

Setting the Table:

Collaborating to Reduce Food Insecurity in Central Iowa

***Central Iowa Food Security Plan
February 2024***



Executive Summary

The Central Iowa Food Security plan is a comprehensive initiative driven by the collective concern of organizations and individuals across the region regarding rising food insecurity and poverty. Emerging prominently during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for a united, collaborative response prompted the creation of this community-wide plan. The aim is to address food insecurity equitably, respectfully, and with dignity.

The plan was facilitated by Jordan Vernoy of See What I Mean (SWIM) Consulting and Scott Raecker of the Robert D. and Billie Ray Center with the funding support of the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines and United Way of Central Iowa.

Data gathered indicates record levels of food insecurity in the Greater Des Moines area, with notable increases in demand for services. In central Iowa (Polk, Dallas, and Warren counties), 6.8% of the population faces food insecurity, while the rates for children in central Iowa is 8.9%. The plan recognizes economic factors as significant contributors to food insecurity, with rising costs affecting stability.

The plan's foundation lies in an inclusive co-creation process led by the Central Iowa Food Security Planning Committee. Through Planning Committee surveys, community conversations, and widespread input collection, the committee made meaning from stakeholder insights. Stakeholder engagement was multi-faceted, involving deep listening and collaborative efforts to understand the root causes of food insecurity.

The plan's strategic framework envisions a strong, collaborative, and connected community committed to addressing the root causes of food insecurity. The plan outlines specific goals, tactics, and measurements to guide actions:

- Offer a Welcoming Experience
- Develop and Implement Policy Solutions
- Tell the Story Through Data
- Build a Collaborative Community

A shared accountability model, emphasizing interdependence, transformative actions, and mutual support is recommended to keep moving this work forward. The model encourages regular convenings, fostering trust and collaboration among diverse stakeholders committed to the plan.

The Planning Committee and partners have committed to the plan, emphasizing that food security is a community-wide responsibility. Shared accountability and individual actions are crucial for achieving meaningful impact. The plan, designed to extend beyond community engagement, encourages organizations, companies, and individuals to actively support its implementation.

By embracing shared accountability and taking intentional, collective actions, central Iowa aims to set an example for other communities in addressing the multifaceted challenge of food insecurity.

Context

The purpose of the plan and the ultimate strategy

Organizations and people across central Iowa have a deep concern about their neighbors facing food insecurity and poverty. As the issues have been brought to the forefront through the rising numbers of people facing food insecurity, it is imperative that the community works in deep collaboration to ensure the needs of all neighbors are met in an equitable, dignified, and respectful manner. That was the impetus of creating a community-wide plan to address food insecurity in central Iowa.

The plan is just the starting line. Having a documented framework will allow organizations from across sectors to find their place in achieving a vision of a strong, collaborative, connected community that listens to our neighbors and takes action to address the root causes of food insecurity. This plan asks for a community-wide commitment to fostering a united and resilient community, harnessing our collective voice and resources to champion policies and initiatives that tackle the underlying issues of food insecurity. We aim to amplify the narratives of individuals facing food insecurity in central Iowa and to create an empowering and equitable experience for our neighbors seeking assistance.

Who was engaged

Gaining commitment to a bold vision and collaborative plan required listening to and involving stakeholders in its co-creation. This process was one deeply rooted in hearing and utilizing stakeholder expertise to drive understanding of the data and insights uncovered. That work was spearheaded by the Central Iowa Food Security Planning Committee, which included the following individuals:

Central Iowa Food Security Planning Committee

Lyn Wilson – Des Moines Public Schools

Matt Unger – DMARC

Michelle Book – Food Bank of Iowa

Jami Haberl – Iowa Healthiest State Initiative

Nalo Johnson – Mid-Iowa Health Foundation

Izaah Knox – Urban Dreams

Patty Sneddon-Kisting – Urbandale Food Pantry and OpportUNITY Food Insecurity Workgroup co-chair

Melissa Stimple – Waukee Area Christian Services

Sue Wilson – WeLIFT, Warren County (formerly of Helping Hand Food Pantry in Indianola)

Shannon Draayer – WesleyLife

Supported by United Way of Central Iowa

Luke Lynch – United Way of Central Iowa

Hannah Nelsen – United Way of Central Iowa

Jessica Nelsen – United Way of Central Iowa and OpportUNITY Food Insecurity Workgroup co-chair

This group was facilitated by consultants Jordan Vernoy, of SWIM Consulting and Scott Raecker, executive director of The Robert D. and Billie Ray Center at Drake University. Funding support was provided by United Way of Central Iowa and the Community Foundation of Greater Des Moines.

Over the course of the planning process timeframe, community stakeholders were engaged in multiple ways. Surveys were conducted with 100 neighbors facing food insecurity at locations in Dallas, Polk, and Warren counties. Three community conversations were conducted with over 30 individuals from different backgrounds attending and sharing insights. Finally, an additional 200 community members provided input on the plan language through a broadly disseminated survey.

The role of the Planning Committee was multi-faceted.

Their role was to:

1

Make Meaning

During engagements, Planning Committee members were asked to listen (literally and figuratively) to the stakeholders. For example, consultants shared artifacts like interviews and survey responses from neighbors, agencies, or food bank/pantry leaders, and with facilitative support, the Planning Committee considered the meaning of what they were learning.

2

Co-Create the Plan

In the second phase, when building the plan, the Planning Committee focused on creating and refining drafts. They assisted in stewarding a second round of feedback from key stakeholders and shared responsibility for developing and sharing a community Plan.

3

Share Discoveries

Finally, Planning Committee members also served as champions for sharing progress and discoveries in plan implementation.

The process used for feedback and collective evolution to the final plan

The process of co-creating the plan with the Planning Committee and community stakeholders unfolded as follows.

1

The consultant compiled a landscape report of data in three categories and presented it to the Planning Committee in the first facilitated retreat.

The categories included:

Neighbor Data: information collected in neighbor surveys about the barriers to access people might currently face.

Community Data: information from publicly-available sources showing the current state of food insecurity in central Iowa.

Network Data: information about the readiness and willingness of local organizations to address common barriers of access for neighbors facing food insecurity.

After reviewing the landscape report, the Planning Committee created headlines from the data. Those headlines fell into two categories:

What is the headline today? What do we want the headline to be in the future?

The Planning Committee created the following headlines for each category:

Neighbors

Today: Not everyone knows where or how to get the right amount of food.

Future: Everyone knows where and how to access services and is able to get the food they want and need.

Community

Today: There are extreme racial disparities across central Iowa when evaluating poverty.

