

# CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

## 2018 REPORT

Jamila Cervantes (they/them)  
Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow

## Introduction

In 2014, Oregon Food Bank (OFB) made an organization-wide commitment to equity work. In the spring of the following year, all staff members received 18 hours of equity and inclusion training. At the end of the training, staff members compiled a list of equity issues that the organization could address, as informed by the aforementioned equity training. Together, staff decided that the organization needed to prioritize clearing avenues for client engagement<sup>1</sup> above other issues on the list. Many staff members agreed that involving clients<sup>2</sup> in decision-making processes would provide client-driven solutions and client-centered service.

Staff initially considered expanding their client engagement efforts by offering clients the opportunity to sit on the Board of Directors (BOD). After some deliberation, employees decided that perhaps this was not the most meaningful ways to have client engage in anti-hunger work. Staff members were concerned that the BOD was not the best place to gather feedback from clients, nor did it have the specific cultural feel appropriate for engaging a wide range of clients. Later, it was decided that clients could have more meaningful experiences if they had have the opportunity to sit on an advisory board that ran parallel to the Board of Directors. Staff agreed that an advisory board should defy dominant cultural norms and that people on the board should have decision-making power.

A new full-time position was created in the Partnerships and Programs (P&P) department at Oregon Food Bank in reaction to the phenomenon described above. One of the duties of the person in the Community Equity Coordinator (CEC) role was to assemble an advisory board. However, the coordinator left soon after accepting the job offer to be in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux tribe, who were leading efforts to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The coordinator's work on the advisory board was largely left unfinished.

Shortly following the departure of the CEC, Oregon Food Bank decided to contract a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow to tackle a similar project. In September 2017, I began the five-month field site placement component of my 12-month leadership program at Oregon Food Bank. I worked alongside the Regional Network Development team as the Client Engagement Fellow. The project I executed differed from the work formally done by the CEC in the sense that it attempted to answer larger, more abstract questions. Rather than building an advisory board, my goal was to understand the various avenues available to integrate the perspectives of the people the organization is serving. My goal was also to understand the ways that we can elevate the experiences, opinions, and perceptions of people facing food insecurity in ways that are meaningful to them and that can also ultimately better inform anti-hunger work to eventually eradicate hunger. I intended to answer the following questions: What aspects of our existing client engagement work should we keep? What are other food banks doing around client engagement and leadership that we should be learning from? Which stakeholders need to be involved? How can our client engagement and leadership efforts merge with our internal equity work?

I used a variety of methods to answer the questions I've listed. I used structured interviews<sup>3</sup> as my primary research method. I interviewed OFB staff members, staff members at our partner agency sites, staff at organizations focusing on anti-hunger work, staff at organizations with client engagement

---

<sup>1</sup> The term, "**client engagement**," is not strictly defined by the organization. I would argue that client engagement is a broad term that encompasses the many ways in which people experiencing a specific issue can involve themselves in the problem-solving processes associated with the issue. In the case of Oregon Food Bank, client engagement is the many ways in which clients can participate in anti-hunger/anti-poverty work.

<sup>2</sup> The term, "**client**," is used throughout this document to reference people facing food insecurity. For the nuances associated with using the term and for alternatives, see the "Reflections," section of this document.

<sup>3</sup> Staff interviews can be found at: S:\Agency Relations\Branches\Regional Network Team\Client Engagement

programs (not necessarily focused on anti-hunger work), and Oregon Food Bank clients. I also conducted a quick two question survey to gauge the level of participation that OFB staff regularly have with clients. Furthermore, I relied on pre-existing data gathered by the Community Equity Coordinator to answer my research questions. Lastly, I also heavily relied on ethnographic observations at partner agencies.

This report includes an assessment of current and past client engagement efforts, an overview of similar work being done at other social service organizations; a sum of my reflections, and finally a set of recommendations that Oregon Food Bank could execute—all of which are grounded in OFB's strategic plan, budget, structure, and networks.

There are various methodological limitations to my research. For instance, during my time here, I conducted 25 interviews with staff members. At the time of my placement, there were 187 staff members<sup>4</sup> at the organization. Similarly, I was only able to formally interview three clients from partner agency sites—all of which were undocumented Latinx<sup>5</sup> people. For the most part, my interactions with clients were limited to our small 10-15 minute conversations as I navigated them through pantries, guided through intake processes, helped them shop clothing closets, called their numbers at sites with the lottery system in place, and/or as I carried their items outside to nearly empty parking lots and waived them goodbye. Both limitations, however, only speak to the importance of having different systems for client engagement in place—which I speak about it greater depth in the “Reflection” section of this report. Secondly, I chose the organizations mentioned in this report rather arbitrarily. Many of the organizations I mention were simply listed on Hunger Net, were the most accessible, and/or had a system for engagement in place as opposed to not having one. I attempted to include a wide variety of organizations that differed in terms of their service area/geographical location, service provided, organization size, relationship to the people accessing their services; but also have no specific reason for their inclusion beyond that reasoning. Furthermore, this report is inevitably informed by longitudinal limitations and by my own cultural bias. It is extremely difficult to explore the grand scope of client engagement and its relevancy to anti-hunger work within the confines of a five-month period. Moreover, it is clear to me that my past lived experiences and my current day-to-day experiences have inevitably informed this report as well. While at the workplace I almost solely identified as a Fellow, but in other social spheres, I largely identify as a nonbinary<sup>6</sup> and queer Chicanx<sup>7</sup> from Southeast Los Angeles. For most of my life until very recently, I lived in a low income, mixed status<sup>8</sup>, Spanish-speaking household. Though I no longer use all those markers of identification, all my prior and current personal experiences have shaped my findings, as it determines how I navigate the world.

---

<sup>4</sup> 187 staff members were listed in the Noodle (OFB internal network) on 01/26/2018.

<sup>5</sup> The term, “**Latinx**,” is the gender-inclusive alternative to Latina/o.

<sup>6</sup> The term, “**nonbinary**,” is a term used to describe people who do not identify with the gender binary (man/woman). For more information, see [transequality.org/nb](http://transequality.org/nb).

<sup>7</sup> The term, “**Chicanx**,” often also written, “Xicanx,” is the gender-inclusive alternative to Chicana/o, who are Mexican American, or people born/raised in the United States who are of Mexican descent.

<sup>8</sup> The term, “**mixed status**,” refers to group of people living in community who have different immigration statuses (e.g. TPS recipient, DACA recipient, undocumented, resident, citizen).

## Overview of Current and Past Client Engagement Work at Oregon Food Bank

This section provides a description and assessment of the client engagement efforts that the Oregon Food Bank has pursued and is currently pursuing.

### Hunger Factors

**Who?**

Partnerships and Programs (Statewide)

**When?**

1986 - Present

Hunger Factors is a paper survey that is mailed out to pantries across the network bi-annually. Pantry staff administer the survey and send them back to OFB; the results are expected to demonstrate a representative sample of participants who access services. According to the 2016 report, the initiative is, “a tool [Oregon Food Bank uses] to identify the demographic, economic, social, health and related factors that affect people accessing service from a food pantry.” The survey results intend to guide the programming design process. Last year, 153 pantries participated in the study and 5,845 surveys were completed.<sup>9</sup>

**Strengths:** The information gathered from the survey allows us to check assumptions and keep clients at center of our work. Hunger Factors allows us to get information from a huge population at once. In 2015, the survey results represented 5,845 households across the entire state of Oregon.

**Opportunities:** The survey could be administered elsewhere to better understand the experiences of people facing food insecurity—the survey is currently only administered in pantries. The survey could be taxing for clients: the English version is seven pages long, whereas the Spanish version is eight pages long. Furthermore, people with low literacy skills and with lower levels of formal education are less likely to take surveys, including Hunger Factors. The response rates from Spanish and Russian speaking communities in 2015 was too low to determine any confident understanding about those populations.

### VOICES

**Who?**

Advocacy, Development, Marketing and Communications

**When?**

1997 - Present

According to Sarah Flynn, a former employee, the “initial purpose [of VOICES] was to gather information about whether the transition from paper food stamps to EBT was working for participants.”<sup>10</sup> Flynn explains that the main focus of the project before 2010 was mainly to gather, summarize, and synthesize information to report to legislators. Flynn took over the project in 2010, and changed the initiative to be an opportunity for people to share their own stories. Currently, VOICES serves a multitude of purposes for OFB. Staff in the Advocacy department have expressed that VOICES serves as a tool to engage client voices into advocacy work and to identify issues that needed to be addressed. Staff interviews with the Marketing and Communications department suggest that the VOICES initiative intends to dispel myths about people utilizing social services, elevate the focus on equity in visual media, and to demonstrate that OFB is a culturally responsible organization. Staff in the Partnerships and Programs department expressed that VOICES serves to tell people’s stories and to bring awareness to issues of poverty and hunger.

**Strengths:** As mentioned, the tool can be used to dispel myths about poverty and food insecurity. The initiative centers on people experiencing hunger and food insecurity. VOICES is a platform for demonstrating lived experience. It is a tool that can be used to gain empathy and understanding. The video component of VOICES allows people to share their own stories and taps into the talent and wisdom of people facing food insecurity.

**Opportunities:** VOICES is not currently designed for ongoing engagement with participants. The content of VOICES is often geared towards donors and used as a marketing tool, rather than used to the benefit of the client. VOICES focus groups are guided to fit an agenda based on the needs of Oregon Food Bank.

<sup>9</sup> From 2016 Hunger Factors Report.

<sup>10</sup> From the VOICES Reboot Guide.

## Paper Plate Initiative

**Who?**

Advocacy, Marketing and Communications

**When?**

2014 - Present

Paper Plate is another initiative intended to engage clients in anti-hunger work. OFB staff and partner agency staff dropped off paper plates at partner agency sites and gave clients the (optional) opportunity to use the plates to describe the effects of food insecurity on their lives. The initiative was intended to increase input streams, specifically for state legislators. While the plates have been used in other communication campaigns, the primary purpose of the plates was to provide legislators attending the Legislative Action Day event with a physical reminder of the needs of their constituents. According to a post on the Oregon Food Bank website, "Thousands of people across Oregon sent personal messages written on paper plates. Food pantries collected over 1,500 of these individual stories."<sup>11</sup> The initiative is used to dispel myths about food insecurity, demonstrate the breadth and depth of food insecurity; and make issues of food insecurity digestible to various audiences including state agents.

**Strengths:** The Paper Plate Initiative model allows for anonymity. Clients can provide feedback fairly quickly. It is also an opportunity for low-barrier engagement and could be done practically anywhere (not just pantries). The initiative also encourages creative expression.

**Opportunities:** The plates are collected before big lobby days (every other year) which is overwhelming for the staff who has to sort through the collected plates. Some staff members considered the plates underutilized in terms of extracting and categorizing themes that emerged from them. All the plates are anonymous as well, so while they encourage engagement at the pantry level, the initiative does not allow for follow-up.

## Participant Legislative Input Group

**Who?**

Advocacy, Marketing and Communications; Partnerships and Programs

**When?**

2015 - 2016

The Participant Legislative Input Group (PLIG) was a cross-departmental group that met three times a year. The intention was to diversify client input streams from the organization's traditional methods (surveys, VOICES) by visiting pantries at least twice during a month-long period and surveying clients one-on-one. The advocacy department wanted to hear what clients had to say about social issues to inform OFB's public policy priorities for the 2017 state legislative session.

**Strengths:** PLIG was a low barrier engagement opportunity. It did not require as large of a commitment as a VOICES focus group and did not depend on literacy in the way a paper survey would. PLIG also offered an opportunity for one-on-one engagement and OFB visibility in communities.

**Opportunities:** The amount of time to execute the project was limited. There were clear language barriers between clients and OFB staff and pantry staff/volunteers surveying clients. The project was also not officially owned by any person or department, which meant it was not considered anyone's official priority.

---

<sup>11</sup> Source: [oregonfoodbank.org/food-housing-transit-victories-salem/](http://oregonfoodbank.org/food-housing-transit-victories-salem/)

## Link2Feed

**Who?**

Partnerships and Programs (Statewide)

**When?**

2015 - Present

Link2Feed is a technology that allows OFB to understand the different dynamics of the populations we serve through a cloud-based universal intake process. According to staff, Link2Feed is a direct connection to/with the people we're serving. It reduces the administrative time associated with the reporting and analysis of service statistics/client demographic data. Link2Feed is also able to do real-time reporting on the direct needs of specific and unspecific communities. In addition to the general intake questions for pantry service, Link2Feed has a special survey feature that can push additional questions to clients based on different factors (demographics, family make-up, geography, benefits status, etc.)

