

## Food Access for All: Empowering Innovative Local Infrastructure

### Abstract:

In underserved communities throughout affluent countries, people lack access to affordable, nutritious food. To remedy this, Social Entrepreneurial Organizations (SEOs) are creating local, community-based food distribution infrastructure that provides sustainable access to healthy and affordable food. Our paper develops an integrative framework focused on identifying the key marketing practices that enhance the success of local, community-based SEOs securing affordable access to healthy foods. We adopt a relational engagement approach and bring an inductive case study method to our collaborative research partnerships with SEOs innovating community-based solutions to improve food access. Our research-based framework suggests opportunities for academic research on food access with conceptual and societal benefit. Finally, we call for more academic research to advance local, community-based social entrepreneurship focused on attaining healthy food access for all.

**Key Words:** Hunger, Food Insecurity, Food Access, Social Entrepreneurship, Transformative Consumer Research, Public Policy

Word Count exclusive of title, abstract, references and tables is 7991.

## 1. Introduction

As the quality of higher-income Americans' diets have improved over the last decade, lower-income Americans' diet quality has worsened, increasing the inequities between affluent and impoverished people (Wang et al., 2014; McMillan, 2014). This reality disproportionately deteriorates the health and well-being of impoverished individuals who consequently suffer from higher rates of diet-related diseases such as obesity and diabetes, and experience diminished physical, mental, and social well-being linked to under-nutrition (Bublitz, Hansen, Peracchio, & Tussler, 2018; Bush & Welsh, 2015; Condon et al., 2015; Victora et al., 2008). A primary reason for this disparity in diet is underserved people's lack of access to affordable fresh and healthy foods (Wang et al., 2014). For example, nearly 40 million Americans live in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods and sparsely populated rural areas with limited access to affordable, nutritious foods (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2013).

For people who live in affluent countries, access to fresh, whole foods is provided through food distribution channels that transfer, for example, fruits and vegetables from farms to retailers such as grocery stores (Rosenbaum et al., 2017). However, many impoverished people in affluent countries live in food deserts, communities that lack a critical link in the food distribution channel—grocery retailers offering fresh, whole foods (Block et al., 2011; Bublitz et al., 2018). Compounding this access problem, the cost of fresh foods places them further out of reach of low-income consumers (Talukdar, 2008). Yet, local food distribution channel bright spots are emerging in underserved communities, providing vital and sustainable access to affordable, healthy foods. Social entrepreneurs, individuals and organizations with innovative solutions to society's more

pressing challenges (Ashoka, 2018), are establishing these bright spots by creating local infrastructure for distributing affordable fresh and healthy foods to people in underserved communities.

Social Entrepreneurial Organizations (SEOs) are providing new points of food access by developing novel food distribution channel solutions. Although these social entrepreneurs face formidable challenges, including political, legal, and environmental constraints, they are forging a path to provide affordable, healthy food access in local communities. For example, *We Don't Waste*, one such Colorado program, reclaims and redistributes uneaten food from catered events—food that otherwise would be thrown away—and turns it into meals. *The Nashville Food Project* grows produce in a multitude of small urban plots throughout Nashville, transforming a bounty of fruits and vegetables into 3,000 meals weekly for people experiencing hunger. Milwaukee's *Hunger Task Force* launched the Fresh Picks Mobile Market, which provides affordable access to fresh produce, meat, and dairy products in the city's food deserts, impoverished neighborhoods devoid of traditional food retailers.

More academic research in marketing is needed to guide these local, community-based social entrepreneurs as they develop solutions to distribution channel food access problems. Bloom (2009) has noted a dearth of social entrepreneurship research in business—and particularly in marketing—and has called for increased academic research in marketing to guide social entrepreneurs toward success. Marketing is vital to SEO success as it impacts the development and maintenance of channel and client relationships as well as an SEO's ability to achieve their mission. Establishing successful social entrepreneurial ventures that innovate affordable access to fresh, healthy foods is

particularly fraught with challenges and complexity because distribution channels for fresh foods, which are perishable, must be short and time sensitive. In addition, organizations must identify a stable and consistent supply of fresh foods on a regular basis as people eat everyday (Change Lab Solutions, 2014). Emily Brown, founder of the *Food Equality Initiative*, a Kansas City nonprofit focused on people with food allergies, echoed what is perhaps the most significant barrier for organizations working to provide affordable access to healthy foods: “Every city’s food system [food distribution channel] is different and uniquely local.”

By synthesizing research in marketing and the marketing practices of local SEOs focused on food access, we seek both to answer Bloom’s research call and to appeal to more researchers to do the same. Our research offers a contribution by developing an integrative framework focused on identifying the marketing practices supported by academic research that allow local, community-based SEOs to provide vital access to affordable, healthy foods. We call for more academic researchers, particularly those in marketing and distribution, to explore best practices of local social entrepreneurship as a way to make SEOs more successful in their work to secure stable, affordable, and healthy food access for all.

Our framework for empowering innovative local social entrepreneurial food access solutions offers a contribution grounded in Ozanne et al.’s (2017) relational engagement approach. In keeping with Ozanne et al.’s (2017, p. 1) recommendation to broaden research contribution to include “the creation, awareness, and use of knowledge to (effect) societal impact,” we worked collaboratively from our project’s inception with a variety of local, community-based SEOs in two affluent countries, the United States

and United Kingdom. By investigating SEOs addressing affordable, healthy food access in their own community, we gained a deeper understanding of the challenges these organizations face and the vital practices that make them successful. Our investigation culminated in a research-based framework, inductively derived from the practices of local, community-based SEOs. The framework outlines key marketing practices for these organizations and uncovers opportunities for future academic research with both conceptual and societal benefit.

In what follows, we begin by presenting the methodology for our relational engagement investigation of local, community-based SEOs providing affordable and nutritious food access. We then explore food access and the barriers to food access that SEOs seek to overcome. Next, we integrate the marketing practices of these local SEOs and extant academic research in marketing into a singular framework. This framework highlights several critical practices of these organizations and infuses these practices with relevant concepts from academic literature in marketing. Finally, we propose additional research to advance local, community-based social entrepreneurship aimed at securing food access for all.

## **2. Relational Engagement with Social Entrepreneurial Organizations (SEOs) Using an Inductive Case Study Method**

Building on a relational engagement approach as a means to increase the societal impact of our research (Ozanne et al., 2017), we sought to ground our research in an understanding of the practices of SEOs providing affordable access to healthy food in their communities. To this end, we adopt a multiple case study method to explore the problem of food access and more broadly to identify solutions—the patterns of social

entrepreneurial marketing practice that secure access to healthy and affordable food. Using multiple case studies offers an opportunity both to cross-validate the food access practices we identified (Ravenswood, 2011) and to offer more generalizable insights (Battistella, De Toni, De Zan, & Pessot, 2017). Our team of researchers began by exploring secondary sources and networking with industry experts to identify bright spot SEOs, organizations developing innovative programs designed to address hunger and increase access to healthy food within their communities. We also asked these leaders to identify other organizations innovating in this space, using snowball sampling to identify more bright spot SEOs. Table 1 identifies our relational engagement partners (with permission) as well as a key point of innovation addressing food access for each partner. We interviewed our bright spot partner organizations beginning with broad general questions (e.g. How does your program operate?) Then, we encouraged our SEO partners to take the lead and explore avenues that they deemed important. We sought to include the SEOs as partners in the research process for this project, not as units of observation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Ravenswood, 2011). Finally, we relied on an inductive approach for analyzing the interview insights to identify patterns of practice that foster healthy, affordable food access.