Future: Intentional reduction strategies successfully lift up marginalized populations to reduce food insecurity/poverty in central Iowa.

Network

Today: Central Iowa has a network of connected service organizations ready to serve more neighbors, but they need funding and infrastructure support to do so.

Future: Central Iowa service organizations receive the support they need to reduce food insecurity/poverty through providing food as well as wrap-around services.

2

These headlines were taken to the three community listening sessions.

The community stakeholders in attendance were asked to reflect on the following questions:

The Planning Committee created the following headlines for each category:

Today Headline Questions:

1. What in your own experience supports this headline?
2. What in your own experience is in opposition to this headline?
3. What questions do you have about this headline?

Future Headline Questions

1. What excites you about this headline?
2. What worries you about this headline?
3. What questions do you have about this headline?

Community members in attendance were then asked to reflect on how the government, business, nonprofit community, funder community, and other community stakeholders could support the effort to realize the future headlines. Finally, they were asked what next steps they could take individually or at their own organizations to move toward the future headlines.

The identified themes that were consistent in all sessions included:

**Community
Infrastructure**

**Data Collection
& Analysis**

**Policy &
Advocacy**

**Access &
Experience
for Neighbors**

**Community
Partnerships,
Collaboration,
& Accountability**

3

The Planning Committee reviewed the synthesized information and confirmed the identified themes. They then moved into writing draft goals, tactics, and measurements.

THEME: _____

Draft 1 to 3 possible goal statements

Inclusive, Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Draft up to 5 tactics to achieve the goal statements

Ex. Community funded navigators for connecting neighbors to services

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Draft up to 5 measurements that would point to achieving the goal

Ex. # of new neighbors accessing services (disaggregated by demographics)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

After identifying potential goals, tactics, and measurements for each theme, the Planning Committee further refined their thinking through a process of reviewing each other's work.

Tour of Goals, Tactics, and Metrics

Go to each group's poster and review their Goals, Tactics, and Metrics.



I like this



I have some questions about this



I think we should think twice about this

**Specific
comments
or questions**

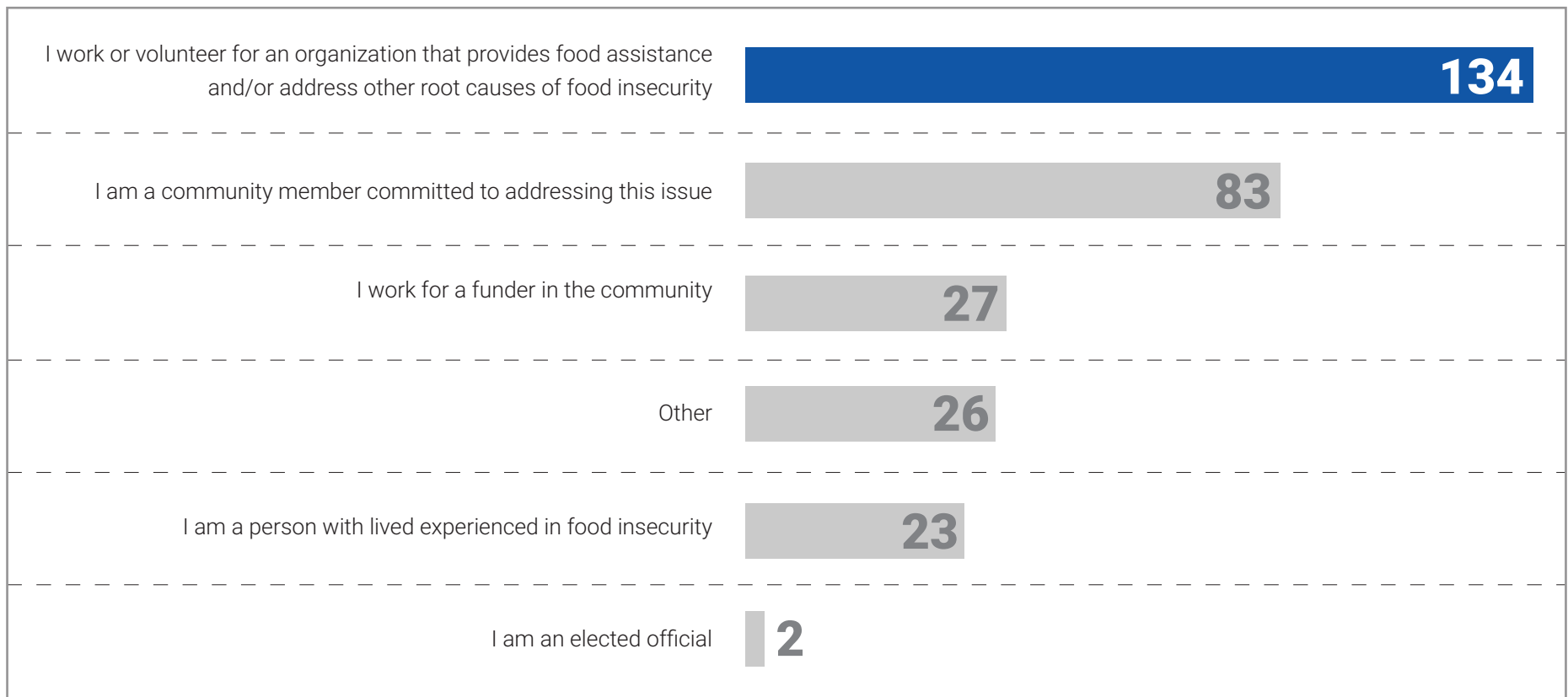
Committee members reviewed each group's work and indicated items they liked, items they had questions about, and items that concerned them. If a Planning Committee member was concerned about a particular item, they included a specific comment or question so that the group could address the concern. This process led to the first draft of the plan, which was further refined through a survey to the Planning Committee.

4

The Planning Committee's draft plan then went back to the community for stakeholder feedback.

A survey was shared broadly, and over 200 community members provided feedback. A snapshot of who engaged with the survey is below:

What is your connection to the community-wide plan?



The survey asked community members to state their approval rating of each section of the plan, and the average approval score across the plan was 92.3 out of 100. Some minor adjustments were made based on consistent feedback, and the final plan as it is seen in this document was approved by the Planning Committee.

Reflections on stakeholder feedback

Overall, feedback throughout the planning process remained consistent with the themes identified. A general concern around the ability of all groups to come together and collaborate was noted prominently in the final survey to the community, while at the same time, there is a lot of energy and hope around the possibilities of having a plan to address food insecurity and its root causes that organizations and stakeholders across the community can support. The plan was designed to not stop at community engagement, but to allow the community to find ways their organizations, companies, and individuals can support the plan and to further identify a shared accountability framework.