**Strengths:** Link2Feed can determine who gets what particular survey question (e.g. staff can identify a subset of clients/subculture and survey that group exclusively). Link2Feed is a quicker and more effective (e.g. storage, results, synthesis) way to survey than paper surveys. During the implementation and rollout process, there is space for feedback.

**Opportunities:** Agencies can already feel at capacity and in addition, feel obligated to do this work which can be time consuming and require more staff time. Additionally, there is a time gap between when we run the survey and when we follow up, meaning that there is a place for lack of accountability/a space for clients to feel unheard. For example, say we run a survey for about two months. We will follow up as soon as that time frame ends and by that time, those who were surveyed at beginning of process might feel unheard--other social phenomenon (e.g. people moving homes, people changing contact information) might impede for any follow up at all. Furthermore, while many OFB staff see Link2Feed as a direct connection, others have expressed that there continues to be a pantry staff member between clients and OFB staff.

## Food Preferences Survey

**Who?**

Partnerships and Programs (Statewide)

**When?**

2016 - Present

The idea for a Food Preferences Survey began at an annual Regional Food Bank Network Meeting. The Network decided that it should be asking what kinds of food clients want to be receiving. In 2016, the Food Preferences Survey was conducted across 38 pantries in two service areas and asked clients to state their food preferences. The survey was administered in six different languages: Vietnamese, Simple Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, English, and Russian. The results allow Oregon Food Bank to compare different regions in the network to see the different preferences that people have across Oregon and to drive decision-making about food acquisition across OFB, RFB, and agency levels.

**Strengths:** The Food Preferences survey is a quick way for people to engage: it took most clients about five minutes to complete. The survey represents a shift from acquiring information about preferences in an anecdotal, informal way to making plans to acquire desired foods based on surveys/data-driven processes. As mentioned, it was conducted in various languages.

**Opportunities:** Though the survey was conducted in various languages and the organization received statically significant responses from Spanish-speakers, the survey received little response from other non-English speaking groups. Specifically with regards to the Food Survey, one staff member expressed that the questions are rooted in assumed value and rarely ask people if they *want/seek* a change in their diets. In other words, we ask about behavioral change because we value it as an organization (and there's scientific backing for it), but we're not asking clients if *they* value behavior change.

## **Direct Client Engagement Examples at Oregon Food Bank**

### **Administration**

Administration staff regularly receive calls from clients interested in being connected to services. In addition, administration staff also work with the Regional Network Development team to assemble food boxes for clients who come to Oregon Food Bank in search of food.

### **Advocacy**

Advocacy staff engage with clients throughout the year, especially during Legislative Session.

### **Marketing and Communications**

Marketing and Communications staff engage with clients directly for various projects, including filming profiles of VOICES participants, conducting VOICES focus groups.

### **Partnerships and Programs**

#### **Nutrition Education Programs: Cooking Matters**

Oregon Food Bank staff administer surveys at week one and week six respectively before and after class. When a volunteer cannot teach a program, OFB staff has stepped in to facilitate the class. Currently, the Cooking Matters team is working to facilitate a Spanish class. In order to gain rapport, the Nutrition Education Operations Coordinator has been teaching a 10-week class to children attending an after school program in Hacienda.

**Opportunities:** The Cooking Matters program could be space to receive feedback, develop trust, and sustain community.

#### **Statewide Education Programs: Seed to Supper**

The six week Seed2Supper course is designed to foster community connections, including connections with trained OFB volunteers who act as course facilitators. Except for class observations and occasional class introductions/announcements, OFB staff do not connect directly with attendees. However, during the registration process, participants receive emails and phone reminders from staff about the process for a week. OFB staff also send out quarterly emails about the class schedule and distribute an end of year survey about the program.

**Opportunities:** Staff do not have a consistent way of interacting with attendees. Classes are held off-site and OFB staff do not attend classes on a regular basis. On-site classes are an opportunity to connect with clients. OFB staff can greet attendees, take part in celebrations, and make announcements. A staff person needs to be on-site for the classes hosted by OFB, so this is not burdensome on staff. Volunteers (and facilitators who are paid in certain situations) are the primary people who engage with clients. There is opportunity for volunteers and staff to mentor S2S alumni who wish to continue to pursue garden education in the field. This would require volunteer commitment, but could potentially yield great results in the form of stronger connections across economic and cultural barriers and in the success of S2S participants' food productions efforts.

#### **Community Food Programs: Free Food Market**

Community Food Programs include Community Basket, Migrant Outreach, and Free Food Market. Free Food Markets were originally structured in a way that involved Oregon Food Bank operating the program and the partnering organization doing the management work, including volunteer coordination. However, the Food Bank is testing a new model in which OFB takes a more active role in the distribution (still contingent on site needs). The model works for Oregon Food Bank because again, it is low barrier; provides fresh produce and culturally relevant items as staple goods, and requires working with community partners. The structure of these programs allow deep space for relationship-building. There is a minimal intake process and little data collection which allows for social connectivity amongst vulnerable groups such as people whose first language is not English, people who are undocumented, people who are skeptical of social services, people with unprotected class statuses, etc.

**Opportunities:** Oregon Food Bank can ensure that partner agencies are intentionally being culturally competent and creating spaces that celebrated cultural differences. The program is not intentionally built to serve the large Chinese community that it currently serves. OFB has a responsibility to serve the communities that value the program, even if they were not their intended audience.

### **Compliance**

The Compliance team receive complaints via phone calls from clients a few times a week. It is not uncommon to receive multiple complaints from one source. The team also conducts drop-in visits to partner agency (PAs) sites.

#### **Other General Direct Client Engagement Opportunities:**

Oregon Food Bank provides up to 16 hours of volunteer time annually to staff members with the approval of their supervisor. Currently, the Corporate and Community Relations Developer organizes volunteer shifts at PAs like SnowCap and Blanchet House. Oregon Food Bank staff can support Link2Feed rollout at PAs.

## Overview of Client Engagement Work at Other Organizations

The following is a list of organizations pursuing client engagement efforts, both in the sphere of anti-hunger work and elsewhere. I've included a description of their initiative, notable outcomes, and elements of their work that can be replicated and/or integrated into models of engagement at Oregon Food Bank.

### I. Food Banks / Food Pantries

#### (1) Member Comment Cards

Greater Vancouver Food Bank  
Vancouver, Canada

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p>         | <p>Greater Vancouver Food Bank (GVFB) has comment cards at multiple and separate sites, meant to gather feedback from members<sup>12</sup>. The organization constructs different versions of the same card depending on the specific goal it wishes to achieve. The first iteration of the comment card had a series of questions that related to the strategic goals set by the organization. The cards asked questions such as, “Do you feel safe at this pantry?” and “Do you access other services?” The cards are designed to be accessible: they are available in large font sizes and numerous languages, including English, Arabic, and simplified Chinese. In addition, the cards adapted the Wong-Baker Pain scale, which uses a range of simplified diagrams of faces (e.g. sad smiley, happy smiley) to allow clients, especially those with varying levels of literacy, and/or disability, and across different cultures to communicate effectively. Each card has a designated space for contact information. If clients choose to share their information, staff members will follow-up with food bank members about the steps being taken to address an issue.</p> |
| <p><b>OUTCOMES</b></p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A fair number of times, people are confused about a policy (usually relating to signage, process about managing pantries) and it really is just about explaining how/why a process exists. When a process is explained and clients feel heard, staff members report experiencing their relationships to members feel tighter knit, closer, and healthier</li> <li>- Often times, the recommendations that clients are making are issues already recognized/named by the organization, but the comment cards incentivize the organization to make the change. It also gives the organization a sense of urgency. Again, clients feel validated and heard when their needs are met.</li> <li>- For suggestions that cannot be implemented quickly/immediately client suggestions can serve to inform long-term programming (e.g. thinking about sourcing meat differently in the future, the capacity to store different foods).</li> <li>- If the data is collected correctly, it can be used to write grants. The data can show grant-writers that the organization is advocating on behalf of the people it is serving.</li> </ul>        |
| <p><b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b></p> | <p>In various Oregon Food Bank staff interviews, staff members mentioned client engagement requiring an educational component to be able to communicate what resources clients can tap into, what aspects of this work OFB can change, why/how a process exists. Staff members from Metropolitan Family Services (MFS) also expressed interest in being able to process and answer logistical questions for clients. MFS staff imagines that many clients have questions about why they use lottery system<sup>13</sup> at their school pantries instead of other systems or why some canned items have expiration dates. The four staff MFS members I interviewed added that they'd like to eventually discuss more in-depth questions with clients after building trust and rapport. Being able to have a space where clients can ask and answer questions is necessary.</p>  |

<sup>12</sup> The term “members,” is interchangeable with the term, “clients.” I discuss this issue further in the “Reflections,” section.

<sup>13</sup> Instead of having clients shop on a “first come, first serve,” basis, many pantries use **the lottery system** which randomly assigns numbers to clients that dictate the order in which they can shop. The lottery system often ensures that clients who cannot arrive to a pantry early due to transportation (or lack of), work schedules, and other circumstances to have a fair chance at receiving services.

## (2) Speakers Bureau

Food Bank of the Southern Tier  
Elmira, New York

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | This program originated as a focus group and was loosely modeled after the VOICES project at OFB. Later, it evolved into a client leadership program after Food Bank staff heard Celeste Licorsh, the founder of the Speak Now Hamilton Speakers Bureau at the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, speak on their initiative and their notable outcomes. The program runs for length of 10 sessions. Each session lasts three hours and focuses on a different topic each time, ranging from subjects like self-care to media literacy training. Each cohort thus far has had about 12 active members. The first cohort was recruited at their local pantry. Most members of their second cohort heard about the program through pantries, community center, events, from a family-share program in their specific county, and the like. Clients participating in the program receive a \$10 gift card at the end of each session and a \$100 gift card at the end of their program (graduation). Transportation and childcare are provided.  |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Clients learn to advocate on their own behalf using the tools taught during workshops and sessions. Last year, two sisters (Speakers Bureaus graduates) received a scholarship from Feeding America to attend a conference in Washington D.C. Those two sisters spoke at a panel about their lived experiences and they received a five minute standing ovation. Many members of the first cohort have been invited to speak at other panels since graduating.</li><li>- The program encourages people across different races and class to find commonalities and build relationships. For instance, Food Bank of the Southern Tier has invited their two cohorts to meet and mingle. The first cohort is made up primarily of white women residing in rural communities. The second cohort is made up primarily of Women of Color residing in urban communities. Food Bank of the Southern Tier provides its members the opportunity to build community with people they might not normally interact with on a regular basis.</li><li>- The Speakers Bureau provides a space for co-counseling, a process that invites people to be both client and counselor. At the beginning of each session, people get to practice active listening with another group member. On top of learning new tools for empowerment, clients also are provided a 5-10 minute space at the beginning of each session for people to talk about their traumas, if any, before the official lecture.</li><li>- As Food Bank of the Southern Tier brings the experiences of these clients forward and demonstrates their commitment to client-centered services, the program coordinators have found that more staff members within the organization are coming forward and speaking about their own experiences about being food insecure. In other words, prioritizing these voices has made staff members empowered to share their own lived experiences.</li><li>- Staff shared that clients expressed being initially incentivized to attend sessions for the \$10 gift cards, but ultimately stayed for the social connectivity, stability/consistency of having a space available to present themselves in the ways they wished to present themselves.</li></ul> |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | As the organization continues to demonstrate its commitment to equity, I can imagine the various ways in which explicitly and outwardly demonstrating its support for people with lived experiences of hunger will allow for staff members to come forward about their own experiences with food insecurity and poverty in the same way that it has for the Food Bank of the Southern Tier. Additionally, I can imagine VOICES being modified to be an inclusive space for co-counseling. Finally, this initiative demonstrates the importance of compensating and incentivizing people.   |

