

VILLAGE FOR VETS

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# Improving the Nutritional Assistance Program Targeting Low-Income Veteran Participants in Greater Los Angeles

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of residents in Los Angeles County experienced food insecurity. Low-income veterans faced greater challenges due to limited income and reduced access to quality food. Organizations like the study partner, Village for Vets, provide ongoing financial and rehabilitation assistance, including food packages. This report explores alternative solutions to offer further support and benefits to low-income veterans at Village sites, ultimately contributing to their rehabilitation.

The literature review and background research investigated the challenges of food insecurity for veterans in Los Angeles and assessed the nutritional values of food distributed through Village for Vets. We conducted surveys with approximately 100 program participants to gain insights. The findings indicate that implementing new policy options could create additional benefits for veterans, improving not only their nutritional intake but also other aspects of their lives. We advocate for new policies and methods to be implemented in Village for Vets to enhance its effectiveness.

The project aimed to identify ways to improve the Food Box nutritional food assistance program offered by Village for Vets to low-income veterans. The organization is interested in key policy options that this team has considered. We identified four policy alternatives for Village for Vets to potentially implement, which would help reduce food insecurity levels. Each option was measured on organizational capacity, economic feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and efficacy on increasing food security with a low, medium, and high scale for evaluation.

Based on our evaluation, we prioritized four policy recommendations: introducing preparation and nutritional education, implementing a permanent food pantry at each site, developing an effective and standardized cooking environment, and providing information on local food sources. These recommendations will help veterans improve their practical skills and nutritional knowledge while addressing their vulnerabilities.

From our findings, we ultimately recommend introducing preparation and nutrition education and developing a permanent food pantry at each location. These policies address the needs of not only Village for Vets participants but also all low-income earning veterans, providing crucial support for their ongoing rehabilitation.

# 02

## INTRODUCTION

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*Policy Context*

*Client Background: Village for Vets*



## INTRODUCTION

### POLICY CONTEXT:

#### VETERAN FOOD INSECURITY IN GREATER LOS ANGELES

Hunger and malnutrition are significant challenges for low-income veterans in Greater Los Angeles.<sup>1</sup> Resources from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are limited and distributed inefficiently. Over 11% of working-age veterans struggle to access nutritionally adequate food<sup>2</sup>. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this issue, with the Military Family Advisory Network reporting food insecurity rates rising from 1 in 8 veteran respondents in 2019 to 1 in 5 by 2020.<sup>3</sup>

Veteran food insecurity is not solely about food access but also concerns the quality and nutritional value of the food they receive. Poor nutrition increases the risk of chronic diseases. Many government agencies and national non-profits offer veteran food assistance programs, but few prioritize nutritional value. For example, Soldiers' Angels provides monthly food assistance through "Veteran Mobile Food Distribution" events, mainly offering non-perishable items.<sup>4</sup> However, non-perishables are often highly processed and can be high in salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats. It is crucial to consider the nutritional content of the food provided to address immediate food insecurity and broader veteran health concerns.

In 2022, two major national legislations were introduced: the End Veteran Hunger Act of 2022 and the Food Security for All Veterans Act.<sup>5</sup> Although neither act was passed, their introduction reflects growing concern for addressing veteran hunger across the nation.<sup>6</sup> The End Veteran Hunger Act of 2022 would have promoted a five-year grant program for qualified

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<sup>1</sup> "Food Pantry at VA: Veterans, Food Insecurity, and Serving Those Who've Served Us All." Teeter, Daniel. *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, 9 December 2022, <https://www.va.gov/greater-los-angeles-health-care/stories/food-pantry-at-va-veterans-food-insecurity-and-serving-those-who-served-us-all/>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> "Solving Food Insecurity among U.S. Veterans and Military Families" Lutz, Jamie, and Caitlin Welsh. *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 1 June 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/solving-food-insecurity-among-us-veterans-and-military-families>.

<sup>4</sup> "What Are Veteran Mobile Food Distributions?" *Soldiers' Angels*, <https://soldiersangels.org/texts/>.

<sup>5</sup> 117th Congress. (2022). *H.R. 8852 - End Veteran Hunger Act of 2022*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8852/text?r=20&s=1>.

<sup>6</sup> 117th Congress (2022). *H.R. 8888 - Food Security for All Veterans Act*. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8888/text>.

institutions, including nonprofits and government agencies, to address veteran food insecurity on a larger scale.<sup>7</sup> This act could have provided Village for Vets with additional resources to improve the quantity and quality of food boxes delivered to low-income veterans in Greater LA.

The Food Security for All Veterans Act aimed to establish an office dedicated to improving food insecurity among veterans transitioning to civilian life<sup>8</sup> This legislation also addressed how veterans obtain information about their eligibility for federal food assistance. These legislations demonstrate the government's efforts to support non-governmental organizations like Village for Vets in addressing veteran food insecurity.

Alongside the challenges of food insecurity, there is a growing recognition of the importance of addressing the nutritional needs of veterans. Nutrition plays a crucial role in maintaining overall health and well-being, and it is essential to develop programs and policies that prioritize the provision of healthy, nutritious food for vulnerable populations, such as low-income veterans.

## **LOCAL AND STATE INITIATIVES**

At the local and state levels, various initiatives are being implemented to address food insecurity and nutrition among veterans. In California, the CalFresh Program, a federally-funded food assistance program, offers support to low-income individuals and families, including eligible veterans, to improve access to healthy food. However, awareness of these programs and the process of enrollment can be barriers for many veterans.

To address these barriers, community-based organizations (CBO's) and non-profit organizations, such as Village for Vets, play a vital role in connecting those in need to these resources and supporting them through the application process. These CBO's support local veterans by providing targeted assistance, including food box delivery services. These organizations have the flexibility to tailor their programs to the specific needs of their communities, making them well-suited to address the nutritional requirements of low-income veterans.

## **PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS**

Public-private partnerships can also be instrumental in addressing the nutritional needs of veterans. Collaborations between government agencies, non-profit organizations, and private sector businesses can leverage resources and expertise to develop innovative solutions to food insecurity and nutritional challenges.

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<sup>8</sup> 117th Congress. (2022). *H.R. 8852 - End Veteran Hunger Act of 2022*.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8852/text?r=20&s=1>.

<sup>9</sup> 117th Congress (2022). *H.R. 8888 - Food Security for All Veterans Act*.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/8888/text>.

For example, local food banks, farmers' markets, and grocery stores can partner with organizations like Village for Vets to donate fresh produce and other nutritious food items, which can be distributed to veterans through food box programs and/or food pantries at the sites. Additionally, partnerships with nutritionists and dietitians can provide valuable input on designing programs with a focus on nutritional value, ensuring that the food provided is both accessible and health-promoting.

## **EDUCATION AND SKILL-BUILDING PROGRAMS**

Education and skill-building programs are essential components of a comprehensive approach to address the nutritional needs of veterans. These programs can empower veterans with the knowledge and skills to make healthier food choices, manage their diets, and improve their overall health outcomes.

Workshops on nutrition education, cooking classes, and budgeting for healthy meals can equip veterans with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their food consumption. Partnerships with local chefs, nutritionists, and other community experts can enhance these programs and provide valuable insights and support.

In conclusion, addressing the nutritional needs of veterans in Greater Los Angeles requires a multi-faceted approach that includes local and state initiatives, public-private partnerships, and education and skill-building programs. By collaborating with stakeholders and leveraging resources, organizations like Village for Vets can continue to make a positive impact on the lives of veterans by providing not just food, but also the knowledge and support necessary to maintain good health and well-being.

## **CLIENT BACKGROUND:**

### **VILLAGE FOR VETS**

Our project's client is Village for Vets, an organization founded in 2016 and headquartered in the Greater Los Angeles area. Village for Vets is dedicated to providing programs and services to homeless veterans in Los Angeles County, aiming to improve their quality of life and create sustainable pathways for their future. The organization seeks to expand resource accessibility for at-risk veterans, with services offered primarily through the Veterans Affairs (VA) campus in Los Angeles or in association with other organizations and projects focused on assisting homeless and at-risk veterans. Village for Vets also advocates for broader access to resources for this vulnerable population across the region.

Village for Vets was started by a Veterans Affairs social worker who had been using her personal income to help homeless veterans with food sourcing. She connected with Marcie Swartz, who later became the founder of Village for Vets, to cater a sandwich lunch for twenty-five homeless veterans in Los Angeles. From this humble beginning, the organization has grown and expanded its objectives, developing numerous programs that have helped many impoverished veterans rebuild their lives. Village for Vets works in collaboration with other projects and organizations to extend their reach within the LA community. The organization is well-known for its responsiveness to the changing needs of at-risk veterans, and this report focuses on Village for Vets' efforts to enhance food security for veteran participants in their nutritional assistance program.





To address the limited mobility of low-income veterans, Village for Vets delivers food boxes to at-risk and low-income veterans, becoming a vital food resource for these individuals.



Image 1: A veteran resident received her food box from Village for Vets  
(Source: Village for Vets)<sup>9</sup>

Village for Vets partners with the Westside Food Bank to provide weekly food box deliveries containing produce and pantry staples to food-insecure veterans living in the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program.<sup>10</sup> VASH offers rental assistance and case management services, with specialized healthcare provided by skilled professionals from the Veterans Affairs. Our report primarily focuses on two VASH sites that collaborate with Village for Vets. The goal of providing meals to impoverished veterans is to allow them to allocate their limited financial resources towards other aspects of their lives while still receiving fresh, nutritious food. Currently, Village for Vets provides approximately one thousand meals to veterans each week.

In light of the policy context and current circumstances, we have developed this report to address the address the following policy question:

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## POLICY QUESTION

**How can Village for Vets improve the nutritional assistance program for low-income veteran participants in Greater Los Angeles?**

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<sup>9</sup> *Village for Vets Food First Programs*. Village for Vets. (n.d.). <https://www.villageforvets.org/foodfirst>

<sup>10</sup> *Village for Vets Food First Programs*. Village for Vets. (n.d.). <https://www.villageforvets.org/foodfirst>

# 03

## METHODOLOGY

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*Methodology*

*Assessing the Impacts and Process of Food Box Program*

*Ethical Considerations*

*Conclusion*



## **METHODOLOGY**

### **METHODOLOGY:**

#### **A Method Overview**

To address the question, "How can Village for Vets improve the impact of its nutritional assistance program targeting low-income veteran participants in Greater Los Angeles?", we sought to understand the state of food security, consumption practices, and satisfaction with the food box assistance program for each participant, as well as the program's characteristics at each site. We utilized responses from program participants for data collection. Our two primary goals with this study were to:

- ① Evaluate the program's effectiveness by conducting a comprehensive analysis of survey data, including demographics, challenges, and participants' experiences, and
- ② Identify opportunities for improvement for Village for Vets and its partners to better meet the needs of veterans at each site.

