

Research Brief

# Meeting NYC'S Need

BOLSTERING THE EMERGENCY FOOD NETWORK IN 2017



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Food Bank For New York City thanks its members for the time and effort they devoted to participate in this research.

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## ABOUT FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

Food Bank For New York City has been the city's major hunger-relief organization working to end hunger throughout the five boroughs for more than 30 years. Nearly one in five New Yorkers relies on Food Bank for food and other resources. Food Bank takes a strategic, multifaceted approach that provides meals and builds capacity in the neediest communities, while raising awareness and engagement among all New Yorkers. Through its network of more than 1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank provides food for approximately 62.5 million free meals per year for New Yorkers in need. Food Bank For New York City's income support services, including food stamps (also known as SNAP) and free tax assistance for the working poor, put more than \$150 million each year into the pockets of New Yorkers, helping them to afford food and achieve greater dignity and independence. Food Bank's nutrition education programs and services empower more than 50,000 children, teens and adults to sustain a healthy diet and active lifestyle on a low budget. Working toward long-term solutions to food poverty, Food Bank develops policy and conducts research to inform community and government efforts. To learn more about how you can help, please visit [foodbanknyc.org](http://foodbanknyc.org).



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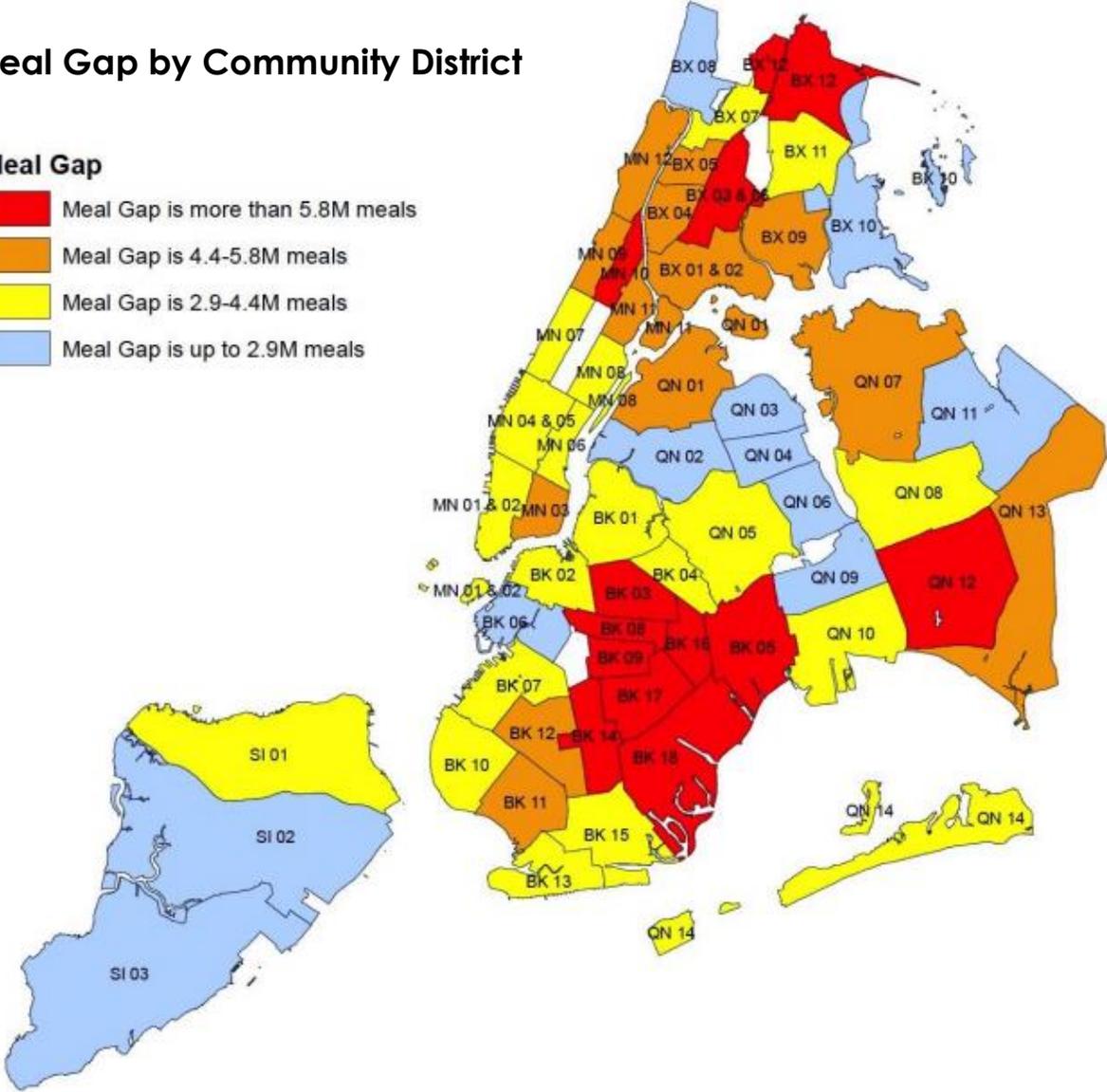
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# A CITY'S NEED