### (3) Food Policy Council

Elijah's Promise  
New Brunswick, New Jersey

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | <p>The Food Policy Council at Elijah's Promise began as a result of responses received from a series of focus groups and surveys which demonstrated the need to create workgroups composed of multiple stakeholders to support different issues raised by community member. The workgroups described are composed of government agents, community center staff, community members, and other people closely grounded in community work. The Food Policy Council at Elijah's Promise is a member of a larger network of councils and organizations, the Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future's Food Policy Networks (FPN). The network seeks to create systemic change throughout the food system. The Food Policy Council at Elijah's Promise is composed of five different committees (community engagement, advocacy, health food access, economic development, and agriculture) and promotes community engagement.</p>  |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Various initiatives grew from the Food Policy Council. Last year, the organization took a stance in support of various issues that emerged from the discussions led by the committees. For example, clients on the council expressed the need for fresh produce. Farmers sitting on the committees then expressed having fresh produce, but not enough labor to glean their farms. Elijah's Promise assembled a volunteering team that was able to glean produce from the farms and later helped distribute food products across the state of New Jersey. Elijah's Promise has also supported liveable wage measures and policies in response to the council's parallel vision for equity.</li><li>- Other initiatives have also grown as a result of this. For instance, Elijah's Promise began to host city-wide film screenings that focused on food-related issues after the Food Policy Council discussed the need to inform community members about different health outcomes associated with food. According to a staff member, about 40-50 people attend each screening, which is held at a local agency or onsite by the garden. Following the screening, people have the opportunity to engage in a discussion based on the topic explained in the film. The organization takes the themes that emerge from the discussion and implement that into their programming. The community feels heard, and has an explicit channel to express their vision. Two important notes: people are incentivized to attend the screening with food and the screenings usually happen in the communities where community members are already working/residing.</li></ul> |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | <p>During an OFB staff discussion on client engagement, when asked to identify who clients of the Oregon Food Bank are, one staff member said, "Former and future clients. People who don't access our services yet." Another staff member added, "They are people who benefit from our services such as affordable housing via advocacy's efforts that may never cross through PA doors." Because our clients have a wide variety of needs, a Client Advisory Board could engage different stakeholders who are experts across different fields to ensure that the holistic needs of clients are met. On a similar note, the Food Policy Council demonstrates the importance of forging partnerships across different organizations and institutions. Oregon Food Bank could partner with H-FLI to expand their program to reach a wider net of clients and provide the logistical support (e.g. providing a venue for workshops, hosting workshops of different issues related to food programming, provide additional compensation, etc.) needed to best serve people experiencing food insecurity.</p>  |

#### (4) Community Conversations

Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona  
Tucson, Arizona

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | The Community Conversation model is loosely based on Oregon Food Bank’s FEAST model. The goal of the Community Conversation is to strengthen relationships with the community, support community driven processes; and finally to facilitate new, collaborative efforts to build community-centered solutions. Community Conversations involve identifying leaders, letting community members set their own agenda, creating/carving space for people; acknowledging space and expertise, and constantly asking, “who is at the table?” Regional Network Developers (RNDs) go to community events for about 2-3 months to identify stakeholders and leaders; they also coordinate one-on-ones with identified leaders. Staff then facilitate conversations: they walk people through activities to set priorities, break people out into small groups, support projects that come out of conversations. The staff let people know what resources are available and let the community move forward in the ways they see fit according to the available resources. They support their efforts until the communities feel self-sufficient. |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clients learn to identify and leverage their social capital.</li> <li>- Clients learn to organize and celebrate their specific strengths.</li> <li>- Communities and the food bank feel connected and forge strong relationships throughout the process.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | Historically, the Oregon Food Bank FEAST program has worked to strengthen food systems of rural communities. Now, the Food Bank is expanding its program to serve culturally-specific demographics. This expansion begins to reflect the Community Conversation model of the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona. The forum of FEAST has not yet explicitly focused on individuals experiencing food insecurity, as it focuses more on networks and food systems. The forum of the initiatives could shift to mirror town hall spaces or community dialogue spaces.   |

#### (5) Speak Up Project!

Alameda County Community Food Bank  
Oakland, California

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | The Speak Up Project! (SUP!) is a free, six-week workshop series intended to help Food Bank clients, social services recipients, and other community members to advocate for themselves by teaching them to navigate legislative processes. This year’s workshops taught attendees about relevant social issues (focusing on the minimum wage, child nutrition, and SSI), how to lobby and testify; and how California’s budget and bill process works. The workshops run on two different tracks—an afternoon and evening track—on different days of the week to accommodate attendees’ schedules. Food is provided at every meeting. Parents/guardians/etc. can bring their children. SUP! members are required to attend all workshops. |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Members have the opportunity to meet with legislators and other government officials/agents, which increases their social capital. The 2015 cohort was able to visit the state capitol and advocate to protect local and national government programs.</li> <li>- The space is intended to be a place of skill-building and skill-sharing; as well as a place to develop friendships and social networks.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | The Advocacy department at Oregon Food Bank is already currently connecting clients to government officials. An effort that trains clients how to meet and interact with government agents could complement existing efforts. As mentioned previously, OFB staff expressed interest in teaching clients how processes work. Adding a component to the existing work that teaches clients about legislative processes and social movements could be done effortlessly.  |

**(6) Client Voice**

Alameda County Community Food Bank  
Oakland, California

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | <p>The Alameda County Community Food Bank (ACCFB) serves as a hub for approximately 250 agencies. Client Voice is a platform for data integration that uses human-centered design methodology to gather direct, consistent, and frequent feedback from clients accessing services within their network of agencies. The data gathered serves to inform the organization where service gaps exist. The localized map data is intended to be compared and overlaid with census information to measure meal gaps. The effort also intends to bridge informational gaps between the Food Bank’s departments—which mostly work independently—to unify data to ultimately serve clients better. Current challenges include identifying, choosing, and implementing a database system to gather information. Another challenge is understanding best practices around gathering data. In an interview, one ACCFB staff member reflected, “How do we get answers from people that are helpful? How do we gather data without being invasive? How do we use that data ethically?” Training volunteers to administer the survey could also be difficult. Implementing the model across the network might also pose a challenge. This specific model works for the Food Bank because of the number of agencies that the organization partners with as well as the scale of its service area. The organization also highly values its relationship with partner agencies, and this approach to client engagement/feedback will also allow help agencies improve their services. Currently, 10 agencies are conducting surveys before and/or after visits that clients can opt out of (the process is voluntary). The organization intends have 40 agencies follow suit for the next four years.</p> |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The results would shift organizational rhetoric from educated assumptions to truth grounded in the experiences of clients. A staff member explained that the organization has some idea about what data will come from the effort, but that surely surveying people would bring about ideas that the organization had never considered and possibly bring about whole new types of programs and opportunities for clients.</li><li>- The results would help the organization understand how to collaborate with other systems to address issues beyond food insecurity, such as housing, employment, etc.</li><li>- The initiative can reach a large amount of clients in a short amount of time and can gather information/feedback daily.</li><li>- Currently, the organization gathers data from monthly reports submitted to the organization by partner agencies. Client Voice would remove that additional step between clients and the Food Bank to forge a stronger connection between clients and the ACCFB.</li></ul>   |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | <p>Link2Feed is currently used for a variety of purposes, but it does not include questions about client experience at a partner agency site. Oregon Food Bank could use this model for engagement to ask clients what they hope to see at food pantries, meal sites, etc. and to gather more information about what clients would like to see from the Food Bank rather than solely using Link2Feed as part of a larger intake process. It was suggested in an interview with Alameda County Community Food Bank that clients would be able to indicate what kind of services they would like to be connected with, how they could be better served, and the kind of support they would like the organization to provide. Link2Feed could be used in a similar way.</p>  |

## (7) Leadership Table

Clay St. Table  
Portland, Oregon

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | <p>The Leadership Table is composed of internal stakeholders--namely clients, volunteers, and/or staff members--who meet every week before pantry days to determine how to distribute food for the following week. Other people who do not identify as clients, volunteers and/or staff members are welcome to the space as long as they are willing to do more listening than speaking. The director of the meals program, food pantry, and coordinator of this group, Dr. Paul Davis hopes that this space can eventually be a place to discuss traumas and emotional wellbeing. No requirements exist for the group. For instance, people are not required to have a six month commitment to join. All that is necessary is that people show up during the designed time slot. Dr. Paul Davis operates under the motto, "Low barriers to service, and low barriers to serving." He incentivizes members to show up with pizza and soda. Challenges associated with the Leadership Table are mostly associated with staff capacity and efficiency. Dr. Davis suggests that the main goals of the Leadership Table are to 1) strategize how to best serve Clay St. Table's clients and 2) be an inclusive space where all voices are welcome. Both of these goals require patience and time from staff coordinating the efforts. The second goal often places efficiency lower on their priority list. Conversations can be lengthy because they require longer and more explicit explanations and details especially due to the inconsistency of attendees. Some conversations also last longer, especially for neurodivergent<sup>14</sup>/disabled clients and for clients experiencing substance abuse. Another challenge is that clients get attached to their leadership position(s). The organization has addressed this mostly by creating other leadership positions and allowing for shadowing opportunities. For instance, when high school students come to volunteer at the pantry. They often want to run a specific pantry station on their own. However, a client/volunteer/leader has already claimed that station as their own. Dr. Davis pairs the students and leader and finds that the two groups are willing to coexist when they are allowed to do the job together.</p> |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Dr. Paul Davis primarily provided anecdotal evidence for the success for the Leadership Table. He claims that the initiative encourages community accountability. Many of the people on the Leadership Table are people living in community (both physically and otherwise) with other clients. On the rare occasion that clients attempt to take more produce than necessary, they are confronted by other clients--who they know and trust--and explained patiently (and often in their language) that they cannot take more. The fact that clients are on the Leadership Table calls for community accountability and circumvents the uncomfortable power dynamic between staff and clients/volunteers and clients that often exists at the workplace when accountability is necessary.</li><li>- According to Paul, the initiative has given people a sense of purpose. For example, he tells the story of a disabled client who received immense satisfaction from being called, "a leader." She mentioned to Davis that in her 30 years, she had never been given a leadership role and she was excited to do her job, which mostly entailed listening to complaints from clients with regards to what was accessible at the pantry.</li><li>- The initiative has brought forth various community-based solutions. Earlier last year, the organization received a training with regards to equity and inclusion. After going through the training, the Leadership Table realized that the organization could be doing more for their homeless population. Street Table, an effort that focuses on meeting the needs of homeless people facing food insecurity, was started by the Leadership Table.</li></ul>   |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | <p>Depending on the priorities of the organization, the Client Advisory Board could follow the "nonstructural" structure of Leadership Table, where everyone can participate, to avoid tokenizing any clients. Furthermore, I like the idea of Oregon Food Bank blurring lines between clients and non-clients (namely, staff). I also like the idea of OFB centering the principle of community accountability in their work.</p>  |

<sup>14</sup> The term "neurodivergent," refers to a style of cognitive function that does not fall within societal standards of what is typical. It is commonly used to describe the behavior/thinking styles of people with developmental disabilities and/or mental illness.

## II. Other Organizations

### (1) Early Learning Washington County (ELWC) Parent Advisory Council (PAC)

United Way

Washington County, Oregon

|                                   |   |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| <p><b>DESCRIPTION</b></p>         | <p>An Early Learning Hub is intended to be a space where different stakeholders/partners can work together to create systems that are client-centered. In this case, the clients being families, especially those with children in early education programs. Early Learning Washington County is one of those hubs, and is run by the Washington County Health and Human Services Department and United Way of the Columbia-Willamette. Different groups govern the ELWC, including the Parent Advisory Council. The Parent Advisory Council is made up of parents, grandparents, and legal guardians with children age(s) 0-6 or those with children who are older but are interested in advocating for early education access. People belonging to marginalized communities (e.g. people with disabled children and/or disabled people with children and/or disabled people with no children but who are interested in advocating for early education access) are also encouraged to sit on the board. The ELWC PAC consists of two subgroups (PAC West and PAC East). The subgroups were created with the intention of covering all areas and populations in Washington County. For instance, PAC West meets in Hillsboro, and represents residents of Hillsboro, Forest Grove, Banks, and Gaston; PAC East meets in Beaverton and represents residents of Beaverton, Tigard-Tualatin, and Sherwood. There is one president for the PAC (West and East), and two vice presidents for each subgroup. There are about 16-20 people in each subgroup. Membership is for two to three years and members apply via an application. Each subgroup meets once a month for 2 hours. Dinner is provided. Each subgroup discusses the same agenda items.</p> |
| <p><b>OUTCOMES</b></p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The PAC provides different leadership, advocacy, training, conferences, and networking opportunities to parents. For instance, in the past, members spoke to Oregon Legislature about their work, participated in “Popular Education” workshops, and attended conferences.</li> <li>- In the past, PAC contributed to various initiatives. For instance, PAC provided feedback on the early literacy program led by ELWC meant to provide early learning materials in different languages to children. In the past, the PAC has informed the language and content of the educational and outreach materials being distributed/used by partner agencies to make sure that it was culturally relevant and appropriate.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b></p> | <p>Early Learning Washington County (ELWC) Parent Advisory Council is a good example of a client engagement effort facilitated by an organization that is not a direct service organization. It is also a good example of what a decentralized advisory board looks like. The Oregon Food Bank could consider having multiple advisory boards across their service area follow one agenda and discuss the same agenda items. I like the idea of forging partnerships with other invested stakeholders to increase capacity and make change more efficiently. The Early Learning Washington County (ELWC) Parent Advisory Council is an effort lead by both United Way and the Washington County Health and Human Services Department. I can see a similar partnership be forged between other institutions and the organization to ensure that systemic change could be made. I can especially see this being the case eventually in places like Clackamas County where the Oregon Food Bank’s RND team has already formed strong bonds with the Clackamas Public Health Department.</p>  |