Data

Community

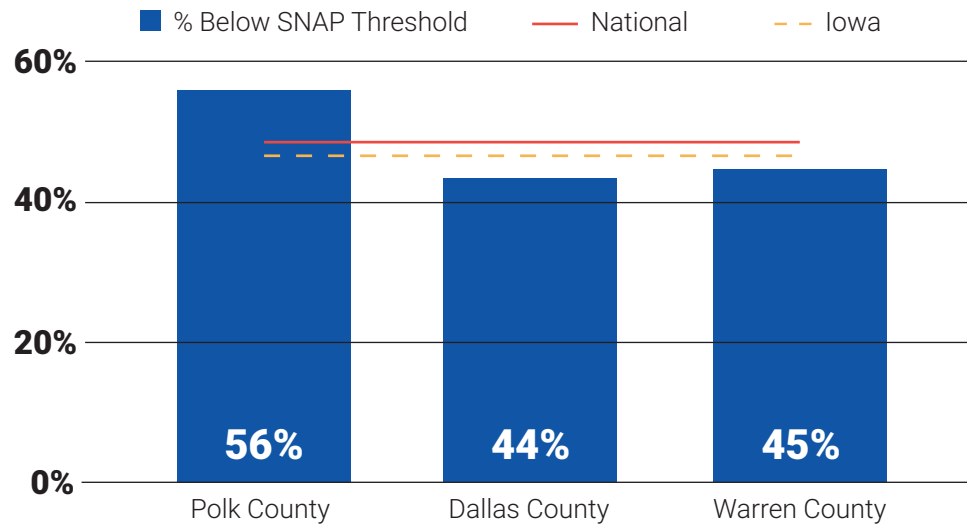
On Sept. 7, 2023 the *Des Moines Register* wrote that the metropolitan area, and the state as a whole, was experiencing record levels of food insecurity. One example of this uptick was that in August 2023 DMARC served almost 24,000 neighbors; over 2,100 of them were first-time visitors. This was the highest number of neighbors served by DMARC since November 2019. There were also more than 27,000 pantry visits during the same time period, which was an 18% increase in the number of pantry visits when accounting for the fact that some neighbors visited pantries multiple times that month. The Food Bank of Iowa also reported increases in the number of neighbors within their service area over the past year. The increases in neighbors seeking food assistance for both DMARC and the Food Bank of Iowa can likely be attributed to rising costs of food and living expenses, which puts a strain on neighbors who otherwise would be financially stable during periods of economic stability.

In Iowa, 7.5% of the population is food insecure compared to 10.4% nationally. For residents of Dallas, Polk, and Warren counties in central Iowa, food insecurity rates are 6.8% overall, including 8.9% food insecurity among children under age 18 (FANO 2021). According to the American Community Survey (2022), just over 196,000 neighbors in Dallas, Polk, and Warren counties lived at or below 250% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). 250% of the FPL is the level at which neighbors are on

the path toward self sufficiency. Over 80% of these central Iowa neighbors live in Polk County. Polk County averages are on par with Iowa averages of 7.5%. However, children in Polk County experience food insecurity at a rate of 10.6%, higher than the state's average of 9.4%.

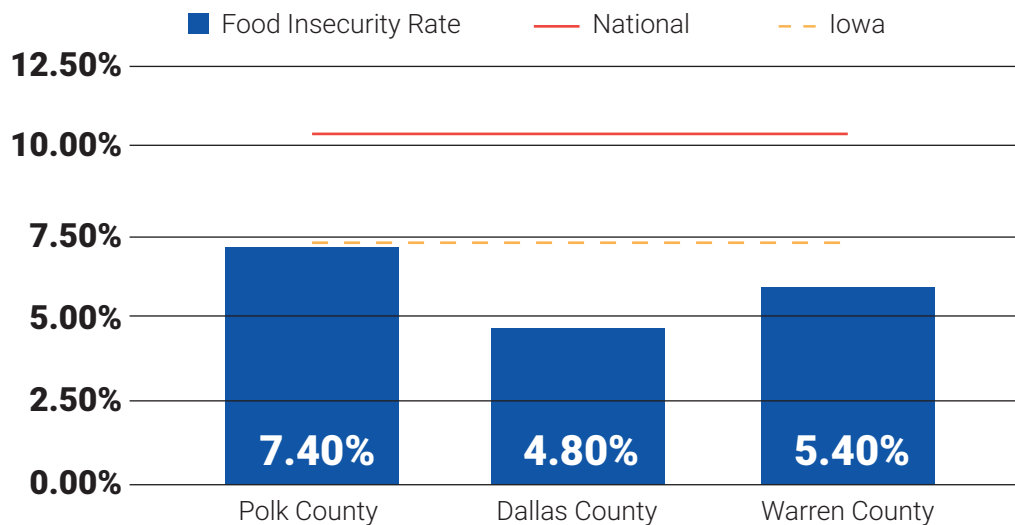
Polk County also has a higher percentage of neighbors who are at the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility threshold of 160% of the federal poverty line. This is most likely due to it being Iowa's most populous and one of its most diverse – racially/ethnically and economically – compared to the rest of the state. Disparities are evident in Polk County; 32.7% of neighbors identifying as Black, 18% identifying as Native American, and 15.6% identifying as Latino/a/e experience extreme poverty, while 7.6% of white neighbors experience the same level of poverty. According to the Iowa Hunger Coalition, in September 2023 over 49,000 neighbors in Polk County received SNAP benefits, which translates to \$1.86 average meal benefit per person or a \$341.99 average monthly household benefit. This monthly investment of \$8,248,561 in SNAP benefits produces a \$12,702,784 economic multiplier effect in the county. An estimated additional \$25 million is needed to meet the food needs of neighbors.