- Meals missing from the homes of food-insecure NYC residents: **242 million**<sup>1</sup>
- Number of food-insecure New Yorkers: **1.4 million**<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly **1 in 5** NYC residents rely on food pantries and soup kitchens.<sup>3</sup>

## Meal Gap by Community District

### Meal Gap



<sup>1</sup> Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. Food Bank For New York City, 2013.

# HUNGER SAFETY NET AT RISK

This year, the expanded implementation of a punitive policy affecting some unemployed recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), as well as the threat of SNAP cuts and restrictions, could intensify need for emergency food as New Yorkers who lose access to this vital nutrition and income support increase their reliance on food pantries and soup kitchens.

## Punitive Federal Policy in Effect

After three consecutive months of unemployment, non-disabled SNAP recipients between the ages of 18 and 49 who do not have dependents could lose SNAP benefits completely for up to three years.<sup>4</sup> To maintain benefits, a person who is not otherwise exempt must secure employment or participate in an approved job training program for at least 80 hours per month. The average length of unemployment in the United States currently is nearly six months.<sup>5</sup>

- Affected individuals could lose approximately **60 meals per month**.<sup>6</sup>
- This time limit is in effect in 2017 in **Manhattan Community Districts 1-8** and **Queens Community Districts 1-11, 13 & 14**.

## Threats from Washington

The House of Representatives, under the leadership of Speaker Paul Ryan, has consistently advocated for cutting and restructuring SNAP and other safety net programs as part of its federal budget plan. With partisan alignment between both houses of Congress and the White House, there is a greater likelihood this year that such plans will be realized.

- Cost to New York State in lost SNAP benefits by 2026: **approximately \$8 billion**<sup>7</sup>

## Proposed Cuts to City Funding for Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

- The Fiscal Year 2018 Preliminary Budget for New York City **cuts the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) by \$4.9 million** – a 37 percent decrease in baseline funding from FY 2017 levels.

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<sup>4</sup> This is known as the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) policy, enacted as part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996.

<sup>5</sup> United States Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics. January 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Calculation based on the maximum monthly SNAP allotment for a single adult with no income (\$194 per month) and the average cost of a meal in New York City, from Gundersen, C. *et al.* 2016.

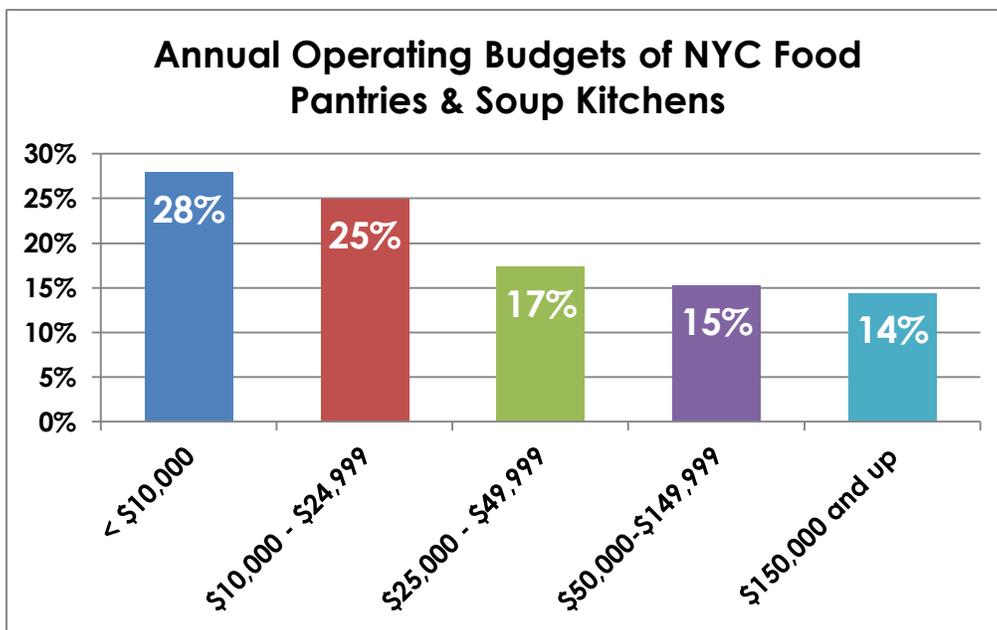
<sup>7</sup> Rosenbaum, D. and B. Keith-Jennings. "House 2017 Budget Plan Would Slash SNAP by More Than \$150 Billion Over Ten Years: Low-Income Households in All States Would Feel Sharp Effects." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 2016.