## (2) Hunger-Free Leadership Institute

Partners for Hunger-Free Oregon  
Portland, Oregon

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | <p>The Hunger Free Leadership Institute (H-FLI) originally began as the Institute for Volunteers, which was a way for H-FLI to engage with its volunteers. However, Partners for Hunger Free Oregon staff members admitted their engagement with volunteers was primarily for development purposes. The program now exists as an eight month training program. Fellows attend a half day of training every month and learn about a plethora of subjects ranging from media literacy to the history of efforts attempting to address food insecurity in the United States. The goal of the program is to refine the skills of people who have lived experiences of hunger so that they can advocate for themselves. There is a strong emphasis on relationship building and information/knowledge sharing. The first two cohorts have consisted of 10-12 members. The first year, people had different levels of lived experiences of hunger. Some people had no experience (e.g. some people were students pursuing graduate degrees) while other people were currently experiencing hunger/had experienced hunger in the past. The last cohort was more intentionally designed. H-FLI coordinators decided that at least half the cohort should be made up of people of color; all the people should have lived experiences of hunger; and a large portion of the training should be spent on building community, and trust as well as addressing social issues such as racism, misogyny, etc. H-FLI is also a highly dynamic program: there is an advisory council that meets that discusses how to shape the program to be better. Currently, half of the graduates from the last cohort sit on the council. The advisory council is highly successful. The first cohort was directed to complete a capstone project. But the instructions were vague and unclear. The staff expressed that they tried to allow the members flexibility by not giving people assigned topics. But Fellows sitting on the advisory board mentioned that there was too much flexibility and not enough clear direction. Now capstone projects are much more structured. Logistical provisions for program participants include, "Meals and childcare will be provided at all trainings. Transportation and lodging will be provided when trainings take place outside of a one-hour drive. Stipends of up to \$1,000 will be available to Fellows at an income-based sliding scale," according to their website.</p> |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Fellows learn to transform their skills and stories into tools</li><li>- The staff encourage participants and alumni to remain connected after the program and to share their experiences about the program to improve it.</li><li>- Fellows have the space to unpack trauma with other people with similar traumas.</li><li>- The huge emphasis on relationship building has resulted in people building strong and healthy relationships with other cohort members.</li><li>- One graduate from last year's cohort currently sits on the Partners for Hunger-Free Oregon Task Force and is using the skills she gained throughout the program to continue to effect change</li></ul>  |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | <p>Though it began primarily as a space for all, Partners for Hunger-Free Oregon eventually converted the space into one specifically intended for people with lived experiences of hunger. If the intention is to solely make space for clients, Oregon Food Bank could learn to make that clear and explicit. Oregon Food Bank could also learn to make their client engagement models fluid and dynamic. In order for models of client engagement to work efficiently, it is essential that they constantly be assessed and modified based on feedback of stakeholders. Oregon Food Bank staff also expressed concern about compensation during staff interviews. The organization could consider compensating participants of models in the same way that Partners for Hunger-Free Oregon currently compensates their Fellows.</p>  |

### (3) Food Action Board

Hunger Free America  
New York, New York

|                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | According to their website, “the goal of the FAB program is to enable community members to develop the leadership, advocacy, and community organizing skills to stand up for their rights and speak out on their own behalf.” Members have the opportunity to interact with elected officials, engage with the media, and participate in community events. Trainings are held every two weeks and community members can show up to whatever training, whenever. About 10-15 people show up to each meeting, depending on the issue. The majority of members are SNAP receipts, pantry users, and newcomers to the city/country. Filomena Acevedo, Director of Community Organizing at Hunger Free NYC explained that their most difficult challenges are associated with training. In particular, it is often challenging to teach community members how to speak to the media and how to articulate their points in a way that is well received. |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Members feel empowered by the knowledge they gain during training and the leadership, advocacy, and community organizing skills they are able to refine.</li> <li>- Clients engage with people that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to engage with such as government officials and media staff.</li> <li>- Members have previously gone to the FRAC Conference in Washington D.C.</li> <li>- Members are encouraged to sign up for the SNAP program at their office and also encourage others to sign up for SNAP and similar social services</li> </ul>  |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | If OFB is interested in involving the wide range of the community that it serves, it might be interested in implementing a model that lacks a time commitment. Hunger Free America also connects clients to media outlets and government officials. Instead of Oregon Food Bank staff distributing information to the media or meeting with government officials to discuss legislative concerns, the Food Bank could consider training clients to do that work, but facilitating the process in the same way that Hunger Free America does.  |

### (4) Frontlines to Power Run for Office Training Programs

The Power Shift Network  
Washington D.C.

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | According to their website, the goal of Frontlines to Power is to train young climate leaders of color from historically marginalized communities to advocate for themselves by running for office. Each cohort is made up of about 10 to 15 individuals, all under the age of 35 who are interested in running for office within the next three years. The program consists of a six part training series that runs from October to April. Two of the trainings are in person (all costs are covered including housing and transportation), with one training taking place in Washington D.C. and another training taking place elsewhere (location varies each year). The rest of the trainings take place remotely. The training sessions cover different topics, ranging from how to run for office to how to overcome identity based challenges while running as a candidate. |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Members will gain access to a network of people who are also interested in working on climate and environmental issues.</li> <li>- Members have the opportunity to foster social connectedness.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | An appealing aspect of this program as with the Hunger Free Leadership Institute is the ability to broadcast/host trainings remotely. I like this idea for when the organization considers expanding its client engagement efforts to rural communities. I also like the idea of members meeting people interested in similar social movements, because it promotes leaderships amongst the cohort and makes the sustainability of client-led efforts more probable.   |

### (5) Resident Advisory Council

Housing with Services

Portland, Oregon

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>DESCRIPTION</b>         | The Resident Advisory Council began as a way to hear feedback for one project. The council was made up of two residents from each of the 11 subsidized housing buildings in the network managed by Housing with Services. The members met twice a month and gave their opinions on issues relevant to the project including streams for outreach, etc. Now, the council is made up of at least one member from each building. The goals of the council are to manage the food program and to provide an ongoing stream of feedback (on issues such as outreach and education). The staff has the opportunity to pose a question and received answers. The Resident Advisory Council meetings are currently facilitated by staff, but members are strong leaders. Council members are not compensated with money—stipends are legally unclear and salaries put people at risk of being kicked out subsidized housing—but are compensated with the gift cards of their choice. |
| <b>OUTCOMES</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Resident Advisory Council members feel a sense of ownership over projects. The Council currently oversees the food program at Housing with Services.</li><li>- Members of the council live in close proximity with one another (or in the network of subsidized housing managed by Housing with Services) and they see the work and decisions made in the space intertwined with their relationship with one another.</li><li>- Members of the council feel heard by the organization since the Council provides a space for constant and consistent feedback.</li><li>- The Council serves the elderly community, which is a community often neglected/underserved in the Portland Metro area. Members of the council not only have leadership opportunities, but a place for social connectivity as well.</li></ul>  |
| <b>REPLICABLE ELEMENTS</b> | As mentioned previously, staff at OFB expressed concern over issues of compensation. Housing with Services demonstrates that compensation is easy if you know your clients. Compensating with gift cards is perfectly acceptable and enough, especially for people who need to be below certain income guidelines to receive services. In the case of the Resident Advisory Council, each building in the network of buildings overseen by Housing with Service sends a representative to the meetings. In a similar way, Oregon Food Bank could build a Client Advisory Board in which pantry staff and/or pantry clients can elect or identify an individual who could represent them at periodical Advisory Board meetings.   |

## Reflections

In this section, I detail the major takeaways and common observations that arose in staff interviews, partner agency site visits, and conversations with clients. The reflections mentioned here ultimately informed the set of recommendations outlined in the following section.

### I. Transparency

It is crucial that Oregon Food Bank be transparent internally and externally when creating new and revisiting old models for client engagement. In particular, the organization should be clear about the scope of its work, the extent to which they understand their clients; the groups/people considered clients; and the intentions/goals of their initiatives.

Oregon Food Bank needs to be clear about the breadth of their engagement work. In a cross-departmental conversation on client engagement,<sup>15</sup> one staff member explained that they felt more comfortable using “community engagement,” as opposed to, “client engagement,” when it came to the work I’ve described in this report. I also like the idea of replacing “client,” with “community.” However, swapping the terms begs the question: Is Oregon Food Bank interested in engaging with broader communities of people, such as people not accessing OFB’s services? Or is organization is primarily interested in models specifically designed to engage clients? Eventually, the organization should work to engage broader communities because it is important to integrate the perspectives of 1) people who are not accessing services, but face food insecurity, 2) people not currently experiencing food insecurity, who might at any given time, and 3) people who are not directly affected by food insecurity but who can play a role in solving hunger. However, the organization’s state of readiness does not permit this at the current time (I explain this further in the section titled, “Organizational Readiness”). Regardless of the organization’s interests, it is important for the organization to be honest about whom models of engagement benefit. It would be disingenuous and inaccurate to advertise work as community engagement, when the interests of the organization lie elsewhere. For a similar reason, in my mock job description draft for a full-time employee (see *Appendix Item 1*) dedicated to this work, I made the conscious choice of selecting language that I felt appropriately reflected the work this staff member would be doing.

The organization should also be clear about who they believe their clients to be. Within the organization, people have different ideas about *who* is an Oregon Food Bank client. Three people on the Development team identified donors and funders as their primary clients. One staff member in P&P mentioned that partner agencies were their primary clients. Across the organization, people retain different ideas about who they are serving. In the cross-departmental conversation mentioned earlier, at least seven different definitions for clients were provided by staff members. These definitions included: people being served through partner agencies and/or programs, such as receipts of pantry, meal site, and harvest share foods. Staff mentioned that OFB clients were also people who received services affiliated with us in the past and people who would receive our services in the future (people who do not have access to services yet). Staff members also considered people who benefit from services who may never cross through partner agency doors, such as people who reside in affordable homes thanks to the efforts of the Advocacy department. Another person identified Cooking Matters attendees as clients. Someone else mentioned that patients being screened for food insecurity at clinics and hospitals were OFB clients as well. Another staff member added that FEAST participants were also clients. Lastly, someone said people in supplemental programs, such as children utilizing backpack meal programs, are clients. One employee

---

<sup>15</sup> I facilitated a cross-departmental conversation on client engagement at Oregon Food Bank for OFB employees on December 14, 2017. Notes from the conversation can be found at: S:\Agency Relations\Branches\Regional Network Team\Client Engagement

also said, “Our clients are also people within our targeted audience who don’t use services, but need them.” Such a vast definition for the term complicates the idea of creating a model that addresses all clients. More important than defining the term—which becomes increasingly complicate when we realize how fluid “clients” are—is explicitly stating who models for engaging are serving. I’ve thought a lot about how a client advisory board would initially serve all of our clients. The answer for Oregon Food Bank right now is: it wouldn’t. We should acknowledge that our scope of work in our current state should be limited to partner agency clients in the Metro Portland area.