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Patterns emerged and were organized into a framework that highlights the key marketing practices of these SEOs (Eisenhardt, 1989). The pattern of organizational practices that these bright spot partners exhibit include: customizing to the local community, building local relationships, adopting a client-centric focus, addressing

holistic well-being, and promoting inspirational and expert leadership. Finally, to bring our investigation full-circle, our research team then took the key practices and initial framework to selected social entrepreneur partners for validation and further refinement. Tables 2 and 3 summarize our findings.

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The marketing practices in Tables 2 and 3 are further discussed in the sections that follow. In the next section, we explore food access, food insecurity, and hunger, followed by a summary of the individual and societal barriers to food access, as a way to understand and contextualize the unique challenges SEOs face in crafting solutions that provide affordable access to healthy food.

### **3. Food Access**

Scholars and advocates agree with Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's conclusion that it is the lack of *access* to food, rather than the amount of food *available*, that causes hunger in food-rich environments (Barrett, 2010; Dreze & Sen, 1989). Consequently, even when abundant food is available in a locality, hunger persists if people do not have access to that available food. The challenge of access to affordable, healthy foods is particularly acute in underserved neighborhoods and communities that lack grocery retailers. People in these food deserts depend on small convenience stores that offer few fruits and vegetables and instead stock highly-processed, shelf-stable foods (Bodor et al., 2008). Research findings are clear regarding the importance of access to affordable, healthy foods: "the amount of healthful foods available [in a community]... correlates to the diet quality of the residents in the area" (Dimitri & Rogus, 2014).

### *3.1 Food Insecurity*

Food insecurity is a concept frequently used by policymakers and governmental agencies (USDA, 2018; World Food Programme, 2018). People are considered to be food insecure if they do not have stable access to “sufficient, safe, nutritious food needed to maintain a healthy and active life” (Bublitz et al., 2018; USDA, 2018; World Food Programme, 2018). While people may eat enough calories to sustain themselves on a daily basis, due to the inaccessibility of affordable, healthy foods, the foods they consume may lack nutritional quality thereby undermining their well-being. For example, a review of the research investigating the relationship between food insecurity and the prevalence of obesity found that, for women in particular, the likelihood of obesity increases when people experience food insecurity (Larson & Story, 2011). It is important to note that the policy-concept of food insecurity has a broad focus on “access to nourishing food and not merely access to calories” (Dimitri & Rogus, 2014).

### *3.2 Hunger*

Hunger is often a progressive experience: it begins with worries about not having enough food; progresses to a reduction in the quality of food consumed; and finally, results in the consumption of an inadequate quantity of food (Sarlio-Lähteenkorva & Lahelma, 2001, p. 2880). Some people proceed through the experience of hunger in a linear manner while others pivot between these experiences. As such, people experiencing hunger “eat what they can afford, not what they want” or what they need for health and well-being (Bublitz et al., 2018; Food Ethics Council, 2018). A plethora of research has found that the anxiety and stress of hunger deteriorates people’s physical and mental well-being. Specifically, people experiencing hunger in food-rich countries



are more likely to be under-nourished (Bush & Welsh, 2015), overweight (Condon et al., 2015), depressed (Leung et al., 2015), and have trouble sleeping (Ding et al., 2015).

SEOs tackling food access are working to address the fact that although people experiencing hunger may consume sufficient calories to stave off physiological hunger, the foods they consume may lack the essential nutritional diversity needed to thrive (Bublitz et al., 2018). The SEOs we collaborated with are making changes to their operations to deliver a healthier, more nutritious array of foods. For example, *Forgotten Harvest* seeks to deliver healthier food to its clients—more than half of whom have diabetes, high blood pressure, or other chronic conditions requiring a special diet—and aligns the nutrients of its delivered food mix to the US Department of Agriculture’s MyPlate nutritional guidelines. As Mike Spicer of *Forgotten Harvest* affirmed, “There is not a food problem in this country, there is a food distribution problem in this country.” See Table 3. The Detroit-based *Capuchin Soup Kitchen* helps people acclimate to healthier foods by slowly introducing healthier options each time a client accesses their services. Others among the local, community-based SEOs we interviewed offer educational programs on healthy cooking, growing one’s own fresh food, and teaching children about healthy food options so that healthy eating becomes a lifelong skill. These organizations scale deep, achieving impact by embedding deeply with a community, identifying, connecting with, and then leveraging their unique, local resources to secure food access in that community.

Many barriers must be overcome to ensure access to healthy and nutritious food for people experiencing food insecurity and hunger (Bublitz et al., 2018). In the following two sections, we outline the individual and societal barriers to food access.

### *3.3 Individual Barriers to Access*

#### *3.3.1 Limited Resources*

Financial limitations often prevent those with the fewest resources from purchasing healthy foods (Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010). Some people may be able to afford energy-dense, less healthy foods but cannot afford more nutritious alternatives (Talukdar, 2008). Price premiums on certain foods such as lean meat/fish, fresh fruits and vegetables, local/organic foods, dairy products, and foods for those with allergies or chronic health conditions put these foods out of reach for people at risk of hunger. Low-income households have very little flexibility in how they spend money from week to week. Many studies find that people will economize on food either by buying cheaper or less healthy items (e.g., no fruit, fewer vegetables, cheaper processed meats), or by omitting meals altogether (Dowler, Turner, & Dobson, 2001; Leather, 1996). Beyond the financial limitations, many people lack the energy, time, proper kitchen equipment, literacy skills, or knowledge of how to prepare healthy foods. Cooking skills are vital because they help people meet nutritional guidelines and make healthier food choices (Hartmann, Dohle, & Siegrist, 2013; Viswanathan, Sridharan, Gau, & Ritchie, 2009).

#### *3.3.2 Stigma*

People experiencing hunger may feel invisible as policies and programs designed to address hunger leave coverage gaps and fail to meet their needs (Corus et al., 2016). While some feel neglected by programs and organizations intended to provide food access, others may feel stigmatized, which can also deter people experiencing hunger from accessing well-intended programs. Stigma, which results from stereotyping, is an attribute or characteristic that is “deeply discrediting” in a relationship and affects how

we see ourselves as well as how we see and treat other people (Goffman, 2009, p. 3). For example, in the United States, there is a pervasive ideology espousing that those who work hard will be successful, and that lack of success is due to moral failings, self-indulgence, and/or lack of self-discipline (Cozzarelli, Wilkinson, & Tagler, 2001; Shipler, 2005). In fact, many people who receive food assistance work minimum wage or low paying jobs and use food benefits to supplement their income. In a large, national study, 53.5 percent of people experiencing hunger were from families where the head of household was employed (Alaimo, Briefel, Frongillo Jr., & Olson, 1998). Yet, there is shame associated with needing or asking for help—shame that may act as a barrier confronting people when they experience hunger.

