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Food Security Through Church-Sponsored Food Programs

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Walden University

College of Health Sciences and Public Policy

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Samantha M. Scott

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Food Security Through Church-Sponsored Food Programs

by

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BS, Ashford University, 2014

BS, Clark Atlanta University, 2010

Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Public Administration

Walden University

February 2026

Abstract

A south-suburban Cook County, IL city lacks grocery stores with high-quality food options, which contributes to food insecurity. Residents often rely on highly processed, low-nutrient foods, contributing to nutritional vulnerability. Friendship Church's food bank sporadically serves this food desert, but sustaining its operations is challenging. Using community-based participatory action research design and the food security theory, data were collected from 25 semistructured interviews with food bank beneficiaries and church staff/volunteers and analyzed using reflective thematic analysis. The four dimensions were examined: availability, access, utilization, and stability. Two questions guided the research: How do parishioners in one south-suburban Cook County community perceive and use the healthy food options provided by the Friendship Church's food bank program? and What actionable recommendations can enhance the programs' effectiveness and stability to meet the nutritional needs of parishioners? Four key themes emerged: resource accessibility and quality, strong community support, relational trust, and barriers to utilization, including scheduling constraints and limited variety. Recommendations intended to improve public administrative practice include expanding volunteer recruitment, adopting flexible operating hours, and building partnerships with Cook County to broaden donation networks and promote public administration policies favorable to community giving. The deliverable outlined Cook County donation resources, guidelines, and eligibility criteria, and confirmed the community's need for a fully operational, sustainable food bank program to improve food security, which can promote positive social change by potentially increasing food access.

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Dedication

This professional administrative study is dedicated to my entire village, my late younger sister Erin Nelson, whose memory pushes me to keep striving forward; my siblings; my son Carter Lester; my parents; my aunt and uncle; and my loving and supportive grandmother.

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I am sincerely thankful for my supportive chairperson, Dr. Steven A. Matarelli, for his patience, invaluable guidance, and flexibility. His perspectives truly strengthened this professional administrative study. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to all my professors and my committee member, Dr. Kristin Dailey, for their flexibility and for consistently offering thoughtful feedback.

I am grateful to my supportive son, Carter Lester, who provided the inspiration I needed to continue pushing toward completion.

Last but not least, I am truly thankful to my supportive family who have been cheering me on to keep me motivated. My close friends who always gave words of encouragement and were willing to be a listening ear when I had challenges. My siblings, because I know they always look up to me. And my loving grandmother for her constant prayers and encouragement.

This accomplishment stands as a reflection of the collective strength, inspiration, and belief that each of you has contributed to my success.

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Section 1: Introduction

Introduction

The public administrative issue this client sought to address is Friendship Church's (organization pseudonym) desire to assess community perceptions and needs when considering the establishment of a sustainable food bank in a south-suburban Cook County, IL city. This city lacks supermarkets and grocery stores where residents can access fresh produce, dairy, and quality food options. Friendship Church periodically operates a food bank to serve parishioners. The food is only available when the church receives food donations in sufficient quantities to support a distribution campaign. The church wants to address this lack of access to healthy food options within their community but is uncertain how to (a) sustainably operate their food bank and (b) locate and secure reliable and sustainable food donation resources. The study used multiple data sources to develop a tangible deliverable for the church to use as a sustainable program plan to address food insecurity issues among its church parishioners. As a study deliverable, the church leaders will be presented a toolkit of available community resources in Cook County, mainly information regarding the local and state regulations on food and the need for food bank operations. The resources for the locally sourced sustainable food donations and evidence-based approaches for food bank eligibility criteria would be applied to the community of parishioners.

Organization Background and Problem Statement

The participant client is the Friendship Church, located in a south-suburban Cook County, IL, city. The public administrative issue this client wants to address is that this

city lacks supermarkets and grocery stores where residents can access fresh produce, dairy, and quality food options, leaving city residents with unhealthy food options from convenience stores and gas stations. This food desert is causing concern for Friendship Church about its parishioners' lack of access to healthy food options and its impact on a healthy eating lifestyle. The church periodically operates a food bank to serve parishioners, but only when the church receives sufficient food donations to support a distribution campaign, relying heavily on donations from food drives and other community giving. The church wants to address this lack of access to healthy food options within their community but is uncertain how to (a) sustainably operate their food bank, and (b) locate and secure reliable and sustainable food donation resources.

The leaders and members of Friendship Church seek to establish a more sustainable food bank program but are uncertain about local and state regulations, sources of sustainable funding for large-scale food donations, and how to establish food bank necessity criteria for parishioner access. I sought to close this gap by providing a client deliverable that addresses local and state regulations for food bank operations, providing a resource list of available food donation resources in the greater Cook County area, and offer evidence-based approaches to food bank eligibility criteria sourced from evidence-based research associated with community food banking programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) study was to use multiple data sources to compile a deliverable for Friendship Church that addressed these food insecurity issues among church parishioners by providing these church leaders with a

toolkit of available community resources in the greater Chicago Cook County area specific to information regarding local and state regulations for food bank operations, resources for locally sourced sustainable food donations, and evidence-based approaches to food bank eligibility criteria to be applied to parishioners and other community residents in need of food bank Summary of Data Sources and Analysis.

The research design utilized PAR and involved the active participation of community members, program workers, and other relevant stakeholders. Purposive sampling guided participant recruitment (see Cornish et al., 2023). For the data collection, I used interview techniques; these semistructured interviews elicited detailed experiences and perceptions of respondents that participated in the church's food distribution programs. Thematic data analysis was applied to the collected data to identify the main themes emerging from the study results.

The study was conducted using a systematic approach, with the research designed to include community members, program staff, and other relevant stakeholders throughout most of the research process. The PAR framework encapsulates collective inquiry and action, yielding actionable insights. The consultation ensured that when designing, executing, and evaluating the study, it encompassed the ideas and opinions of the community. The research is based on semistructured interviews with beneficiaries of food distribution programs and community members. A thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data to identify significant themes and insights.

Using PAR as the guiding methodology, the study engaged community members as co-researchers, allowing them to participate in research stages. The data collection was

multifaceted, beginning with semistructured interviews with program participants, staff, and church members. The interview entailed a personal account of the experiences of the food program users and helped to identify the areas that need improvement.

Data collection was multifaceted, beginning with semistructured interviews conducted with church members, program participants, and staff. These interviews provide detailed, personal accounts of individual experiences with the food program, helping to identify both strengths and areas for improvement. The method allowed a detailed collection of information on the operations of the program. The use of food bank policy and church guidelines were reviewed. The information helped in contextualization of the qualitative data that I gathered in the interviews.

Limitations

Participant recruitment included diverse limitations, ranging from skepticism about research in general to when someone outside their community conducts it. Additionally, it was challenging because parishioners and other community members were reluctant to identify themselves as needing or using Friendship Church's food bank. The research setting is one food bank, so it does not reflect the experiences of other food banks in the Chicago area.

Participant bias poses a potential limitation, as the responses from participants may reflect their tendency to provide socially desirable feedback. This type of limitation can lead to skewed data, which may not accurately represent the shortcomings faced by the food bank program. Furthermore, participant bias could hinder efforts to address the challenges that beneficiaries of the food bank program may encounter regarding

accessibility and affordability. Socially desirable responses from participants would not accurately portray the food bank's issues, as these responses would likely be influenced by concerns about judgment and privacy, resulting in skewed data.

As a result, interpreting qualitative data, especially from the interview scripts, may introduce potential researcher bias. When the interpretation is biased by limiting the outcome to the researcher's perspective, the findings may not accurately reflect the participants' responses regarding my research topic. The data analysis depends on the researcher's viewpoint, making it difficult to generalize the results to a broader community that similar food desert issues may impact.

Definitions

This section describes key terms, serving as a bridge between the reader and the researcher for operational application to the study.

Community based- approach research: a study approach in which community members are actively involved in the research with their views incorporated in the research (Collins et al., 2018). The approach is relevant in this study in that it would provide for the needed assessment of the community needs in engaging them to provide their views on improving the program's services by addressing the public administrative issues within the food bank program.

Equity: all individuals having the opportunity to access and achieve health potential regardless of their social and economic status (United Nations Food Coordination Hub, 2024). It is relevant to the study in ascertaining the deliverables in

terms of the enhancing equity in distribution of the food in the community receiving food aid in the food bank program.

Food insecurity: The World Health Organization (WHO) and Food and Agriculture Organization define food insecurity as a situation where people lack their regular access to safe, enough, and quality food for their normal growth and development (World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization, 2024). This definition will be employed to identify and assess the community needs in terms of their accessibility, utilization, and the quality of food provided in the food bank program.

Food security: a situation where people can socially, economically, and physically access food that is safe and of good quality (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2024). This research will employ this definition to ascertain if the community would be able to achieve access to quality food in their different social and economic status.

Significance

This study is significant in that it has the potential to advance information by delivering empirically informed findings on the efficacy of church-affiliated food assistance in mitigating food insecurity. It will assist in the design and implementation of these programs by providing rich data with which to understand food access for low-income households and, in the process, enrich local food assistance policies. The study is relevant in contributing to positive social change in public administration as it examines policies, may highlight the need for policy reforms, and seek to empower community engagement activities to solve a local food insecurity challenge.

Summary

This study investigated how the Friendship Church can effectively intervene to address the community's nutritional gaps and needs in its food bank program. Using a community-based approach, community members and program stakeholders shared their experiences regarding accessibility, utilization, and food quality in the food bank program. Section 2 provides a literature review assessing studies on food bank programs and the administrative issues that align with and resonate with the church.

Section 2: Conceptual Framework and Relevant Literature

Introduction

As cities began to change, the things you see in the neighborhoods also began to change. When this happens, it often creates an accessibility issue within the community. One suburban city in Cook County has dealt with this issue. It is currently depleted regarding grocery stores, which has left their residents with few choices regarding healthy food options. As a result of this issue, the resident's main convenience option is local corner stores or gas stations that primarily only offer unhealthy food options. With the local church's heavy presence in the community Friendship Church has focused on assisting their congregation with healthy food choices. The church's first mission in addressing this issue is to incorporate a food bank within the church as one of its give-back initiatives to the community. To put this idea into motion, the church's leadership will need local businesses to contribute to the food bank's success.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review aimed at using evidence based research from an array of digital scholarly repositories that include but not limited to Google scholar, spring link and ProQuest databases to assess food insecurity and the supportive food programs. The keywords for my search activities included *food insecurities in urban areas, food insecurities and church-sponsored programs, COVID-19 and church food assistance, religious organizations and food aid, faith-based organizations and food access, and community food programs*. Evidence-based publications were limited to 2020 through 2024, with infrequent but impactful sources from prior publication years. Supplementary

information has been obtained from the WHO and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, which provided background on the four pillars of food security: (a) availability, (b) access, (c) utilization, and (d) stability.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual approach for this study combined Simelane and Worth's (2020) food security conceptual framework that entails four dimensions: (a) food availability, (b) access, (c) utilization, and (d) stability. In integrating these four dimensions in understanding and approaching food insecurity in Cook County, IL, this research provides an in-depth analysis of Friendship Church's food bank program, identifying the potential areas to be improved for overall effectiveness.

Food Security Theory

This theory describes food security as a situation whereby all people have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food conducive to an active and healthy life (Manikas et al., 2023). This theory identifies four key dimensions: (a) availability, which ensures adequate quantities of food; (b) access to the physical and economic ability to access food; (c) usage, described as food quality and nutritional value; and (d) stability, described as food availability consistently over time. These dimensions are foundational in understanding the assessments and designs for solutions that reduce food insecurity, especially in food deserts characterized by a scarcity of healthy options (Simelane & Worth, 2020).

Analysis Needs

An analysis of currently available and accessible food highlights specific shortcomings to address while assessing community food security. This approach focused on community participation in developing targeted interventions that address local needs, emphasizing the sustainability and resiliency of food bank services. A needs-based gap analysis also enabled one to match, based on concrete steps to overcome, between available resources and expected results. A study of particular and available food notes certain areas particular to a community that requires attention when addressing food security.

Further, a needs-based approach encouraged community involvement in identifying appropriate solutions to specific problems. It was structured to be sustainable and to withstand future calamities in the delivery of food bank services. A needs-based gap analysis involved comparing any current resources with the assessment of the target community's needs and identifying specific gaps and concrete recommendations for action. Local problems are targeted in this model, meaning that sustainability and ownership of the interventions are highly likely to occur. I sought to examine efficacy of needs-based approach presented by Rizvi et al. (2021) to examine systemic discrepancies and consider implementing mop-up strategies that align with identified deficiencies. Combining this method with Simelane and Worth's (2020) food security theory led to information for short-term and long-term sustainable strategies and measurable goals to reduce food insecurity issues in the church's immediate and extended community.

Literature Synthesis

Food banks temporarily aid food insecurity (Rizvi et al., 2021). Present research has documented their prevalence in urban areas and, more highly, during the COVID-19 pandemic. These programs often need help finding constantly available funding, managing resources, and assuring operational sustainability. Community partnership collaborative efforts among all the stakeholders involved, including churches, local businesses, and government agencies, enhance effectiveness and provide some sustainability to food programs. It is also important to note that partnership with public health agencies ensures that all the local and national guidelines are followed. Besides, good storage facilities are required to ensure good food quality and expansion of service coverage.