To better understand the veteran population being served and those not yet reached, we conducted background research on the demographics of veterans in the Greater Los Angeles area. This allowed us to identify the specific population of low-income veterans, their locations within the area, and the sites where food was being delivered.

#### **B Solution Evaluation Framework: Criteria-Alternative Matrix (C.A.M.) Analysis**

After collecting the data, our team analyzed it to identify common themes and opportunities for improvement within the program. This also helped us understand veterans' needs before and after participating in the program. We then employed an objective solution evaluation framework, known as the Criteria-Alternative Matrix (C.A.M.) analysis, to assess different potential solutions to these issues. The criteria weighed in this framework included organizational capacity, economic feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and impact on veterans' well-being. We selected these criteria based on interviews with key stakeholders, such as Village for Vets staff and partner representatives, where the essential values and requirements became evident. For instance, during one interview with a Village for Vets staff member, they emphasized the importance of cost-effectiveness and the need for feasible solutions that can be easily implemented.

##### **Organizational Capacity**

We assessed each potential solution's organizational capacity by evaluating whether Village for Vets possesses the necessary resources, such as staff, equipment, and expertise, to successfully implement and manage the solution. This criterion helped us determine if the organization could effectively execute the proposed improvements.

### Economic Feasibility

We assessed the economic feasibility of each potential solution by considering whether the organization's budget or resource streams would allow for full implementation of the policy alternative, particularly looking at the surpluses in their budget. This criterion was crucial for determining if a solution could be realistically implemented within the current or future budget constraints of the organization.

### Cost-Effectiveness

We evaluated the cost-effectiveness of potential solutions by comparing the benefits of the solution relative to its costs on a per capita basis (e.g., per veteran served). This allowed us to compare and interpret the benefits of each solution across policy alternatives and assess each solution's cost efficiency. We also considered whether cost-effectiveness was assessed within current budget constraints or potential future budgets.

### Efficacy on Food Security

We evaluated each solution's potential impact on veterans' well-being, considering factors such as the nutritional value of the food consumed, the veterans' ability to prepare and utilize the food, overall program satisfaction, and any improvements in their mental and physical health. This criterion helped us determine the extent to which a solution would effectively address the well-being of the veterans.

We used this framework to evaluate a set of possible solutions and provide a detailed analysis of their performance along the key criteria presented above. More detailed explanations can be found in the Policy Evaluations Chapter.

## **ASSESSING THE IMPACTS AND PROCESS OF THE FOOD BOX PROGRAM**

### **A** **Surveys of program participants**

To capture data on the food box program's impact on veterans' nutrition and well-being, we asked 92 program participants living in the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) to complete anonymous surveys. Each survey consisted of 13 questions, gathering information about veterans' demographics and challenges they faced in consuming the food provided. The surveys also aimed to collect information on specific obstacles that hindered respondents from fully utilizing the food (such as dietary restrictions, preferences, quality, storage, cooking abilities, resource access, etc.). We analyzed the survey responses using both qualitative and quantitative methods, including descriptive statistics, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program from the veterans' perspective.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

### **A Measures to minimize potential risks and maximize potential benefits**

To ensure that the study was conducted in an ethical manner, the research team took measures to minimize potential risks and maximize potential benefits for the participants. These measures included:

#### **① Informed consent:**

All participants were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits before they agreed to participate. They also were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

#### **② Confidentiality and Privacy:**

Any and all data collected was kept confidential, and all participants were assigned a unique identification number to ensure anonymity while still allowing us to differentiate between survey responses. Access to the data was restricted to the research team and A-Mark staff.

## **CONCLUSION**

The methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of the food box program provided by the A-Mark Foundation and Village for Vets involved a combination of qualitative research and quantitative analysis. The research included surveys with 92 program participants and background research on the demographics of veterans in the Greater Los Angeles area. The quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics to better understand the trends and patterns in the data collected from the surveys.

The evaluation framework, the Criteria-Alternative Matrix (C.A.M.), was used to objectively assess potential solutions, including considerations of feasibility, cost-effectiveness, and impact on veterans' well-being. The results of the study were then used to identify areas for improvement in the program and make recommendations for better meeting the needs of veterans.

# 04

## **SURVEY RESULT ANALYSIS**

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## SURVEY RESULT ANALYSIS

Our team conducted an anonymous survey to gather data on the impact of the food box program on the nutrition and well-being of veterans. The survey targeted participants of the program who reside in the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. A total of 92 program participants were asked to complete the survey consisting of 13 questions including multiple choices and free response questions.

All of our survey participants reside in VASH. In order to be eligible to reside in VASH, homeless veterans would go to their local Veteran Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) to determine their eligibility of homeless status, income level, health condition, etc. Once they pass the VAMC screening, they are automatically determined as part of the low-income veteran population.<sup>11</sup> In this section, we will be analyzing three specific survey questions that are the most relevant and representative within the context of our research.

One of our survey questions asked our participants to rank 5 options (More Kitchen Tools, Cooking Classes, Information on Ingredients, Recipes, and More Variety of Items) they find most helpful for improving their experience of food boxes (“1” as the most helpful, to “5” the least helpful).

First, we can see that the most popular option for improving the experience of food boxes was having more kitchen tools, with 48.9% of respondents ranking it as the most helpful. This suggests that many participants may not have the necessary tools to prepare the food they receive, which could be a significant barrier to utilizing the food boxes effectively. Providing participants with basic kitchen tools such as pots, pans, and utensils could help improve their experience with the food boxes.

The second most popular option was having more variety of items, with 23.9% of respondents ranking it as the most helpful. This suggests that participants may feel limited by the food items provided and desire a wider range of options. This could be important for addressing dietary restrictions or cultural preferences, as well as increasing overall satisfaction with the program. It may also indicate a desire for more fresh produce or other perishable items in the food boxes, as these are often the most lacking in non-perishable programs.

The third most popular option was having cooking classes, with 18.2% of respondents ranking it as the most helpful. This indicates that some participants may lack the necessary cooking skills to make use of the food provided. Offering cooking classes could help participants learn new recipes and cooking techniques, which could increase their confidence and ability to use the food boxes effectively.

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<sup>11</sup> “VA Programs For Homeless Veterans.” *U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs*, [https://www.va.gov/homeless/for\\_homeless\\_veterans.asp](https://www.va.gov/homeless/for_homeless_veterans.asp).

The fourth popular option was having a recipe, with only 8% of respondents ranking it as the most helpful. This indicates that while having a recipe can be helpful, it may not be as important as having access to kitchen tools or cooking classes. It is possible that participants may prefer to have more flexibility in terms of what they can prepare with the food provided, rather than being limited to a specific recipe.

Additionally, only 1.1% of respondents ranked information on ingredients as the most helpful option. This suggests that participants may not have significant concerns about the ingredients provided in the food boxes. Alternatively, they may already have a good understanding of the ingredients and their nutritional value.

From the survey question asking challenges the participants had in utilizing the food boxes, among the most commonly selected challenges were food preferences (38%) and recipes (33.7%), indicating that veterans may struggle with incorporating the provided foods into meals they enjoy. Additionally, cooking equipment (22.8%) and safe storage (9.8%) were cited as challenges, which could suggest that some participants may not have the necessary equipment or storage space to properly prepare and store the food.

Finally, a smaller percentage of participants reported dietary restrictions (8.7%) or cultural restrictions (6.5%) as challenges, which may suggest a need for more diverse or specialized food options in the program. These results suggest that in order to improve the effectiveness and accessibility of the food box program, there may be a need for greater consideration of the specific dietary and cultural preferences of the veteran population, as well as provision of cooking equipment and recipes to support meal preparation. Additionally, ensuring safe storage of the food may help to address some of the challenges reported by participants.

From the survey question asking the participants of their missed meals during the week before they joined the food box program, the survey results indicate that a significant portion of the food box program participants experience food insecurity, with 22.8% reporting often missing meals during the week and 51.1% reporting sometimes missing meals. These findings highlight the importance of the food box program in addressing the issue of food insecurity among the veteran population. However, it also suggests that more needs to be done to ensure that veterans have access to sufficient and nutritious food. The survey results can be used to inform the development of additional programs and interventions that can help veterans better meet their nutritional needs.



# 05

## PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

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*Food Insecurity in LA*

*The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic*

*Food Insecurity of the Veteran Population*

*Village for Vets*



## ■ PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

### FOOD INSECURITY IN LA

The United States Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as “a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life. This can be a temporary situation for a family or can last a long time. Food insecurity is one way we measure how many people can’t afford food”.<sup>12</sup>

Los Angeles County is the largest populated county in the nation, home to approximately 10 million residents. It is also the place where people experience the highest rate of hunger.<sup>13</sup> According to data from the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, it is estimated that 1 in 5 households within LA county is facing food insecurity.<sup>14</sup> Food insecurity affects everyone, regardless of their education level, race, ethnicity, or job status. However, low-income families, people with disabilities, and seniors are considered the most vulnerable populations.<sup>15</sup> In Los Angeles, the issue of food insecurity is intertwined with other prevalent concerns, including the high cost of housing, transportation, and child care.

The consistently increasing cost of living in LA causes many families, despite having multiple sources of income, to struggle to afford essential necessities, including sufficient nutritional food. As a result, these families find it challenging to make ends meet and provide for their basic needs.<sup>16</sup>

### THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic fallout have severely affected vulnerable people in LA. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate more than tripled after the COVID outbreak, rising from 3.6% in 2019 to 13% in 2020.<sup>17</sup> In 2021, the unemployment rate reached 20%, with a drastic decrease in earnings across

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<sup>12</sup> “Hunger and Food Insecurity.” *Feeding America*,

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/food-insecurity>.