# A NETWORK'S RESOURCES

- Amount of food distributed annually by New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens: **more than 100 million meals**<sup>8</sup>
- Food pantries and soup kitchens still seeing elevated need since SNAP benefits were cut in November 2013: **79%**<sup>9</sup>
- Food pantries and soup kitchens experiencing food shortages within a single month: **49%**<sup>10</sup>

With threats to the federal safety net looming, Food Bank For New York City surveyed food pantries and soup kitchens about their resources and needs in January 2017. The findings are shared below.

- Median operating budget: **less than \$25,000**



- Average number of people served monthly: **2,000**
- Average number of full-time paid staff at a food pantry or soup kitchen: **1**
- Average number of full-time volunteers at a food pantry or soup kitchen: **3**

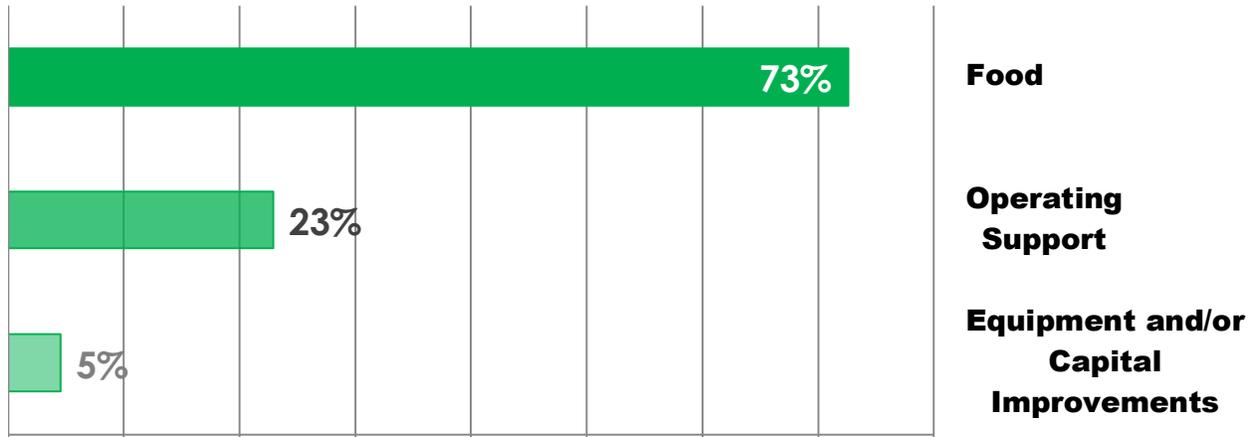
<sup>8</sup> Food Bank For New York City analysis.

<sup>9</sup> "Still Scaling the Hunger Cliff: Need at NYC Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens." Food Bank For New York City, November 2016.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

# A NETWORK'S NEEDS

## What Is the #1 Need for NYC's Network of Food Pantries & Soup Kitchens to Better Serve New Yorkers?



When asked to rank food, operating support, and equipment/capital improvements in order of need, food pantries and soup kitchens responded decisively that food is the top need for the city's network of emergency food providers. On a 1 to 3 scale, the average scores were 1.4, 2.0 and 2.6, respectively.

### Food Needs

Three in four (76 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "My food pantry/soup kitchen needs more food." With respect to different types of food needed:

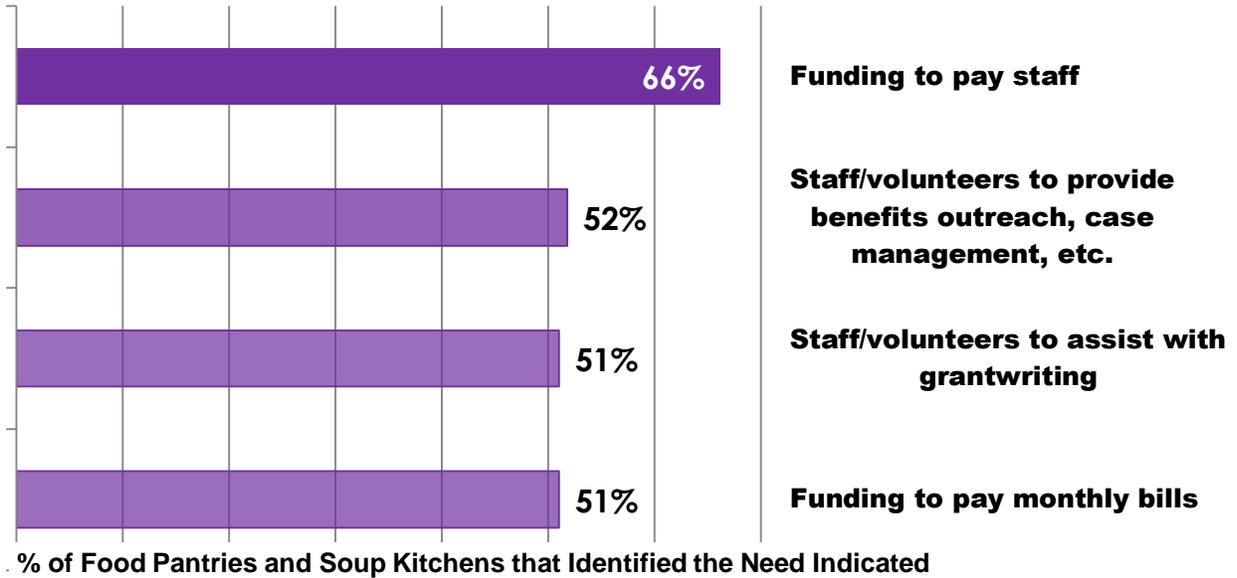
- **80%** expressed a need for more meat, poultry or fish
- **74%** expressed a need for more fresh fruit or vegetables
- **70%** expressed a need for more dairy products.