While conducting interviews with other food bank organizations, I also found that people have different ways to address people who access their respective services. For instance, the Greater Vancouver Food Bank (GVFB) in Vancouver BC refers to the people who access their services as, “members.” Other organizations use different vocabulary, ranging from patrons, guests, and friends. One OFB staff member explained that at her prior job, she steered away from using clinical terms to refer to people accessing her organization’s services and instead used “guests” when referring to them and staff members were referred to as, “hosts.” The word choice implied that the hosts were there to serve guests, but also let people know that the space could be considered a place of residency/”home.” Throughout this report, I primarily used the word, “clients.” In the case of OFB, it could be argued that the term is appropriate because it describes a relationship in which the organization is held accountable by the service-user if/when necessary. It also emphasizes holding clients at the center of their work. This terminology reminds me of the “customer is always right” approach to service that balances a dynamic that might be unbalanced otherwise. Personally, I find this conversation on language to deflect from the issue that mattered to me during my time here: meaningful engagement with those who access our services. Unless food banks are inviting clients to discuss nomenclature and terminology, the conversation sidetracks from addressing practical issues to addressing theoretical issues. Though I will not deny the power of language and the way that power is shaped by/though language, I would also add that I believe there is a degree of privilege with being able to focus language and deny the sense of urgency around food insecurity that many clients face. However, even with my disdain for discussing language, I simultaneously believe that the organization should be intentional or at the very least understand/agree on the reasoning behind using one word over the other.

Finally, it is necessary that Oregon Food Bank is transparent and explicit about the kind of power allocated to and/or shared with clients who participate in their client engagement efforts. How much (if any) decision-making power do clients have in all of the models for engagement in place? Are looking specifically for client input or are we dedicated to engagement? What do distinctions have we drawn between those two and what are their implications? Are our systems collecting information that cannot be access or used? If so, why? In the early stages of constructing new models for engagement, the organization does not need to know all the answers to the questions. However, the organization should be able to communicate its intentions, internally and externally. For instance, if clients on an advisory board demand that OFB no longer partner with faith-based organizations—it should be clear whether that issue can or cannot be addressed. From its inception, the organization should state the purpose of models for engagement, the intentions behind the model, the reason for the implementation of this model as opposed to others, and the kinds of power that participants retain.

## II. Organizational Readiness

During my Lunch and Learn<sup>16</sup> presentation, I told staff that many of the clients at pantries did not know what services Oregon Food Bank provided. Several of the clients I helped through pantries were confused about the organization—many of them asked me about hours of operation, restrictions, and location. On one occasion, I drove a two clients to a Motel6 that they were staying at after their subsidized housing apartment burned down. After explaining where I worked, the clients asked me the routine series of questions but concluded with asking me why I was the first food bank employee she had ever met despite visiting the pantry multiple times. After my presentation, someone asked me, “Is it important for Oregon Food Bank to be visible within communities?” And the response is complicated. Yes, if the organization is interested in establishing models for deep client engagement. No, if the organization is interested in supporting community models of engagement and/or interested in gathering client input. Without being visible in a community, we cannot build rapport. Without building a relationship, people might be hesitant to be honest or vulnerable. I would describe “deep client engagement,” as engagement that goes beyond traditional models of engagement (such as survey or one-time focus group). Deep engagement requires time, vulnerability on behalf of all the parties involved, and does moves beyond consultation/receiving input.



Figure 1

Figure 1 explains the process behind implementing models for deep engagement.

It is important to learn about the people the organization is serving before interacting with them. It is also important to learn how to interact with people before attempting to build relationships. The organization needs to draft an internal document about the best practices concerning direct client engagement so that clients are helped in a dignified and respectful manner. Learning how to interact with people before interacting with people is crucial to ensure that the organization does the least damage possible and the clients receive the greatest benefits circumstantially available in during client-organization interactions. After learning about clients and how to interact with them, the organization can begin building relationships with people. This second step is perhaps the most tedious and laborious. Build relationships with people requires time and patience. It requires understanding clients as individuals and as a larger conglomerate. Relationship-building also requires a reciprocated vulnerability, consistent follow-up, and good communication. One of the most meaningful relationships I built was with a client volunteering at a school pantry site. While volunteering I expressed my fears about being a recent transplant and my concerns about being away from my family, and in turn this person shared their own traumas and fears, especially concerning their immigration status. My understanding of immigration policy allowed for the conversation to run smoothly—the client spent no time on details and did not feel the need to contextualize their experience for me. We exchanged phone numbers and talked multiple times after that. Building a relationship was almost effortless with a client that I knew how to interact with: I have lived experiences of poverty and a deep personal understanding of immigration rights. Being culturally aware

<sup>16</sup> A “Lunch and Learn,” is a staff-led educational presentation on an initiative/topic.

and understanding of situations eases the relationship-building process and allows ways for meaningful relationships to be built. After relationships are built, the organization can begin to implement models for deep engagement.

There are already organizing bodies doing deep client engagement work. Though I doubt the organization's readiness to implement deep engagement models at this moment for reasons listed below, the organization *is* ready to support people and organizations already invested in communities doing engagement work. For instance, one staff member at William Temple House explained that there were three major ways OFB could help support their client engagement efforts: provide a toolkit for facilitating conversations amongst clients, aid in the facilitation of conversations for clients, and help with compensation. The staff member explained that their pantry staff already knew what feedback they would receive from clients. She listed ADA accessibility, food choices; and language barriers between staff and Slavic and Asian communities as a few of the issues pantry clients would like to address, but felt at capacity to facilitate the process. Similarly, one staff member at Northeast Emergency Food Program said OFB could support client engagement efforts by facilitating connections between community leaders and other partner agencies doing similar work, providing network support funds, and offering logistical provisions for clients such as food for community meetings and bus passes for transportation. If the organization feels unready to launch models for deep client engagement, it could easily partner with other organizations doing similar work. For instance, the organization could create partnerships with organizations like Partners for Hunger-Free Oregon that are local and have already built rapport with community members. Again, Oregon Food Bank could lend dedicated staff time to the organization, provide a physical venue for meetings, share internal equity resources with the organization for potential workshop ideas, and aid in compensation.

In terms of organizational readiness for new and deep engagement, Oregon Food Bank's strengths lie its fluidity; and in the ability of staff to be open to change. For instance, in previous years, the organization refrained from commenting on contemporary political discourse. However, three days after the inauguration, the CEO of the organization, Susannah Morgan, published a piece called, "Dear Hungry Neighbor," which encouraged all people to seek and demand food assistance if in need of it.<sup>17</sup> Following its rescindment, the organization published a statement in support of DACA.<sup>18</sup> Both instances demonstrated the organization's willingness to adapt to the changing times, especially when events have ramifications that could have harmful effects on people experiencing food insecurity. The Food Preferences survey and the implementation of new policy to address the needs of the people surveyed demonstrates the organization's commitment to listen to clients and change accordingly. Even in interviews, every staff member welcomed the idea of engaging with clients more deeply and more often.

However, I am concerned about the organization's ability to be responsive to the needs of clients who may demand more than food choice changes. I believe the organization has a lot of work to do in terms of disengaging with respectability politics<sup>19</sup> and internal equity issues. As mentioned, there should be different avenues available for all clients to engage—including clients who cannot articulate themselves well, clients who are disruptive, clients who take five bell peppers when a sign at a pantry says to take four only. At pantries and at the OFB workplace, I heard plenty of conversations about who is "deserving,"

---

<sup>17</sup> Source: [oregonfoodbank.org/food-for-all/](https://oregonfoodbank.org/food-for-all/)

<sup>18</sup> Source: [oregonfoodbank.org/discontinuing-daca-will-push-many-hardship-hunger/](https://oregonfoodbank.org/discontinuing-daca-will-push-many-hardship-hunger/)

<sup>19</sup> The term "**respectability politics**," is attributed to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham. The term describes the process in which people tell marginalized people that they need to act more like the group(s) with power in order to be treated better. The process can also be internalized, which means that respectability politics can be perpetuated when marginalized people tell other marginalized people that they need to perform differently to gain respect.

of food, of space, of being heard. Respectability politics perpetuates a dangerous narrative about who is deserving and who is not. It justifies deny basic human rights, such as food security, to those who are deemed undeserving. I also have deep concerns about how the organization will interact with clients as it modifies current models and builds new ones. Though staff members are willing to learn about different cultures and people, not all staff members currently have the tools to do so. At an OFB event, my partner and I—who are both easily read as people of color in Portland—were ushered out of a space designated for staff and volunteers by a staff member, who stated that she was concerned that we were in the wrong place. During my time here, I listened to staff make jokes about building a wall,<sup>20</sup> imitate “Mexican” accents, and ask me if I knew, “[insert the name of a random person with an ‘ethnic sounding’ name that I probably did not know because I was a Portland transplant from Southern California].” Other employees of color were also met with racially-charged transgressions during my placement. White staff members constantly confused staff members of color for one another. Staff members often confused names and nationalities of the Black, Latinx, and Asian employees. These experiences hurt, but they also worried me: Could this be an indication of how staff members could treat people who are not like them, such as clients? These interactions in particular stressed the importance of having white/middle class/upper class staff members learn the best practices around interacting with people unlike them and also the importance of having active interaction with clients after receiving training. I also think the organization is heavily invested in, “getting it right.” And while I respect the struggle to be intentional, I also agree with one staff member who said that perfection should not impede the work from being done. In the staff day-to-day work, it is easily to lose track of the sense of urgency that clients face but it is important to begin empowering clients today, even if it will require reflection and correction after the fact. Partners for Hunger-Free Oregon’s Hunger-Free Leadership Institute is effective because it assess its effectiveness after each cohort, but does not cease the program in fear of doing the work wrong. Lastly, the issue of compensation concerned staff members greatly. Staff members mentioned worrying about the compensation aspects of client engagement in interviews. The organization should consider that there are multiple ways to compensate people: with skills, a lie to add to a resume, and monetary compensation that could come in the form of a gift card, stipend, loose cash, and the like.

### **III. Tokenism**

Author Sherry Arnstein describes various degrees of tokenism in her work, "Ladder of Citizen Participation." She names three specific degrees of tokenism: informing, consultation, and placation. Informing refers to a one-way flow of information. The process involves the entity with structural power extracting information from the entity without/with limited structural power. The second degree of tokenism which is a step toward the redistribution of power is consultation. Consultation involves symbolically addressing clients as experts, but only seeking advice which may or may not inform the work of the entity with more structural power. Lastly, placation refers to the process of redistributing some power to marginalized people/people with limited structural power but under specific conditions. For instance, placation can look like forming an advisory board, but only allowing people with palatable opinions, presentation, or identities sit on the committee. Placation can also look like building structures for feedback loops, but ultimately giving the power holder the ability to disregard the advice or judge the legitimacy of the advice.

I found Oregon Food Bank staff members were highly concerned with the possibility of tokenizing people with lived experiences of hunger in their models for client engagement. The concern was mentioned in in at least six staff interviews. One staff member problematized requiring clients to make commitments. She

---

<sup>20</sup> A reference to Donald Trump’s statement about building a wall at the United States/Mexico southern border in his campaign for presidency on June 16, 2015.

mentioned, “[A model for client engagement] would not be truly representing all experiences if [Oregon Food Bank asks] people to commit to a time frame.” She added that OFB needs to make room for more voices than not. Another staff member added, “[A Client Advisory Board could] work but it's important that the organization understands that it's hard to work with people who are clients. We need to understand to be flexible to their schedules.” This comment reflects the concern for both organizational readiness, which I talk about later in this reflection, but it also comments on the nuances associated with time commitments. Clients are not monolithic and the Food Bank needs to learn to accommodate people with different needs in order to avoid the tokenization of their clients.

One staff member mentioned how the organization is perpetuating tokenism today. “[VOICES profiles are] less tokenizing because people get to tell their own stories, but we've completely lost track of that since VOICES became such a large marketing effort.” In an assessment of their current efforts, one Marketing and Communications team member responded that some initiatives are a double-edged sword. There are competing issues: in terms of funding, what often gets people to donate is a story that generates an emotional response; but on the other hand, it is important to tell an authentic story in an authentic way.