Percent of food insecure neighbors below SNAP Threshold of 160% of poverty



Food Insecurity Rate 2021

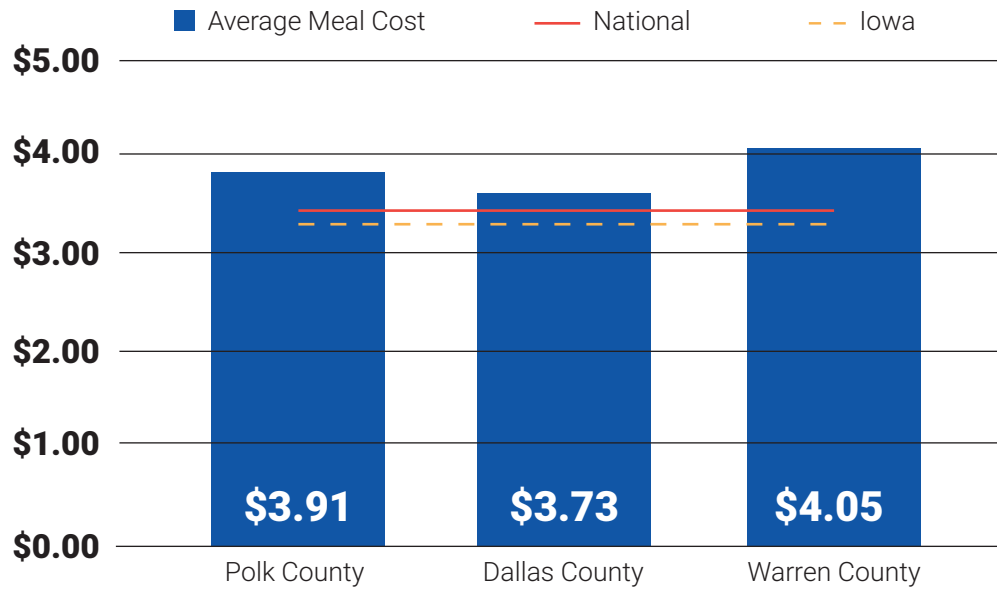
(source: Feeding America National Office (FANO) & Iowa Hunger Coalition)



Although there are several factors that lead to food insecurity and the need for food assistance services, the economy and rising costs of food are a significant factor in the growing numbers. In 2021 the average cost of a meal in Dallas, Polk, and Warren counties were higher than state and national averages (FANO). The higher meal costs in Warren County are likely due to it being more rural, therefore more costly to transport and stock food supplies compared to urban Polk and suburban Dallas counties.

2021 Average Meal Cost

(source: FANO Map the Meal Gap)



Central Iowa neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity have a range of assistance options, in part, due to the availability of food resources provided by Des Moines Area Religious Council (DMARC) and the Food Bank of Iowa. In 2022, DMARC and the Food Bank of Iowa networks served central Iowa neighbors through over 800,000 visits. This translated into more than 5.3 million pounds of charitable food assistance worth more than \$7.6 million dollars. In 2022, DMARC and the Food Bank of Iowa combined to distribute food at 173 sites for a total of 9,047,932 lbs. of food worth \$11,484,361.91. DMARC served 16 sites – not including mobile pantries or school services – that distributed a total of 2,760,801 lbs. of food at \$2,566,705.64 cost/value. The average food distribution per DMARC site was 172,550 lbs. of food at \$160,419.10 cost/value. The Food Bank of Iowa distributed food at 157 central Iowa sites for a total of 6,287,131 lbs. of food at \$8,917,656.27 cost/value. The average food distribution at Food Bank of Iowa sites, some of which overlap with DMARC, resulted in 40,045 lbs. of food at \$56,800.36 cost/value. Additionally, 34 central Iowa community gardens donated 31,284 lbs. of fruits and vegetables for charitable food assistance.

Neighbors

The results of a survey of 100 neighbors facing food insecurity in Dallas, Polk, and Warren counties provided insight into opportunities to improve the network of services provided in central Iowa.

Although 69% of individuals hear about resources through word of mouth, only 36% prefer that method of receiving information. This might be a factor causing 72% of neighbors facing food insecurity only knowing of one or two places where they can access food. Across the country, food banks and community organizations are working to shift marketing and communication dollars to direct outreach to the people they want to serve, but often miss. The northern Illinois food banks have paid ads on bus lines that drive past or near food access points with schedules of when those organizations are open. They have also added social media content dedicated to sharing similar information, and websites are shifting from being donor-centric to neighbor-centric.

62% of neighbors said it is challenging to find a site open when needed. This a consistent challenge in many communities, and action is being taken through supporting local organizations with the resources they need to be open more hours, as well as on nights and weekends. As you will see in the data following, some organizations in central Iowa are interested in being open more hours, but will need more resources like food, volunteers, and staff to implement that shift in hours.

57% of neighbors struggle with transportation to access food. In communities across the country, food security organizations are partnering with food delivery services like DoorDash or Instacart to get food to people struggling with transportation issues. In Virginia, there was a successful advocacy effort to get more bus routes with stops at food access points.

The data shows not only challenges, but also opportunities, that the implementation of this plan can address.

Central Iowa Neighbor Engagement Insights



of neighbors learn about services by **word of mouth**, informally neighbor to neighbor.

62%

of neighbors said it is **challenging** to find an open site when needed.



72%

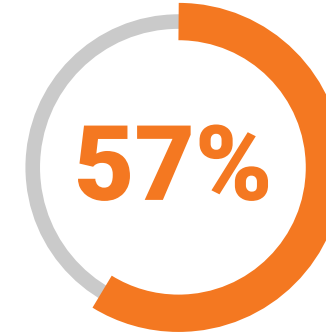
of neighbors surveyed know of **only one or two** places for free groceries.

36%

of neighbors want to learn about free groceries by **word of mouth**.

34%

of neighbors surveyed receive the **variety/type** of food they want **always or often**.



of guests surveyed **struggle with transportation** for free meals/groceries **sometimes, often, or** every time they access services.

Other ways neighbors want to learn about free grocery opportunities:

- Referrals from other organization
- Fliers and posters
- Social media

36%

of neighbors report their health as fair or poor in general.



68%

of neighbors surveyed said the **amount** of food they receive is **just right**.

32%

of neighbors surveyed rely on transportation **not owned by their household**.

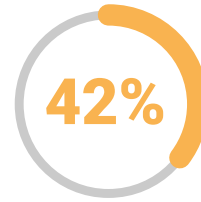


Network

The consultant's Network Assessment measures community organizations' willingness to grow an adoption/interest in implementation of neighbor-centered practices in relationship to their free food initiatives. "Neighbor-centered practices" is See What I Mean's term to describe methods that organizations can use to match service design with the needs and desires of neighbors. In other words, organizations seek equity by focusing on removing barriers facing specific neighbors. Follow-up questions within the Network Assessment bring clarity to the support and resources needed for organizations to implement equity-centered practices.