Stigma is a “fundamental cause of health inequalities” because it hinders those in need from seeking help (Hatzenbuehler, Phelan, & Link, 2013). Therefore, in addition to the physiological impact of hunger, the stigma associated with both hunger and the programs designed to tackle hunger may exacerbate negative health consequences for those experiencing hunger. In the same way that stigma may prevent some from seeking treatment for stigmatized health conditions (e.g., Cooper, Corrigan, & Watson, 2003; Keyes et al., 2010), the stigma associated with hunger may prevent those experiencing hunger from seeking supplemental nutrition services and other sources of help designed to eliminate hunger. In Denver, students at South High School can visit the school’s “discreet food pantry,” an effort to make food accessible while minimizing the stigma some may feel (Food for Thought Denver, 2018). Stigma also impacts students’ participation in school lunch programs as some schools have separate queues or food choices for subsidized lunch options. Such overt demarcations that make children eligible

for free- or reduced-price lunch visible to others leads parents to forego such options for their children and causes some children to skip lunch rather than consume eligible meals (Bhatia, Jones, & Reicker, 2011; Pogash, 2008).

### *3.4 Societal Barriers to Access*

#### *3.4.1 Geographic Isolation*

People living in food deserts have limited access to fresh and healthy foods and are dependent on small convenience stores offering few whole foods (Guy, Clarke, & Eyre, 2004). While much of the research on food deserts has focused on urban populations, extremely rural geographic areas also lack access to fresh and healthy foods generally made available through traditional grocery stores (Majid & Grier, 2010). Transportation issues amplify the problem of food access in both rural and urban food deserts. For residents of food deserts without transportation (e.g., a personal vehicle or convenient bus route) to grocery stores outside of their neighborhood, access to healthy food is further limited (Kirkup et al., 2004; Lake & Townshend, 2006). Compounding the problem, most food banks do not stock a large selection of healthy and fresh foods (see Bazerghi, McKay, & Dunn, 2016 for a review). Securing food access in food deserts involves innovating transportation solutions as well as encouraging food banks and local merchants to stock healthy foods. Access to fresh, nutritious food allows people vulnerable to hunger to incorporate healthy foods into their diet, and provides children and youth with a path to develop the requisite food literacy skills needed to prepare, consume, and enjoy healthy foods. Without access to fresh and healthy foods, people's overall well-being is undermined (Block et al., 2011).

#### *3.4.2 Navigating the System*

There are many government programs (e.g., SNAP, WIC, free and reduced school breakfast and lunch programs) available that provide supplemental food assistance. However, a lack of awareness of available programs, let alone an understanding of their eligibility requirements and bureaucratic processes, are key barriers for families accessing public benefits (Wu & Eamon, 2010). Navigating the complex and often rigid system to obtain the benefits these programs offer can be daunting without expert assistance. For some people, the cost of doing the necessary paperwork may outweigh the possible benefits of participating in a particular program. For instance, to receive SNAP (food assistance benefits) in Florida, an individual must provide proof of US citizenship, a social security number, and information on income, assets, and expenses (Florida Department of Children & Families, 2018). Language barriers, lack of access to technology, lack of a physical address, and fear may also hold people back from accessing SNAP benefits (Algert, Reibel, & Renvall, 2006). Navigating the system has become increasingly complex because it involves a myriad of constantly changing local, state, and federal programs. Innovative local organizations can increase access by taking a consultative approach when it comes to helping people experiencing hunger understand the community, governmental, and private food resources available, as well as the steps needed to apply, receive, and maintain access to food programs. Further, at an organizational level, food donations can be blocked by legislation or corporate policies (Block et al. 2016). A path for reforming this cumbersome system is a noteworthy goal that should be explored in future research.

### *3.4.3 Organization Challenges*

Food systems are the distribution channels in a community that move food from the producer through intermediaries such as retailers to the consumer. Large, external organizations and even national and state governments working to secure food access face many challenges in large part because each community's food system and path to stable food access is unique. However, social entrepreneurs working at the local level are in a unique position to establish trust and develop relationships in the community that better equip them to address food access on a local level. "Building local capacities to solve problems" and investing in "innovations that mobilize existing (local) assets" are critical components of empowering local, community-based social entrepreneurs to lead societal transformations that benefit marginalized populations (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004, p. 270). Research has explored how shared ownership models, such as local food cooperatives, benefit the community (Iuviene, Stitely, & Hoyt, 2010). Such models, for example, give weight to the needs of local individuals and ensure that decisions benefit the local community and its members (Iuviene et al., 2010). In the same way, solutions to food access grounded in the local community can be designed to address the uniqueness of its food system and food distribution channels as well as the specific needs of its residents.

#### **4. A Framework to Empower Innovative Local Infrastructure to Secure Food Access**

Through our collaborative, relational engagement partnerships with a variety of local, community-based SEOs, we identified a pattern of marketing practices that enhanced the success of such organizations seeking to provide affordable, healthy food access. These key marketing practices call on organizations to: customize to the local

community, build local relationships, adopt a client-centric focus, address holistic well-being, and promote inspirational and expert leadership. Tables 2 and 3 highlight how the SEOs we partnered with for this project are implementing these critical marketing practices. In the following sections, we describe each of these marketing practices in greater detail and explore how community-based SEOs benefit from these practices. To be clear, the sections that follow interweave descriptions of the vital marketing practices of organizations providing food access with the findings from the extant academic literature in marketing and distribution that investigates these practices. We infuse this information with opportunities for future research on food access with conceptual and societal benefit and call for researchers in marketing and distribution to conduct research investigating food access for all.

#### *4.1 Customize to the Local Community*

Local SEOs are often intimately embedded within specific communities and, as a result, are effective innovators. They understand the local community ethos; build on local skills and resources; and engage and inspire community members to participate in a way that provides direct social, economic, and cultural benefits to the community and its members (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). A community-based, customized design allows SEOs to address local barriers to food access, as well as tackle the problems and opportunities that exist within a particular community's food system. The local SEOs we partnered with leverage their embedded knowledge of their communities as an asset in their quest to provide food access. *Hunger Free Colorado*, for example, embeds its bilingual food access services in medical clinics, grocery stores, recreation centers, public libraries, and senior housing units through a mobile outreach program, connecting with

people experiencing hunger in its own community and offering people immediate food access. Ellie Agar of Hunger Free Colorado explained, “The [hunger] issue is like a Rubik’s cube: you have to line up the right resources with the right people in need.” See Table 3.

The value proposition of *Hunger Free Colorado* and other local SEOs focused on hunger includes identifying and serving the unmet food access needs of local communities in culturally appropriate ways. Local food access and hunger solutions are frequently designed around the unique culture, demographics, and needs of clients in a particular area. For example, recognizing that many older people in their community were alone, isolated, and experiencing hunger, *FirstBite* in the United Kingdom runs a Silver Sundays program, providing a healthy meal and entertainment to alleviate the social marginalization older people experience on Sundays, a day traditionally spent with family within this cultural environment (FirstBite, 2018). Furthermore, local social entrepreneurial efforts often find ways to creatively address specific barriers to access and build the capabilities of their local communities through innovation (Luke & Chu, 2013). When community members who have experienced hunger achieve food stability, their experience may lead them to give back to their community through their own entrepreneurial endeavors, advancing the collective well-being of the community (Viswanathan & Venugopal, 2015; Viswanathan, Echambadi, Venugopal, & Sridharan, 2014).