Regarding nutritional quality and inclusivity, the food programs must represent different diets while offering healthy choices to help vulnerable populations. Other observations in both studies indicate that churches where financial operations are transparent and management is structured around volunteers have enjoyed a higher success rate for their food assistance programs.

The combination of food security theory and needs-based gap analysis aligns with my study's purpose, and the food banking concerns Friendship Church has identified. The food security theory provides a framework that addresses the multidimensionality of food insecurity. At the same time, the needs-based gap analysis presented action-oriented and pragmatic frameworks that supported further strategies toward closing the identified gaps. Together, these approaches provided the underpinning needed to ensure that

formulation should be evidence-based and community-focused toward creating a full-service food bank. This research integrates theoretical insights with practical strategies for sustainably enhancing food security among parishioners and society through the church. Friendship Church can, with its food bank, regularly provide an assured resource to address issues such as availability, access, utilization, and stability concerning the provision of food. With food shortage being a known issue, this research provided the church with strategies to assist with longevity, underlined by the role that faith-based organizations continue to play in furthering inclusivity and public health.

Literature Review for the Study

My research investigated food insecurity and considered food programs supported by the church as feasible solutions. In places like Cook County, Illinois, food deserts are prevalent and prevent people from consuming fresh and healthy food from stores, and they can only get processed foods from corner stores. The WHO (2021) UN and Food and Agriculture Organization outlined food security's four essential components: (a) receipt, (b) attainability, (c) deployment, and (d) reliability, each contributing to a systematic approach to assessing food insecurity solutions. The aspect of utilization and stability are informed food consumption over long extended time (Calloway et al., 2023). Each of these facets presented the issues that church-sponsored programs combat by implementing tactical and focused community solutions.

Food Banks and Food Insecurity

Studies on food banks and mutual aid organizations in the United States shed light on an organization's function in combating hunger. Lofton et al. (2021) analyzed the state

of mutual aid in Chicago and concluded that such organizations help to reduce food insecurities, particularly in urban areas affected by COVID-19. Lofton et al. viewpoint is that even when the community steps in as a support system and offers things such as food bank even though they are positive efforts sometimes these can be also looked at as stop-measures because they do not fully address the food insecurity within the community (Lofton et al., 2021).

According to Furey (2020), food bank organizations (FBOs) can address the issue of food insecurity given that they are located closer to the communities in question, are trusted by the people, and have strong networks. Currently, and particularly in urban food deserts, churches act as sources of food through pantries as well as food drives from members, businesses, and nonprofits (Shuman, 2022). However, due to operational factors such as fluctuating donation patterns, inadequate funding, and relatively fewer numbers of people for relevant staff or volunteers, there are issues with the continuation of such programs. According to Jones-Burdick (2023), sustainable food programs also need reliable supplies, which may mean maintaining lasting relationships with local farmers, food banks, or regional distributors.

A community partnership approach is valuable research where community members work together to overcome certain issues. This approach is more widely used to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of programs for non-profit and faith-based organizations (Cornish et al., 2023). When the members of the community pour into the overall goal and there is high participation it allows for the members of the church to have an influence of the decision making and programs being implemented in the city. If

the church is allowed to serve the community based on the needs from the surveys, then they can more effectively address the food needs within the city. In addition, it is possible to use a case study method to evaluate various successful community partnership experiences. This method allowed special consideration of the problems and how they can be resolved, which is helpful for general use. The needs-based gap analysis is still important because it determines the size of the gap between what is currently available and offered to the needy people in the community.

On the positive side, faith-based groups are essential in providing food security for individuals. However, the issue of regulation proves a challenge. Fresh produce distribution is challenging in most churches due to non-compliance with national and local food safety laws. Fagbemi et al. (2024) argued that food banks follow regulations that are put in place therefore he wanted to build relationships with the public health organizations to ensure that the church lived up to following those regulations. In doing so this allowed for the church to have the ability to increase the amount of food they were able to store, because storage becomes a primary issue for the church when they don't have the ability to accept donations because they don't have the capacity to store the goods.

Program development should entail the long-term acquisition of resources, coherent donation plans, and organizational protocols for food aid. Partnerships with stakeholders and government organizations also help churches obtain resources and support the continuation of the programs (Cooper & Cooper, 2021). Finally, incorporating community-engaged research, purposeful collaboration, and strategic

planning provides a framework for churches that want to extend their food pantry services and address food deficiency in marginalized communities.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

For food banking programs to work, they must be available to those with specific dietary needs. Parrott (2023) highlighted that while college students can make food choices based on the label, there may be limited options for individuals with allergies or restricted diets. Stahacz et al. (2024) agreed with this view, stating that a client-choice model in which people can choose foods that meet their health needs enhances diet quality and mental health. Therefore, increasing the food options in the aid programs promotes diversity, as students would not have to worry about being unable to select a healthy, suitable food option.

The food bank initiative by Friendship Church would be helpful to the elderly parishioners who cannot access help from the project. First, older people with fixed and limited incomes experience challenges of the ever-rising cost of food. Parker et al. (2020) asserted that with the proper framework for providing them with meals via the food bank initiative, they could manage meal accessibility. In addition, older people who cannot make themselves available during the food donation and distribution exercise might be experiencing the challenge of accessibility. When developing food bank projects at the church, a need to develop a policy that considers the geographic location also must be considered. Older adults away from food banks and distribution centers face significant meal access challenges. Parker et al. (2020) argued that an elaborate plan to have easy access to food would promote the overall efficiency and service of the program.

Flexible Staffing in Food Aid Programs

Staffing models enhance food aid programs, particularly community food aid programs. Sharma et al. (2024) agreed that front-line employees work part-time in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Thus, they do not create a commitment to staffing. D'Andrea-Baker and Kapinos (2024) have affirmed this model, noting that using policies in multiple tiers and applying evidence-based decisions in community colleges might enhance the elasticity and reliability of food aid. DeNunzio et al. (2022) noted that a deliberative public health workforce could improve the food environment of the conditions engaged in food security interventions by raising awareness among the target groups and increasing their geographical coverage.

A flexible staffing model would also be essential for the food aid program because it would address the shifting and varying demands of food donations and serving those in need. A flexible staffing approach allows for adjusting to economic fluctuations and season changes (Kenney et al., 2021). Consequently, the program could overcome operational costs, such as recurrent expenditure on salaries for employees who do not volunteer. Additionally, part-time and temporary employees imply a reduced benefit on the payroll. The long-term benefits of a flexible staffing approach would be a reduced cost for the program, with additional financial resources set aside to increase the food aid supply.

Food Safety and Nutritional Quality

When it comes to the food being provided by food banks, there is a major focus on the healthy options that are being offered to the community. Lester (2020) pointed out

that safe food handling is not well practiced among food recovery organizations, mainly because they lack adequate training and resources. Ravikumar-Grant et al. (2023) noted that the food given to people experiencing homelessness is often deficient in the required nutrients, which can be unhealthy for certain individuals while adequate for others. Kibe et al. (2023) expanded on this in older African American populations where pandemic food insecurity resulted in consuming energy-dense, nutrient-sparse foods.

The nutritional quality can also be enhanced based on the availability of food choices to constitute the various nutritional values that include but are not limited to fruits, vegetables, proteins, and whole grains. A food program is meant to offer food to people in need and invest in the quality that would benefit those in need and promote overall well-being (Drew, 2022, Chapter 8). Also, food safety is a key concern, and this should form a critical part of the need for a program that advocates for proper handling right from the onset, including through processing, cooking, and over-hygiene practices (Balkir et al., 2021). Those handling food should be trained to ensure that they know how to use appropriate food-handling practices.

Technological Integration and Modern Solutions

There are many gains that exist as it relates to integrating food assistance programs with technology. Wright and Reames (2020) described 28 successful church food banks and found that those employing tools based on digital storage decreased waste by 34% compared with paper systems. Studies undertaken by the authors showed that the digital solutions introduced enhanced the efficiency of stock control, volunteer organization, and communication with the program participants. Also, churches adopting

online registration and appointment scheduling solutions benefitted from an increased participant satisfaction rate of 45% and reduced wait times drastically. These enhancements illustrate how technical advancement can help increase the effectiveness and quality deliveries of food programs initiated through churches. In addition, technology can develop real-time inventory systems that enhance the planning and coordination of the program. The program management significantly shifts from the traditional booking and records to a more advanced approach where food banks can track supplies and mitigate wastage (Ataseven et al., 2021). An example of a barcode on the food packaging would be vital in tracking food distribution and keeping inventory. Overall, this would reduce wastage and errors, hence improving the program.

Resources Management and Financial Planning

Supervision of resources is essential for implementing church-based food programs because of financial, food, and time resources. Shi et al. (2020) researched highlighted the importance of funding at 32 church based food programs. They discovered that organizations with multiple funding sources through grants, corporate sponsorships, and public donations were more viable. Their studies indicated that church-based food programs achieved a 67% higher donor retention rate if the church set up specific fundraising committees and followed such practices as transparent financial reporting. The above conclusions support the need for an implemented program of resource management mechanisms to facilitate program sustainability and achieve enhanced community benefits.

Food bank programs managers require appropriate training and development in the management of the financial and human resources for the program. The training would ensure the quality of service delivery and efficiency needed for a better food bank program (Principato et al., 2022). Additionally, facility management must address aspects such as energy efficiency practices that would significantly reduce the cost of operations. The cost of repairs and maintenance can also be mitigated using financial planning and management. With unstable sources of donations of food and funds, practical management skills would play a vital role in the overall quality of service delivery.

Community Participation and Engagement

Hearing from communities is critical in establishing and sustaining food assistance programs. Taking 15 urban communities as participants, Royer (2024) found that food banks with community advisory boards had 2.3 times the chance of having consistent funding and sustainable food reserves. Royer illustrated that, in successful programs and formative contexts, community members are users of services and the most critical stakeholders in reforming programs.

Community participation and engagement are essential in recruiting more stakeholders to support the program. Food bank programs depend on the resources from the stakeholders stemming from the community, and the need to have them increase their involvement is significant to the continuation of the same. Increasing awareness is part of the process, creating a needs assessment and the subsequent intervention to provide solutions (Cheyne et al., 2021). Participation in public events and social media effectively enhances engagement as the platform provides avenues for constant updates and the

introduction of programs. The community outreach programs are meant to provide vital information to support the program.

Infrastructure Development and Capacity Building

The development of infrastructural facilities constitutes the framework of effective food aid initiatives. Herzog et al. (2020) explained how storage capacity influenced program reach. They evaluated how several urban church food banks had determined that churches investing in proper storage facilities could address 40% more Food Insecure families while preserving the quality needed to follow food hygiene requirements. Their research stressed that appropriate storage means increased service exposure to clients, decreased wastage, and enhanced food safety. This work revealed the significance of planning infrastructure development, especially for the churches in food desert areas.

Capacity building can be introduced using innovative programs that bring together community members to produce healthy food and promote well-being. Creativity in managing food bank programs is part of enhancing efficiency (Cheyne et al., 2021). Additionally, enhancing infrastructure development by promoting mobile pantries where food is deposited and distributed in underserved communities would further reduce barriers and reach needy people.

Volunteer Management and Training

Volunteer management plays a primary role in ensuring operational success at church-based food programs. Shi (2020) brought to the forefront that when the churches implemented food safety and handling strategies there was about 56% fewer incidents as

it related to food spoilage it also helped with ensuring the church stayed in compliance with local authorities on food hygiene safety standards. Shi examined 12 urban church-based food banks, finding a strong positive relationship between structured volunteer training and better food storage and distribution practices. These results indicate the need for strategies concerning structured recruitment, professional training, and volunteer management and retention programs.

Food bank programs involve a wide range of volunteers who must be integrated into the program. Recruiting volunteers who align with the program's objectives is pertinent, and this would enhance the quality-of-service provision (Martin et al., 2020). Training using a comprehensive approach to equip the volunteers with resource management and food handling knowledge is essential. It is very beneficial for the church to ensure their volunteers complete the available food nutrition learning opportunities to ensure that the volunteers are trained on healthy diets, budgets, and meal planning.

Church-based food banks are one of the major players in the fight against food insecurity, particularly at the community level. The success of such a program depends on addressing several issues discussed in section. Also, when the volunteers complete the training, it assists with assuring that the program has effective delivery that align with the safety standards. Technology integration improves inventory management, reduces waste, and enhances participant satisfaction. Accessibility and inclusivity cater to dietary diversities, infrastructure development, and capacity-building storage facilities that have the capacity to serve. The sustainability of the program through community participation and engagement encompasses the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making and

mobilization of resources. Resource management and financial planning further strengthen the longevity of food aid initiatives by setting up transparent multisource funding models.

Success is long-lasting at Friendship Church only when it implements a program across all these areas. Community-driven initiatives would then strengthen by developing partnerships, enhancing operational systems, and eliminating barriers. Most importantly, the food bank program must leverage technology integration to provide modern solutions to logistical and capacity challenges needed for improved service delivery. With a strategic investment in technology, the program would also excel in resource management, which is crucial to its success. With technology taking over at such a fast pace, the food bank should heavily implement the usage of technology as they build out the program. Friendship Church's food bank should prioritize capacity building to achieve its objectives.