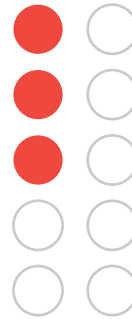
The Network Assessment has been used across the country with ending hunger networks to create operational plans that often focus on reaching people who are often missed in minoritized populations and communities. The Planning Committee used SWIM's Network Assessment to understand the momentum of the network, the assets within the network, and finally, the resources needed so that together we can help more neighbors in central Iowa. In tandem with the community research, the following network assessment insights were brought to the community and advisory group to inform the final plan.

Through the network assessment, the Planning Committee heard from over 40 organizations in central Iowa. At right is a snapshot of insights regarding these partners:



A snapshot of our network

of organizations describe food relating to their mission as the following:
We provide food to hungry people because we work with the people who are struggling on many issues including food insecurity.



31% of organization are volunteer led.

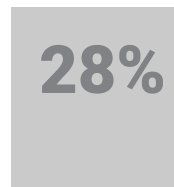
24 agencies

do not or are unsure if they have an emergency plan for a natural disaster or emergency event.

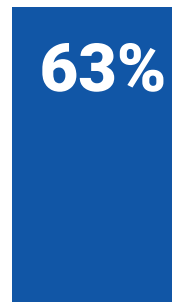
41% of organizations have budgets less than \$50,000 for their food/meal program each year



How ready is your organization to serve more neighbors?



High ready. We can serve more neighbors now.



Ready, but we would need some support.



Not ready now, but interested in the future.

The Network Assessment provided insights to the following questions:

Is the network of community partners in central Iowa ready to grow in order to support the plan?

The network of community partners in central Iowa is ready to grow.

Our network is ready to grow. When asked how ready organizations are to serve more neighbors, over 90% of the network said they are ready to serve more neighbors, with the majority needing additional supports.

Where is the network in central Iowa's momentum for change?

The network is focused on providing nutritious foods and continuing to learn from neighbors. We have an opportunity to support partners in offering variety, choice, and multiple visits.

Several factors influence how and where network energy flows. Network capacity and external forces tug and pull members back or propel the network forward. Understanding where the momentum is in the network helps create moments of lasting impact and makes it easier to guide the network toward a shared vision.

Guiding network adoption requires a strategic approach to timing. The image following illustrates See What I Mean's Wave of Adoption. We used this image to better understand the role they can each have in supporting the community partners' momentum.

Through the Network Assessment, the Planning Committee identified neighbor-centered practices at the right moment within the network to support adoption. They also identified next steps food banks/pantries may take, highlighting when it may be necessary to lead, to follow, to push, or to nudge the network forward when adopting neighbor-centered practices.

The adoption journey for a new practice

Also known as “the wave of adoption.”

Not yet.

Agencies have not discovered this topic, or they might think it doesn't apply to them, or they're focused on other things.

Ready to act.

Inspiration often leads to a desire to act, to DO something. But what? Agencies are seeking concrete ways to take action.

Meaningful change.
“My Board doesn't get it.”
“We can't pay for THAT!”
“We listened to our community. Now what?”

Culture, systems, mindsets, and policies sometimes create an undertow when our early actions don't create the real change we seek. Agencies may be feeling inertia, disappointment and even fear, putting adoption at risk.

Bigger than me.

Agencies can see the power of these shifts in their own organizations. They want to see change beyond their organizations.

Below is an image identifying the network's momentum of adopting neighbor-centered practices:

Where is the network's energy?

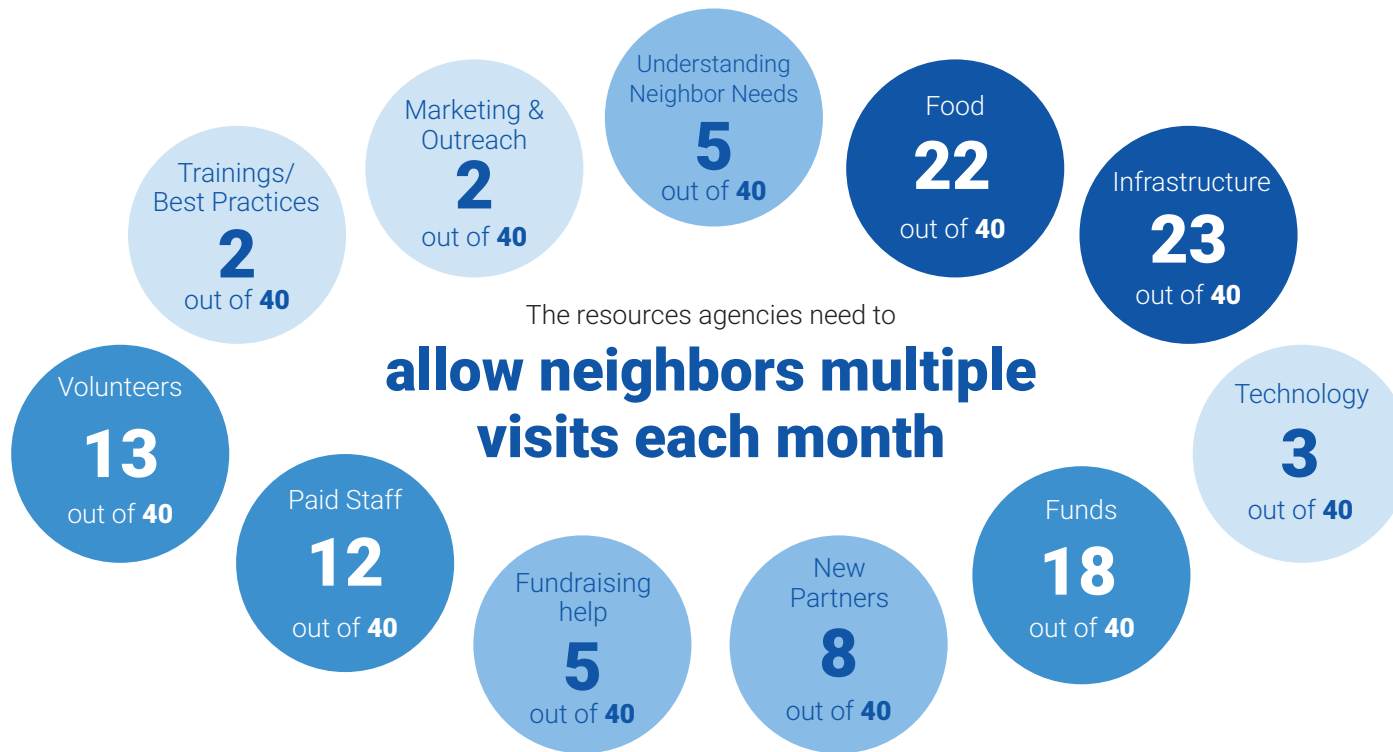


How can we support the momentum of the network of community partners in central Iowa?