This customized entrepreneurial approach to food access within a local community contributes to a sense that the organization is owned by its stakeholders: clients, employees, volunteers, donors, and community members. Thus, the community



and its members are primary actors in such social entrepreneurial arrangements. Fulfilling the needs of people experiencing hunger within a community is primary and central; however, hunger has a broader, collective impact on an entire community in terms of the community's social cohesion, public health, and local development (Laville & Nyssens, 2001). Local stakeholders frequently care deeply about their communities and mobilize to support local social entrepreneurial initiatives such as those addressing food access. SEOs can leverage such support and become practical spaces for action (Birkhölzer, 2009), thus increasing the effectiveness of a local, customized approach to alleviating hunger.

Given that every community's food system, or distribution channel for food, is uniquely local, the task of getting locally grown food and surplus food that is often wasted to people experiencing hunger is best resolved at the local community level. Locally grown foods are nutritious, fresh, and whole—but also perishable creating a logistical challenge that requires reliable local food distribution networks. As noted by Hart, Stevenson, & Dial (1996), a key determinant of whether or not social entrepreneurial initiatives succeed is their knowledge of the key suppliers and clients in their immediate spheres. Ideally, local social entrepreneurship focused on access to healthy, affordable food allows community-based organizations to target opportunities and mobilize food resources efficiently to achieve the greatest impact within their localities (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006).

#### *4.2 Build Local Relationships*

Given the local nature of hunger and the importance of customized local solutions to meet food access needs, it is imperative that organizations working to secure food access build local relationships and partner with local entities to gain efficiencies, access

local knowledge and resources, help clients navigate the local system, and gain credibility with local stakeholders, including clients. Working together with other community partners, local SEOs possess a distinct collaborative advantage, potentially allowing them to achieve greater success through relationships with partners than could be achieved on their own (Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

Local, community-based SEOs are frequently built upon a shared value system that advances the goals of the organization together with the needs of their clients in the communities they serve. These entrepreneurs use their social and personal networks in the realization of their community value proposition to mobilize social capital and develop reciprocal relationships in the community (Putnam, 1993). The involvement of local partners and suppliers further enhances customized care for the community as a whole, given that local partners have a vested interest in helping the communities in which they exist to thrive. Effective local, community-based social entrepreneurial initiatives, therefore, are often built on person-to-person relationships. It is this specific form of social capital that creates flexible and responsive SEOs. In practice, the way in which resources such as social, personal, and tacit knowledge are effectively mobilized often are not acknowledged explicitly, yet they are vital to how SEOs sustainably manage their operations (Chell, 2007).

Not only is it important for SEOs to have strong relationships in their food distribution channel, it is also important for them to collaborate with community partners such as businesses, government organizations, and other NGOs (Gray, 1989). This is especially true given that food banks can and often do play a role in hunger education and advocacy in their local communities (Solak, Scherrer, & Ghoniem, 2014). Businesses can

become key partners by donating food, supplying volunteers, and providing funds to local organizations. Government organizations can provide grants, resources, and information. Other non-profits can offer complimentary services, such as working with youth organizations, educating people about healthy cooking and food storage, or sponsoring job training programs to give their clients support beyond food access. As an example, the *Hunger Task Force* coordinates a community-wide summer meals program for Milwaukee children vulnerable to hunger, partnering with schools, community centers, public parks, and meal providers to serve more than 800,000 meals. Private donors and federal nutrition programs fund this collaborative program (Hunger Task Force, 2018).

SEOs can build community-based relationships through co-creation, the process of partnering with clients and stakeholders as co-producers and co-creators of products and marketing messages (Pralhad, 2005, 2006; Viswanathan, Sridharan, & Ritchie, 2010; Weidner, Rosa, & Viswanathan, 2010). Such collaborations benefit from the expertise and experience of clients and other stakeholders in a community and promote the creation of solutions that address specific barriers to food access—for example stigma—within a particular community. With co-creation, there is a shared purpose in the collaboration among the partners (Lee, Olson, & Trimi, 2012). Furthermore, while each partner contributes and gains something new, the result of their collaborative effort can create network effects that provide additive value to the entire community (Gulati, 1998). For example, *Growing Oshkosh* partners with schools to set up and manage a customized school garden initiative while also delivering high-quality nutrition education to students vulnerable to hunger. As Dani Stolley of *Growing Oshkosh* explained, “We help each school develop a vision for their gardens.” See Table 3. These school gardens serve many

purposes: developing an appreciation among students for outdoor spaces, exposing children to nutritious foods, and providing a source of fresh, local produce to feed families within the school community experiencing hunger.

Although the SEOs we worked with report that building local relationships and collaboration are important, such partnerships do not come without challenges and costs. Organizations and their partners may struggle with power, structural issues, competition for resources, added time constraints, and management differences (Babiak & Thibault, 2009). Future research should explore these challenges. Successful collaborative partnerships require planning in design and management as the relationship evolves. More research is needed to better understand how SEOs can leverage strategic partnerships and community collaborations to navigate these challenges as they work to provide food access for all.

#### *4.3 Adopt a Client-Centric Focus*

To achieve success, local SEOs should incorporate best practices in marketing, including a client-centric focus that values the ability to identify, know, and empathize with its clients. According to research on empathy in marketing, being empathetic does not mean exhibiting pity or feeling sorry for someone; rather, it entails being absorbed *into the feelings* of another (Escalas & Stern, 2003). Empathy is also the ability to take the perspective of the other individual (Davis, 1983). For example, the ability to see the world from the perspective of people experiencing hunger provides vital information to SEOs seeking to eliminate the barriers to food access. Thus, the needs of individual clients, including senior citizens, those with allergies, people from diverse cultures, children, and individuals with chronic health needs such as diabetes will be better

understood—and in turn, served—when SEOs adopt a client-centric focus rich with empathy.

Furthermore, SEOs working to secure food access have many stakeholders—donors, volunteers, partner organizations, and policymakers—and the organization’s success will depend on helping these stakeholders empathize with people experiencing hunger. Empathy has been shown to have a positive relationship with prosocial behaviors, including helping behaviors and donations (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987) and community involvement (Batson, Ahmad, & Tsang, 2002). The perspective-taking aspect of empathy is also important for augmenting prosocial behaviors among local stakeholders. Perceived similarity between the self and another person can evoke compassion, regardless of whether or not both individuals experience similar role status (Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010).

How can SEOs evoke empathy in their volunteers, donors, community members, and policymakers? Research in marketing has documented one particularly successful method: sharing well-developed stories that evoke empathy (Deighton, Romer, & McQueen, 1989; Escalas & Stern, 2003). A story consists of “a detailed, character-based narration of a character’s struggles to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal” (Haven, 2007, p. 79). Empathy is associated with higher levels of story engagement and influence (Van Laer, Ruyter, Visconti, & Wetzels, 2014). Storytelling can also facilitate emotional contagion, or an unconscious absorption of the emotion conveyed in a story (Van Laer et al., 2014). As a result of these processes, audiences become transported into the story, altering their beliefs about the world (Green & Brock, 2000).