Summary

Urban neighborhoods are changing at a rapid pace store surface in the neighborhood and are short lived for many different reasons. One Cook County suburban city is a community that has been facing the problem of the depletion of grocery stores. The Friendship Church has been at the forefront to ensure that it addresses the problem of food access challenge by establishing food banks as part of the community outreach program. Additionally, the program aims to provide healthier food for the population that is in need, lacks access, and faces food insecurity issues. The project's success is mainly aimed at providing solutions to the array of factors that have been identified throughout

Section 2. A literature review on the food program and the interventions necessary to ensure their improvements have significantly informed Section 2 of the paper. The theoretical framework for this paper provides a framework for the area on which the program should be improved, with suggestions provided. The food banks would provide for the ease of accessibility and inclusivity, the use of food safety standards and nutritional quality, and improved resource management are part of the development of the food bank program. Section 3 of the paper describes my data collection process, which includes assessing the research question and establishing the approach for research design with the aim of understanding how the food bank program can improve its functions towards serving the interests of the community.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

Introduction

One south-suburban Cook County, IL, city lacks supermarkets and grocery stores where residents can access fresh produce, dairy, and quality food options. Friendship Church periodically operates a food bank to serve parishioners living in Chicago's food desert area. Since the church does not have a set-in-stone food bank, it can only offer food when it receives large donations. Friendship Church wanted to address this lack of access to healthy food options within their community. Still, it is uncertain how to: (a) sustainably operate their food bank, and (b) locate and secure reliable and sustainable food donation resources. The study used multiple data sources to investigate community food banking options for the church to address food insecurity issues among its church parishioners as a sustainable program offering. As a research deliverable, church leaders were presented with a toolkit of the available community resources in Cook County, mainly information regarding the local and state regulations on food and the need for food bank operations. The resources for the locally sourced sustainable food donations and evidence-based approaches for food bank eligibility criteria would be applied to the community of parishioners.

Practice-Focused Research Questions and Research Design

Research Question

1. How do parishioners in one south-suburban Cook County community perceive and use the healthy food options provided by the Friendship Church's food bank program?

This question aimed to assess data on the community's perception of the quality of food and the service of Friendship Church's food bank. Accessibility, utilization, and community perceptions together shape the broader experiences of participants in the food bank program.

1. What actionable recommendations can enhance the effectiveness and stability of Friendship Church's food bank program to meet the nutritional needs of parishioners?

The questions encouraged the church community to share their experiences with the food bank program. This vital information helped identify the program's strengths and weaknesses. The practical recommendations offer a clear path to address the community's challenges and enhance the program's functionality.

Research Design

The research employed a community-based PAR approach that fosters collaboration between the community and the researcher as part of a reflective process starting with problem identification and definition, the data collection stages, analysis, and ultimately, the dissemination of the findings of the research (see Cornish et al., 2023). This approach proved vital for the community's needs, empowering them by actively participating in positive change. For this reason, a collective approach involving the community provided in-depth insights into the participants' experiences to inform the actionable recommendations for improving the food bank program.

The organization needed to tackle the church community's administrative challenge of food insecurity. This posed difficulties for the organization because it had

not fully comprehended the community's needs regarding food deserts and the effects that food shortages may have on the health and well-being of parishioners and the wider community. Similarly, the issue has been exacerbated by the inadequate optimization of food distribution channels at the church's food bank. The organization had not utilized available community food distribution resources, leading to inequality and instability in food access for the community and parishioners. Improved community approaches that engaged residents to understand their perceptions and knowledge of the issue significantly assisted in finding a lasting solution to the problem.

The client deliverable emanated from the proposed research question. It sought to address and reduce the client's problem by increasing the church's perception of how the community members utilize the food bank, considering food quality and accessibility, and mitigating the stigma of needing food banking services (see Dai & Chen, 2021). In addition, accessibility issues, notably the varying food bank operational days based on community food donation variability, have been part of the problem. Simelane and Worth (2020) offered that those variable aspects, such as the operating hours of the food bank and eligibility requirements, significantly underpin an organization's administrative issues. Further, Simelane and Worth posited that when considering the utility of food banks, an organization has contributing issues to consider, such as community recipients' eating habits, dietary intake needs, medical restrictions, cultural influences, and overall food preferences.

Collaborative development, as an intervention plan that entail participatory reflections on the data collected, significantly helped improve the organization's

engagement with the community so that they could provide first-hand information about their experiences. Through participatory reflection and feedback on improved ways to engage an organization and its community, actionable strategies involving community feedback provided options for establishing a program that provides both entities with sustainable, high-quality food supplies (Simelane & Worth, 2020).

Qualitative Approach and Specific Methods

The study involved me as the researcher, key stakeholders from Friendship Church, volunteer participants from the church's congregation, and community members (see Appendix A). Purposive sampling was used to identify and select the participants. Data collected through semistructured interviews, helped gather insightful and descriptive information from the community (Tetnowski & Damico, 2001). The respondents who are also part of the community engaged in discussing the problems that have been making it difficult for them to access quality food in the program by the church.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) reflective thematic analysis approach was also utilized to sort and analyze data to derive emerging and recurring central themes. The process entailed familiarizing myself with the data, generating codes, searching for themes in the participant responses, and defining the themes through a clear analysis to present the findings coherently. Similarly, NVivo v. 15 software employed to organize, analyze, and uncover insights from the unstructured data. The study conducted using a systematic research design to comprehensively address the research question. Stakeholders in the program leaders, staff, suppliers, and the entire community relying on food supplies—have contributed by providing insights into the project's challenges regarding the food

bank. PAR involves collective inquiry that enables practical interventions to address administrative issues in operating the food program. The data collection methods I implemented in this research include semistructured interviews and questionnaires, which served as my primary approach for the study's descriptive data collection. The interviews were completed to identify the interviewees' perceptions, experiences, and any suggestions they may have in relation to the food program.

Semistructured Interviews

The semistructured interviews significantly involved the program participants, the congregation members, residents, particularly those affected by food insecurity, and the church employees. The semistructured interviews were informed by the research question to maintain the focus of the study's scope, and this was meant to allow for the development of flexible yet focused exploration and understanding of the issue in a way that reduces the challenges of having limited food for the food bank program (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021).

Roles of the Researcher and Client Organization

Researchers in administrative studies seek to increase information and understanding of how organizations operate, seeking areas of change to enhance effective management. Using the information drawn from research, I employed Simelane and Worth's (2020) food security conceptual framework as policy theory that would focus on the entails four dimensions: (a) food availability, (b) access, (c) utilization, and (d) stability. In integrating these four dimensions in understanding and approaching food insecurity in a south-suburban Cook County, IL, city is the research goal. In this research

context, the relationship with the client, the Friendship Church food bank program, is to seek information related to the organizational stability challenges for their food bank program. Resource management regarding food donations, finance volunteers, and human resources are aspects of the research area that identify how the organization and the community must work collaboratively to mitigate the challenges (Huff, 2020). Similarly, the operational challenges in distribution channels and processes have been part of the food bank problem, inhibiting it from realizing its objectives of meeting the community's needs, and these be evaluated.

Community participation is founded on engagement to build an effective stakeholder relationship. This participation is instrumental in understanding a community or organization's needs, specifically to identify limitations and success areas. For the Friendship Church community, this engagement focused on accessible food and the financial stability of a stable food bank program.

Professional Relationships With Participants

The professional relationship involved power dynamics that necessitated clearly defined roles and expectations for me as the researcher and for the participants. In this study, participants were informed of my specific roles to uphold professionalism throughout the research. Most importantly, previous personal relationships with the participants were addressed at the start of the research to prevent issues of power imbalances. Additionally, strategies to mitigate bias arising from my personal relationships with participants were to be discussed in independent recruitment, employing purposive sampling to eliminate bias in participant selection.

Furthermore, clear communications significantly shaped the supervisory roles in research and clarified relationships with participants. The study involved a variety of stakeholders, including employees and the community. Emphasizing voluntary communication as essential helped reduce the chances of decline or withdrawal from the research. My informed consent process illustrated my researcher role, disclosed any potential conflicts of interest, and advised any potential participant about their rights to bypass questions they felt uncomfortable answering and the option to leave the research at any time.

Biases and Measures for Mitigation of Researcher Bias

Potential biases during research included researcher bias when describing the research influenced by personal experience, assumptions, and beliefs. Researcher bias can affect research outcomes. For example, my personal notions and beliefs about food banks might interfere with the interpretation of the feedback from the participants.

This was mitigated by reflecting on the collaborative inclusion of participants' insights to comprehensively identify and integrate their views. Moreover, employing multiple codes during data analysis addressed the issue of researcher bias, as it reduced the influence of a single person's perspective in data interpretation. Furthermore, some participants consented to share their email addresses so that their individual interview transcripts can be shared for review. The participants' feedback on my interpretation assisted in mitigating researcher bias.

Participant bias can also potentially affect the entire data collection process. This bias was addressed by creating rapport between participants and the researcher, fostering

an environment that encouraged engagement as a safe space. This approach motivated participants to be open and share their realities regarding their experiences with the food bank program. Additionally, careful and well-defined research questions featuring neutral questions were used to help to minimize participants from providing misleading and biased responses. Phrasing questions in multiple ways significantly assisted in cross-checking participant responses. Furthermore, triangulation was employed to strengthen participant responses by comparing them with the reviewed literature. Using multiple data sources helped corroborate participants' responses and mitigate bias. In addition, sampling bias was mitigated by using a convenience sample, where the selected participants came from diverse backgrounds with adequate numbers to ensure sufficient representation from the church parishioners who depend on the food bank program.

The partnership organization supported this research in the following ways:

1. Spoke about the project in the weekly church announcements from the pulpit.
2. Posted recruitment flyers on my behalf.
3. Emailed my recruitment flyer to the congregation for those interested persons to contact me for more information.
4. Provided data on the food bank, such as the number of people served every month and the amount of food used.

Methodology

The data sources utilized to effectively address the practice-focused research question regarding how Friendship Church collaborates in accessing, perceiving, and utilizing the healthy food options offered by its food bank program. Using semistructured

interview questions and with the support of available community data, actionable interventions were identified and summarized as a client deliverable.

The semistructured interview involved the experiences of participants, including beneficiaries and community leaders. Church members from diverse demographics were part of my data sources. They provided vital information about the food bank and offered valuable insights to the study, particularly regarding perceptions and experiences of local food security. Appendix B includes my interview guide and the semistructured interview questions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment

The targeted participants included 20 beneficiaries of Friendship Church's food bank program and five staff members associated with the program. The recruitment strategy consisted of making an announcement in the church and allowing members to reach out via posters and referrals. Additionally, the food bank users assisted with disseminating information on this research and the needs of the participants. Recruitment was conducted through church service announcements (Text present in Appendix A) and posted community bulletin board flyers for congregation members who have used or may need to use the food bank (Appendix C) and for church volunteers who work with the food bank program (Appendix D).

The potential participants were provided with consent forms to learn the research objectives and outcomes that were to benefit the food bank program (Negrin et al., 2022). The participants were directed to take part in the research voluntarily. Also, the

information shared during the research was confidential and it was reported in aggregated form only. The meaningful, directly quoted information that is included, a pseudonym was used to identify the participant, and the content was modified to avoid ease of identification of any participant.

Participation

The interviews were scheduled in locations and times that are highly convenient to participants. Data collections occurred in the church and community areas where the beneficiaries were located. I build rapport with the participants by emphasizing the importance of honest and accurate interview feedback.

The data collected was only accessible to me, which upholds the participants' confidentiality (Kang & Hwang, 2021). Developing rapport between the participants was partially achieved through assurances of confidentiality. The data collection period covered three weeks, drawing from stakeholders involved with Friendship Church's food bank program.

Procedure

The development of the semistructured interview considered demographics, including age, household composition, gender, and employment status. From the reviewed literature, these factors are important when addressing the issue of food accessibility and quality. The element of age is very important because it place a major role in the dietary needs of the respondents it also can highly impact the accessibility for the individuals. Even though access can play a major role at any age when it comes to accessibility that impact may be greater due to their mobility and their overall ability to

access transportation. When it comes to younger parents they may face the added challenge of feeding children. Each household's unique composition creates distinct nutritional needs. In developing the semistructured interview, demographic aspects such as age, family composition, and gender provided insights into how the food bank program not only meets the nutritional needs of participants but also aligns with the unique qualities and circumstances of the beneficiaries.

Flexibility

The interview guide (see Appendix B) was flexible; follow-up questions and probes for further information were permitted based on participants' responses. The valuable insights from the data collected from the interviews were used for detailed exploration of the impact of the food bank (Karatsareas, 2022).

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing of the semistructured interview questions involved two to three participants who had used Friendship Church's food bank to ensure no ambiguities or redundant questions hinder informative engagement. Additionally, pilot testing ensured that the semistructured interviews captured the richness of information required. The feedback from pilot testing was part of refining the interview to align with the objectives and goals of the study and captured the community's aspirations regarding the impact of the food bank program. I was able to make the necessary adjustments to the interview guide and allow participants to have their input in the process of formulating the semistructured interview.