#### **IV. Importance**

I was lucky enough to attend a VOICES Focus Group at Willowbrook Pantry in Sherwood, Oregon during my term. The Focus Group demonstrated all the reasons why building avenues for client engagement is important. The VOICES facilitator asked the group about a wish they had for themselves. One client responded, “My hope is for self-sufficiency. A holistic view of self-sufficiency.” Her response made it clear to me that one of the many reasons we build avenues for engagement is to empower clients to be champions of their own struggle. Client engagement is also important to keep organizations from making assumptions. Client engagement projects like the Food Preferences Survey ensures that the Food Bank is providing the kind of food that clients want to receive. Client engagement is important because it ensures that clients are receiving what they want from the institutions dedicated to serving them whether that be strictly limited to food or whether those needs also incorporate training or jobs. Models for engagement need to be in place in order for Oregon Food Bank to best incorporate the opinions and narratives of the people served into their work, and to elevate the voices of the people affected by food insecurity. Finally, clients are experts in their own experiences and Oregon Food Bank is responsible in acquiring their expertise in ethical ways to ensure that clients are providing their own client-based solutions. Even on a superficial level, clients know what is best. At the Focus Group, one client said, “I wanna try to save out part of my food stamps 'til the end of the month. 'Cause it seems like Safeway always has the buy one, get one free on meat at the end of the month. So I always try to do that, that helps.” Another person replied, “I never noticed that!” The knowledge-sharing that occurs between clients whenever Oregon Food Bank provided the forum never ceased to astound me. I attended a Cooking Matters class at Independent Living Resources, where one client shared the name of a place where she acquires blueberries for a dollar per pound during the appropriate season. One participant in the VOICES Focus Group mentioned a solution for housing: “I know that just in my area alone, where I live, they're putting up houses and apartment buildings everywhere. [...] If these contractors and builders, when they built these, if they have to have so many of them, be allotted for Section 8 or affordable housing [...] You have your whole complex there that people are going to purchase, but if a small percentage of those homes had to be for allotted for that already, then that way there'd be always a constant influx of these homes. And I think that the waiting lists would get shorter because people are going to these homes. Because you're constantly building these construction sites and the idea is that they are going to be getting paid because it's going to be a government entity that's paying them [...] that will also help two-fold because one, it will place people that are low-income in areas where maybe their children wouldn't have been able to be a part of those schools, be in that school district, be in those areas. It will allow them

to have that area and will allow that area to also be more balanced economically, thus creating more well-balanced children and human beings that grow up to be well-balanced people [...] I think that will also allow for some of those that need to be renovated and updated to be allowed to be done so. That way it's actually more of a competitive. I'm sure that the builders and contractors could then use whatever percentage of affordable housing could then be a tax write-off for them. So it seems like it would be a win-win." Many people agreed and one person even said they should be president. Clients have the capacity to problem-solve and come up with their own solutions, but it is the responsibility of Oregon Food Bank to facilitate the process if the Food Bank chooses to implement models for deep client engagement.

On a similar note, an employee at Metropolitan Family Services (MFS) shared an anecdote with me while I was interviewing her. She told me about an issue her staff was experiencing at the shopping-style pantry at David Douglas High School. She said that for some time, her pantry staff was having trouble communicating to their Chinese clients that they could only take four of the items marked with a four. Her clients continued to take five of the items marked with four. When notified that they could only take four, clients took three instead of four. After an in-depth conversation with one client, she found out that many Chinese people believe that receiving anything in quantities of four is bad luck. MFS staff could serve that community better upon understanding that phenomenon.

It is important that client engagement efforts at Oregon Food Bank be complementary to one another. I asked my mother if she would hypothetically join a Client Advisory Board. My mother is a formerly undocumented immigrant from Mexico who accessed different social services in my childhood and early adolescence. I was surprised when she flatly said no—she feigned support when I debated dropping out of school to be a performer (despite being awful at dancing) so I had assumed she would pretend to support an initiative I was recommending. I asked her, "What if you were compensated for your time? What if your friend attends meetings? What if childcare is provided?" Each time she said no. She patiently explained. She accessed services primarily as a young undocumented adult. At the time she didn't have a reliable source of transportation, she had three young children and little time and money to spend. She did not speak nor write English. Her life at the time largely revolved around her husband and most of her time was spent catering to him (the dynamics of our household at the time reflected the most patriarchal elements of Mexican nationalism). Her comment, though not indicative of the sentiments of any of the groups she identified/identifies with struck me as important. Some people do not have the time or energy to engage with us in long, taxing ways. It is not up to the organization to decide what meaningful engagement looks like to people. For some clients, it might look like filling out a survey. For other clients, it might look like leadership programs that provide tools for them to do the work they consider fulfilling. I can imagine some clients not being interested in participating in any of the models implemented by the Food Bank. It is important to honor and respect all the ways in which clients choose to engage (if at all). As mentioned, clients are a population characterized by fluidity—they are not monolithic and so it is essential to build avenues to accommodate all the ways in which clients may choose to engage. Furthermore, models for engagement do not exist in a vacuum: efforts like Link2Feed can help us identify where Client Advisory Boards should exist to better provide services. One staff member said in response to being asked about whether decentralized Client Advisory Boards would be a good idea or not, "It is not necessary to have a board at each site. You'd get redundancy and it would be a misuse of funds. Many clients are combining the use of programs and PAs." This staff member continued to say that Link2Feed could be used to identify the places that are less underserved and hold Advisory Board meetings there. This is a good example of how we can merge efforts to holistically meet the needs of people accessing our services.

## **Recommendations**

I have included three recommendations that could be implemented to improve client engagement efforts at Oregon Food Bank. These recommendations are based on the fact that we currently have no systems in place for deep client engagement. At some point in the future, I would like to see the organizations build partnerships with other people/organizations in communities (to ensure sustainability) and job training programs to help food insecure people learn to do the job at Oregon Food Bank; as well as see the organization leverage their power to “train the trainer.”

### **I. Full Time Client Engagement Position**

The first recommendation is creating a new position for someone to do client engagement work full-time. The need for this recommendation was hinted at in staff interviews. It became apparent to me that this position was necessary after realizing past engagement efforts, such as the Participant Legislative Input Group, fell apart because the cross-departmental efforts did not have a specific point person that could manage/oversee the project. I can imagine this person collaborating with collaborate with key stakeholders, such as pantry staff, volunteers, and clients to plan advisory board meetings that intend to identify community priorities, seek community-driven solutions, and gather client input in the Portland Metro Area. I also imagine this person assembling a taskforce of key stakeholders such as clients, Oregon Food Bank staff, pantry staff, and other community leaders to ensure the implementation of client input and to consistently brainstorm new avenues for client engagement beyond OFB’s established models. The full-time engagement person would serve as primary contact for client advisory board participants, task force participants, and other collaborative efforts that focus on client engagement. The person in this role could potentially coordinate mandatory partner agency site visits for Oregon Food Bank staff with OFB managers and People and Cultures department staff. A full-time employee doing client engagement work should conduct evaluation(s) of OFB’s client engagement to identify what aspects of the program (if any) should continue to exist the following year. An evaluation of the Client Advisory Board is absolutely necessary. I can imagine their onboarding plan including volunteering at partner agency sites, such as food pantries and harvest shares, 1-2 times a week to establish visibility within various communities and build relationships with partner agency staff and clients. I can also imagine their 90 day work plan including drafting a document on best practices around direct client engagement that could be used internally for staff when conducting obligatory quarterly site visits (see below). My ideal candidate would be someone familiar with the Portland Metro area. This person would ideally have experience doing community organizing/mobilizing, or has a background in customer service. This person could demonstrate experience working with people from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds. An ideal candidate for this job would have excellent facilitation and relationship-building skills; they would also demonstrate a commitment to serving historically marginalized communities including, but not limited to: people of color, immigrants, refugees, undocumented people, and/or LGBTQ+ people. Given the huge need for translators in the Russian and Chinese community, I would encourage people who are bilingual in either to apply for the position. Finally, I would encourage the organization to prioritize candidates with lived experiences of hunger and poverty.

## II. Obligatory Quarterly Site Visits

The second recommendation is making it obligatory for staff to visit partner agencies on a quarterly basis. I spoke with the Director of People and Cultures to discuss any possible challenges in requiring staff members to directly engage with clients to which she responded with the following questions:

- Who would primarily be working on this effort?
- What does coordination with partner agencies look like?
- Does People and Cultures/Administration schedule site visits internally?
- What would we do about coverage for operations, for example?
- What would transportation look like for employees who ride public transit?
- How would remote worker and nontraditional workers (such as Americorps members, Emerson Hunger Fellows) participate?
- How would site visits impact team work?

However, she concluded that site visits are important and doable. She mentioned the importance in being able to tell yourself a robust story about why you're doing this work. For her, obligatory site visits are an opportunity for people without lived experiences of hunger and people with distant experiences to remind themselves of the important of this work. The Director of People and Cultures hopes that site visits begin a discussion about how what Oregon Food Bank does can be more informed and more effective. She reiterates a point I mentioned earlier: it is important that we are not guessing nor making assumptions. I decided to include this recommendation after visiting multiple partner agency sites and receiving responses from staff like, "We don't see you guys down here too often!" I also decided to include it after staff lamented about not having enough direct engagement with clients.

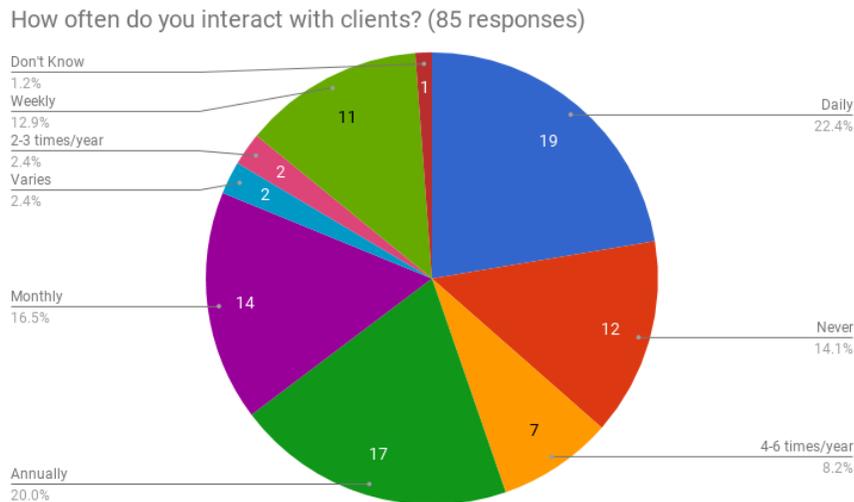


Figure 2

Figure 2 displays the results of a poll I sent out to staff asking how often they interacted with clients. I defined clients in the survey description as, "Anyone facing/experiencing food insecurity who is accessing a service provided by Oregon Food Bank. This includes - but is not limited to - Cooking Matters students, FEAST attendees, and pantry users." The results surprised me—the amount of people that engage with clients daily and the amount of people that have never engaged with clients (through work) is a lot larger than I expected. Based on staff interviews, I have reason to believe that the people who responded to "Daily," are not defining clients in the same way as I did in the description of the survey. Appendix Item 2 shows the data above disaggregated by departments.

The intention is that site visits help inform the work being done by staff. Oregon Food Bank also lacks visibility within the communities being served and therefore models for deep engagement cannot be implemented. Having staff make partner agency site visits would increase visibility and would allow for OFB to begin building trust amongst clients, as well as partner agency staff. It would also alleviate labor for PA staff. Initially, I was concerned that obligatory site visits would burden staff because PA staff had to take the time to train OFB staff. However, my observations at food pantries and at the Ortiz Center Harvest Share demonstrated that partner agencies are often understaffed and grateful to have OFB staff volunteer. Moreover, PA staff are constantly training new volunteers, so it would not be overwhelmingly burdensome for them. This effort would fulfill the needs of clients who are interested in one-on-one engagement and who may not be interested in joining/participating in a Client Advisory Board. Attending site visits would also blur the harsh distinctions between service providers and service receivers by forcing people to coexist in the same physical space. My hope is that emphasizing OFB's commitment to serving people with lived experiences of hunger will call for an internal cultural shift, where OFB staff who have experienced poverty and hunger feel less scared/ashamed to share their experiences in a ways similar to what happened at the Food Bank of the Southern Tier in Elmira, New York (see *Overview of Client Engagement Work at Other Organizations*, example 2). To be clear, interpersonal interaction should not replace structures and models for engagement. However, this process would lay the groundwork for future client engagement efforts, like a client advisory board by increasing OFB visibility and the level of trust in the relationship between OFB and their clients.