Thus, storytelling can create content that resonates with SEOs' clients and stakeholders. By sharing local stories, SEOs can change the way people see the problem of hunger within their communities. Furthermore, these stories broaden community understanding of the problem, reduce stigma, and call local audiences to action, whether that be clients approaching the organization for help or community members volunteering, donating, or lobbying local policymakers (Bublitz et al., 2016).

Consider this story about the founder of the *Food Equality Initiative*.

*Our pantry model was born out of my own family's personal experience with food insecurity and allergies. My oldest daughter was diagnosed with allergies to peanuts, milk, eggs, wheat, and soy. Then I went to the store and I looked at the cost of the food and I could not believe that a loaf of bread could cost \$6.99 or the hemp milk that she drank for a while was over \$15.00 a gallon. That's impossible for almost anyone to afford. Our family enrolled in a federal nutrition program to help with grocery bills, but the program did not pay for the allergy-friendly food we needed. I met my food pantry partner at a food allergy support group. Her daughter was the same age as mine and they shared some of the same food allergies. Together, we started the Food Equality Initiative to get these expensive foods to the people who need them.*

*Emily Brown, CEO, Food Equality Initiative*

This founder's story gives the audience a window into the life of a mother whose young daughter has food allergies. By assuming the perspective of that mother, audience members gain deeper insight into what it would be like to struggle to afford needed foods and begin to feel empathy for her by sharing her emotions. As such, this story allows the *Food Equality Initiative* to put a face on hunger, thereby increasing awareness of the problem that vulnerable individuals with food allergies confront, reducing stigma, and offering its services as a solution.

Local stories are also a critical component of efforts to address the stigma barrier to food access. When members of the local community hear stories about people in their own community who are hungry, their views about who is hungry and why often change.

Research on stigma shows that such stories can induce perspective taking that may positively impact the viewpoint of community members who have never been affected by hunger (Chung & Slater, 2013). Once residents acknowledge that hunger is an issue in their community, the issue becomes more tangible; thus, gaining a deeper understanding of the perspective of those experiencing hunger may reduce stigma.

#### *4.4 Address Holistic Well-being*

Holistic well-being encompasses more than just physical health and includes psychological, emotional, and social relationships (McMahon, Williams, & Tapsell, 2010; Block et al., 2011). Recent research suggests the need to adopt a holistic view of the role that food plays in a person's well-being (Block et al., 2011; Bublitz et al., 2013). However, for people experiencing hunger, achieving a positive holistic relationship with food in a way that advances their well-being may be out of reach (Bublitz et al., 2018). The severe and debilitating consequences of hunger on health and well-being are widely documented and include an increase in hypertension and cardiovascular disease (Stuff et al., 2004; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003; Seligman, Laraia, & Kushel, 2010), diabetes (Seligman et al., 2007; Seligman et al., 2010), obesity (Robaina & Martin, 2013) and other chronic health issues (Seligman et al., 2010; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003).

For these reasons, it is important that local, community-based SEOs take a holistic view of clients' well-being when working to facilitate stable access to affordable healthy food. Understanding the connection between hunger and diminished well-being is critical for SEOs to help people navigate a path toward stable food access. Beyond health consequences, hunger is also related to poor or inconsistent job performance, higher rates of absenteeism, reduced productivity, and difficulty learning (Hamelin, Habicht, &

Beaudry, 1999). Clients who can't perform in the work environment or lack essential job skills may become trapped in the cycle of hunger and poverty. In Detroit, *Capuchin Soup Kitchen* serves a nourishing meal to people experiencing hunger but also provides essential training in food preparation for clients, preparing them for food service jobs in their local community. As Allison Costello of *Capuchin Soup Kitchen* explained, "We focus on how to get guests beyond their immediate needs to focus on the whole person." See Table 3. Thus, addressing holistic well-being extends beyond ensuring access to nutritious and affordable food; it also takes into account the complex role food plays in people's physical, emotional, social, and psychological well-being (Block et al., 2011; Bublitz et al., 2018).

A holistic approach to well-being by local, community-based SEOs working to secure food access is essential given the pervasive negative impact of hunger on individuals. Indeed, social support is particularly essential to addressing the problem of hunger (Kollannoor-Samuel et al., 2011). Organizations working to ensure access to food often collaborate with community partners that serve many of the same clients—individuals facing housing, job, or health crises as well as hunger—to provide holistic support. For example, partnerships between *Hunger Free Colorado* and a number of local medical clinics is reducing the stigma barrier to food access as clients, on the advice of their physicians, become more willing to access food assistance. According to Ellie Agar of *Hunger Free Colorado*, "Success comes from building relationships, networking, and collaborating. We are partnering with housing developments and medical communities." See Table 3. Social entrepreneurs working to ensure food access should work collaboratively with organizations offering affordable access to housing; managing free



health clinics; addressing transportation needs; providing education at all levels; and meeting a broad range of physical, social, spiritual, and emotional needs to address the holistic needs of each client while advancing the collective well-being of their communities.

#### *4.5 Promote Inspirational and Expert Leadership*

Where does the inspiration for social entrepreneurs working to develop local, community-based solutions to secure food access come from? For some, motivation arises from moral outrage at a problem that leaves many people hungry. Often insight emerges as many entrepreneurial solutions do: someone with a unique view of food access envisions a novel solution. Training for social entrepreneurs who innovate such food access solutions range from agricultural science, social work, political science, medicine, marketing communications, environmental studies, or physical distribution. This diversity of backgrounds is likely not a coincidence given that research indicates that entrepreneurial success is more likely when founders, organizational leaders, and employees possess a range of knowledge and professional experiences (Staniewski, 2016) thereby bringing creative ideas to a long-established problem or challenge.

Whatever their background, a key characteristic social entrepreneurial leaders share is a contagious passion for solving problems. Leveraging their passion, they inspire and engage others in their organization, but also in their community, to pursue innovative food access solutions (Cardon, 2008). Bob Bell and John Thielen, the founders of Denver-based *Food For Thought*, provide Denver schoolchildren with PowerSacks on Friday afternoons containing enough food for two weekend meals (Food for Thought Denver, 2018). Bell and Thielen leveraged their passion, commitment, and community

relationships to grow their volunteer-run organization from serving 600 families for 10 weeks at inception five years ago, to serving more than 2,000 families every week in 2016. Social entrepreneurial leaders often possess the ability to inspire creativity, dedication, and leadership in those around them. Persistence and tenacity are also essential qualities required of entrepreneurial leaders, given that securing food access requires continuous long-term effort. Social entrepreneurs recognize that there are external political and legal realities beyond their control; however, they devise methods to advance food access despite these limitations (Elkington & Hartigan, 2008). Furthermore, passionate, dedicated social entrepreneurs inspire the creation of social entrepreneurial hubs, collectives of such organizations within a community. Minniti and Bygrave (1999, p. 43) find “three simultaneous elements” that influence the prevalence of social entrepreneurship within a community: (1) individual motivations or drive to meet a need or solve a problem, (2) community-specific institutional and economic circumstances, and (3) existing levels of entrepreneurship within the community that inspire other individuals. When social entrepreneurship is thriving within a community, it creates a visible path for other social entrepreneurs to follow (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006).