Justification for the Semistructured Interview Questions

The semistructured interviews enabled me to gain a detailed information of the individuals' experiences when attending the food bank. When the questions were left open-ended, it allowed each participant to share as much information as needed to clarify their viewpoint (see Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). I helped achieve the scope and focus of this research by facilitating the interview session to ensure that participants do not deviate from the research objective.

Semistructured interviews were important because they ensured that there is a balance when it came to flexibility and structure, this made them a valuable tool for data collection regarding the church's food bank program. The questions were organized in a way to provide a framework that guided the interview and allowed the participants to communicate their individual perspectives and experiences with the food bank. The layout of how the questions were designed ensured the key ideas were addressed and that their responses aligned with the objectives of the food bank. Allowing semistructured interview questions allowed for the participants to give authentic answers which gave a better understanding of the viewpoint of the food bank within the community. The semistructured approach enhanced data validity by capturing authentic responses, while its adaptability ensured the questions resonated with diverse interviewees (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Using this method has been proven effective when analyzing social issue because it assisted with the flow of the interviews as well as helped build connections with the participants.

Strategy for Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis approach employed as the coding method, using the recurrent themes identified from the views and responses of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019). These six steps included familiarization with the data by assessing the transcripts by reading and re-reading. The goal was to become deeply familiar with the content, noting initial impressions and potential patterns. Step 2 entailed generating initial codes. In this step, I started to identify and label specific features or segments of the data that were interesting or relevant to my research question. In Step 3, I looked for broader patterns or relationships between the initial codes. This was followed by grouping codes that seemed to be related or share common ideas. The use of the visual material that included the mind maps to assist with the arrangement of connecting themes and codes helped to maintain coherence and flow of ideas and data accuracy. Aligning each data from the extracts with the theme made it possible for categorization and explanation. The step five entailed naming of themes as per the participants who contributed them. The final, six step included presenting thematic analysis in a clear, coherent, and well-supported manner by describing methodology, outlining the identified themes, data extracts for each theme, and discussing the significance of findings related to the research question and past scholarly works.

The deductive approach uses pre-defined codes based on research questions and a review of existing literature, such as "access barriers," "food preferences," "community support," and "stigma." Codebook development involved creating a codebook that defined each code and provides examples from the data. I coded independently using an

iterative and reductive approach. This ensured that a particular idea in the participants' responses is recurrent and worthy of being marked as a theme (Christou, 2022). Once the themes were formulated into codes, they were combined into broader themes for related groups.

Interpretation identified themes informed by the Braun and Clarke thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Examples of starting themes were to include, but are not limited to, access, availability, affordability, transportation, and physical accessibility (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Utilization entailed food preferences, cooking skills, storage, and waste. The barriers' theme included cost, time constraints, lack of knowledge, and cultural barriers. Community support is defined in terms of social networks, community resources, and support from the food bank.

As a data cross-reference, thematic analysis using NVivo 15 was also conducted to identify, organize, and interpret patterns of meaning within the qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire and potentially from member-checking feedback. The open coding commenced that entails a reading the labeling of each segment that is based on themes to access, use and experiences of using the food program was documented.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Enhancing credibility of the study entailed use of multiple collection of data methods using interviews, reviews of documents to support findings (Adler, 2022). The data source triangulation included food bank data, community needs assessments, and

agency reports, which cross-reinforce various findings. Triangulation was employed to ensure that the scholarly sources mitigated individual bias.

As part of strategies to achieve trustworthiness, I engaged in prolonged interaction to develop rapport with the participants and deeply understand their perspectives on the food bank program. I learned about the experiences of the participants and their behaviors. This helped me capture vital and rich data that would not be possible to gather in a short interaction. Similarly, I achieved transferability as a component of trustworthiness by providing the participants with sufficient explanations of the significance and long-term benefits of the research (Ahmed, 2024). I described each stage and process of the research to the participants, relating the context of the study to their food bank program.

I ensured conformability through peer debriefing, where I engaged with colleagues and experts who have performed qualitative research prior to reviewing interpretations that I used to validate the findings and mitigate personal biases. For purposes of qualifying for the peer debriefing, I recruited those who have credentials on experiences on qualitative research work and their studies and findings have been proven valid. By employing these techniques, I enhanced the credibility of my findings, ensuring that the research is trustworthy, accurate, and reflects community perspectives on utilization and food accessibility.

Ethical Procedures

My research entails human participants, which required approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board [IRB Approval #: 10-06-25-0461624]. For this

reason, an application was forwarded to the IRB outlining the study's purpose, design, and procedures. Recruitment was an important part of the research that required ethical considerations to avoid vulnerability and coercion of participants (Kang & Hwang, 2021). The informed consent process, conducted as part of my recruitment processes, provided important information for the participants regarding the study's objective and their participant rights, including the right to withdraw at any time and to not answer questions that may be sensitive. Participant safety and privacy during Zoom interviews were paramount. Participants confirmed that their interviews were audio recorded. Confidentiality remained a key priority in the data collection phase. Sharing of information regarding food bank is sensitive (see Kang & Hwang, 2021). Non-judgmental interview approach and the subsequent data collection activities were done in confidentiality, and all research data will be retained for the required 5 years after which paper notes will be shredded and electronic data will be encrypted before deletion from storage devices.

Summary

This research investigated how a south-suburban Cook County city and church community perceives, utilizes, and accesses food banking program services provided by the Friendship Church. Using a mixed-methods approach that combined participant interviews with available data sources, this study aimed to examine how community members' experiences, including perceptions and experiences of barriers to accessing quality food, provided insights into their needs and preferences for sustainable food banking resources offered by Friendship Church. The data were analyzed using thematic

analysis, which provided insights into actionable recommendations as part of an intervention to address food insecurity in this community.

Section 4: Results & Recommendations

Introduction

This PAR project involved inductive research to seek information and expand understanding of what one south-suburban Cook County, IL city's residents think and feel about the food bank program offered by Friendship Church, and to determine how this program can improve the availability, access, utilization, and stability of healthy food choices. Based on the food security framework proposed by Simelane and Worth (2020) and a needs-based gap analysis, two broad research questions were adopted, including: (a) How do parishioners in one south-suburban Cook County community perceive and use the healthy food options provided by the Friendship Church's food bank program? and (b) What actionable recommendations can enhance the effectiveness and stability of Friendship Church's food bank program to meet the nutritional needs of parishioners?

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and data collection. Topics include a description of the research setting, participant demographics, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. Trustworthiness is addressed, and the study's results are structured in accordance with the research questions and emergent themes.

Data Collection

Data collection took place over a three-week period and was conducted through semistructured interviews via Zoom with 25 participants (20 beneficiaries and 5 volunteer staff), and NVivo was used for thematic analysis. The interpretations relate findings to the research questions, which focus on communication strengths and evidence-based enhancement of the community.

Research Setting

My study was conducted in one south-suburban Cook County, IL, city, which is an ideal representation of a typical food desert, where the population experiences great challenges in accessing supermarkets, grocery stores, and fresh produce. The unavailability of infrastructure makes many rely on convenience stores and gas stations to sustain themselves daily, which in many instances means a high energy level of processed food and lower level of nutritional value, which leads to rampant health issues such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and even cognitive impairments, especially in children and the elderly. The interviews were held with the support of a secure Zoom platform, accommodating the preferences, comfort, and confidentiality of the participants, offering them the ability to talk freely without interruptions.

Participant Demographics

Purposive sampling was also used to ensure that a wide range of experiences related to the Friendship Church food bank program were represented among participants, with both direct users and operational staff represented in equal proportions. Overall, 25 individuals were interviewed, 20 of whom were beneficiaries of the food bank, mostly Friendship Church congregants and residents who relied on the program for nutritional support. Five participants were staff members, including volunteers and church leaders, all of whom manage the food bank distributions and logistics.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic framework in the NVivo 15 software environment, which was employed to combine both deductive

inquiries based on existing literature on food security dimensions with inductive inquiries that emerged during the data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This was carried out through broad familiarization with various readings of the transcripts, followed by the development of preliminary codes, the identification of patterns to develop themes, and a final check for internal consistency. This process included naming themes with concise names and reporting the findings with illustrative passages. To enhance the qualitative basis with a quantitative rigor, some ancillary measures, such as word frequency counts to bring out commonly used words, sentiment analysis with classifications of very positive, moderately positive, moderately negative, or very negative with references to valence scores, and emotion detection with categories of trust, anticipation, fear, joy, anger, and sadness using automated tools now validated by manual oversight were provided.

RQ1 centered on perceptions and usage. High-frequency words that provided a view of centrality of resources, such as food at 150 instances, advanced that theme, and the sentiment score of +3 about benefits and -1 about need, yielded to the desired purpose of gap identification in access and utilization. Relational reliability was emphasized by emotion metrics, the highest level of which is 571 counts of trust.

Conversely, the analysis of RQ2 on recommendations highlighted such terms as maybe ($n = 35$), where emotions occupied the 76 counts of trust against anger ($n = 31$) to guide advisable knowledge on steady programs (Appendix G). Saturation of the data was guided by the iterative dimension of the analysis as no new themes emerged when the entire body of data was reviewed and member checking with 15 participants who volunteered

ensured interpretations by taking into consideration their opinion about the accuracy of the transcript.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To create credibility, the study observed the practice of triangulation, cross-verifying the narratives on the interview with notes of observation in the field and secondary documents such as reports of programs in the churches and church recordings of donations, triangulation has been made and it has validated the theme of providing quality of resources provided as well as the challenges of operation. The rapport built during the distribution events due to the prolonged engagement enabled participants to express genuine experiences in the fear of others judging them, which reduced the possibility of the social desirability bias where and where people could over rate the positive perceptions.

To be transferable, the descriptions of the deep contexts of a south-suburban Cook County, IL, city's food desert, the participants' demographics, and the program dynamics were rich, allowing readers to assess applicability to other settings, including other faith-based food programs in the urban suburbs. To ensure the dependability, a detailed audit trail was drawn, which tracked all the steps, i.e. the origin of raw audio files and transcripts, coding schemes and theme development, to ensure reliability. Conformability was tackled by the researcher's biases, such as the preconceived notions of prior familiarity with the community, through reflexive journaling that monitored personal reflection and decisions, and peer debriefing of two outside qualitative researchers, who helped both to discuss objectivity through a 20% sample of the coded data. The research

questions are supported directly by these strategies, relying on the guidelines (see Adler, 2022), which are guaranteed to provide reliable interpretations of the perceptions (RQ1) and recommendations (RQ2), and adhering to the objectives by preparing a set of trustworthy tools to be fully used in operating sustainable food banks.

Study Results

The two research questions underpinned my interview data, and the emergent themes offered data patterns for detailed analyses. Emphasis was laid on the ways the findings explain community perceptions and use to RQ1, and make practical improvements towards RQ2, which is based on the food security framework. In this framework, a systematic and methodical examination of qualitative and quantitative findings obtained during interviews, word frequencies, sentiments, and emotions was possible, ensuring that the interpretations were closely related to community collaboration and empowerment, the grounding principles of the PAR. Through these findings, I have demonstrated that the Friendship Church's food bank initiative is an important intervention within the food desert in this south-suburban Cook County city, where the lack of healthy food reinforces health inequities. It is not only that the results support the framework presented by Simelane and Worth (2020), which focuses on the availability, access, utilization, and stability, but also the results directly add to the study goals of creating a toolkit that would consist of local regulations, sustainable donation resources, and evidence-based eligibility requirements.

RQ1: Perceptions and Utilization of Healthy Food Options

An overwhelming opinion by the participants reflected the food bank as an indispensable support within their food desert setting, where usage trends served as strength in combating instant relief and opportunities to enhance in terms of congruence. Three themes appeared: (1) resource accessibility and quality, (2) community support and relational dynamics, and (3) utilization challenges and preferences. The identified themes were investigated using combined data, correlating the frequencies of words, sentiments, and feelings with the goals of identifying gaps and informing toolkit development to enhance availability, usability, and stability. The goals are achieved by putting these patterns to practice into the toolkit, which include plans of collaborating with Cook County suppliers to increase availability and regulatory advice to provide safe yet quality distributions.

Theme 1: Resource Accessibility and Quality

This theme creates awareness of the perception of participants of the program offerings as being essential but varying, thus answering RQ1 by exposing the perceptions related to availability and quality. Across both questions, the most frequent substantive words were “food” ($n = 186$), “people” ($n = 182$), “community” ($n = 121$), “church” ($n = 108$), “bank” ($n = 82$), and “need” ($n = 98$), confirming that the core activity of the program is providing basic food assistance in a church-based setting often described by beneficiaries as a crucial stopgap in a neighborhood without real stores.

Sentiment analysis of key words showed a strongly positive tone: terms such as “great” (+3), “benefit” (+3), “benefits” (+3), and “blessing” (+3) appeared repeatedly,

reflecting appreciation for the existence and impact of the food bank, while “help” (+2) and “support” (+2) further reinforced perceived value. Milder positive terms like “important” (+2), “resources” (+1), and “available” (+1) were also common. Negative terms were far fewer and milder, limited primarily to “need” (-1), “time” (-1), “low” (-1), “limited” (-1), and “challenge(s)” (-2), indicating occasional concerns about quantity, variety, or logistical constraints rather than fundamental dissatisfaction.