### **III. Client Advisory Board**

A Client Advisory Board as a model for client engagement has been suggested various times since OFB declared their organization-wide commitment to equity in 2014. In the summer of 2016, Oregon Food Bank conducted an organizational assessment using a protocol made by the Coalition of Communities of Color intended to be used for organizations attempting to be culturally responsive.<sup>21</sup> The protocol meant to gauge the organization's ability to build toward an equitable structure that encourages feedback from clients. A Client Advisory Board was explicitly mentioned at least 29 times in the document as a necessary step toward being a more equitable organization. I imagine a Client Advisory Board to be a decentralized board held in different areas across the Portland Metro area. The Client Advisory Board initiative should be composed of decentralized boards to accommodate the mobility needs of individuals accessing services across the OFB network. The effort could be culturally-specific in multiple ways. For instance, the organization could consider hosting specific Board meetings for school pantries. Alternatively, it could also choose to solely address people speaking one particular language. I would recommend trusted and respected community leaders to lead and facilitate meetings. Again, the organization should be clear about what they could offer people contributing to Board meetings; and OFB should also be clear on the length of commitment. A longer time commitment could promote deeper connections and engagement, but could also exclude marginalized individuals who are not afforded the opportunity to spend time/energy in the same capacity. I can see the Advisory Board being a place for knowledge and resource sharing in the way that the Willowbrook VOICES session could have been. I also see a Client Advisory Board initially following the structure of VOICES but allowing agenda items to be chosen by clients. The intention of an Advisory Board is not only to create feedback loops, but to create a forum for people to discuss the breadth of services they are receiving, and what they would like to receive—however arbitrary. The goal for the Advisory Board should be to improve the experiences of people accessing service in whatever way clients see fit.

---

<sup>21</sup>The Organizational Assessment could be found at S:\Equity\Organizational Assessment. This report references the 10.18.16 version and primarily refers to Domain 1, Domain 8, and Domain 9.

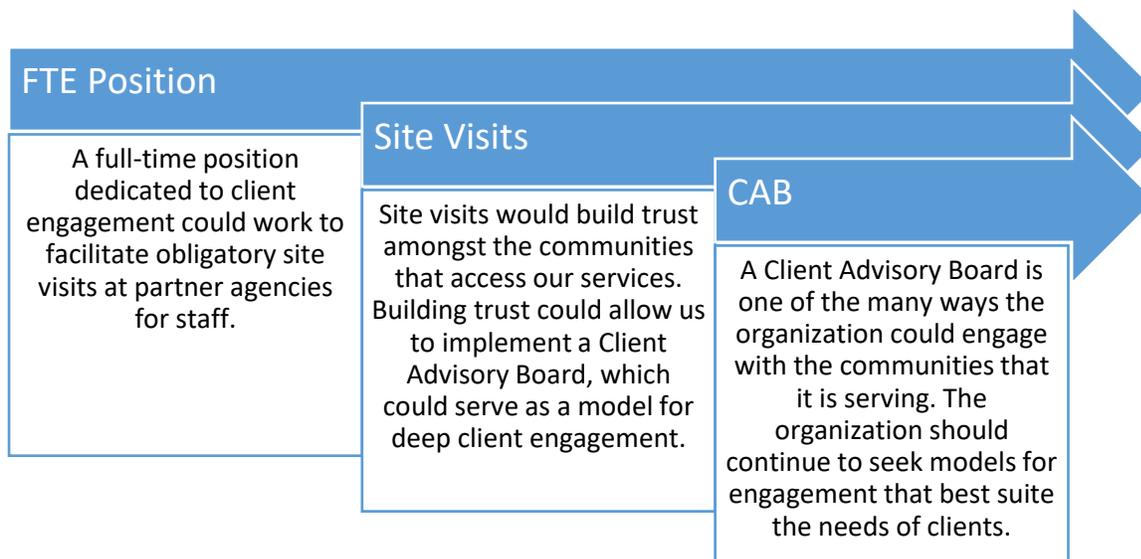


Figure 3

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the three recommendations I have presented in this report. The arrows indicate that these three recommendations are not the “end-all, be-all” of client engagement. The work should continue and should be constantly accessed and evaluated. More models for engagement should be built to accommodate the wide needs of the populations being served by Oregon Food Bank.

## Conclusion

In conducting interviews with staff at other food banks, I realized Oregon Food Bank is ahead of many food banks across the nation. Employing an Emerson National Hunger Fellow to solely work on this project indicates a degree of dedication and commitment to this work that others have not yet done. However, there is so much left to be done at Oregon Food Bank with regards to client engagement. The recommendations I have listed here are steps toward building models for engagement, which means that the work is yet to be completed when/if these steps are implemented. I encourage the organization to continue assessing its efforts, brainstorming new ones, and working collaboratively across different stakeholders (primarily clients) to ensure that the services being provided are holistically meeting the needs of the people being served by the organization.

**Appendix**  
Item 1

Oregon Food Bank  
Job Description

**Job Title:** Client Engagement Coordinator  
**Reports to:** Regional Network Manager  
**Job Type:** Non-Exempt  
**Supervises:** N/A  
**Date:** [TBD]  
**Primary Function:** Engage clients of the Portland Metro Area in the work being done by Oregon Food Bank (OFB) by various means, including an Advisory Board, Task Force, Focus Groups and other similar collaborative efforts.

**Commented [JC1]:** I'd love to say "community engagement coordinator" but I also want to be honest and transparent – it seems like we're primarily interested in engaging our clients and not "the community." I also think that shifting this language requires us to internally change our language to reflect this shift as well.

**Who we are:**

Oregon Food Bank (OFB) believes that no one should be hungry. Our mission is to eliminate hunger and its root causes. We provide food, education and hope to our neighbors experiencing hunger, and we build community action to change the systems that allow hunger to grow.

- **We are collaborative.** At the center of a network of over 960 partners, OFB's work is done in collaboration with organizations throughout Oregon and in Clark County, WA.
- **We focus on freshness.** OFB's Produce Initiative and Fresh Alliance Program bring fresh food to people facing hunger.
- **We champion self-reliance.** OFB's education courses teach skills that make families more resilient and impact life-long changes to eating habits.
- **We advocate for change.** OFB advocates for public policies and programs and supports community food systems that address the root causes of hunger.
- **We are committed to equity and inclusion.** We believe that only a diverse, vibrant staff that is fully included will be able to achieve our mission.

**Oregon Food Bank is an Equal Opportunity Employer, and we encourage applications from candidates who can contribute to the diversity of our organization.**

**Who we are looking for:**

Oregon Food Bank is seeking a mission-driven **Client Engagement Coordinator** to oversee the development, logistics and coordination of OFB client engagement efforts. You will develop and implement new programs like a Client Advisory Board and support existing programs such as on-going Focus Groups. In this role, you work with different stakeholders to recruit and train volunteers and community partners to implement food distribution programs. You are service-oriented and passionate about increasing food access, while holding our clients at the center of all that you do.

**Who you are:**

You care deeply about people experiencing hunger. You demonstrate inclusivity and equity in all that you do. You believe that no one should be hungry; that communities thrive when people are nourished; that hunger starves the human spirit and that together, we can solve hunger. You have strong community mobilizing skills and the ability to work collaboratively with coworkers, partners, and clients. You thrive at establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with many diverse stakeholders. You think creatively, can respond to a changing environment, and have excellent problem solving skills. You have a strong interest in and experience with community organizing, community food systems, cooking, nutrition education, and hunger and poverty issues. You are skilled at leveraging emerging ideas and navigating a complex, dynamic network. You provide excellent customer service and are self-motivated to support programs that improve food access in underserved communities.

### Primary responsibilities

- Collaborate with key stakeholders, such as pantry staff, volunteers, and clients; to plan three (3) Client Advisory Board meetings that intend to identify community priorities, seek community-driven solutions, and gather client input over the course of one calendar year in the Portland Metro Area
- Assemble team force of key stakeholders such as clients, Oregon Food Bank staff, pantry staff, and other community leaders to 1) ensure the implementation of client input and 2) consistently brainstorm new avenues for client engagement
- Serve as primary contact for client advisory board participants, task force participants, and other collaborative efforts that focus primarily on client engagement
- Coordinate mandatory partner agency site visits for Oregon Food Bank staff with OFB managers and People and Cultures department staff
- Volunteer at partner agency sites, such as food pantries and harvest shares, 1-2 times a week to establish visibility within various communities and build relationships with partner agency staff and clients
- Conduct evaluation of Client Advisory Board at the end of three sessions to identify what aspects of the program (if any) should continue to exist the following calendar year

### Skills and Experiences of Ideal Candidate

- Resident of the Portland Metro area
- 2+ years of community organizing/mobilizing work and/or customer service work
- Prior experience in working with people from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds
- Excellent facilitation and relationship-building skills
- Commitment to serving historically marginalized communities including, but not limited to: people of color, immigrants, refugees, undocumented people, and/or LGBTQ+ people
- Bi-lingual (Russian/English, Chinese/English) and cross-cultural skills strongly preferred
- Candidates with lived experiences of hunger and poverty strongly preferred

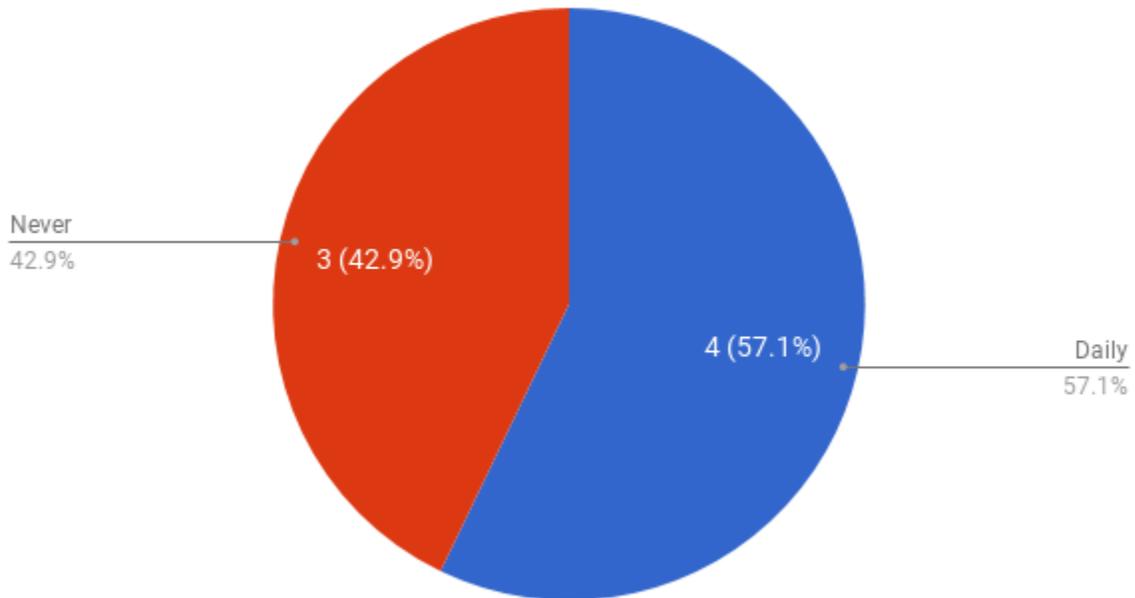
**The Fine Print:** Work is performed in a variety of office environments and other locations inside and outside of Oregon Food Bank while using a telephone and sitting at a computer screen for extended periods. May lift, move, and carry objects of about 20 pounds, such as boxes, materials, and other supplies. Frequent travel by car to points outside the greater Portland metro area as well as work outside normal working hours, such as evenings and weekends.

**Commented [JC2]:** Basically, I'm trying to convey that this person needs to figure out what aspects of the CAB work and what aspects of CAB don't and should be willing to modify the project according to their findings.

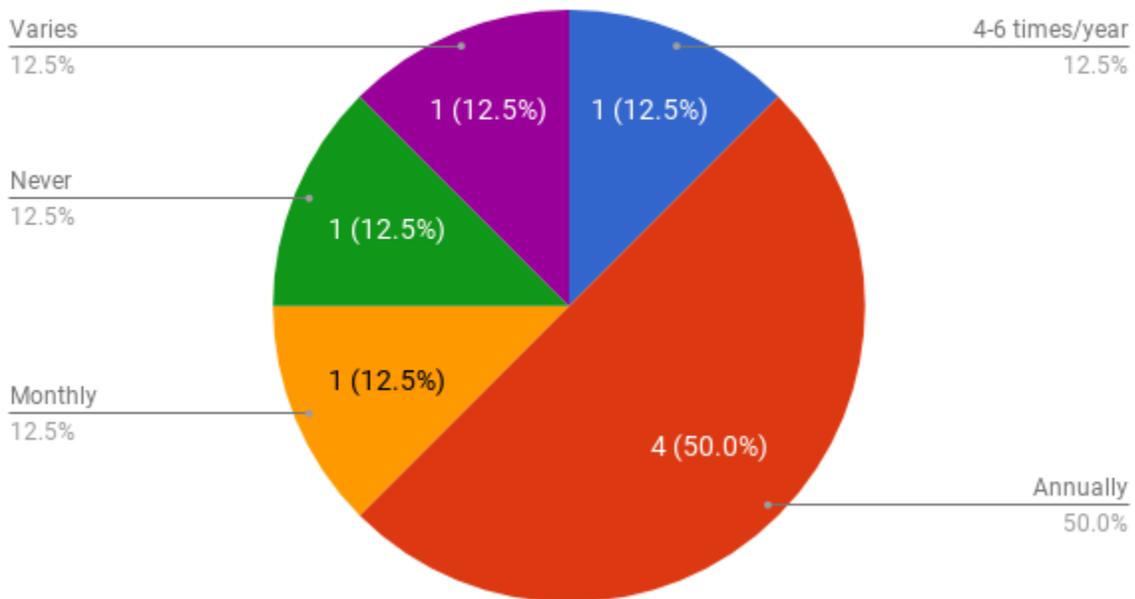
**Commented [JC3]:** I'm trying to make this position really accessible for folks, especially those who have been organizing for years but have little formal experiences (esp. at institutions/organizations). I think there are tons of organic intellectuals already doing good work within communities. **But** I'd only recommend keeping this if the organization is also committed to 1) being receptive and understanding of someone who might not be immediately palatable and 2) allowing space for someone to *learn* to navigate this workplace.