Leaders of successful local, community-based SEOs also possess marketing and business knowledge and skills. Bloom and Smith (2010) identify key factors that enhance the impact of SEOs including: staffing, communicating, lobbying, earnings generation, replicating and stimulating market forces. While some of the drivers of high impact SEOs are not likely to surprise organizations working to secure food access (e.g. staffing, communicating, lobbying, and replicating successes) others may be less familiar or even counter-intuitive (e.g., earnings generation, stimulating market forces.) For example,

although SEOs understand that they need to generate financial resources to deliver their mission, generating revenue that exceeds expenses (Bloom & Chatterji, 2009) may facilitate development of new and more innovative solutions. Minimizing expenses while also incentivizing communities to provide sustained support for their efforts to secure food access may be essential to building social entrepreneurship organizations that last. Furthermore, creating incentives to encourage partnerships that simultaneously advance both private interests and the public good (Bloom & Chatterji, 2009) may activate a wider set of stakeholders with a vested interest in increasing affordable food access within their community.

## **5. Discussion**

Our research focuses on innovative local food distribution channel solutions that provide affordable access to healthy foods. We investigate Social Entrepreneurial Organizations (SEOs) that have established food distribution channel bright spots by creating a local infrastructure for the distribution of affordable, healthy foods to people in underserved communities. We adopt a relational engagement approach (Ozanne et al., 2017), working collaboratively with local SEOs that have developed community-based solutions to improve affordable fresh food access. Through our investigation of the dimensionality of successful local social entrepreneurship, its common challenges, and critical factors for success—together with academic research in marketing—we develop an integrative framework detailing the key marketing practices of organizations innovating local, community-based food access solutions, and call for more academic research on food access with conceptual and societal benefit.

### *5.1 Creating an Infrastructure for Food Access: Scale Deep*

Scholars (Martin & Osberg, 2007, p. 34) suggest that SEOs should deliver value in the form of “large-scale, transformational benefits to a significant segment of society or to a society at large.” Research offers insight into how social entrepreneurs can more effectively scale their operations (Bloom & Smith, 2010). This research implies that local, community-based SEOs are vulnerable and deliver limited impact, as their value and scope remain confined to local communities. However, in innovating solutions to secure food access, scale on its own may not be the answer. Immediate responsiveness and knowledge of the local community are vital to reaching people experiencing or at risk of hunger and securing affordable, healthy food access. Scaling involves identifying the best method for increasing the impact of social entrepreneurship, with most social entrepreneurs seeking to *scale up* or expand their operations as rapidly as possible to new communities (Bloom, 2009). Instead, for the reasons outlined in our framework, we advise SEOs working on food access to *scale deep*, or in other words, to achieve greater impact by embedding deeply with a community to secure food access for people living in a specific community. The investigation of ways social entrepreneurship can help local, disadvantaged communities meet the needs of people with low levels of purchasing power remains a neglected area of scholarship (Birkhölzer, 2009). More research investigating local, community-based social entrepreneurial enterprises that are *scaling deep* is needed.

### *5.2 Creating an Infrastructure for Food Access: Knowledge Transfer*

SEOs and the people who lead, manage, and volunteer for them are repositories of knowledge and expertise about clients, partners, community needs, and successful practices. Processes and systems are needed to help organizations capture, store, and

share this knowledge and experience internally. For example, a food pantry may track client count and food distribution to identify ways to improve operations (i.e., *Tuesday is our busiest day, we need more fresh food and more volunteers on that day*). Knowledge transfer is a strategic marketing practice (Argot & Ingram, 2000) in that organizations better at transferring and sharing knowledge are more successful. Within an organization, transferring knowledge and expertise from one person to another or one group to another is critical because the organization is dependent on its employees and volunteers to codify new information, share that information with others, and use that information strategically and operationally to advance the organization's mission.

Local SEOs securing food access should implement both formal as well as informal methods to transfer information and knowledge within an organization (Becerra, Lunnan, & Huemer, 2008). In addition, because the services offered by SEOs focused on food access and organizations addressing other issues such as housing, education, and joblessness are often complimentary, with a common client base, coordination and collaboration among service providers may help ensure that the holistic well-being of clients is addressed. A community that acts cooperatively in the pursuit of the common good creates a synergistic network of local solutions to protect not only individuals but also the community as a whole (Peredo & Chrisman, 2006). Furthermore, a community may be better served if SEOs, their partners, and other organizations in the community share information and act as a knowledge network (Martin-Rios, 2014). For such knowledge networks to be successful, collaborations, trust, communication, and coordination must be established and maintained (Chen, Hsiao, & Chu, 2014). The knowledge accumulated by a network may be greater than the sum of its parts, resulting

in inter-organizational learning that “ripple[s] out to unanticipated stakeholders in unexpected ways,” directly and indirectly benefiting partners within the network, clients, and the community more broadly (Rossi, Rosli, & Yip, 2017, p. 7). More research is needed on how local, community-based SEOs dedicated to securing food access can formally collaborate and share their knowledge through networks and partnerships to create an infrastructure designed for distributing affordable fresh food within a community.

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Insert Table 4 about here  
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### *5.3 Creating an Infrastructure for Food Access: Future Research*

Throughout this paper we highlight areas where more research is needed to advance local, community-based social entrepreneurship securing food access. Table 4 highlights other research questions within each dimension of our organizing framework; systematic research answering these questions would advance the collective effort of researchers and SEOs to increase food access. Within underserved communities, the ability to navigate the system is critical to accessing food benefits, healthcare, childcare, education, affordable housing, job training, and other essential support services needed not only to maintain life but also to transition an individual or family from support to stability. While some may argue public services perform this critical role of helping people navigate a bureaucratic system, it is a system in crisis with far fewer resources available than needed to meet the demand. In response, several of the local SEOs we collaborated with have developed local public-private partnerships. More research is needed to understand how to initiate and design such partnerships to ensure success in

securing food access. Finally, how should local, community-based SEOs measure success in securing food access? To measure progress, both individual and community-based quantitative and qualitative measures that reflect local outcomes should be used. However, more research is needed to guide local SEOs as they set goals, manage programs, and measure outcomes to assess their efforts.

Community-based SEOs are creating local food distribution infrastructure that provides sustainable access to healthy and affordable food. Our paper develops an integrative framework focused on identifying practices that enhance the success of local SEOs working to secure food access. By empowering innovative, local solutions within our communities, we can collectively make progress toward affordable, healthy food access for all.