Emotion profiles differed noticeably between the two questions yet remained predominantly positive. Responses to Question 1 (general perceptions) were dominated by *trust* ($n = 571$) and *joy* ($n = 73$), with moderate *anticipation* ($n = 59$) and very low levels of *fear* ($n = 21$), *anger* ($n = 11$), and *sadness* ($n = 11$). In contrast, Question 2 (suggestions/improvements) showed continued *trust* ($n = 76$) but higher *anticipation* ($n = 35$) and markedly elevated *anger* ($n = 31$), suggesting that when participants were explicitly invited to critique or propose changes, frustration about existing limitations surfaced more strongly, even though overall trust in the program remained high.

One of the main concerns that remain consistent throughout the interviews was the supply inconsistencies. Many of the individuals stated that sometimes there could be long wait time which possesses an issue when there are things such as inclement weather affecting their abilities to wait. When issues such as these arise, it can cause people to become upset or angered out of the fear that they may miss out on the opportunity to gain access to the needed food. However, outside of these barriers, it still remained consistent that the individuals found the food bank to be favorable because it gave them access to quality food options that would not have been readily provided to them. As one

participant noted, “The use is reflected in the fact that quality affects our everyday decision such as when we buy veggies, we can improve our food” (Participant B6), highlighting the connection between quality and food security utilization. Based on the respondents in the interviews it can be determined that for the most part the food bank was able to give them the ability to use some of their income in other needed areas because they were able to depend on the food bank for their healthy food options which allowed for them to cut down on stress and anxiety as it related to how they would eat. These outcomes help explain the relatively low negative emotion levels observed overall.

This theme addresses RQ1 by demonstrating context-dependent perceptions: the food bank is viewed as an essential, trusted, and greatly appreciated resource, yet its reliability and assortment could be improved. Recommendations for the toolkit therefore emphasize sustainable sourcing partnerships with Cook County suppliers to increase and stabilize availability, alongside adherence to food-safety and nutrition guidelines to maintain or enhance quality. These evidence-based enhancements aim to reduce vulnerability to chronic illness and build long-term community resilience.

The participants underlined the presence of the program as noted by one of the volunteer staff members, “Our city (city name redacted) is what it’s called a food desert. We don’t have a grocery store in the proximate distance that’s needed to support members of this community” (Church Volunteer 2), amplifying the urgent necessity of a continuous presence to deal with the food issues on a daily basis.

The word cloud (Figure 1) clearly represents the dominance of words such as "people," "food," "need," "church," "community," and "bank" with other prominent

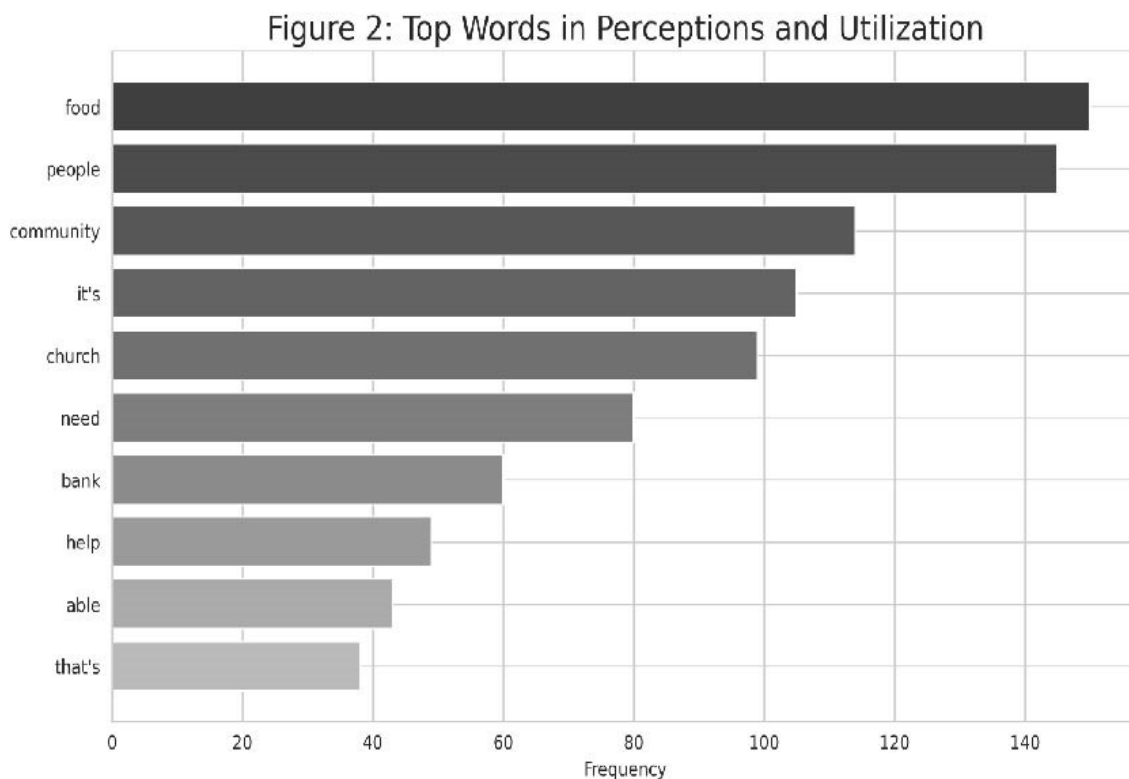
described using any negative words and so, means that it is overall positive, yet contradictory frequencies imply problematic issues that require interventions that are stability oriented such as intermittency. To add to this, the cloud is a simplified version of thematic density where words that are resource focused dominate and the community uses the program as a model of essential survival within a food desert. The interpretation is directly related to the objectives of the study in that it reveals trends which may shape up the particular components of the toolkit taking the form of lists of local suppliers in Cook County to increase availability.

Besides, the visual cloud also provides focus to the emotional dimension, evidenced by words such "know" and "think", which may inform educational materials on how to make healthy meals. The analysis generates knowledge on the impact of perceptions on behavior by taking advantage of this visualization to provide select proposals that empower participants and lead to social equity. As an example, the accessibility of the program was echoed by one of the beneficiaries' claiming that "you can come and get what you need and it's free of charge" (User 12) which mirrors the emotional stance of them about receiving the resources even though it is sometimes limited.

Figure 2 illustrates both the frequencies and sort them based on the most common ones with "food" ($n = 148$) leading the trailed by "people" ($n = 128$), "community" ($n = 98$), while others such as "need" ($n = 73$) and "bank" ($n = 63$) comes at a distant count thus giving a quantitative theme assessment.

Figure 2

Top Words in Perceptions and Utilization Bar Chart



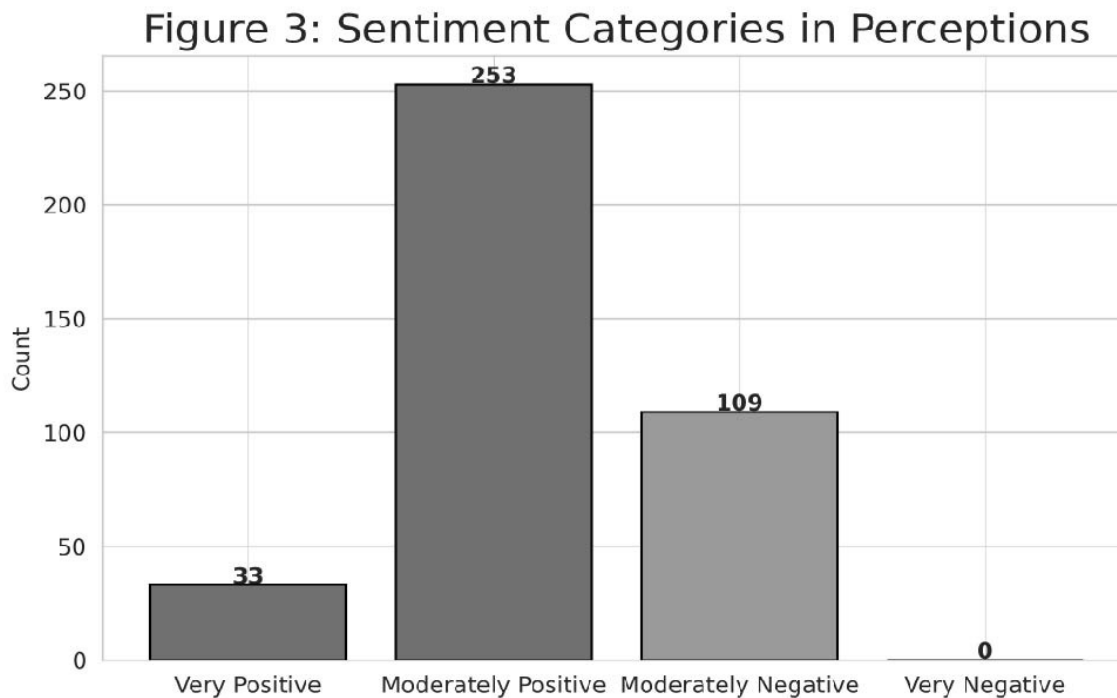
This graph views perceptions as resource-oriented directly answering RQ1 by demonstrating utilization as being resource-based on necessities, with "people" ($n = 128$) and "community" ($n = 98$) highlighting the strong social and collective dimension of support networks, while "need" ($n = 73$) and "help" ($n = 48$) underscore perceived deficits and assistance requirements. Related to objectives, it highlights deficits in access, suggesting inclusion criteria in the toolkit to focus on the high-need households, promoting superior stability and social equity.

Based on the frequencies identified above, the visualization serves as bridge that connects the data of emotion and action-oriented goals, including the necessity to be inclusive in minimizing moderate negatives and maximizing positives to foster social change in the food-insecure communities. This is amplified by real experiences and utterance of participant 11, "It impacted us in a good way. At a point of time, I needed to get some extra food, and I was able to go to them for help" which mirrors the positive feeling toward quality and accessibility.

The sentiment categories bar graph (Figure 3) in perceptions has moderately positive ($n = 253$), very positive ($n = 33$), moderately negative ($n = 109$), with no instances of very negative words ($n = 0$) which reflects relatively positive profile, with a possibility of being better (Appendix G). This interpretation indicates that the perceptions of the whole group are considerably favorable with most positive aspects being linked to benefit as a concept (+3/-2), but negative attributes such as "challenge" (-2) indicating obstacles to utilization.

Figure 3

Sentiment Categories in Perceptions Bar Chart



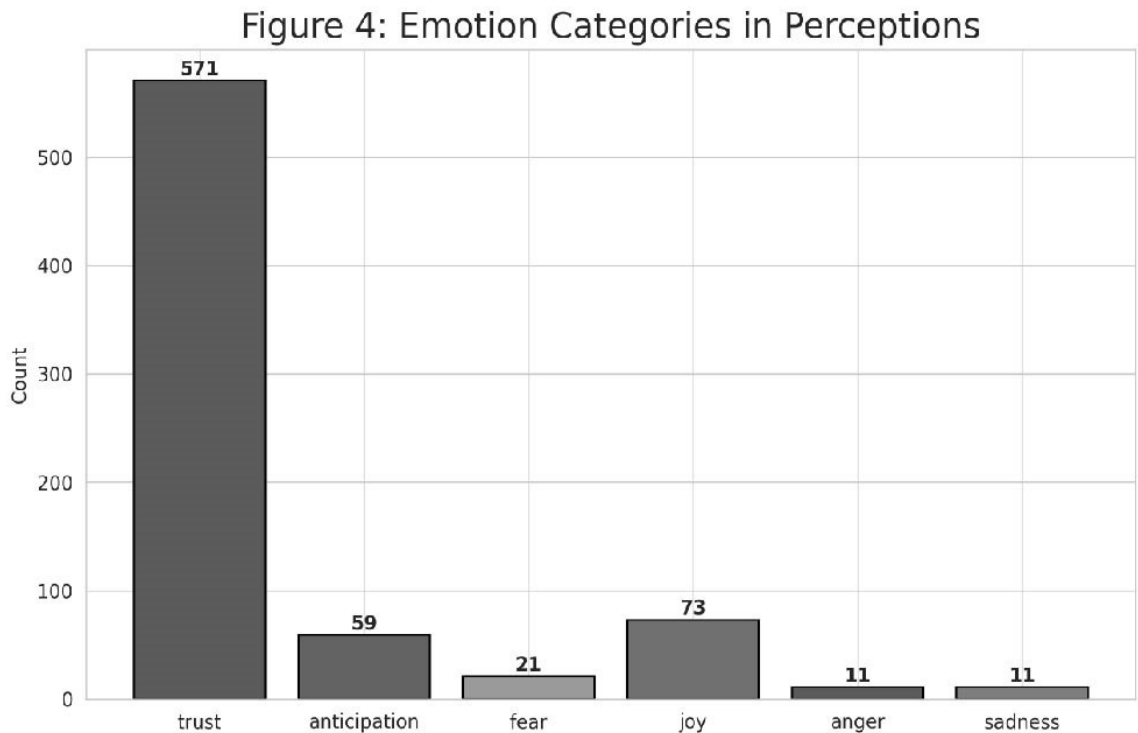
The findings align with the study goals and objectives by determining sentiment-based gaps, including the case of affordability to guide toolkit aspects of regulations and resources, facilitating increased usage and community transformation. Additional analysis of distribution of the chart indicates that there is a balance that demonstrates subtle opinions of those who are not specifically negative about the role the program plays in reducing hunger, but no extreme negativity demonstrates any form of robustness despite the limitations. Words such as "able" and "available" can be said to be balanced

(able +1; available +1), which implies that there is a possibility of growth by implementation of special interventions.