<sup>13</sup> “Hunger in Los Angeles County.” *Los Angeles Regional Food Bank*,

<https://www.lafoodbank.org/about/hunger-in-la/>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> “Unemployment Rises in 2020, as the Country Battles the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *Bureau of Labor Statistics*,

<https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2021/article/unemployment-rises-in-2020-as-the-country-battles-the-covid-19-pandemic.htm#:~:text=Total%20civilian%20employment%2C%20as%20measured,3.6%20percent%20to%2013.0%20percent%20to%2013.0%20percent>.

various industries, such as restaurants, hotels, and other tourism-related sectors.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, it is estimated that 1 in 4 residents in LA County has faced food insecurity.<sup>19</sup> The Los Angeles Regional Food Bank predicts that the economic impact on LA County will outlast COVID-19, and more people will need various forms of assistance, including food assistance, in the near future.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to the pandemic, although access to healthy and nutritional food was unequal for people of color, immigrants, and low-income households, the overall rate of food insecurity in Los Angeles County had been decreasing.<sup>21</sup> However, during the pandemic, the rate of food insecurity in LA County rose again, affecting a broader range of income levels. Minority groups such as people of color were still hit the hardest.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “6 Food Insecurity News Stories From 2020 You May Have Missed.” *Los Angeles Regional Food Bank*, 12 February 2021, [https://www.lafoodbank.org/stories/food-insecurity-stories-from-2020/?gclid=Cj0KCCQiA2-2eBhClARIsAGLQ2RnxOq6h4OYOSjKregxGmRXyTx6VmuLgFGZATp7xA-4uLGdSSp-TmxaAvW9EALw\\_wcB](https://www.lafoodbank.org/stories/food-insecurity-stories-from-2020/?gclid=Cj0KCCQiA2-2eBhClARIsAGLQ2RnxOq6h4OYOSjKregxGmRXyTx6VmuLgFGZATp7xA-4uLGdSSp-TmxaAvW9EALw_wcB).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

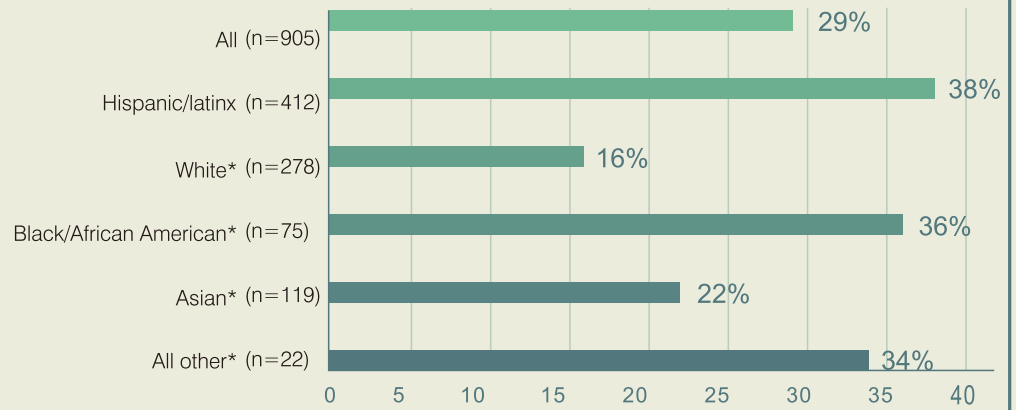
<sup>21</sup> “Food Insecurity in Los Angeles County: Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic.” *County of Los Angeles Public Health*, November 2021, [http://ph.lacounty.gov/nut/media/nutrition-physical-activity-resources/LA\\_County\\_Food\\_Insecurity\\_Report\\_2021\\_508Compliant.pdf](http://ph.lacounty.gov/nut/media/nutrition-physical-activity-resources/LA_County_Food_Insecurity_Report_2021_508Compliant.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

**Figure 1.**  
**Food insecurity in April and May 2020 across racial and ethnic groups**

**29%**

of the L.A. county population were food insecure between April and May. This graph shows the percentage of the population within a given racial and ethnic group who experienced food insecurity during this time.



\*Following the U.S.census Bureau’s guidelines , ethnicity is categorized as Hispanic/Latinx or Non-Hispanic/Latinx.In this figure,the race categories White,Black/African American,Asian,and All other are Non-Hispanic/Latinx.

Source:University of Southern California’s Understanding Coronavirs in America tracking survey

Figure 1. Food insecurity in April and May 2020 across racial and ethnic groups (Source: USC Dornsife)<sup>23</sup>

The graph from USC Dornsife above illustrates a clear racial disparity among those experiencing food insecurity. Non-white populations suffered more food insecurity compared to their white counterparts.<sup>24</sup> Among non-white populations, the Hispanic community was hit the hardest by the pandemic, reflecting the highest rate of food insecurity.<sup>25</sup> The discrepancy between white and non-white populations is strikingly apparent and must be addressed carefully as the nation transitions into a post-pandemic economy.

When comparing veteran and non-veteran status, evidence shows that veterans are generally worse off than the non-veteran population in terms of the pandemic's negative impact on their access to food. According to a study conducted by Syracuse University, veterans, especially those who cannot work, face approximately three times the level of food

<sup>23</sup> “Food Insecurity in April and May 2020 across Racial and Ethnic Groups.” USC Dornsife, 27 July 2020, <https://publicexchange.usc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/USCLAC-Food-Insecurity-Report-April-%E2%80%93-May-2020.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Ibid



insecurity as the general U.S. population.<sup>26</sup> This indicates that a significant proportion of disabled veterans struggle to obtain adequate food and are at higher risk of hunger or malnutrition. The comparison highlights the unique challenges veterans face and underscores the need for targeted policies and programs to support their well-being. Additionally, it suggests that more needs to be done to address issues of poverty and food insecurity in the U.S. more broadly, as these problems appear to be particularly acute among vulnerable populations like disabled veterans.

Within the veteran population, the level of food insecurity has undoubtedly worsened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As shown in Figure 2, the food insecurity rate among military and veteran families before the pandemic was about 12.5%. During the pandemic, it increased to 20%. In the post-pandemic period, although the food insecurity level decreased to 17%, it remains much higher than the pre-pandemic period.



Figure 2: Food Insecurity fluctuated over time and was worsened by worldwide events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Source: Military Family Advisory Network)<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> “Food Insecurity among Military and Veteran Families.” Heflin, Colleen. *Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion & Center for Aging and Policy Studies*, 25 May 2021, <https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1136&context=lerner>.

<sup>27</sup> “Food Insecurity among Military and Veteran Families.” Heflin, Colleen. *Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion & Center for Aging and Policy Studies*, 25 May 2021, <https://surface.syr.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1136&context=lerner>.

## FOOD INSECURITY OF THE VETERAN POPULATION

As mentioned earlier, food security is a critical issue in the U.S., particularly in Los Angeles. The at-risk veteran population faces severe challenges concerning food insecurity. After serving in the armed forces, individuals may experience poverty due to unemployment and significant mental and physical health conditions. Consequently, veterans are more likely to experience food insecurity than their non-veteran counterparts.<sup>28</sup> Research from the U.S. Department of Agriculture reveals that, when controlling for demographic factors like age, education, and income level, the risk of food insecurity among veterans aged 18-64 is 7.4% higher than the non-veteran population.<sup>29</sup>

Poverty, which is correlated with food security issues, undermines the right to adequate food.<sup>30</sup> The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reported that around 1.5 million veterans live in poverty, and the poverty rate among this group is likely to increase in the future.<sup>31</sup> The growing poverty among veterans has profound implications for their food security and health outcomes, as access to sufficient food resources for a positive and balanced life is essential for maintaining a healthy body.<sup>32</sup> In this context, poverty is correlated with food insecurity.

Furthermore, there is a racial disparity in the risk of food insecurity among veterans of color. California has the largest veteran population of any state in the United States, with over 1.8 million former service members living there; Los Angeles County is the most populous.<sup>33</sup> In California, veterans are more racially diverse than those across the nation. For example, while only 7% of veterans identify themselves as Hispanic or Latino, 17% of California veterans belong to this racial group.<sup>34</sup> The state is also home to about one-third of the Asian-American veterans across the country, who comprise 6% of California's veteran population, compared to only 1% of the national veteran population.<sup>35</sup> However, racial disparity exists in the food insecurity issue among the veteran population. According to the data from the "2021

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<sup>28</sup> Lutz, J., & Welsh, C. (n.d.). Solving food insecurity among U.S. veterans and military families. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/solving-food-insecurity-among-us-veterans-and-military-families>.

<sup>29</sup> Lutz, J., & Welsh, C. (n.d.). *Solving food insecurity among U.S. veterans and military families*. CSIS. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/solving-food-insecurity-among-us-veterans-and-military-families>

<sup>30</sup> *Poverty, the right to food and Social Protection*. OHCHR. (February 17, 2023). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/topic/poverty-right-food-and-social-protection>.

<sup>31</sup> Rabbitt, M., & Smith, M. (n.d.). *Food insecurity among working-age veterans - USDA*. Economic Research Service, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE. [https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829\\_summary.pdf?v=6019.1](https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/101269/err-829_summary.pdf?v=6019.1)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> *Understanding the veterans services landscape in California*. Legislative Analyst's Office. (2017, January 17). <https://lao.ca.gov/Publications/Report/3525>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid



Military Family Support Programming Survey Result" from the Military Family Advisory Network, white and non-Hispanic military and veteran families were statistically less likely to be hungry or food insecure than non-white, Hispanic respondents.<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, the focus on veterans of color indicates that California has a large and diverse veteran population, and the risks of food insecurity vary among veterans of different races.

Another critical factor contributing to food insecurity is the age of veterans. Recent data from the Health and Retirement Study showed that veterans over the working age are more likely to suffer from food insecurity because challenges with daily activities were significantly associated with increased odds of food insecurity among male veterans aged 50 to 64.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, this study suggested that among male veterans older than 65 years, a psychiatric diagnosis and depression were significantly associated with increased odds of food insecurity.<sup>38</sup> Thus, food insecurity is a critical and growing challenge for at-risk older veterans in Los Angeles.

In conclusion, the veteran population, especially those in California, is more likely to suffer from food insecurity due to common factors such as poverty, race, and aging, which are strongly correlated with food insecurity.

