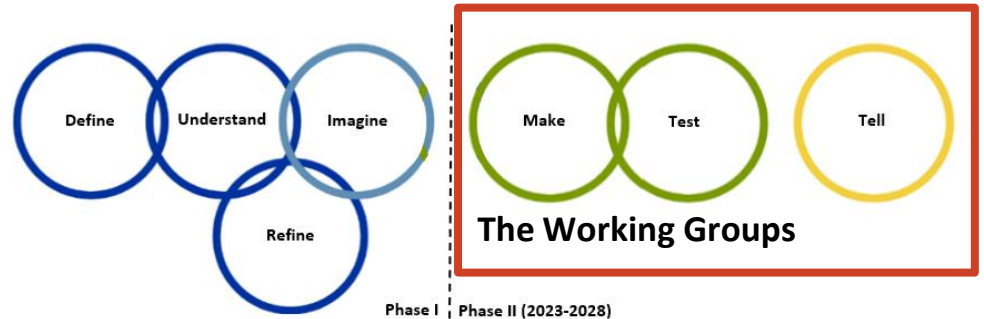
POTENTIAL LEADERSHIP AND WORKING GROUP

- NTFB/TAFB and pantry staff
- City of Denton, Denton County
- Local organizations and leadership

Prototype 5: Community Awareness Campaign

Working Groups

- Five working groups (Prototype 1.a & 1.b, 2, 3, 4, & 5)
- Meet monthly (in person or online)
- Set specific progress benchmarks
- Make, Test, Tell (conduct and evaluate the prototypes)
- Follow the road maps
- Report back to the network
- **Always be learning!**



Prototyping Starts Today!

Laying the groundwork now

Getting Started Now

- Select a prompt and a working group
- Share your name and contact information on the sheet at your table if you want to be part of the working group (or just stay in the information loop)
- Let us know your best time to get together - early morning, lunch time, late in the day
- Start small today with an idea that will generate good information for the working groups

Your Task Now

Explore five smaller projects that will inform the work of the task forces as they develop and implement the five prototypes.

- After you select a prompt you want to work on to help get prototyping started in Denton County take a set at that table
- In your group, discuss the prototype guide questions
- Record your responses on the tabletop sheet
- Share your thoughts with the larger group

Prototyping Prompts

1. An improvement to make food and other resource tracking easier.
2. An improvement to a pantry's experience of acquiring food.
3. An idea for connecting cross-functional agencies and food providers.
4. A response to the lack of nonprofit partners in northeast Denton county.
5. A mixed-channel strategy for a community awareness campaign.

Getting Started - Brainstorming an Idea

- What is getting in the way of ... data collection, distribution, being a collaborative learning community, doing joint projects, community awareness ... what is working well in support of those activities?
- How might you address a challenge? Develop lots of rapid response ideas
- Chose one idea to explore

Use this stem to create your main research question (this is your hypothesis):

Will (doing this thing) help (these end users) to be better able to (achieve this outcome)?

Getting Started

Will (doing this thing) help (these end users) to be better able to (achieve this outcome)?

- What will you do?
- Why are you going to try this?
- What do you want to know/find out/hope to discover?
- Where and when will you do it?
- Who will do it with you?
- Who will test it with you?
- What do you think they will say or discover?

Let's Try One Together

Will (doing this thing) help (these end users) to be better able to (achieve this outcome)?

- The Challenge: Pantries sharing their food intake sources and pounds received
- What could get in the way?
- Ideas: What might help? What will you try?
- What do you want to know / find out / hope to discover?

Choose a working group and get started

Sharing: What Did You Learn?

Your idea, your insights, ah-hahs, new questions

Thank you for being here today!
We can't wait to see what you accomplish.