The bar chart emotion categories (Figure 4) in perceptions measures "trust" ($n = 571$) with a resounding frequency, followed distantly by "joy" ($n = 73$) then "anticipation" ($n = 59$), with a sharp decline to "fear" ($n = 21$), and least observations in "anger" ($n = 11$) and "sadness" ($n = 11$) showing the trend of landscape of reliability with minimal apprehensions beneath it.

Figure 4

Emotion Categories in Perceptions Bar Chart



This graph solidly answers RQ1 since it translates the perceptions into trust-based perspectives whose utilization would increase through happiness in support and decrease through the fear of inconsistency. The fact that the chart places overwhelming emphasis

on trust follows the role of the church as a reliable anchor where happiness comes as a result of effective interactions that can promote utilization, that is, one gets things one likes. The reduced presence of fear implies fewer issues of instability, such as random distributions, which are consistent with the necessity of the elements of regulatory toolkits that would make sure of conformability and uniformity. The isolated frustrations are marked with minor anger and sadness that can be interpreted as change motivators instead of harmful factors. The emotional profile demonstrates an interest in community-based approaches that would capitalize on the pleasant feelings and reduce the impact of unpleasant ones which, in the long run, would lead to a healthier population and decreased susceptibility of this south-suburban Cook County, IL, city.

Theme 2: Community Support and Relational Dynamics

Expanding on the relational dynamics and community support, this theme looks at the establishment of connections through the program considering the use of "help" ($n = 49$) "people" ($n = 145$), and "community" ($n = 114$), as the indicators of social capital that increases utilization and perceptions drawing from RQ1. The trust prevailed over emotions as participants explained that the church was a supportive body, and any form of interaction reflected dignity. The positive feelings such as "great" (+3) and "benefit" (+3) reveal the strengths and minor negativity mirrored by words such as "challenge" (-2) indicates an opportunity in further interaction. This theme has a linkage with goals as it focuses on the aspects of being inclusive in the approaches to eligibility of the toolkit to achieve social change by providing power in the relationships. The pattern of data indicates the nature of extents of utilization beyond transactions to form a network

against isolation in food deserts. To illustrate, the mentions of "great" ($n = 26$), shows gratitude that builds trust, and goes hand in hand with joy in emotional (Figure 2; Figure 4). These can be interpreted as a mitigating factor to fear encourages stability in community ties.

The theme covers the gaps by suggesting toolkit materials on training in empathetic service on volunteers, which would enhance positives and reduce the needs. All in all, understanding relations to be central to sustainable food security and the wider equity evidenced by some the beneficiaries citing "It definitely brings you know community. It brings people together. It's basically saying no one left alone in this community like if something is wrong in your household, you have people to help you" (User 1), and "I think it brings a sense of belonging. It brings a sense of community and a space for people to have those resources" (User 18). The real accounts demonstrate how the program has helped people to establish a social network and emotional support.

Theme 3: Utilization Challenges and Preferences

This theme explores both practical challenges and wants, analyzing utterances such as "need" ($n = 80$), "time" ($n = 20$), and "like" ($n = 157$) to indicate biases in favor of healthy products against challenges and fulfills RQ1 by demonstrating the use as adaptive but limited. The understanding of fear and low anger as a motivating factor towards change coincide with the goals and provides understanding on resources to be used in education to encourage the use and maintenance. Going further, these tendencies underscore how time restrictions of working participants restrict access, relating to negativity of sentiment such as "challenge" (-2). Tendencies towards variety, reflected by

utterance of word such as "full" ($n = 15$) imply that client-choice models can be boosted to increase the joy and anticipation. The interpretations of the theme reveal some of the weaknesses of the pillar of utilization, like cultural incompatibilities in food items provided, and the toolkit content such as lists of local suppliers can be suggested to differentiate donations.

Dealing with these barriers with more flexible hours of food distribution, culturally appropriate sources of food, and offering more choices would help the utilization pillar of the program. By countering inconsistent quality and the lack of scheduling, the program can be better able to support consistent nutritional intake, which evidence shows is critical for preventing cognitive impairments associated with food insecurity (e.g., reduced executive function, memory deficits, and lower academic/work performance in both children and adults; see Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015; Jyoti et al., 2005; Seligman et al., 2010). One of the respondents explained their hurdles alongside preferences stating: "I mean the value of the food helps out quite a bit. There's a quality item, not just random generic items" (User 4). Further, User 18 said, "Some of the challenges I think are that it's only during the week which could be an issue for some people that may have different work hours and can't make it in time to get there in time." The contextual evidence implies that there is a need for the food to be of high quality to increase the use of the food bank daily.

RQ2: Actionable Recommendations for Effectiveness and Stability

Recommendations were made that emerged as practical solutions, and the subjects of Volunteer Engagement and Sustainability, Program Improvements, and the issues of

Addressing Challenges being interpreted to drive improvements and achieve meeting the requirements of an all-encompassing toolkit. I used the data to arrive at strategies that were to expand on the insights of RQ1, which include operational and relational change as well as enhancement of the program's overall impact on one south-suburban Cook County, IL, city. This section analyzes utterances of word such as "important" (51) and emotions dominated by "trust" (51) to show that the community is confident in the opportunities of changes, which is linked to the stability pillar of the food security framework. Through these themes, the analysis links the suggestions of the participants with the aspects of the toolkit, including the regulatory compliance and resources to donation, which secures the sustainability. The participants provided certain suggestions, such "I think the food bank can improve by just getting more involvement with the community, getting more people involved" (User 1) indicating that volunteer and community engagement can streamline operations.

Theme: Volunteer Engagement and Sustainability

The central theme, which focuses on "important" ($n = 24$) and "volunteer" ($n = 10$), is the need to have expanded roles to make them consistent. The toolkit objective of donation is sustainability development to access and social change. The emphasis on the role of volunteers responds to the gaps in RQ1, and such sentiments as "necessity" (+2) focus on human resources in a critical situation. Patterns imply the training programs to enhance the engagement, which corresponds to the stability due to the trustworthy operations. The data provided in this theme is associated with the resources of Cook County, which proposes collaboration in terms of further donations. Interpretations also

underscore empowerment, which mitigate the challenges by adopting community-based developing opportunities, and helps to support the holistic perspective of the framework. The sentiments from both volunteer and beneficiaries such as "us as members we kind of package the food and then distribute it to those that are in need" (User 1), and

The reason we brought the food bank to our ministry because (city name redacted) is what it's called a food desert. I think. What keeps me motivated is that every time that I've served anyone that is in need, the Bible declares that I'm doing it as a service unto the Lord (Volunteer 2)

echoes the concept of volunteer support to the program's sustainability and service to the community.

The word cloud on recommendation (Figure 5) presents the word important as the most significant and then the word volunteer, day and improves presenting the priorities of enhancing the operation. Applying this to RQ2, the emphasis on action orientation is evident, which is connected to the goals because it proposes strategies to volunteer of the toolkit to enhance stability. Further analysis of the cloud's structure reveals major terms such as "challenge" and "operate" meaning that it is urgent to deal with the issue of intermittency.

Figure 5*Word Cloud in Recommendations*

To visualize the most prominent language used by participants when offering suggestions for improvement, this cloud chart supplements frequency data, which informs that the concept of positive feedback can be used to designate regulatory toolkit portions. The analysis highlights social justice and program durability through evidence-based improvements by giving preference to words like "maybe", "challenges", "able", and "need." The word cloud's most prominent terms (food, people, maybe, need, able, bank, don't, and challenges) suggest a focus on recommendations and potential improvements. The tentative language ('maybe') combined with references to obstacles ('challenges,' 'don't') indicates participants were thinking critically about how the program

could be better rather than simply expressing satisfaction. This improvement-oriented mindset appeared in the interviews as well. One participant explained, 'I think the food bank can improve by just getting more involvement with the community, getting more people involved... I think if it got more people involved you know it could be bigger than what it is now' (User 1), pointing to volunteer recruitment as a key factor in the program's long-term sustainability

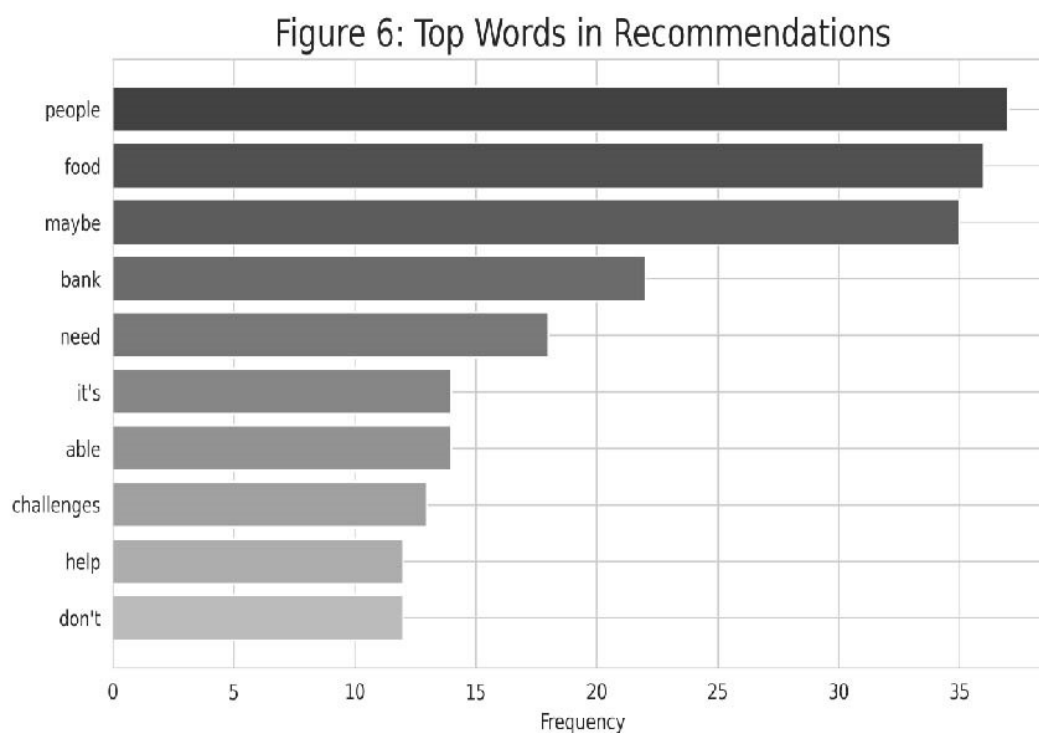
The bar graph reinforces this theme by showing the frequency of key terms in participant recommendations: 'important' appeared 24 times and 'volunteer' 10 times, emphasizing the need for better scheduling and staffing. The prevalence of speculative and problem-focused language in Word Cloud 1 shows that participants were not just identifying barriers but actively proposing solutions. These findings offer actionable directions for toolkit development, particularly around increasing community involvement, improving resource availability, and addressing operational challenges.

The language used in participants recommendations was analyzed in terms of the frequency of words used. Figure 6 displays the most frequently occurring words that are related to the suggested improvements which highlight the priorities. This filtered-funnel-like bar graph aligns with the objectives of the study, suggesting the elements of toolkits in the regulatory area to be more effective. Increasing the sequence of the chart puts an emphasis on the words "improve" ($n = 6$), as well as on the word "available" ($n = 7$), which are related to sustainability by means of practical shifts. They are based on community input and were to contribute to the objectives of PAR as a collaborator and cover the gap of donations to ensure long-term stability. A participant noted "the way that

we can improve the food bank is by providing more resources, whether it's more items, funding, people, just to be able to provide more resources and food for those who are in need. More and more people are wanting to come to use it as a resource" (User 5), justifying that the number of volunteers should be expanded to keep up with the increase in demand.