## VILLAGE FOR VETS

### Overview of Program Issues

Village for Vets consistently faces two primary challenges: securing monetary funding and providing sufficient impact, such as offering nutritional sustenance, to support at-risk veterans. Improving the current state of the Food Box program will help to address and minimize these challenges. By ensuring that the food boxes are nutritionally efficient, the program can potentially reduce costs while still improving the lives of at-risk veterans. The additional funds saved from enhancing the efficiency of food boxes can help extend supportive services to more veterans in Los Angeles. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the importance of mitigating limited financial resources and maximizing the nutritional output of food boxes.

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<sup>36</sup> Military Family Advisory Network. (n.d.). *2021 military family support programming survey - MFAN*.

<https://www.mfan.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Executive-Summary-MFAN-Programming-Survey-Results-2021.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Brostow, D. P., Gunzburger, E., & Thomas, K. S. (2017, March 23). *Food insecurity among veterans: Findings from the Health and Retirement Study - The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging*. SpringerLink. Retrieved January 22, 2023, from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12603-017-0910-7>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

## Maximizing Resources and Output

Village for Vets continuously receives support from government funding and charitable donations to assist at-risk veterans in the greater Los Angeles area. As part of a major network of veteran support organizations, funding allocation can be challenging, as they share their resource intake with other groups. Government funding is limited; however, organizations can seek financial assistance from multiple sources. A significant percentage of funding opportunities come from charitable donors looking to contribute to the cause. For example, in April 2022, Village for Vets received a charitable \$5,000 donation from the North Westwood Neighborhood Council (N.W.N.C.) to help at-risk veterans in the area secure permanent housing by providing food kits.<sup>39</sup> Many donors often provide multiple stipends over the years, including the N.W.N.C. Smaller organizations and donors collaborate with institutional leaders, such as Village for Vets, to achieve shared goals. Despite the immense support, Village for Vets' largest source of monetary funding comes from government grants.<sup>40</sup>

Government funding for veterans, especially those at risk, is projected to expand monetary investments into more nonprofit organizations in the coming years. As part of the Biden-Harris Administration, the President has initiated efforts to direct more investment into addressing the needs of at-risk veterans. In 2022, Congress introduced the End Veteran Hunger Act, providing extensive grants to nonprofit organizations across the United States that support programs seeking to end food insecurity among veterans.<sup>41</sup> This five-year program aims to increase the impact of veteran assistance programs in local communities. Village for Vets seeks to utilize this newly sourced funding to continue increasing its impact on improving the lives of at-risk veterans.

Considering their funding sources and limitations, it is crucial that their financial resources are efficiently allocated relative to their impact. As the organization continues to rely on the support of established connections and donors and the promise of future government initiatives in grantmaking, the potential pool of resources remains finite. As a nonprofit organization, their primary goal is to reduce the number of at-risk veterans by providing monetary and nutritional assistance. To provide the most extensive and effective support throughout Los Angeles County, the program must create the most efficient outlet that helps as many veterans as possible while improving their sustainability.

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<sup>39</sup> Tegetho, Brooke. "NWWNC Funds Village for Vets to Support Veterans Experiencing Homelessness." *Daily Bruin*, 11 Apr. 2022,

<https://dailybruin.com/2022/04/11/nwwnc-funds-village-for-vets-to-support-veterans-experiencing-homelessness>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Jowers, Karen. "Veterans Hunger Bill Aims to Connect Those in Need with More Resources." *Military Times*, Military Times, 15 Sept. 2022,

<https://www.militarytimes.com/veterans/2022/09/15/veterans-hunger-bill-aims-to-connect-those-in-need-with-more-resources/>.



## Maximizing Nutritional Output in their Food Boxes

Providing the highest opportunity for veteran improvement is a critical concern, alongside funding. Securing funding is the initial step, while offering the most optimal food box will ultimately provide the impact the organization seeks to achieve. Maximizing the nutritional output and impact for at-risk veterans benefits not only the veterans but the organization as well. Current issues in the food boxes include the limited longevity of fresh produce, ultimately risking the goods becoming unusable. Enhancing the ingredients and content of food boxes will not only impact the health of at-risk veterans but also provide substantive benefits to other areas of their lives. Insufficient nutritional intake can lead to detriments in veterans' lives, such as a decline in mental health. With veterans lacking proper nutrition to maintain a healthy lifestyle, it becomes challenging for them to improve their current state of insecurity.<sup>42</sup> They may need to seek additional sources for food, putting them at risk.

## Key Considerations

Our policy analysis focuses on three essential aspects of research on food box assistance programs:

### Generalizability:

Providing universally relevant recommendations is challenging due to the diversity of populations served and the barriers to efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in various contexts.

### Stakeholder Engagement and Policy Implementation:

We believe a holistic analysis using information from program participants, staff, and considering the current policy and community context is vital for successful policy recommendation and implementation.

### Equity and Unintended Consequences:

Our team has taken extensive measures to ensure the study's benefits are clear and don't threaten anyone's resources, mental state, or well-being.

## Generalizability:

### The Challenge of Universally Relevant Recommendations in a Diverse Global Context

Achieving generalizability is difficult due to the diversity of populations and barriers to efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in various contexts. Our team aims to provide recommendations that can be adapted by other agencies and populations. To accomplish this, we have utilized information gathered from surveys and focus group interviews with program participants, as well as overarching research. This approach ensures the validity and reliability of our results.

The complexity of generalizability increases with the different goals, target populations, funding sources, implementation strategies, and evaluation methods of various food box assistance programs. For example, while our study focuses on

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<sup>42</sup> <https://moveforhunger.org/why-are-so-many-veterans-food-insecure>

a nutritional assistance program for veterans in permanent supportive housing, another food box assistance program sponsored by our client, Village for Vets, also focuses on providing emergency food assistance for non-permanent housing. These differences make it difficult to generalize findings and solutions across programs, as the viability of each solution is likely to be unique to their specific context.

## **Stakeholder Engagement:**

### **Making Solutions Work**

Effectively engaging with stakeholders is crucial for understanding the perspectives of program participants and ensuring the solution's viability. Engaging with stakeholders ensures solutions align with the current policy context and the agency's resources. This approach helps our team ensure that the recommended solutions are fiscally viable and align with existing policies and regulations, such as those related to food safety, procurement, and distribution.

Additionally, engaging with stakeholders can help ensure that the solution is implemented in a manner consistent with the resources of the agency. Food box assistance programs require substantial investments in staff, supplies, and sometimes infrastructure. Approaching this study with great consideration for stakeholder engagement assists our team in ensuring that the solutions we recommend are feasible and well-suited to the specific circumstances of the programs we examine.

## **Ensuring Equity and Avoiding Unintended Consequences:**

### **A Framework for Thoughtful Action**

Our team has made extensive efforts to ensure equity and avoid unintended consequences in the study. We considered the psychological impacts and continuously evaluated strategic decisions to ensure they met intended goals without causing harm. Approaching the study with this mindset has been helpful and was supported by regular evaluations and discussions with faculty instructors and staff from the A-Mark foundation.

It was crucial for our team to consider the potential consequences of our study on the well-being of program participants. We wanted to avoid this study being a source of stress or shame for any of our participants. By being aware of these potential consequences, we could take measures to mitigate them. Ensuring equity and avoiding unintended consequences has been a critical and beneficial consideration in our research, allowing us to better serve the needs of the veteran population in L.A. and providing a solid foundation for the recommendations we provide.

# 06

## **POLICY CRITERIA**

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## POLICY CRITERIA

We use the following four criteria to evaluate our policy options:

- **Organizational Capacity**
- **Economic Feasibility**
- **Cost-Effectiveness**
- **Efficacy on Food Security**

The criteria helped us achieve our objectives of identifying ways to assess and enhance the nutritional aid program and the general level of food security.

### **ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY:**

Does the policy alternative require significant increase of staff workload, additional equipment or expertise?

A policy option's organizational capacity is evaluated based on whether it requires additional record keeping, event planning, information gathering, or collaboration outreach, which would increase the workload of existing staff or necessitate the hiring of additional personnel. Additionally, if a policy alternative requires extra resources like equipment or materials, it may demand changes to the budget or procurement process. If a policy recommendation necessitates professional knowledge, instruction, or information in a specialized area, it could lead to additional costs in the budget or reallocation of resources. By assessing a policy option's organizational capacity, we can determine whether its implementation and management fit the capacity at the organizational level and estimate the necessary resources needed.

#### **Method of Evaluation:**

##### *Low:*

A policy option with "low" organizational capacity requires a significant increase in staff workload, additional equipment, or expertise. Implementing and managing this policy option may be time-consuming, resource-intensive, and exceed the current organizational capacity.

##### *Medium:*

A policy option with "medium" organizational capacity requires some modifications to staff workload, additional equipment, or expertise but not to the extent of a policy option with "low" organizational capacity. Implementing this policy option may still require some changes to the existing workload, more equipment, and expertise, but it would be relatively easier, more reasonable to carry out, and less time-consuming or resource-intensive.

##### *High:*

A policy option with "high" organizational capacity can be implemented with little or no modifications to the current organizational capacity, such as staff workload, equipment, and expertise. Implementing and managing this policy option does not require significant changes to the organization and can be integrated into organization operation with ease.



## **ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY:**

### **How economic feasible will it be to implement this policy alternative into this organization?**

Economic feasibility ensures that the organization will have the necessary financial resources to implement the policy alternative without jeopardizing existing initiatives. It is essential that the option fits within the current budget and does not exceed available funds. Therefore, new policy alternatives should be financially acceptable concerning the organization's current allotment.

#### **Method of Evaluation:**

##### *Low:*

A policy option with "low" economic feasibility has total costs significantly higher than the organization's current affordability allows. A lack of financial funding will make implementing the policy option difficult and may not result in any meaningful outcome.

##### *Medium:*

A policy option with "medium" economic feasibility has total costs that are reasonable concerning the organization's current affordability. This suggests that the policy option can be implemented from a financial standpoint without jeopardizing any other policies in effect.

##### *High:*

A policy option with "high" economic feasibility has total costs significantly lower than the organization's current affordability. This policy has a relatively low financial cost, which means that there is a relatively easy pathway for its implementation.

## **COST-EFFECTIVENESS:**

### **How effective are the relative costs of this policy in comparison to the benefits it delivers, making this option suitable for the organization?**

When implementing an effective policy option, the costs should not outweigh the benefits it provides. Assessing the costs and benefits of an option is essential in determining if it is worth implementing. In this case, the organization should expect lower costs but greater value generation and efficient consumption of the food boxes. Therefore, it is necessary to find a reasonable option that may incur some costs but extends significant benefits to the organization.