By understanding the resources partners say they need to succeed and creating (and maintaining) opportunities to stay connected.

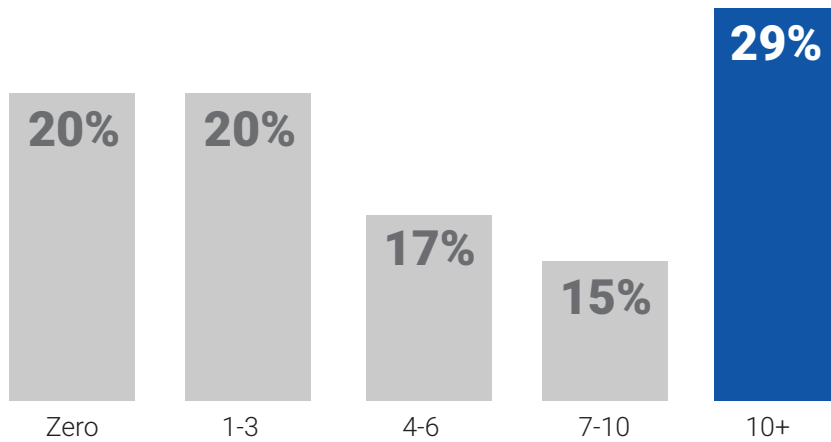
The network is already inspired. They are ready to act today, but they need support and resources to implement the neighbor-centered practices they are interested in. The Network Assessment provided insights to what these resources are. This information was used in our community engagements and planning process to understand how we can best support this work.

The numbers below reflect the number of organizations, **out of 40 respondents**, that identified each specific resource need.



Agencies are well connected!

Besides food bank pantries, how many other social service organizations do you know well enough to call and ask for advice?

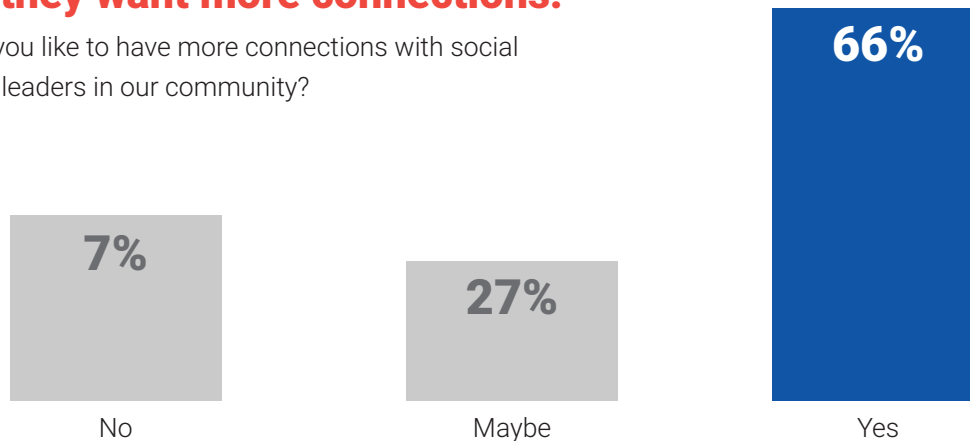


29% of the network know 10+ other social service organizations

The network is already well-connected. In networks, collaboration helps the gears of change to keep moving. Community partners in central Iowa want to continue to build connections as they engage in work to end hunger. Partners agree that collaboration is imperative for success and strengthening the collective ecosystem will propel the community toward sustainable system change.

And they want more connections!

Would you like to have more connections with social service leaders in our community?



Through the Network Assessment, community partners said they:

- 1 Are ready to grow.
- 2 Are already implementing neighbor-centered practices and are planning to do more.
- 3 Need resources and support in order to succeed in adopting neighbor-centered practices.
- 4 Want opportunities to be and stay connected.

The Planning Committee also reviewed the data by organizations serving a high percentage (~50%+) of minoritized populations to better understand disparities among resources and access. Following is a snapshot of these insights. Common to work across the country, populations that are disproportionately impacted are served by organizations that lack resources. However, they are still ready and willing to serve more neighbors if they have extra support from their community.

Profiles of agencies serving a high percentage (-50+) of minoritized populations

Asian

3/43

33% (1/3) with budgets \$50k+

0% (0/3) are volunteer run organizations.

~29 average hours open per month

100% (3/3) are highly enthusiastic and ready to serve more neighbors

Black/African Americans

13/43

13% (1/8) with budgets \$50k+

13% (1/8) are volunteer run organizations.

~72 average hours open per month

82% (9/11) are ready to serve more neighbors now, but may need some extra support.

Hispanic/Latinx

11/43

22% (2/9) with budgets \$50k+

22% (2/9) are volunteer run organizations.

~58 average hours open per month

73% (8/11) are ready to serve more neighbors now, but may need some extra support.

Middle Eastern/North African

3/43

0% (0/3) with budgets \$50k+

0% (0/2) are volunteer run organizations.

~7 average hours open per month

100% (2/2) are highly enthusiastic and ready to serve more neighbors

Strategic Framework

The results of the Planning Committee's work and all of the input from the central Iowa community is the following strategic framework that allows nonprofits, corporations, funders, elected officials, and other community leaders and stakeholders to engage to address food insecurity in central Iowa. That framework is as follows.

Shared Strategic Vision: A strong, collaborative, connected community that listens to our neighbors and takes action to address the root causes of food insecurity.

Community-Wide Commitment: We are committed to fostering a united and resilient community, harnessing our collective voice and resources to champion policies and initiatives that tackle the underlying issues of food insecurity. We aim to amplify the narratives of individuals facing food insecurity in central Iowa and to create an empowering and equitable experience for our neighbors seeking assistance.

Relevant Measurements of Success:

- Reduction in households living below 250% of the federal poverty level
- Reduction in food-insecure neighbors

Goal #1

Offer a welcoming and dignified experience for neighbors in need of food and services through an accessible and connected network of providers in central Iowa.

Tactics

Gain a commitment from community organizations to listen and meaningfully engage with neighbors when shaping decisions that affect the way they access services.

Improve and invest in making service navigation easier for neighbors, particularly for minoritized, immigrant, or refugee communities.

Collaborate and communicate across the community to make services more well-known to neighbors.