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Table 1: *Relational Engagement Partners: Social Entrepreneurial Organizations (SEOs) Innovating to Secure Food Access*

<i>Organization Contact, Title</i>	<b>Key Point of Innovation</b>	<b>Website Link</b>
<b>Hunger Free Colorado</b> Ellie Agar, <i>Communications Specialist</i>	Medical community partnerships along with poverty alleviation agency relationships. Leading community and agency collaboration and engagement to action.	<a href="https://www.hungerfreecolorado.org">https://www.hungerfreecolorado.org</a>
<b>FirstBite Community Food Project UK</b> Debbie Lockett, <i>Co-founder</i>	Focus on intergenerational and social relationships as an important part of sharing a meal. Also targets unique needs of children, parents, young adults, senior citizens.	<a href="https://www.volunteerwessex.org/news/first-bite-community-food-project">https://www.volunteerwessex.org/news/first-bite-community-food-project</a>
<b>We Don't Waste</b> Arlan Preblud, <i>CEO &amp; Founder</i>	Leader in reclaiming and redistributing prepared food; focus on venues, catering, and distribution partnerships. Augment efforts of community agencies and NPOs.	<a href="https://www.wedontwaste.org/">https://www.wedontwaste.org/</a>
<b>Hunger Task Force</b> Jonathan Hansen, <i>Development Director</i>	First in the nation to develop a MyPlate Food Pantry that guides food donations and distribution efforts to ensure supply of nutritious foods to local food pantries.	<a href="https://www.hungertaskforce.org">https://www.hungertaskforce.org</a>
<b>Food Equality Initiative</b> Emily Brown, <i>Founder</i>	Foodbank focused on the unique needs of families with food allergies. Working to share the pantry-within-a-pantry model to help other communities meet the needs of those struggling with food poverty and food allergies.	<a href="http://foodequalityinitiative.org">http://foodequalityinitiative.org</a>
<b>Food For Thought</b> Bob Bell, <i>CEO</i>	Minimize the social visibility of food distribution to children and youth. Elementary schools with high free/reduced lunch ratio distribute receive food packs. New “discrete pantry” model at the high school level.	<a href="http://foodforthoughtdenver.org">http://foodforthoughtdenver.org</a>

<b>The Nashville Food Project</b> Tallu Quinn, <i>Executive Director</i>	Developed micro-entrepreneurship model with refugee groups and neighborhood gardens. Emphasis on the cycle of growing, cooking, and sharing.	<a href="https://www.thenashvillefoodproject.org">https://www.thenashvillefoodproject.org</a>
<b>Food4Hull</b> Hilary Hamer, <i>Founder</i>	Sustainable food city focus, leading community collaborations as a resource hub for organizations that grow, cook, and supply local food.	<a href="http://food4hull.co.uk">http://food4hull.co.uk</a>
<b>Growing Oshkosh</b> Dani Stolley, <i>Founder &amp; Executive Director</i>	Focus on food and environmental stewardship. Empowers each school to develop a unique vision for their school garden, education beyond food and cooking including, science, creative writing, and industrial arts.	<a href="https://www.growingoshkosh.org">https://www.growingoshkosh.org</a>
<b>Capuchin Soup Kitchen</b> Br. Bob Malloy, <i>Pastoral Director</i> Allison Costello, <i>Head Chef</i>	Food access, rehabilitation plus efforts to nurture the spirit. Key audiences include those struggling with addiction or previously incarcerated. Teach life and job skills while providing food access to community.	<a href="http://www.cskdetroit.org">http://www.cskdetroit.org</a>
<b>Forgotten Harvest</b> Mike Spicer, <i>VP Operations</i>	Established itself as a logistics organization, matching available food to local needs. Coordinate food rescue teams to reclaim and redistribute prepared food.	<a href="http://www.forgottenharvest.org">http://www.forgottenharvest.org</a>

Table 2: *How Local Bright Spot Social Entrepreneurial Organizations Secure Food Access*

<i>Organization</i>	<b>Customize to the local community</b>	<b>Build local relationships</b>	<b>Adopt a client-centric focus</b>	<b>Address holistic well-being</b>	<b>Promote inspirational and expert leadership</b>
Hunger Free Colorado	Bilingual, culturally-based programming	Medical, public agency collaboration, local need identification	Clear barriers, create ready path to food access	Holistic needs: food, health, education, transportation	Develop communal knowledge from agency collaborations
FirstBite Community Food Project UK	Social programs plus healthy meals for Seniors	Connect gov't programs with local distribution partners	Family centric, nutrition/budget education	Food and health plus social isolation	Activate wider set of community stakeholders
We Don't Waste	Perishable prepared food distribution network	Connect restaurant/catering with food distribution network	Food with dignity, community empathy	Connect job, housing, food and education needs	<i>Not observed</i>
Hunger Task Force	Vertical channel coordinator	Public/private partnerships, co-creation of solutions	Mobile-market, concierge support to access benefits	Community education to drive healthy food access	Train/equip pantry coordinators, policy advocates
Food Equality Initiative	Reciprocal, converting local pantries	Pantry within pantry, specialty/allergen food producers	Personal story, cater to individual dietary needs	Food for chronic health conditions, meet unique needs	Educate food system partners, share best practices



<i>Organization</i>	<b>Customize to the local community</b>	<b>Build local relationships</b>	<b>Adopt a client-centric focus</b>	<b>Address holistic well-being</b>	<b>Promote inspirational and expert leadership</b>
Food For Thought	All volunteers, local relationships	Match funder to school/agency partner	Reduce stigma, break the cycle of hunger	Food literacy, path to stable food access	Volunteer passion contagious, zero-overhead model
The Nashville Food Project	Local network, seed to plant, food to compost	Community collaboration to grow, prepare, distribute food	Customize meal prep and delivery, emergency response team	Access to healthy, nutritious food as learning necessity	Micro-entrepreneurship, seeds of change
Food4Hull	Promote vibrant, diverse, sustainable local food economy	Grower network, schools, local gov't, community partners	Children's access continuum: home, school, caregivers	Food poverty, health, affordable healthy food access	<i>Not observed</i>
Growing Oshkosh	Civic learning model within schools	Education partners, volunteer networks, community food	Each school partner shapes garden focus	Nutrition, food science, art, mindfulness	Empowered school leaders set vision for gardens
Capuchin Soup Kitchen	Urban focus, Reduce Recidivism	Collaborative housing, job training, food, social services	Develop pro-social skills plus essential life skills	Physical, social, spiritual needs, build community	Train urban farmers, managers, skill transfer
Forgotten Harvest	Mobilize existing food system with logistics	Coordinated management of local food network	Mobile pantries, neighborhood needs targeting	MyPlate ratios, healthy food access	<i>Not observed</i>

Table 3: *Addressing the Challenges of Food Access: A Framework to Empower Local Food Access Infrastructure*

<i>Framework Dimension</i>	<i>Challenges</i>	<i>Solutions</i>
<b>Customize to the local community</b>	Each community's food infrastructure is different but understanding it is essential to designing access solutions	<i>"The issue is like a Rubik's cube; you have to line up the right resources with the right people in need. Hunger needs differ, so you must find the right solution for the right hunger problem (e.g., poverty, lack of access to grocery stores), which requires active participation in the community. Community building leads to greater acceptance and communal knowledge (e.g., neighbors helping one another) and a local infrastructure to tackle food access."</i> (Ellie Agar, Hunger Free Colorado)
	Tackle food deserts, bring affordable access to healthy food customized to the tastes of each neighborhood	<i>"Trust of local customers and word of mouth are essential to get customers to the Mobile Market. Then when you know the customers in each neighborhood, you can customize the variety of healthy foods offered. Each neighborhood is different but learning what items were most popular and increasing stock also increases your relationship with the clients."</i> (Jonathan Hansen, Hunger Task Force)
	Local communities need to take ownership of problems and customize their solutions	<i>"The key to success is getting committed buy-in from supporters who are tied to the local community. For example, the woman in charge of one of our community gardens is from that community. This gives her credibility with the folks she is working with. It is very important to be responsive to the local community. That might not be transferable."</i> (Tallu Quinn, Nashville Food Project)
<b>Build local relationships</b>	Maximize local resources to address hunger and minimize waste	<i>"There is not a food problem in this country, there is a food distribution problem in this country. There is enough food that is wasted in this country to fill the need. There is not a food problem, it is a distribution problem."</i> (Mike Spicer, Forgotten Harvest)
	Hunger is often accompanied by complex chronic health needs	<i>"Success comes from building relationships, networking, and collaborating. We are partnering with housing developments and medical communities. We make our staff and services available in local medical clinics."</i> (Ellie Agar, Hunger Free Colorado)