#### **Method of Evaluation:**

##### *Low:*

A policy option with "low" cost-effectiveness has implementation costs that are substantial in relation to the benefits it provides. This means that this policy requires considerable financial costs and delivers minimal benefits to the organization. Financial funding would be better prioritized for other options with potential benefits.

**Medium:**

A policy option with "medium" cost-effectiveness has implementation costs that are reasonable in relation to the benefits it provides. This means that this policy will require some level of financial funding, but there are substantial benefits that make this option justifiable. This policy would be a suitable inclusion in the current structure.

**High:**

A policy option with "high" cost-effectiveness has implementation costs that are significantly small compared to the benefits it provides. This means that the financial costs are minimal, and the benefits provided are significant. A policy option that fits under this category can be implemented into the organization.

## **EFFICACY ON FOOD SECURITY:**

### **How effective is the alternative in achieving full consumption of available resources and improving the nutritional intake of veterans?**

As we acknowledge that food insecurity is a complex problem, we consider it crucial to understand and evaluate the potential impact that a policy option might have on food security levels. We describe the efficacy on food security as the effects of the alternative on food box consumption patterns and nutritional intake. The organization should expect full consumption of the food boxes and improvement in the ability to obtain sufficient food to fulfill daily nutritional needs for a healthy and productive life, including food quantity, quality, variety, equal accessibility to food, food utilization with adequate knowledge, and cultural and personal preference on food.

### **Method of Evaluation:**

**Low:**

A policy with "low" efficacy on food security will have a neutral impact on the food security level of the veterans, which would not lead to significant changes in the current level of food security, including full consumption of available resources and daily nutrition intake.

**Medium:**

A policy with "medium" efficacy on food security will have a moderately positive impact on the food security level of the stakeholders, which would create some changes to the current level of food security but may only include a single aspect between full consumption of available resources and daily nutrition intake.

**High:**

A policy with "high" efficacy on food security will have a significantly positive impact on the food security level of the veterans that would increase the current level of food security from both angles: full consumption of available resources and daily nutrition intake.

# 07

## **POLICY OPTIONS AND EVALUATION**

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## POLICY OPTIONS AND EVALUATION

After thoroughly analyzing the participants' feedback, our team has identified four evidence-based policy options that aim to enhance the program's effectiveness in increasing food security for veterans. These policy options are designed to tackle common issues veterans encounter while utilizing the program. The following policy options have been proposed:

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- ① **Preparation and Nutritional Education**

② **Permanent Food Pantry at Each Site**
  - ③ **Developing an Effective and Standardized Cooking Environment**

④ **Providing Information on Local Food Sources**
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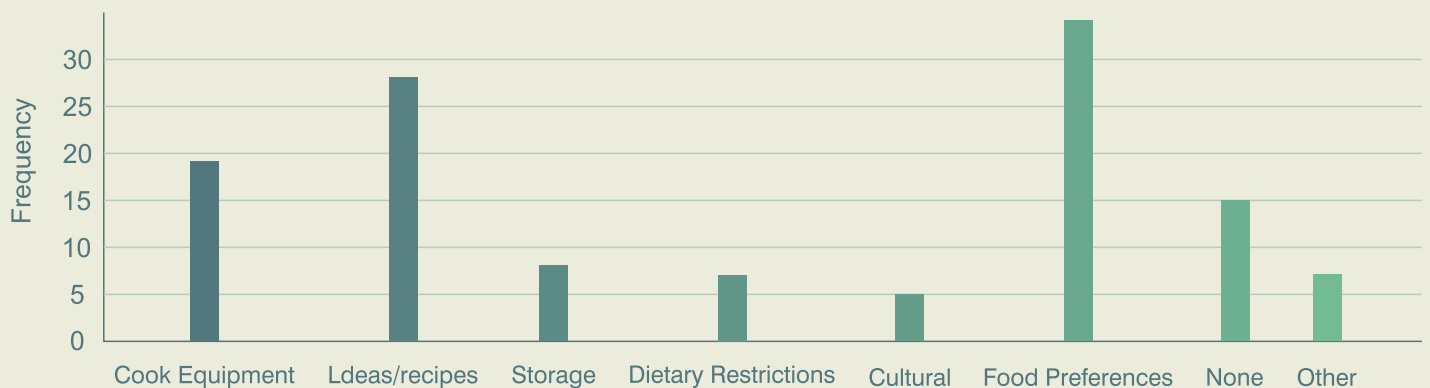
Each policy option strives to address specific challenges faced by veterans and contribute to the overall improvement of their food security situation.

### **POLICY OPTION 1:** Preparation and Nutritional Education

This policy option focuses on providing veterans with the necessary knowledge and skills to prepare healthy meals using the contents of the food boxes. According to the program participant survey, 33.7% indicated that a lack of recipes/ideas was the number one challenge they faced in utilizing food box contents, making it the second most common choice. By offering comprehensive guidance on meal preparation and nutritional education, veterans can maximize the benefits of the food assistance they receive. This can be achieved through two main approaches: collaborating with a local culinary school to provide live lessons or leveraging technology to create a YouTube playlist of instructional videos that veterans can access 24/7.

The YouTube playlist would be a more cost-effective solution, as it eliminates the need for veterans to attend live lessons and ensures that valuable information is available to them at their convenience.

**Challenges Frequency Chart**





A study from Maryland supports the potential of this policy option but encourages a more age-friendly engagement approach.<sup>43</sup> The study found that participants who received nutrition education in addition to food assistance experienced greater improvements in their diet and food security than those who received food assistance alone. However, since the lesson was only taught virtually, some participants reported trouble with accessing the virtual lessons.

## Rating for Policy Option 1:

### Preparation and Nutritional Education

#### **Organizational Capacity:**

**Medium** - Collaborating with local culinary schools or creating online content is achievable with a moderate amount of resources put into planning and execution.

#### **Economic Feasibility:**

**High** - Collaboration with local culinary schools or chefs would require some monetary input, although the amount would not be substantial for basic information, and a YouTube playlist would require significantly less continuous investment.

#### **Cost-Effectiveness:**

**High** - Collaboration with local culinary schools or chefs would require some monetary input, although the amount would not be substantial for basic information, and a YouTube playlist would require significantly less continuous investment.

#### **Efficacy on Food Security:**

**High** - Addresses a reported challenge from participants, and the Maryland study demonstrates that nutrition education can lead to significant improvements in diet and food security.<sup>44</sup>

#### Summary:

The first policy option aims to improve the overall experience and effectiveness of the food box program by offering practical guidance on meal preparation and nutrition. This can be achieved through collaboration with local culinary schools or by creating easily accessible online content. With 33.7% of survey respondents identifying recipes as the most helpful solution and the supporting evidence from the Maryland study, this policy option holds significant potential for enhancing the program's impact on veterans' food security and overall well-being.<sup>45</sup>

## **POLICY OPTION 2:**

### **Permanent Food Pantry at Each Site**

This policy option focuses on personalizing the items provided to program participants based on their preferences and needs. One site in the program has already addressed this issue by providing empty bags for veterans to choose their

<sup>43</sup> Sarah, C., Jamie, G., Heidi, O., Leslie I., K., Odessa, A., & Elizabeth, P. (n.d.). *Archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu*.

[https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/bitstream/handle/10713/18186/SOM\\_Cassatt\\_2022.pdf?sequence=1](https://archive.hshsl.umaryland.edu/bitstream/handle/10713/18186/SOM_Cassatt_2022.pdf?sequence=1)

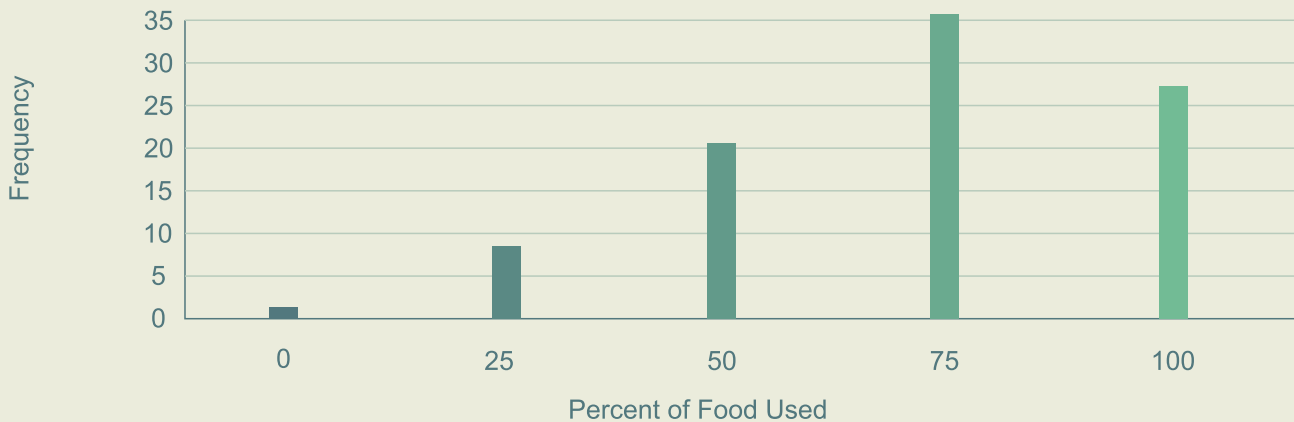
<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid

food items from a permanent food pantry. This site also keeps non-perishable food on hand between drop-offs so that veterans can replenish their pantry as needed. According to the site manager, this strategy has proven effective in decreasing food waste, although it is more time-consuming than providing uniform food boxes.

In the anonymous survey, approximately half of the participants reported hoping for more variety and quantity of food in the food-box services. For instance, 29.4% of respondents indicated using 100% of the food from the food boxes, suggesting a need for greater quantity, while 23.9% explicitly expressed a desire for more variety in the food boxes. If implemented, this policy would improve residents' experiences with food-box services and increase food security. However, scaling this policy to all additional sites may require more resources, including additional budget resources for purchasing non-perishables or seeking more donations from other sources. Additionally, maintaining perishable items could pose a challenge. These factors may increase the workload for staff and participants, potentially leading to more food waste if certain items remain unchosen.