**Appendix  
Item 2**

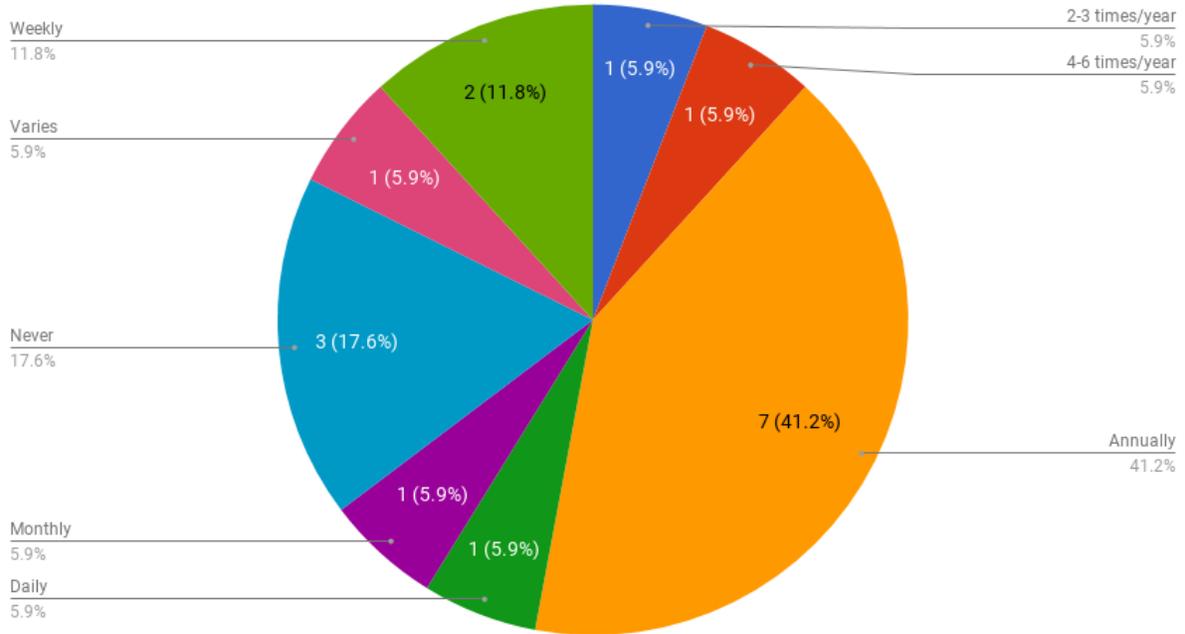
Administration (7 responses)



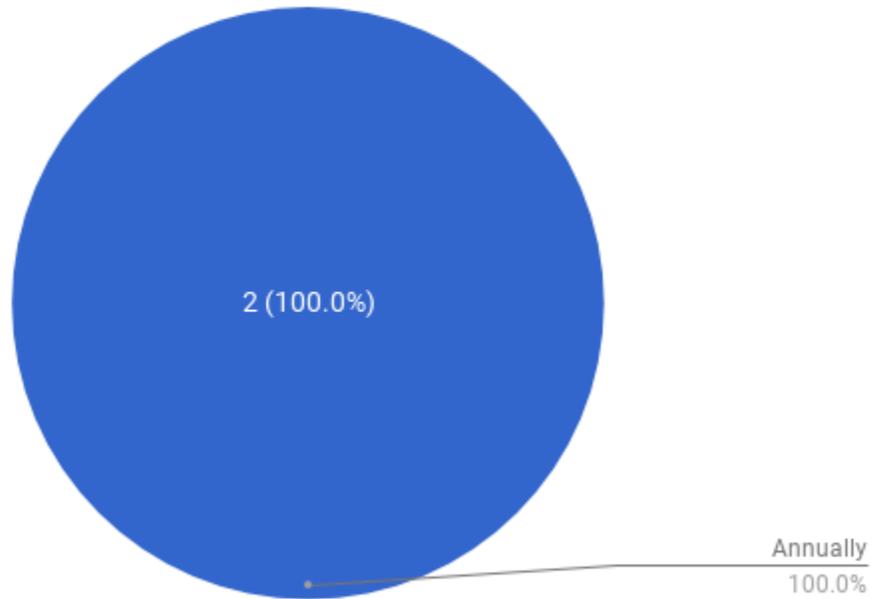
Advocacy (8 responses)



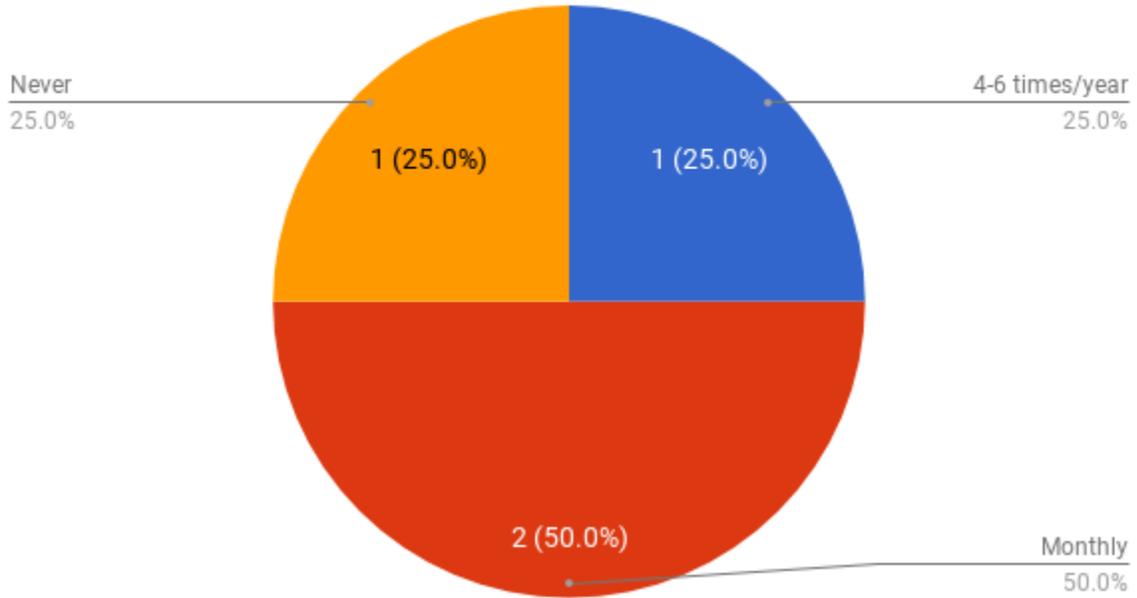
### Development (17 responses)



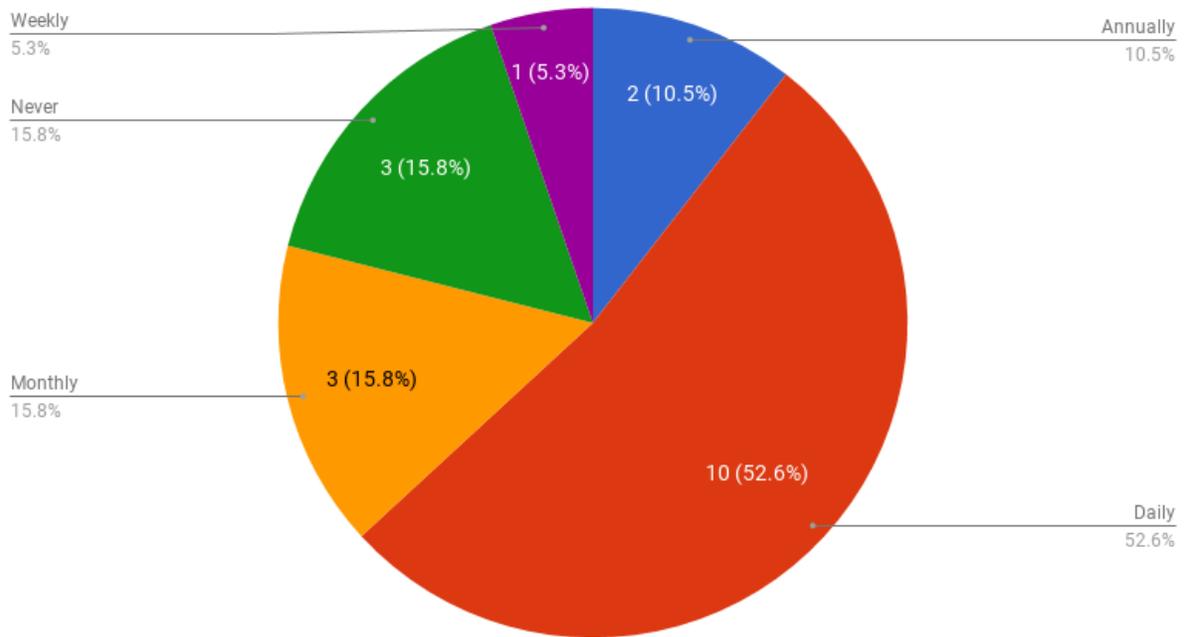
### Information Technology (2 responses)



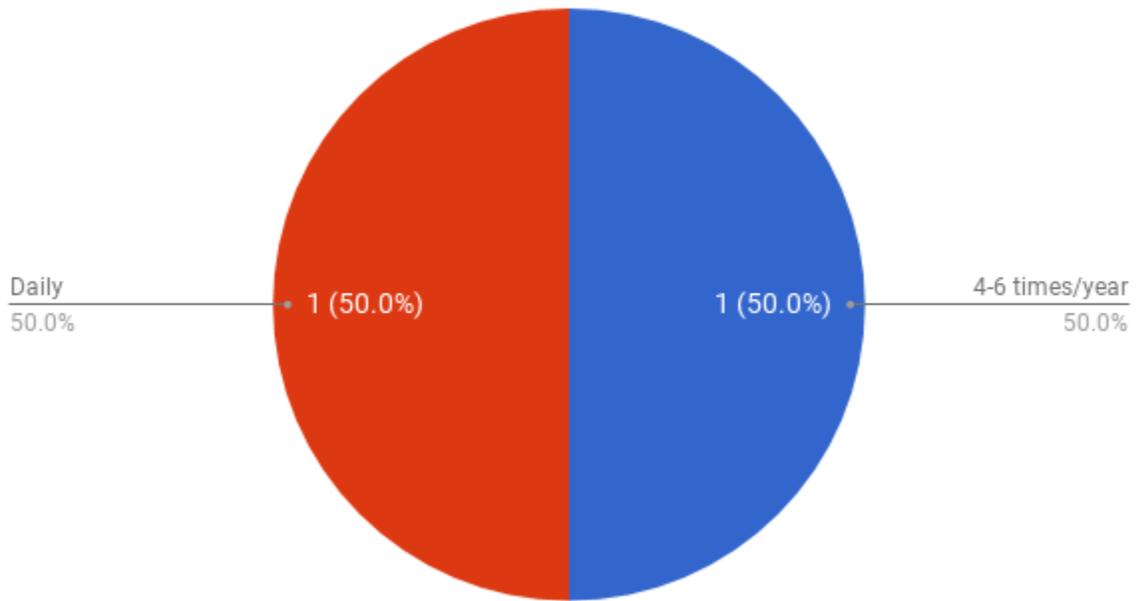
### Marketing and Communications (4 responses)



### Operations (19 responses)



### Other/Multiple (2 responses)



### Partnerships and Programs (26 responses)