	Beyond food, nutrition knowledge, cooking skills and equipment are needed to convert food into meals	<i>“Food4Life partnership: We work with 43 schools to teach holistically about food. The curriculum focuses on growing and preparing food as well as nutrition knowledge. It changes the way the whole school community thinks about food.”</i> (Hilary Hamer, Food4Hull)
	Navigating the system is complex, prevents access to benefits and programs	<i>“Asking for help is often hard. When individuals apply to participate in the federal nutrition programs, namely SNAP or FoodShare, it can be overwhelming. The application is long, the paperwork is confusing, and letters regarding the program often present conflicting information. We assist folks with limited English proficiency to get needed translations. State and federal policy changes have immediate impact on how the programs operate. Hunger Task Force helps explain the complex and confusing rules governing our federal nutrition program and assists individuals [to] navigate the process.”</i> (Jonathan Hansen, Hunger Task Force)
<b>Adopt a client-centric focus</b>	Design menus around local foods available and local tastes	<i>“The responsive kitchen modifies its menus and recipes depending on the ingredients available. This model is relatively unique. NFP is trying to build a ‘grow, cook, share ecosystem’ to create an intentional community around local food.”</i> (Tallu Quinn, Nashville Food Project)
	Food poverty cycle passed on from one generation to the next	<i>“Hunger is persistent because of a negative cycle—when you’ve always known food to be only sporadically available, then it isn’t something you strive for as you grow up; knowledge is lacking. Hunger is largely solvable, but the education piece is necessary.”</i> (Bob Bell, Food for Thought)
	Programs need to fit unique needs/interests, co-creation creates ownership of solutions	<i>“We help each school develop a vision for their gardens. Teachers participate from a wide array of disciplines. Shop: design/build structure, Home-education: cooking real food, Science: oxygen cycle, composting, life science, English: butterfly garden, journaling center, PE: mindfulness, energy expenditure.”</i> (Dani Stolley, Growing Oshkosh)
<b>Address holistic well-being</b>	Community stigma and self-stigma create barriers to participate in programs that provide food access	<i>“Each of us, no matter what our stage in life, is only one misstep, only one poor judgment from being in line for food. If you lose your job, get in a car accident, or make a poor choice, you could easily experience hunger. We have an obligation to help out our fellow man who cannot control their unfortunate circumstances.”</i> (Arlan Preblud, We Don’t Waste)

	More than healthy access, how to budget/shop for healthy food and positively shift choices	<i>“Change the relationship young children have with food, encouraging more nutritional consumption and developing lifelong ideas around healthy eating. Change the way individuals shop and store food e.g., read labels, avoid processed food, prevent bulk buying to reduce food waste.”</i> (Debbie Lockett, FirstBite UK)
	Recognize community impact of hunger and long-term community benefits to inclusive solutions	<i>“We focus on how to get guests beyond their immediate needs to focus on the whole person. It might take longer to get a person to a place where they are using their own skills to get what they need and want. Build up people to give them the skills and self-esteem they need to be successful in their lives to be a productive member of society.”</i> (Allison Costello, Capuchin Kitchen)
<b>Promote inspirational and expert leadership</b>	Shift the public point of view and craft policies to address root cause of hunger	<i>“Hunger Task Force believes that every person has a right to adequate food obtained with dignity. We work to prevent hunger and malnutrition by providing food to people in need today and by promoting social policies to achieve a hunger free community tomorrow.”</i> (Jonathan Hansen, Hunger Task Force)
	Tap into embedded knowledge/skills, train more to innovate	<i>“A pilot program includes 10 refugees who were farmers in their home country; they are now growing produce on gifted plots or leased land. We work with them to set goals and sell their produce through supported channels. It’s NFP’s first attempt at micro-entrepreneurship.”</i> (Tallu Quinn, Nashville Food Project)
	Low awareness of the prevalence of specialty food needs in the communities served	<i>“One of the things we are working on is being a leader, there is a need for awareness of [allergen] impact on food needs everywhere across nation. I want to create a network of pantries to work together and establish best practices; create a new niche, a new sector within the emergency food industry.”</i> (Emily Brown, Food Equality Initiative)

**Table 4: Future Research to Empower Local Food Access Infrastructure**

*Research Questions and Issues*

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<b>Customize to the local community</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How does the geographical landscape (urban/suburban/rural, distance from population centers, geographical features, weather and climate factors, etc.) create challenges and opportunities to secure food access on a local level?</li><li>• What is the role of local initiatives in creating community cohesiveness in social change efforts to secure food access and address other poverty-related issues?</li><li>• What are the benefits vs. costs of locally customized solutions compared to external or national organizations that scale up or expand their services to a new community?</li></ul>
<b>Build local relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What are the benefits vs. costs of different relationship and community partnerships structures, depth vs. breadth? For example, are there differential benefits/costs of relationships within the food production and distribution system of a community as compared to relationships across the spectrum of social change organizations working to alleviate poverty in a community?</li><li>• How can local social impact organizations dedicated to securing food access collaborate and share their knowledge through networks and partnerships to create an infrastructure designed to meet food access needs within a community and tackle the root causes of hunger?</li><li>• How can public-private partnerships help engage a broader set of community stakeholders to meet the needs of those living with food poverty in their community?</li></ul>
<b>Adopt a client-centric focus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How can technology be used to help people navigate the system and help community advocates who assist others in navigating federal, state, and local programs providing food access?</li><li>• How can storytelling be better utilized as a tool to increase awareness of the local problem of food access as well as increase empathy and community support?</li><li>• What can we learn from research on trust between individuals but also trust between clients and providers that can strengthen relationships between social entrepreneurs and the clients they serve?</li></ul>
<b>Address holistic well-being</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How can innovative policies shift subsidies to reduce the dependency on energy-dense but often less healthy foods and increase affordable access to fresh, healthy local foods?</li><li>• How can we reduce the societal stigma associated with hunger in communities and also self-stigma by those experiencing hunger, which creates additional barriers to access by reducing utilization of programs designed to make food available?</li></ul>

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- While the physical effects of hunger present an urgent impact on well-being, what role do longer-term emotional and social effects play in breaking the cycle of hunger and poverty that negatively influence well-being? How can we better understand the interplay between the physical, emotional and social effects of hunger on overall well-being?

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**Promote inspirational and expert leadership**

- The fight to secure food access is long; what factors help social entrepreneurs maintain their passion and tenacity over time so they can to inspire and lead others in their community?
  - How do social entrepreneurs balance individual motives and desires to make a social impact in their community? What are the challenges of managing these tensions for leadership? How does that tension impact progress in providing affordable access to healthy food?
  - How do leaders set measureable goals that provide clear direction on which efforts are most effective in making progress toward organizational goals and strategic priorities?
  - What incentives are most effective at encouraging organizations to develop solutions that simultaneously advance both private interests and the public good?
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