**Percent of Food Used Frequency Chart**



**Rating for Policy Option 2:**

**Permanent Food Pantry at Each Site:**

**Organizational Capacity:**

**Medium** - Medium - Scaling this policy to all additional sites could be resource-intensive, requiring additional budget resources or donations and increasing staff workload. However, non-perishables would be more feasible than perishables, which might require cold storage.

**Economic Feasibility:**

**Medium** - Implementing this policy would require additional budget resources to purchase non-perishable items or seek more donations from other sources.

**Cost-Effectiveness:**

**High** - While costs associated with maintaining perishables and acquiring additional resources could reduce cost-effectiveness, acquiring additional inventory would address two major concerns, including quantity and variety of food provided.



**Efficacy on Food Security:**

**High** - This policy has the potential to increase food security for both stakeholders and U.S. low-income veterans by making more food available and expanding variety, but challenges in maintaining perishables and obtaining additional resources need to be addressed.

**Summary:**

The second policy option aims to improve the overall experience and effectiveness of the food box program by personalizing food items for veterans through establishing an expanded permanent food pantry at each site. With half of the survey respondents expressing a desire for more variety and quantity of food, this policy option has the potential to enhance the program's impact on veterans' food security and overall well-being. However, it is crucial to consider the potential challenges in scaling this policy, including increased resource requirements, maintaining perishables, and the need for additional budget resources or donations, which could affect its overall feasibility and effectiveness.

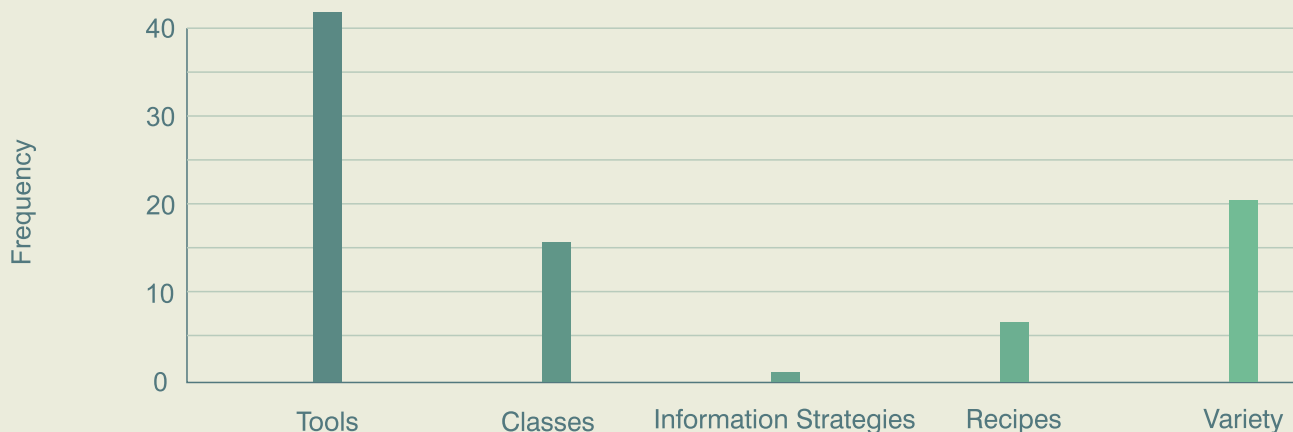
**POLICY OPTION 3:**

**Developing an Effective and Standardized Cooking Environment**

This policy option aims to enable low-income veterans within the program to prepare all their meals at home if they choose to. The objective is to create a list of essential items that every project-based housing unit needs to promote a healthy cooking lifestyle. These items would include appliances such as refrigerators, blenders, microwaves, and stoves, along with necessary cooking tools like measuring cups, basters, utensils, pots, pans, and more. Given that our survey indicates many elderly citizens participate in this program, items like electric can openers and other tools designed to assist those with arthritis and mobility problems should be included as well.

In the survey, participants most commonly ranked kitchen tools as the most helpful option among the choices, with 48.9% of 1st place responses. Implementing this policy would require the program to purchase and distribute the necessary cooking equipment and tools to participants in need. Collaborating with local retailers or suppliers could help acquire the equipment at a lower price, and an equitable distribution plan should be developed.

**Helpful Strategies Frequency Chart**



### Rating for Policy Option 3:

#### Developing an Effective and Standardized Cooking Environment:

**Organizational Capacity:**

**Low** - Providing a standardized cooking environment would require additional staff and resources to forge partnerships with local suppliers, negotiate equipment prices, and develop a list of essential items for each housing unit.

**Economic Feasibility:**

**Low** - This policy option would necessitate significant financial support, which might be beyond the organization's budget.

**Cost-Effectiveness:**

**Medium** - Although costs could be high, this policy has the potential to yield significant benefits by enabling veterans to prepare healthy meals at home and improving their overall food security.

**Efficacy on Food Security:**

**High** - Creating an effective and standardized cooking environment can substantially enhance food security for veterans in the program, especially for elderly participants who may face additional challenges when preparing meals.

Summary:

This policy option aims to improve veterans' food security by enabling them to prepare all their meals at home through the provision of essential cooking equipment and tools. While this policy option can provide substantial benefits, it may be limited in scalability and face implementation challenges due to high costs and the need for additional staff and resources. Collaboration with local retailers or suppliers could help offset costs, but the trade-off between price and benefits should be carefully considered when evaluating this policy alternative.

## **POLICY OPTION 4:**

### **Providing Information on Local Food Sources**

Our team recommends providing informational sheets to program participants that outline the variety of food sources available within their community. These sheets could include information about local food pantries, food banks, and other nutritional support programs that offer assistance to those in need. Providing this information would help program participants supplement their food boxes with additional items while also raising awareness about other assistance programs available to them. The Maryland study demonstrated that providing veterans with resources increased their use of food box items.<sup>46</sup> By offering more local resources, we can enhance the positive impact that information dissemination has on veterans.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid



This policy has the potential to increase participants' overall level of food security by connecting them to additional resources outside of the standard program. However, a potential weakness is that transportation barriers may make it difficult for some participants to access these additional food resources. This could potentially be the reason only 1.1% of respondents ranked it as the most helpful policy option, as shown in the survey results.

### Rating for Policy Option 4:

#### Providing Information on Local Food Sources:

**Organizational Capacity:**

**Medium** - This policy would require some changes in the administrative system, such as additional staff or workload to keep track of local resources and maintain up-to-date information.

**Economic Feasibility:**

**High** - The cost of this policy option is affordable, as it primarily involves printing informational sheets.

**Cost-Effectiveness:**

**Medium** - This policy is expected to generate significant benefits while incurring minimal costs.

**Efficacy on Food Security:**

**Low** - Providing information about local food sources can have a positive impact on stakeholders' food security levels by connecting them to additional resources.

	Organizational Capacity	Economic Feasibility	Cost-effectiveness	Efficacy on Food Security
Preparation and Nutritional Education	Medium	High	High	High
Permanent Food Pantry at Each Site	Medium	Medium	High	High
Developing an effective and standardized cooking environment	Low	Low	Medium	High
Providing information on local food resources	Medium	High	Medium	Low





## *Policy Recommendation*

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*We prioritize our policy options according to the number of "High" ratings each of them has. Therefore, the following is our recommended policy options in order of priority:*

①

**Preparation and Nutritional Education**

②

**Permanent Food Pantry at Each Site**

③

**Providing Information on Local Food Sources**

④

**Developing an Effective and Standardized Cooking Environment**



# 08

## CONCLUSION

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## **CONCLUSION**

Years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity remains a persistent challenge in Los Angeles County, particularly for lower-income veterans striving to achieve financial stability and maintain adequate nutrition. Organizations across the country, including Village for Vets, work with government funding and donations to support the well-being of veterans. These organizations offer various services to their participants, ranging from monetary stipends to delivering food boxes with diverse contents. This report aimed to identify additional methods to enhance the food box delivery system, with the goal of improving nutritional intake for veterans. Our team believes that addressing food insecurity among the veteran population in L.A. can have far-reaching benefits in other aspects of their lives.

Through our background research and surveys of Village for Vets staff and participants, we have developed multiple policy options that could potentially lead to increased benefits within the organization. Our recommendations are based on an evaluative analysis that takes into account the implementation levels, costs, and feasibility of each policy option. Some options demonstrate that incremental changes can yield considerable benefits, while others may require more resources. Nonetheless, we hope that these recommendations will not only serve the Village for Vets program but also provide valuable insights for similar organizations seeking to improve food security among veterans.





# 9

## APPENDICES

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

Anonymous Veteran Survey

#### **Please help us improve our Veteran Food Box Delivery Service!**

We're conducting the survey to learn more about your thoughts on the food box service. It will only take you 10 minutes. And to show we really mean what we said, you'll get A \$30 TARGET GIFT CARD from us as a thank you once you complete the survey.

#### **1.What is your age? (Circle Answer)**

- A.Below 30
- B.30-50
- C.Over 50

#### **2.What is your gender? (Circle Answer)**

- A.Male
- B.Female
- C.Nonbinary
- D.Prefer not to state

#### **3.How long have you been obtaining food boxes from this source? (Free Response)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months

#### **4.Tell me about your availability of food during a given week before the program:**

I.Missed meals during the week? (Circle Answer)

- A.Often
- B.Sometimes
- C.Never

II.Rationed food due to budget constraints? (Circle Answer)

- A.Often
- B.Sometimes
- C.Never



III. Ate proteins, vegetables, and fruits? (Circle Answer)

- A. Often
- B. Sometimes
- C. Never

**5. Since starting to receive the food box, do you feel your nutritional health has improved? And if so, to what degree? (Circle Answer)**

- A. Slightly
- B. Moderately
- C. Greatly
- D. None

**6. How important is the food box that you have been receiving to your meal preparation? (Circle Answer)**

- A. Extremely important
- B. Very important
- C. Slightly important
- D. Not important at all

**7. What challenges have you had in utilizing the food boxes? Please check all that apply:**

- A. Insufficient Cooking Equipment (\_\_\_)
- B. Insufficient Cooking Ideas/Recipes (\_\_\_)
- C. Insufficient Safe Storage (\_\_\_)
- D. Dietary Restrictions (\_\_\_)
- E. Cultural Restrictions (\_\_\_)
- F. Food Preferences (\_\_\_)
- G. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**8. How much of the food do you use from the food boxes? (Circle Answer)**

- A. 0%
- B. 25%
- C. 50%
- D. 75%
- E. 100%



**9. Rank which of the 5 options you would find most helpful for improving your experience of food boxes from (1) the most helpful, to (5) the least helpful.**

- More Kitchen Tools \_\_\_
- Cooking Classes \_\_\_
- Information on Ingredients \_\_\_
- Recipes \_\_\_
- More Variety of Items \_\_\_

Free response questions:

1. What items do you prefer to have in future food box deliveries?

2. What suggestions do you have for improving the current state of food boxes? (Answer in a few sentences, if no suggestions, leave blank)

We would really appreciate  
your participation!