Figure 6

Top Words in Recommendations

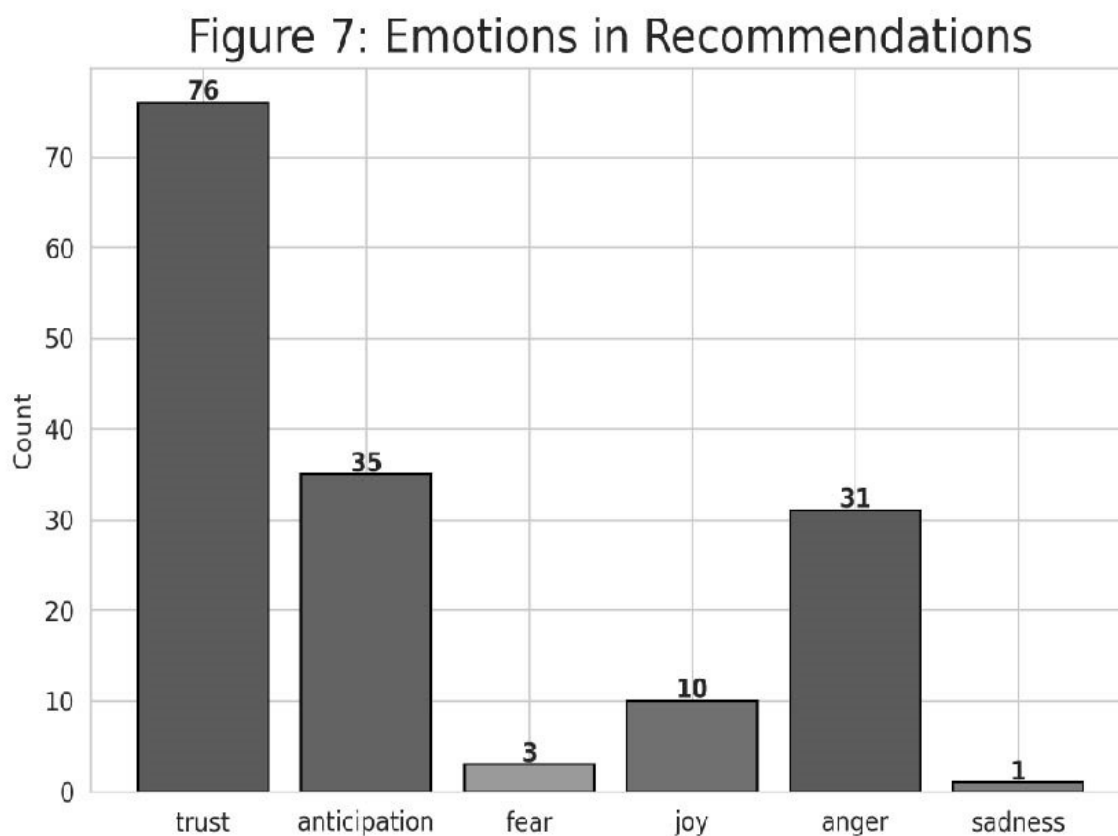


An emotional analysis was also used to examine the affective tone of the participants' recommendations. This illustration is on Figure 7, which has shown the distribution of emotions expressed by the participants when they discussed the suggestions on improvement. The emotions bar chart of recommendations indicates the "trust" ($n = 76$), "anger" ($n = 31$), "anticipation" ($n = 35$), with the tones of confidence but

urgency. In the case of RQ2, this informs recommendations as credible, in encouragement of toolkit development in response to challenges, to foster sustainability. Moreover, the prevalence of trust indicates a belief in solutions to problems within the community, and anger indicates the priorities such as the lack of volunteers. This emotional profile is connected to goals, that is, resource lists are organized to reduce frustrations and maximize positive results. This trust as was confirmed by Volunteer 4 stating, "It shows them that there's a community of people that are there for them versus just saying that you're there for them," mirroring the confidence that despite the operational challenges.

Figure 7

Emotions in Recommendation



Theme 2: Program Improvements

This theme is driven by the sentiments that include such terms like "improve" ($n = 6$) and "available" ($n = 7$), understanding the offers of working long hours and being "available" (sentiment score +1) and offering the actual steps to provide the answer to the second Research Question. In harmony with the objectives of the study, it enlightens evidence-based toolkit requirements to be used, including regulatory provisions and on budgetary allocation to make the program productive. Particularly, the patterns such as "hour" ($n = 1$) demonstrate the necessity to make timing changes to support working families and it is connected to the barrier of RQ1 barriers in access and scheduling issues. According to some of the participants, "Maybe having more operating hours or maybe another day during the week" (User 15) while Volunteer 5 claimed "So maybe twice a week, maybe more frequently during the week twice a week instead of once a week" stems the necessity of flexible scheduling. The sentiments inform the toolkit to develop the holistic approach and, in this case, the program should improve its service to vulnerable population groups and enhance the food desert community's resilience in the long-run perspective.

Theme 3: Addressing Challenges

With emphasis on the theme of challenge, frustrations are seen as opportunities, given the moderately positive sentimental score of "help" (+2) which supports essentials on RQ2. Alongside utterances of words such as "challenges" ($n = 13$) is an indication of the need to prioritize repair as such as expansion capacity to conform to pillars of framework to enhance availability and usage. The theme has been used to transform data

into action plans, including improving eligibility to encompass vulnerable populations, achieve resilience and social change within the community.

Some of the challenges that were noted by the participants were "Often times the food may run out so but of course it's not the food banks. Issues were just more so just reaching out to the community to ensure that there is a plethora of more food" (User 13), and "Some of the challenges, it could be the amount of people that's in need of the food bank," (User 17) showing the growing demand and system overload. There were also operational challenges that were reported like "I think that it's only one day a week for certain hours. You know everybody may not be able to get there while it's available" as seen in the line "You know everybody may not be able to get there when there is some to be had" (User 15) which seems to hint at the problem of access. To respond to those, the recommendations were "the way that we can improve the food bank is by providing more resources, whether it's more items, funding, people" (User 17).

Summary

Chapter 4 described the outcomes of the PAR project for the food bank program at the Friendship Church in a south-suburban Cook County, IL, city. This suburb of Chicago has health problems such as obesity and diabetes because many people living there do not have access to healthy foods. The study responded to two questions based on the Simelane and Worth (2020) food security framework (availability, access, utilization, stability): community perceptions/utilization of healthy options and suggestions on how to enhance the program using semistructured interviews (25 participants; 20 beneficiaries, five staff), field notes, and NVivo thematic analysis. In the case of RQ1, the

themes focused on resource accessibility/quality (needed but variable), community support (developing trust and belonging), and utilization issues (e.g., scheduling, variety). The overall emotional responses are positive, and the most positive emotion is trust. RQ 2 suggests voluntary activities, long-term operations, and resource growth as an improvement of sustainability. Results guide a toolkit of policies, donor networks, and eligibility standards to enhance equity and resilience in food-insecure communities.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan and Conclusion

Dissemination Plan

The important measure of action-oriented research, specifically informed by a participatory approach, is not limited to the quality of outcome in terms of the findings but to have breakdown and translation of each result into bringing positive change. The dissemination plan for my action-oriented research requires a multilayered approach mainly designed to have the outcome first leveraged by the client organization, Friendship Church, and then a dissemination plan distributed and sustainably implemented by a wider community network dedicated to ongoing program support.

Dissemination to Client Organization

The audience that are immediate and critical for this research included core volunteers comprised of Friendship Church leadership and staff with program knowledge and those program beneficiaries, mainly from the church's congregation. I have proposed a three phased approach that ensures the study findings are presented, absorbed, and implemented into operational functions.

The comprehensive action oriented summary report will be presented to the Friendship Church program leadership to include the pastors and program coordinator. The concise report write-up will be focused on actionable steps that drawn from the RQ2, which highlights program metrics, resource allocation, volunteer training needs, and sustainable inventory management practices. My analyzed data serve as the inventory foundation and provide an objective grounding for the proposed outcomes. For example, the ratio of the available food versus the shelf stable items to help identify the gaps those

are available in the administration gaps that would need to be addressed to achieve the nutritional goals.

In the same way, the stakeholder presentation and scheduling for dialogue are part of the dissemination process (Twa, 2022). I anticipate providing multiple presentation sessions to church leadership to encourage them into building consensus while addressing the real organizational resistance to the change for the food program. Core themes, drawn from the thematic analysis, will be presented to include barriers to healthy nutrition and the identified administrative constraints toward implementation of a sustainable food bank program.

The dissemination plan will also entail a proposed structured workshop that engages church leadership, volunteer groups, and the church's ministry leaders. My research deliverables include the food bank operations and the approach to sustainable management. The operational and management manual provides for a list of verified documents for the donations, direct purchases of the food products used in the partnerships and relationship management for the local farmers supplying food items as captured in the data presented during collection (see Twa, 2022). A significant part of the dissemination tools is the sustainability dashboard, which is user-friendly based on its user interface that is developed based on the performance key indicators. The leaders of the food bank program will lead by monitoring the operations to make informed decisions about the program's long-term viability.

The Broader Implications and Applicability

Whereas this research was tailored to address Friendship Church's food bank program, my findings possess an important applicability to the other faith-based organizations that operate and manage food bank programs. The model that is generated from this study identifies that methodology informed by data sources, the demographic surveys, and the capacity of the organization to develop a sustainable model for the food program are important parts of a comprehensive approach. The faith-based organizations that operate food bank programs in a low-income environment can work with the model. The study's outcome is vital for driving positive social change, and this stems from identifying the potential systemic gaps and inequalities when it comes to food insecurity and providing actionable tools to address gaps towards a more sustainable implementation process.

Conclusion

My action-oriented study has used multiple data sources to develop essential deliverables, a robust manual, and a sustainable portfolio for Friendship Church's food program. The model for a sustainable food program is highly adaptable and has a scalable blueprint for both communities and organizations that are looking to build a resilient and data-informed food bank program. By developing reliable community support systems, the study underscores the need for food bank programs that align with a community's social determinants of health and foster a sustainable food supply in community food deserts.

Summary

This research culminates with an effective and practical dissemination plan. The structure of the dissemination plan is developed with an interactive workshop for the food bank program and the sustainability portfolio for Friendship Church. This approach seeks to ensure that there is translation from my research to implementation of identified and recommended operational changes in their church-based food program. Additionally, informed by food theory and using a community-based approach, this study presents the perceptions and utilization of healthy food from the perspective of program volunteers, staff, and program recipients. Food insecurity remains a challenge that manifests in terms of poor health outcomes and often long-term outcomes that manifests in community vulnerability and chronic diseases. Issues identified include, but are not limited to, the need for equal access to healthy food in a south-suburban Cook County, IL, city through the implementation of sustainable, reliable food bank options to supplement community nutritional needs.

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Appendix A: Partnership Letter of Agreement

Partner Organization Agreement

[REDACTED]

Date 9/22/2025

The doctoral student, Samantha Scott, is approved to collect data from parishioners, church staff, and food bank volunteers at [REDACTED] Park Forest. I understand the study to be focused on faith-based food banks and the sustainable availability of healthy food options, food bank operations, and investigating community needs.

Student Responsibilities

I understand that, as per the student doctoral program requirements, the student will publish a scholarly report of this study in ProQuest as a doctoral capstone (withholding the name of the organization), as per the following ethical standards:

- a. In all reports (including drafts shared with peers and faculty members), the student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of evidence/data that might disclose the organization's identity or inappropriately divulge proprietary details. If the organization itself wishes to publicize the findings of this project, that is the organization's judgment call.
- b. The student will be responsible for complying with the organization's policies and requirements regarding data collection (including the need for the partner organization's internal ethics/regulatory approval, if applicable).
- c. Participants will be provided an Informed Consent document that describes how the data will be used in the doctoral project and how their privacy will be protected.
- d. The doctoral student will not use these data for any purpose other than the doctoral study outlined in this agreement.

Approved Recruitment Requests

1. **Church Announcement:** [to be read at church services for three consecutive weeks of scheduled church services]

A Walden University Doctoral student researcher, Samantha Scott, is seeking volunteers for a faith-based food bank research project. If you feel called to contribute to this effort to serve the community, please refer to the bulletin for Samantha's contact information or consult the flyers displayed throughout the church.

2. **Included in Church Bulletin:** [To be printed in the church bulletin for three consecutive weeks.

Volunteer Opportunity:

A Walden University Doctoral student researcher, Samantha Scott, is seeking volunteers for a faith-based food bank research project. If you are interested in supporting Samantha's efforts to serve the community, please contact her directly via email at Samantha.scott@waldenu.edu or via phone at 773-793-7925.

3. **Post Flyer for Congregation:** Once the study is approved, Samantha Scott will email the flyer to the church email address. The church staff will print and post the flyers on the church community bulletin boards for three consecutive weeks, aligned with the congregation and church bulletin messages above.
4. **Distribute Flyer to Food Bank Volunteers and Church Staff:** Once the study is approved, Samantha Scott will email the flyer to the church email address. The church staff will forward the flyer via email to church staff and food bank volunteers who have provided email addresses.
5. **Site Location:** The church will provide a private setting, if requested, where church staff, food bank program volunteers, and food bank users can participate in this research, including reviewing the informed consent materials and participating in interviews.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research activities in our church setting.



Pastor

Partner Organization Leader's printed name and

Title  _____

Appendix B: Interview Script and Semistructured Questions – Church Staff and Food

Bank Volunteers

Staff & Volunteers

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am conducting a research study on the benefits of having a food bank at Friendship Church. The purpose of this interview is to better understand how the food bank impacts the church congregation and the wider community, as well as to learn about any personal experiences or perspectives you may have working with or volunteering for the food bank program. Your input helps to explore the value of the church's food bank ministry and explore ways the program can continue to serve others effectively. Your responses are to be kept confidential, and there is no right or wrong answers. The interview time lasts approximately 45-60 minutes.

If at any point during this interview you have a question you don't want to answer or feel uncomfortable answering, please let me know, and we will move on to the next question. If you decide you no longer wish to participate at any time, you are free to stop the interview.

This interview is recorded audio so that I can accurately capture your responses; however, the camera remains off to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Your identity won't be shared, and all information will only be used for this research.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

Background & Role

1. How long have you been involved with the church's food bank?
2. What motivated you to volunteer or work with the food bank?
3. What are some of the roles and responsibilities you have in relation to food bank program?