No more than 20 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens expressed disagreement with statements regarding a need for more food or certain types of food.

### Non-Food Products for Distribution

- **73%** of food pantries and soup kitchens expressed a need for more hygiene and household products to distribute to community members.

## Operating Support Needs



As shown above, food pantries and soup kitchens identified funding to pay staff, help providing non-food services to assist clients (such as benefits outreach and case management), assistance with securing grants, and funding to pay monthly bills as their greatest operating support needs.

- **45%** of food pantries and soup kitchens expressed a need for staff or volunteers with specific language skills. While Spanish was the most frequently cited language, Chinese languages (Mandarin, Cantonese, and Fujianese were the most commonly reported) were also identified with some frequency.

Nearly half of food pantries and soup kitchens (45 percent) disagreed that they needed staff or volunteers with the skills to assist with bookkeeping or accounting. In addition, more than one in three food pantries and soup kitchens disagreed that they needed staff or volunteers to assist with volunteer recruitment and management, or with maintaining the agency’s information on social media and the web (38 and 36 percent, respectively).

## Equipment and/or Capital Improvement Needs



As indicated above, the top needs for equipment or capital improvements identified by food pantries and soup kitchens were freezer storage, refrigerator storage and computers.

Nearly half of food pantries and soup kitchens (46 percent) disagreed that they were in need of a secure place to store client information, and more than two in five (43 percent) disagreed that they were in need of office space.

## METHODOLOGY

To generate survey findings, an online survey was sent to all active food pantries and soup kitchens for which Food Bank For New York City had an email contact (a total of 811). The survey responses were collected in January 2016.

After rejection of duplicated and incomplete responses, a total of 340 completed surveys from 274 food pantries and 66 soup kitchens (proportionate to the composition of Food Bank's membership) made up the sample for analysis. Unless otherwise noted, the confidence interval for all reported survey results, at the 95 percent level, is plus or minus 5 percentage points.

# CONCLUSIONS

There is an undeniable reality that the network providing services to the most vulnerable New Yorkers is itself quite vulnerable. The average New York City food pantry or soup kitchen serves approximately 2,000 people every month under considerable operating constraints: meager cash resources, few, if any, paid staff, and without access to the basic technology that most workplaces take for granted.<sup>11</sup> (It should be noted that reported operating budgets typically do not account for the food distributed, as most of the emergency food supply is available to emergency food programs at no cost.)

It is not these operational constraints that are reflected in the strong statement of priorities represented here, but the needs of the 1.4 million New Yorkers this network serves. There is widespread agreement that the most needed resource is more food, and in particular the food that is nutritious but expensive, perishable and difficult to procure through donations: meat, fresh produce and dairy.

While the need for operating resources and equipment/capital improvements at food pantries and soup kitchens cannot be ignored, these results suggest that the major suppliers to emergency food programs may yet realize considerable gains in distribution by working with food pantries and soup kitchens to implement delivery models that minimize storage demands, (such as just-in-time delivery processes) and allowing food pantries and soup kitchens to proactively choose the frequency and volume of deliveries – something that does not uniformly occur within the emergency food system when working with donors of highly perishable products can impose competing demands.

This moment of uncertainty for the resources upon which low-income Americans rely to put food on the table must challenge every stakeholder and supporter to work more cooperatively together to ensure no New Yorker struggles with hunger in our city.

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<sup>11</sup> Previous Food Bank research has found nearly half of food pantries lack consistent access to a computer on-site (“Abundant in Heart, Short on Resources.” Food Bank For New York City, 2016).

## FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

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### Community Kitchen & Food Pantry

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