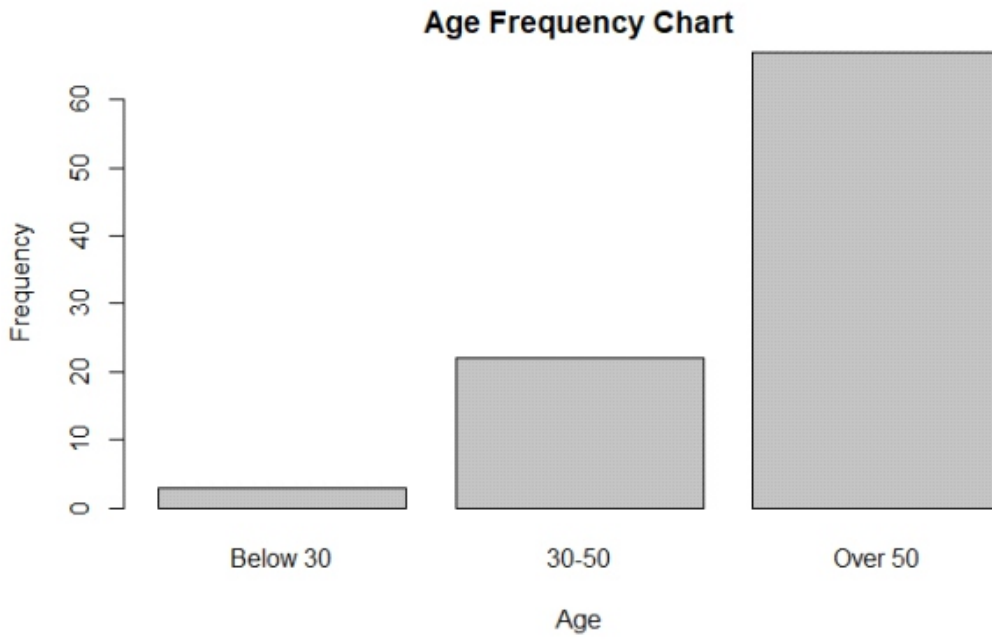
Thank you !



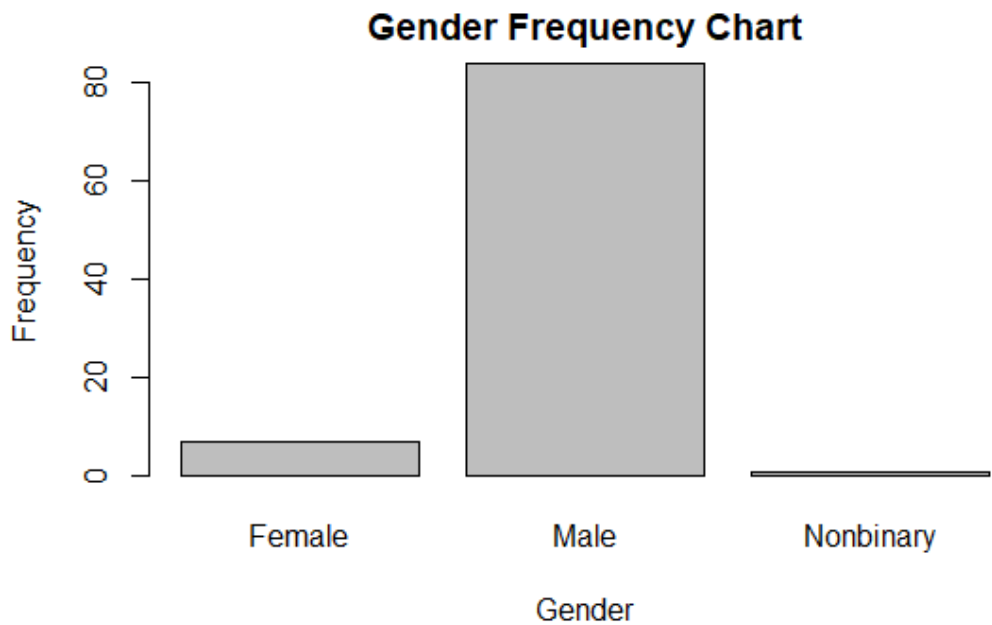
## APPENDIX 2

Frequency charts from the survey

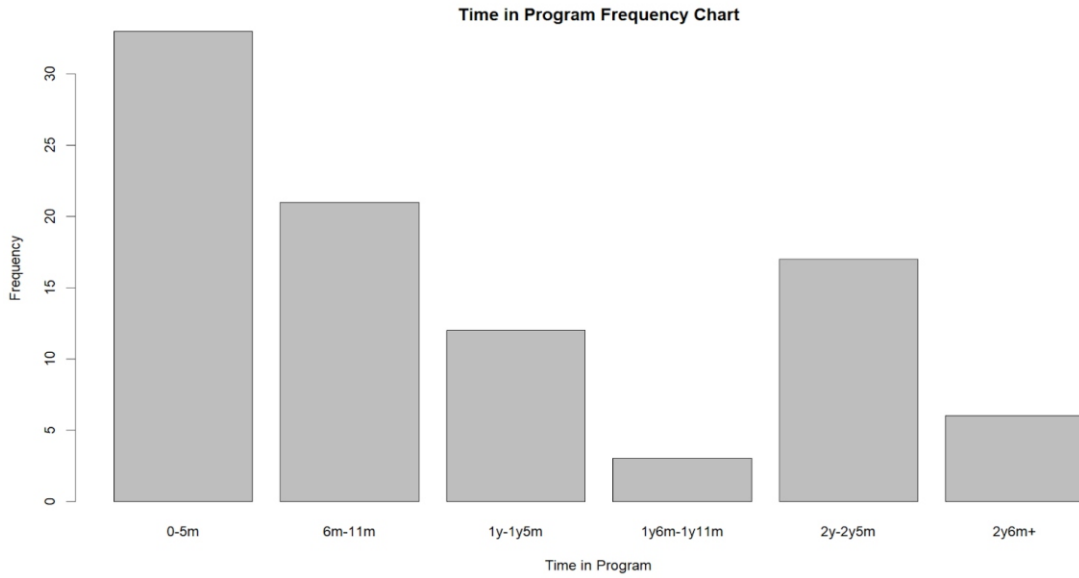
### 1 What is your age?



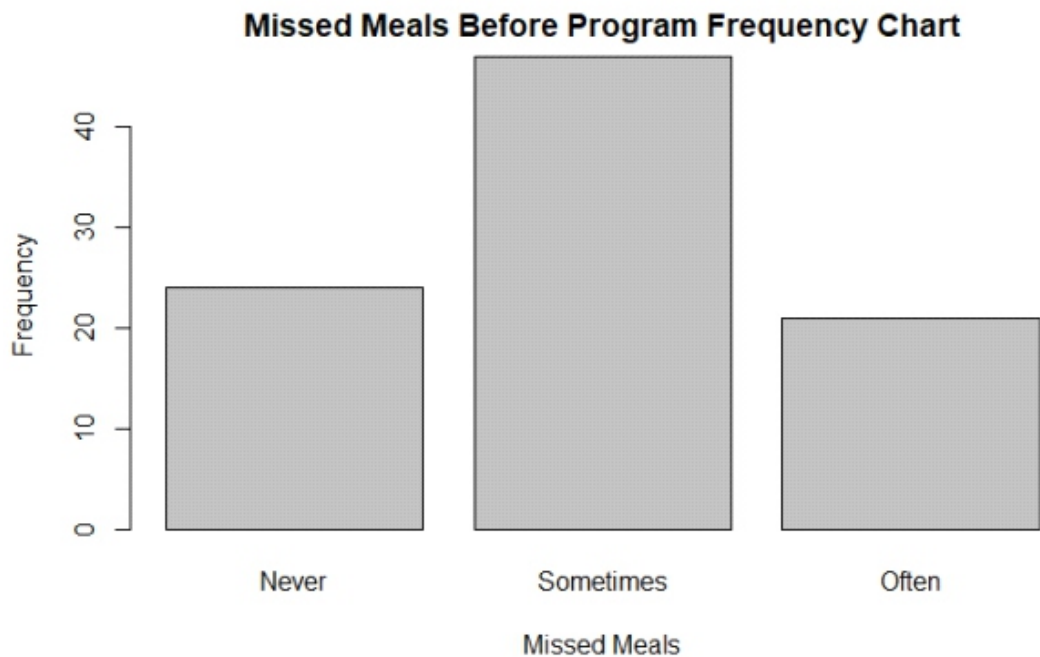
### 2 What is your gender?