Experiences & Observations

4. What has been the most meaningful experience for you while serving in the food bank?
5. Have you noticed any changes in the needs of the people who come to the food bank?
6. How do you think the food bank impacts the families or individuals who use it?
7. What impact do you think the food bank has had on the church's community?

Challenges & Successes

8. What do you see as the biggest strengths of how the food bank operates?
9. What challenges have you faced while volunteering or working in the program?
10. How has the church supported you and other volunteers in this food bank ministry?

Suggestions & Growth

11. What improvements or changes would you recommend for the food bank?

12. What additional services or resources could strengthen the impact of the food bank?

13. How can the church ministry encourage more church members to get involved?

Final Reflection

14. In your view, why is it important for the church to have a food bank?

15. What keeps you motivated to continue serving in this church ministry?

Closing Salutation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and share your thoughts. Your input is highly valuable, and the information you provided highlights the benefits of a sustainable Friendship Church food bank program and its community service mission.

If you would like to receive a summary of the study's findings once it is complete, I would be happy to send it to you.

If Yes: What email address would you like me to use to send you the summary results?

[pause for answer and record and verbally confirm provided email address.]

If No: thank the interview participant and close the session.

Food Bank Users

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. I am conducting a research study on the benefits of having a food bank at Friendship Church. The purpose of this interview is to better understand how the food bank impacts the church congregation and the wider community, as well as to learn about any personal experiences or perspectives you may have from using the church's food bank program. Your input help to explore the value of the church's food bank ministry and explore ways the program can continue to serve others effectively. Your responses be kept confidential, and there are no right or wrong answers. The interview time last approximately 45-60 minutes.

If at any point during this interview you have a question you don't want to answer or feel uncomfortable answering, please let me know, and we will move on to the next question. If you decide you no longer wish to participate at any time, you are free to stop the interview.

This interview be audio recorded so that I can accurately capture your responses; however, the camera remains off to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Your identity won't be shared, and all information only be used for this research.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

Background & Awareness

1. How did you first hear about the food bank at the Friendship Church?
2. What do you know about how the food bank operates?
3. Have you or someone you know ever used the food bank?

Personal Impact

4. In what ways, if any, has the food bank impacted you or your family?
5. Do you feel the food bank has made a difference in the lives of people you know?

Can you share an example?

Church & Community Impact

6. How do you think the food bank reflects Friendship Church's mission?
7. What benefits do you think the food bank brings to the community?
8. How do you believe the food bank influences people's perception of the church?

Suggestions & Improvements

9. What do you think is working well with the food bank?
10. What challenges do you see in using the food bank?
 - a. How might the food bank improve?
11. What other services or supports would benefit you in addition to the church's food bank?

Final Reflection

12. Why do you think it's important for the church to continue having a food bank?
13. What words would you use to describe the food bank's role in the Friendship Church family?

Closing Salutation

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview and share your thoughts. Your input is truly valuable, and the information you provided help highlight the benefits of a sustainable Friendship Church food bank program and its community service mission.

If you would like to receive a summary of the study's findings once it is complete, I would be happy to send it to you.

If Yes: What email address would you like me to use to send you the summary results?

[pause for answer and record and verbally confirm provided email address.]

If No: thank the interview participant and close the session.

Appendix C: Flyer for Recruitment for Food Bank Users



A research study is seeking individuals who have used a faith-based food bank.

This study seeks to collaboratively explore perceptions and utilization of the [REDACTED] food bank program and develop sustainable operational strategies for implementing and maintaining a faith-based food bank. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences using a faith-based food bank.

About the study:

- Participate in one 45-60 minute audio-recorded Zoom interview.
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- Be at least 18 years old.
- Have experienced using a faith-based food bank.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Samantha Scott, a DPA student at Walden University. Interviews will take place throughout September 2025.

To confidentially volunteer, contact the researcher:

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix D: Flyer for Recruitment for Food Bank Volunteers



A research study is seeking individuals who have volunteered at a faith-based food bank.

This study seeks to collaboratively explore perceptions and utilization of the [REDACTED] food bank program and develop sustainable operational strategies for implementing and maintaining a faith-based food bank. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences volunteering at a faith-based food bank.

About the study:

- Participate in one 45-60 minute audio-recorded Zoom interview.
- To protect your privacy, the study will not share any identifying names or details.

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

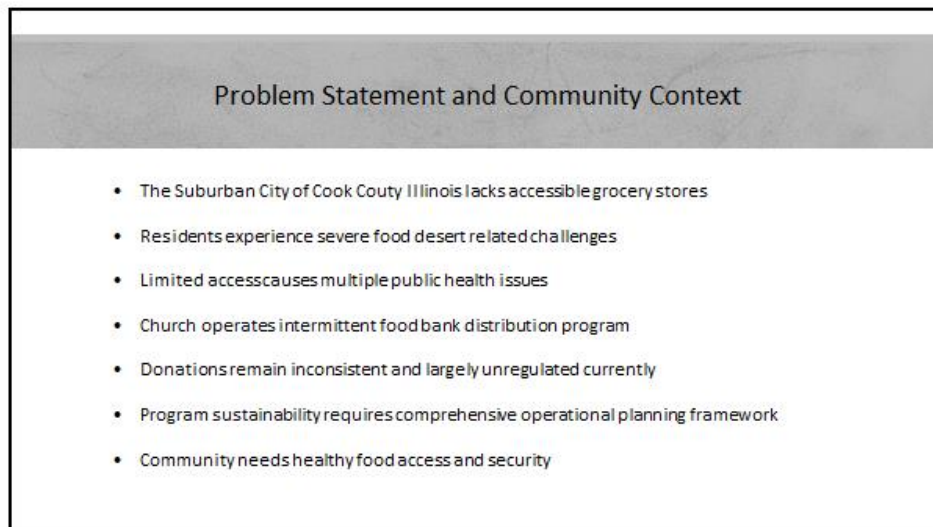
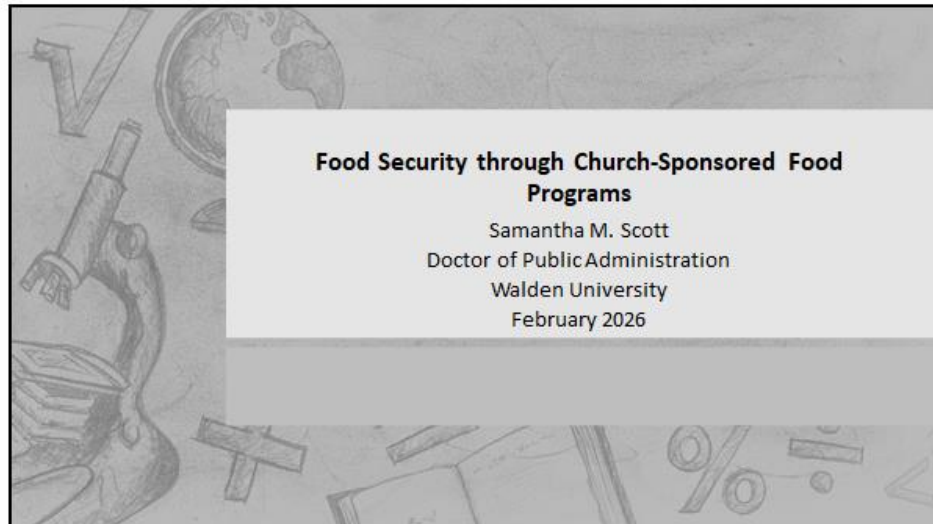
- Be at least 18 years old.
- Be a staff member or church volunteer experienced in working with the First Baptist Church food bank.

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Samantha Scott, a DPA student at Walden University. Interviews will take place throughout September 2025.

To confidentially volunteer, contact the researcher:


[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Appendix E: Partnership Organization Deliverable Presentation




Research Purpose and Objectives

- Evaluate community perceptions of food bank services
- Assess utilization patterns among program beneficiaries currently
- Identify barriers preventing effective food access opportunities
- Develop actionable recommendations for program sustainability
- Create a comprehensive toolkit for church leadership guidance
- Address food insecurity through evidence-based interventions
- Promote equitable access to nutritious food options



Theoretical Framework: Food Security Theory



- Food security theory guided entire research framework
- Availability ensures adequate quantities of food supplies
- Access addresses physical and economic food acquisition
- Utilization focuses on nutritional quality and safety
- Stability maintains consistent food access over time
- Four dimensions inform comprehensive intervention strategies effectively
- Framework addresses systemic food insecurity issues holistically

Research Methodology and Design

- Participatory action research engaged community members directly
- Qualitative approach utilized semistructured interview data collection
- Purposive sampling ensured diverse participant experiences representation
- Community members participated as active research collaborators
- Methodology promoted collaborative inquiry and actionable insights
- Design emphasized practical solutions for administrative challenges
- Ethical procedures protected participant confidentiality and rights



Data Collection and Participant Demographics



- Twenty-five participants completed comprehensive interview sessions
- Twenty beneficiaries shared their utilization experiences extensively
- Five staff members provided operational insights thoroughly
- Interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes
- Zoom platform ensured participant safety and confidentiality
- Audio recordings captured detailed participant response data
- Demographic diversity strengthened data richness and validity

Theme 1: Resource Accessibility and Quality

- Participants valued food bank as essential resource
- Quality food options exceeded convenience store alternatives
- Supply inconsistencies created occasional frustration and concern
- Trust dominated emotional responses toward program offerings
- Beneficiaries appreciated nutritious food access opportunities regularly
- Intermittent operations limited consistent utilization patterns significantly
- Resource availability influenced household food security substantially

Theme 2: Community Support and Relational Dynamics

- Food bank strengthened community bonds and connections
- Program reduced isolation among vulnerable population members
- Church provided dignified assistance respecting participant autonomy
- Social capital increased through meaningful interpersonal interactions
- Trust emerged as dominant emotional response category
- Participants valued belonging within supportive community network
- Relational dynamics enhanced utilization beyond transactional



Theme 3: Utilization Challenges and Preferences



- Limited operating hours restricted working participant access
- Food variety preferences varied across demographic groups
- Cultural food compatibility influenced utilization patterns significantly
- Time constraints prevented some beneficiaries attending distributions
- Participants desired increased client choice model implementation
- Transportation barriers affected elderly and disabled individuals
- Scheduling flexibility would enhance equitable access opportunities

Recommendations for Program Enhancement

- Expand volunteer recruitment through targeted community outreach
- Implement flexible operating hours, accommodating working participants
- Develop partnerships with Cook County donation resources
- Establish evidence-based eligibility criteria ensuring equity
- Create comprehensive volunteer training on food safety
- Adopt client choice models respecting beneficiary autonomy
- Integrate technology for inventory management and efficiency



Local Businesses That Make Donations To Food Banks

- Chick-fil-A (Chicago)Chicago Community
- Trader Joe’s
- Mike’s Subs Corporate
- Target
- Food Lion
- Costco
- Walmart & Walmart Foundation
- ALDI
- CVS Health
- Kroger & Jewel-Osco
- General Mills



Guidelines for A Food Bank in Illinois

- Food Banks in Illinois must provide, a list of their partner agencies to the local state certified public health department.
- Food Banks must follow general food safety practices that are consistent with the Illinois Food Code and local health department regulations for handling storage and distribution.
- Volunteer or staff who handle food should have training that covers: safe food handling, temperature control, hygiene and contamination prevention, proper storage and transportation.
- Food Storage and distribution operations may require registration or inspection by your local health department.
- Illinois “Farm to Food Bank Program” supports acquisition, capacity building, and compliance.

Letter Requesting Food Donations

[Church Name]
 [Church Address]
 Park Forest, IL [ZIP Code]
 [Church Phone Number]
 [Church Email Address]

[Title]
 [Business or Organization Name]
 [Contact Person's Name]
 [Business Address]

Dear [Mr./Ms./Mx. Last Name],

Grace and peace to you.

My name is Pastor [Full Name], and I serve as the pastor of [Church Name], a faith-based organization located in the Village of Park Forest, Illinois. Our church is committed to serving not only the spiritual needs of our congregation, but also the practical needs of individuals and families within our local community.

Through our church food pantry and outreach ministry, we provide food assistance to neighbors who are experiencing food insecurity, including seniors, families with children, and individuals facing financial hardship. As the need for food assistance continues to grow in our community, we are reaching out to local businesses and organizations to request support in sustaining this important ministry.

We respectfully ask you to consider making a donation of non-perishable food items, fresh food (where appropriate), or a financial contribution to support our food pantry. All donations directly benefit members of Park Forest and the surrounding area. Any amount of support would be deeply appreciated and will make a meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve.

Should you wish, we would be honored to acknowledge your generosity through church communications, community outreach materials, or other forms of recognition, in accordance with your preference.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and for the positive role you play in supporting our local community. Please feel free to contact me directly if you have any questions or would like additional information about our food pantry or donation needs.

May God bless you and your continued work.

Sincerely,
 Rev. [Full Name]
 Pastor, [Church Name]
 [Phone Number]
 [Email Address]

EDIT, ADD & REMOVE

Recommendations for Next Steps

- **Local Health Department:** Contact your county or municipal health department early—requirements vary by locality.
- **Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)**

Food Program: Email: dph.food@illinois.gov (questions on food bank guidelines, recalls, health requirements)



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