Relevant Measurements of Success

- Number of neighbors accessing food assistance for the first time (by demographic breakdown)
- Number of neighbors accessing food assistance (by demographic breakdown)
- Overall participation demographics match the demographics of the food insecure population
- Number of positions in the community designed to support navigation of services
- Referrals between organizations
- Net promoter score of pantry participants
- Number of transportation supports given (bus tickets, uber, gas cards)
- Amount of new funding resources provided to organizations working to implement this plan

Goal #2

Develop, advocate, and implement policy solutions that are informed by data and voices of people with lived experience to improve the quality of life for neighbors facing food insecurity.

Tactics

Advocate for policies at all levels (neighborhood, city, county, state, federal) that address the root causes of food insecurity.

Take a multi-faceted approach to sharing the story of food insecurity and poverty in central Iowa.

Foster partnerships to inform policy solutions that are neighbor-informed and outcome-driven.

Relevant Measurements of Success

- Number of policy changes driven by collective work
- Number of media impressions that positively promote efforts to address food insecurity at its root causes
- Number of pilot projects implemented to inform policy solutions using public/private partnerships

Goal #3

Tell the story of food insecurity in central Iowa through an intentional, collaborative, and equitable data collection process to better inform service design and decision making.

Tactics

Understand community context by developing a shared data collection plan that is accessible and approachable to all community organizations and individuals.

Consistently listen to and learn from neighbors to direct our collective efforts.

Measure and report progress toward shared success metrics with all stakeholders.

Relevant Measurements of Success

- Development of a baseline data collection plan and support for food insecurity network organizations across central Iowa to implement
- Number of organizations collecting the same data types
- Number of organizations using feedback loops with neighbors to inform service design and delivery

Goal #4

Grow stronger together by honoring our neighbors' lived experience and building a collaborative and connected community.

Tactics

All partners are committed to sharing accountability and supporting the network in addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

Network members will work together to develop meaningful partnerships that remove barriers and improve access for neighbors.

Amplify the voices of our neighbors and share our collective efforts as a unified message that addresses the root causes of poverty and inspires action toward food security in central Iowa.

Relevant Measurements of Success

- Number of organizations/stakeholders (by type) that are consistently involved in carrying out the Central Iowa Food Security Plan
- Number of organizations offering new services at their locations through partnerships with other organizations
- Number of organizations offering food (outside of traditional pantries/banks)
- Number of organizations/stakeholders (by type) that share messages (by media platform) with information about food insecurity and in support of the Central Iowa Food Security Plan

Next Steps

*The Planning Committee members have each made an organizational commitment to this plan, and the hope is that everyone viewing this plan will make similar commitments. It is important that addressing food security is not seen as the responsibility of any one organization or any one sector; **it is a community challenge that needs to be addressed by the entire community through collective action.***

Shared Accountability

In carrying out plans that cut across organizations like this one, the consultant suggests a model of implementation called shared accountability. Accountability is a cycle of shared information, trust, and co-creation of ideas and strategies. When we say we are accountable we mean that we “owe” somebody else results, actions, insight, or knowledge. But we also realize that this “owing” is a back-and-forth, interdependent action. It is lively, not static. It is transformative, not transactional. It is mutual and the glue that holds us together. Shared accountability is the hallmark of a collective impact framework.

Shared accountability plays out differently in networks with hubs or organizations with complex department structures. In coalitions, like the one carrying out this work, committed members help each other to advance shared interests. Because members are approaching the mission with such different models and a comparatively wide range of resources, players can struggle to establish common ground.

How shared accountability might play out: Many coalitions fall into the trap of report-out meetings that fail to bring people together around a shared vision and move towards collective action. Shared accountability offers the opportunity to connect people who are accountable to a shared goal.

Example: Disparate groups with a shared vision for their community unite to make progress. By embracing shared accountability, convenings become a place where leaders not only share what their organizations are doing to advance collective progress but to support each other and track successes and gaps.

Practicing shared accountability provides a platform for influencing one another and working toward more dynamic solutions. At the end of the day, social impact networks are expected to actually make an impact. Shared accountability can get you there. Shared accountability, a framework fueled by change and used to advance change, helps the network stay focused on the vision while remaining flexible in the approach. To make change happen, we must come together with intention. We must put inclusive, equitable partnerships into practice. Many network leaders are tasked with designing cohorts, learning communities, work groups, innovation teams, steering committees, advisory groups—you name it—to foster some kind of collective growth or achieve a shared goal. Sustaining these initiatives is another story.

Convenings

The Central Iowa Food Security Plan has identified a change approach and established specific goals.

Partners have committed to clearly defined roles. The gears for network accountability and collective impact are in place. As community leaders, your job is to design meaningful convenings that do more than keep the mission afloat. Convenings at regular intervals help generate milestone moments and establish a rhythm and pace for the work. They must build trust as the foundation for collaboration.

Every meeting has the potential to move the network closer to shared goals and deepen relationships in some meaningful way. If we invest some energy before meetings in preparing an agenda that can satisfy both the organizational and relational purposes of coming together, we're building trust as we advance the work.

Example:

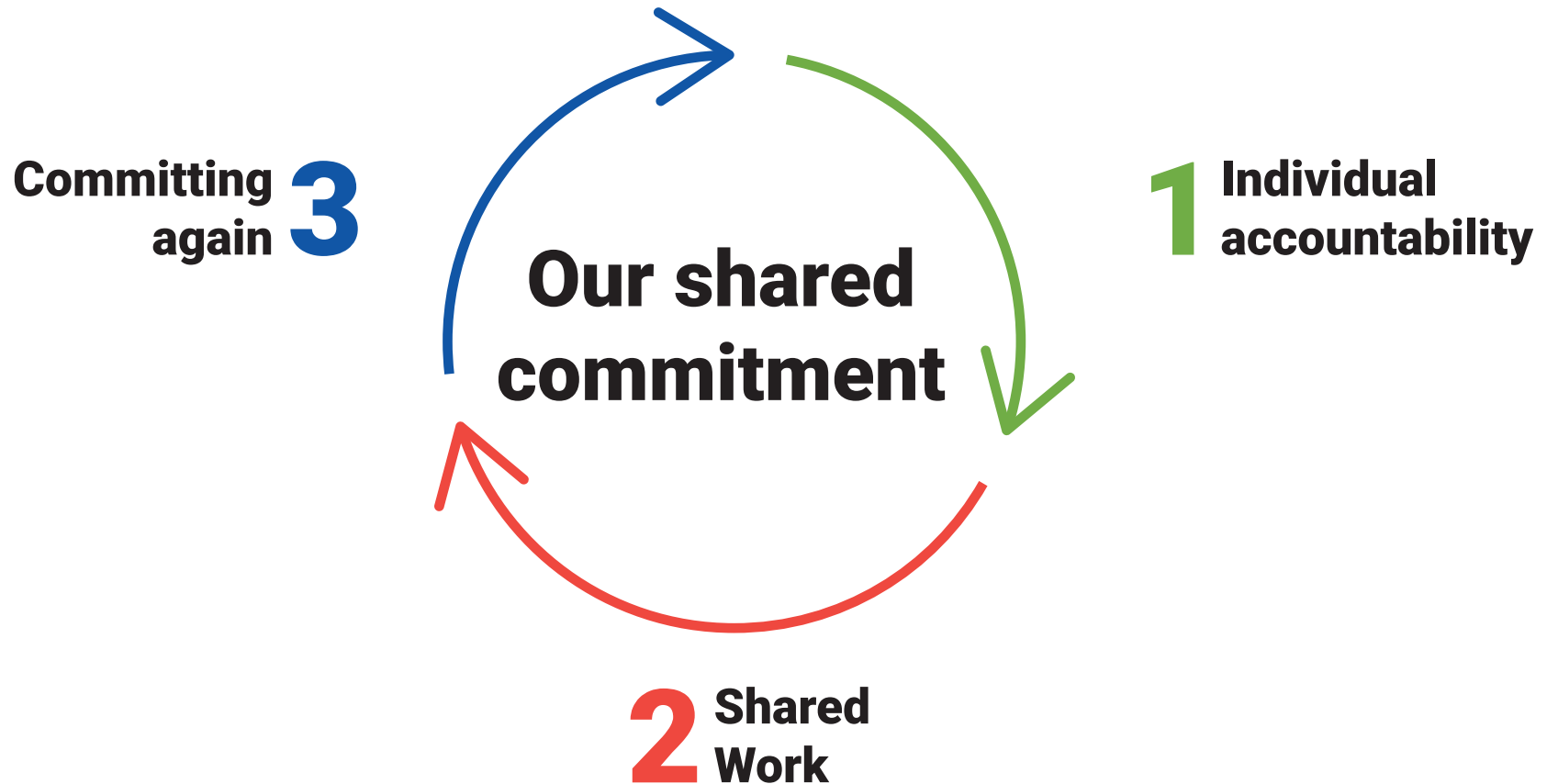
The Shared Accountability Agenda breaks down silos and creates traction around goals. It has five parts:

- Launch Agenda (10% of meeting time)
- Individual Accountability (45% of meeting time)
- Shared Work (40% of meeting time)
 - Featured Initiative
 - Committee Business
- Committing Again (5% of meeting time)

SWIM has implemented this model in networks across the country that seek to prioritize defining moments for connection and action. To keep everything moving forward, consistency is important. This is a similar framework that already exists in the community through OpportUNITY, a collective impact effort to reduce poverty.

Meeting Format

Shared Accountability Agenda

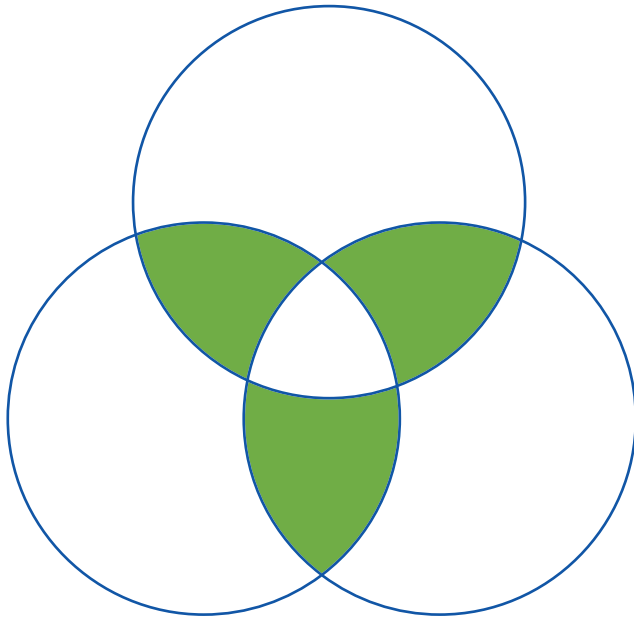


The other key factor in a shared accountability model is that the majority of the work happens at the individual organizations, and by the individual stakeholders, that have committed to the Central Iowa Food Security Plan. It is not about 1-2 shared initiatives, but a model where each member is accountable for creating change in their own sphere of influence in order to add up to something bigger.

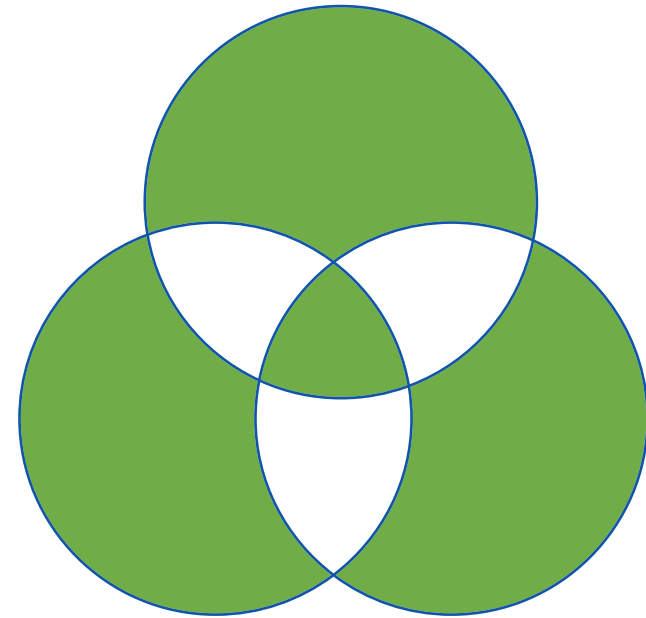
Not a shared project.



Aligning individual efforts.



From 1-2 initiatives shared by many members.



To a model where each member is accountable for creating change in their own sphere of influence in order to add up to something bigger.

The consultant has provided template agendas and tracking tools to the Planning Committee to consider as a tool for future convenings.

This plan was designed to recognize that the entire central Iowa community is accountable for addressing food insecurity that impacts so many of its neighbors. By sharing accountability, and taking individual action to address the immediate needs and root causes, central Iowa can become an example to other communities in addressing this challenging issue.

There is a place for every individual and organization within this plan. The plan will be implemented through the OpportUNITY Food Insecurity Workgroup, which meets on the third Wednesday of each month and includes several members of the Planning Committee.



If you would like to play a part, please scan the QR code or visit:

unitedwaydm.org/opportunity/food-insecurity



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