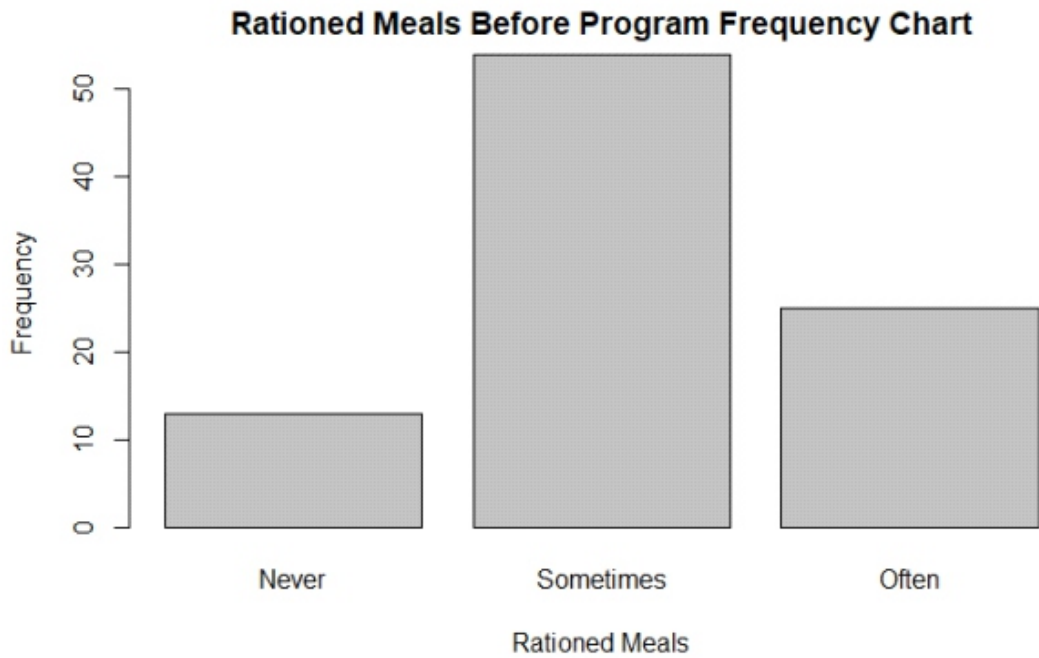
**3 How long have you been obtaining food boxes from this source?**



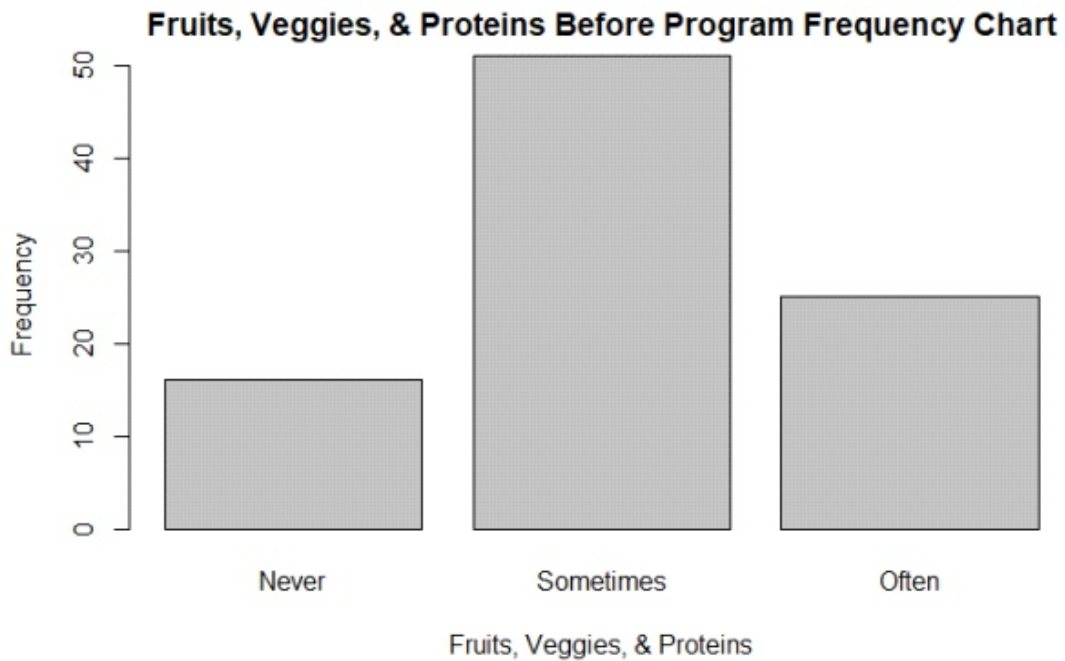
**4 Tell me about your availability of food during a given week before the program: Missed meals during the week?**



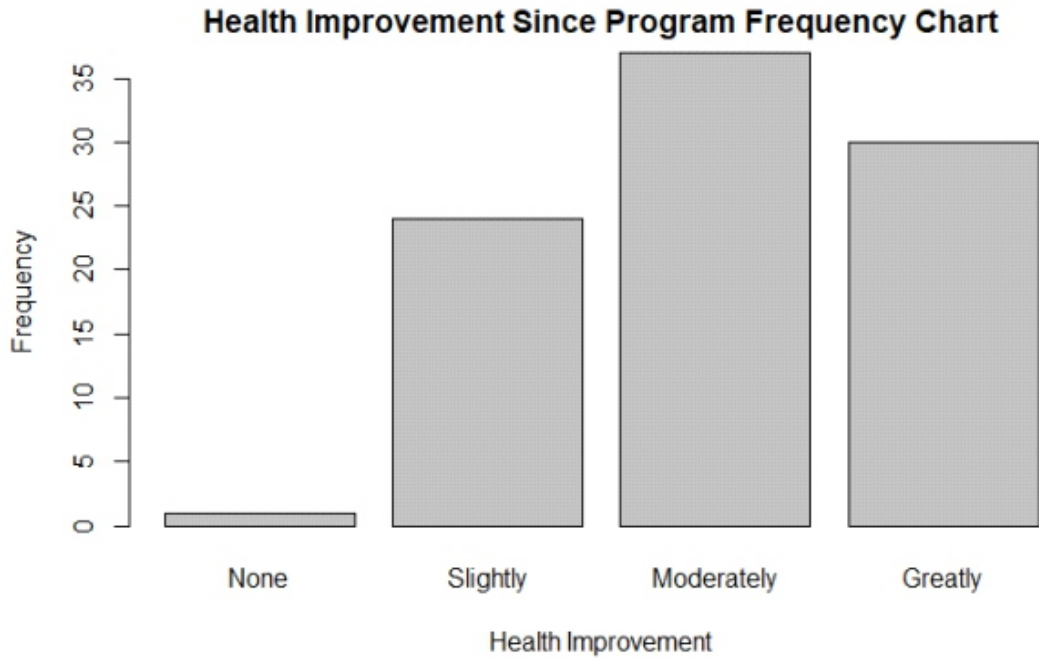
**5 Rationed food due to budget constraints?**



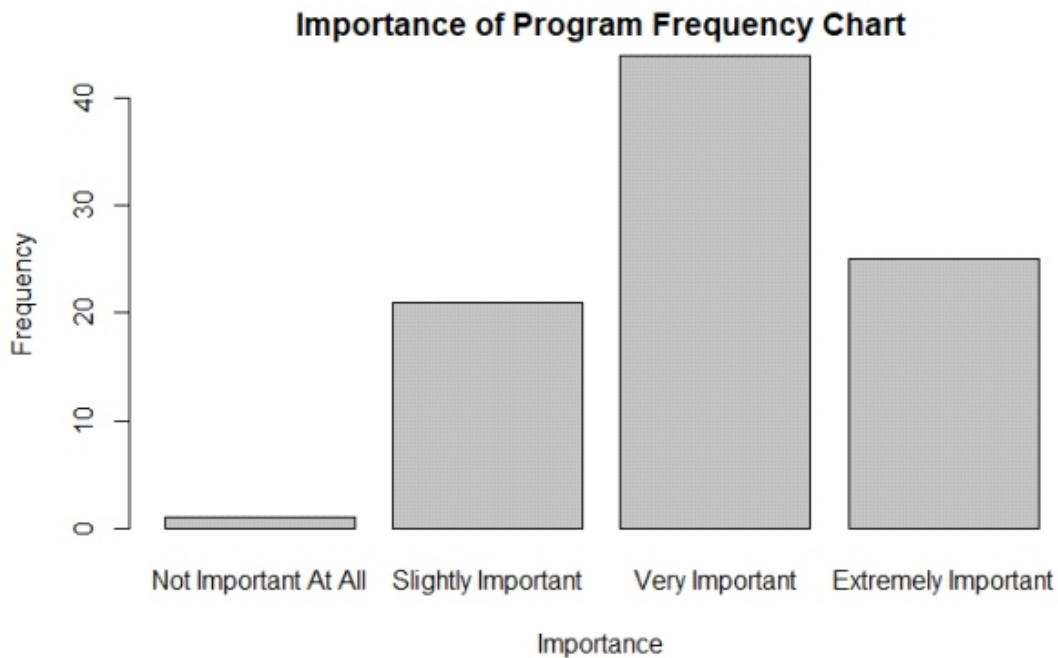
**6 Ate proteins, vegetables, and fruits?**



**6 Ate proteins, vegetables, and fruits?**

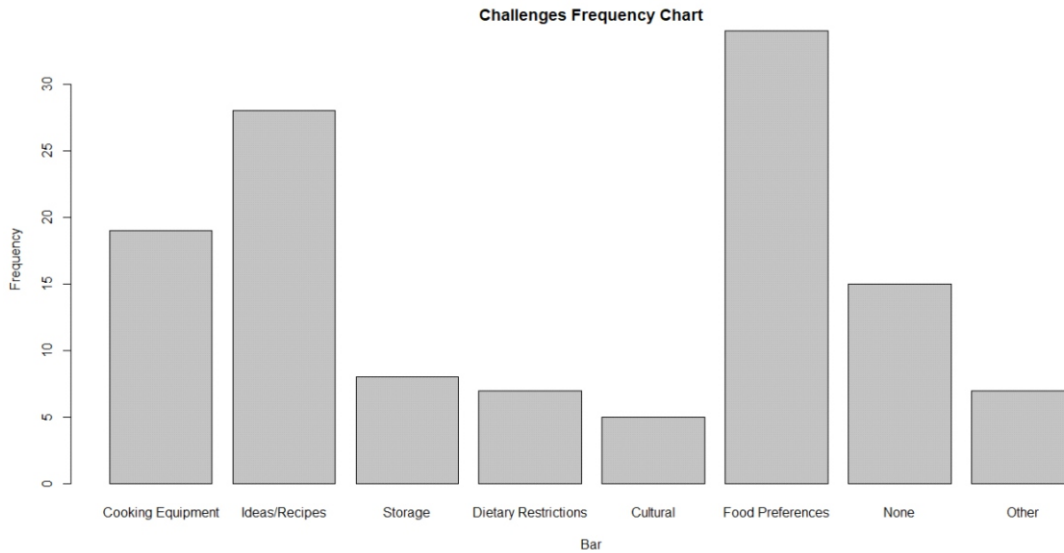


**7 Since starting to receive the food box, do you feel your nutritional health has improved? And if so, to what degree?**





**8** How important is the food box that you have been receiving to your meal preparation?



**9** What challenges have you had in utilizing the food boxes?

