



Food Secure Detroit Final Evaluation Report

Prepared for: Detroit Food Policy Council

Summary

In Fall 2020, the Detroit Food Policy Council (DFPC) received a grant from the State of Michigan Department of Health and Human Services via the Michigan Coronavirus Task Force on Racial Disparities to administer COVID-19 food relief efforts in the City of Detroit. The funds for this initiative came from the federal 2020 CARES Act. DFPC contracted with JFM Consulting Group (JFM) to conduct evaluation activities.

Over October, November, and December 2020, **twelve organizations** implemented the following activities:

- **Food distribution**
- **Cooking classes**
- **PPE distribution**
- **Installation of safety infrastructure**

During the fall, the grantees:

- **Fed over 29,000 people**
- **Distributed 10,439 boxes of food, cooking equipment, and PPE**
- **Distributed 200 baskets of PPE and cleaning supplies**
- **Taught 251 people cooking skills**
- **Supplied 220 grocery stores and markets with PPE and safety infrastructure**

The grantees also achieved several outcomes, including:

- **Providing access to healthy foods**
- **Promoting healthy eating**
- **Teaching residents to grow food**
- **Promoting caring and concern**
- **Providing job training**
- **Developing residents' leadership skills**
- **Nurturing community connection**
- **Promoting safety/PPE use**

While all grantees completed their activities, they needed to make various adjustments to their implementation plans. These included:

- **COVID-related adjustments to account for COVID regulations and reduce transmission**
- **Service delivery changes to account for increasing food insecurity and sense of isolation, and,**
- **Outreach-related changes to reach the most vulnerable residents**

We offer five recommendations for future administration and implementation of emergency hunger relief initiatives.

1. **Endorse the use of grant funds to support local growers and producers.**
2. **Include a line item for both short-term and long-term administrative costs for organizations that administer the grant.**
3. **Facilitate project sustainability.**
4. **Expand what is allowable in staffing line items.**
5. **Nurture organizational and community partnerships.**

Introduction

The Detroit Food Policy Council was approached to manage the Food Secure Detroit program in part due to their relationships in the Detroit food space. Even before receiving the funds, they sought the guidance of community partners to advise them on ways the funds could be spent wisely. Projects were designed to expand access to healthy food as well as support COVID relief in one of the hardest hit cities in the state of Michigan. Undergirding the program administration and implementation is an equity lens—driving decision-making that prioritizes marginalized groups and facilitates a process by which resources are distributed equitably and in a culturally responsive manner.

The grant came at a good time for organizations wondering how they would continue feeding individuals and families after the summer and fall seasons.

“So at the end of our season in September, I became very worried because looking at the need, I was like...Where are these people going?...then I think it was maybe the first week in October, I get the call from the Detroit Food Policy Council to talk about the spending and wanting to know if I would be interested. And I'm like, yes, because this is the way we can continue to support our families.”
 --Grantee

	Food Distribution	Cooking Classes	PPE/Safety	Other
Atlas Wholesale Foods	x			
Auntie Na’s House*				x
Detroit Food Academy	x	x		
Detroit Food Policy Council			x	x
Eastern Market Corporation			x	
Food Rescue US Detroit	x			
Keep Growing Detroit	x			
Kids Health Connections	x			
Make Food Not Waste	x			
Oakland Avenue Urban Farms	x	x	x	
Saffron de Twah	x	x		
Soulardarity/HPCCC*				x

*received grants to purchase items to support COVID relief efforts

Goals and Activities

The twelve grantees' primary goals were to provide Detroit residents with access to healthy food and support local growers and food producers. Grantees provided food access in three ways: distributing food, hosting cooking classes, and providing PPE/safety installations so that residents can access food themselves.

Most food distributions occurred in curbside pickup events or delivery. Cooking classes were hosted virtually. Grantees distributed PPE to residents in boxes or baskets, as well as being added to food boxes. One grantee improved their infrastructure to make the market safer for residents to shop. This included installing signage, fencing, floor markings, plexiglass, and mobile handwashing stations.

Grantees were more likely than not to provide multiple services. For example, when grantees held cooking classes, they often provided participants with boxes containing food and cooking equipment. Grantees might also seek to obtain food to distribute from local growers and producers, thus reinvesting the grant funds in their communities. While most grantees conducted activities to fulfill the terms of the Food Secure Detroit grant, there were two (2) additional grantees that received funds to purchase items (e.g. vans) to expand COVID-related food distribution activities. Items purchased include: one van, two storage containers for food and water reserves, and 50,000 water bottles.

In addition to administering the grant, the Detroit Food Policy Council conducted activities to promote food security and equity, as well as increase residents' access to healthy food by increasing SNAP enrollment. As food insecurity is increasing in the city of Detroit, the DFPC sought to make residents aware of their rights to

access SNAP benefits. One approach they used to accomplish this was distributing informational flyers about SNAP eligibility and the application process. DFPC's partners (both FSD grantees and non-grantees) gave out flyers to community residents as part of their food distribution. Their second approach was to purchase radio spots on multiple radio stations in the Detroit market, including WJLB and WMXD. Finally, they used their social media channels such as Facebook. They also utilized funds to promote policies that facilitate food security through an op-ed.



Outputs



29,000+
people fed



10,439
boxes distributed



251
people learned
new cooking skills



220
stores and markets
safer for shoppers

Because of the Food Secure Detroit program, many Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park residents received food, including those from multiple vulnerable groups—families headed by single parents, seniors, differently abled, and individuals experiencing poverty. Grantees also served other groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic, such as food service and healthcare workers. Over 48 zip codes were served by the Food Secure Detroit projects.

Food Secure Detroit grantees provided food to more than 29,778 individuals, including 1931 families^[1]. 10,439 boxes were distributed during the grant period. In addition, grantees provided vulnerable residents with at least 15,600 non-boxed meals.

Regarding classes, 251 individuals participated in 15 total classes across grantee projects. Many of the participants also received food and cooking equipment boxes; those numbers are included in the box totals above.

Grantees also distributed personal protection equipment (PPE). Not all grantees tracked their PPE distributions as they were included in food boxes or available upon request. Three grantees provided PPE-related outputs. One grantee developed PPE baskets with hand sanitizer, masks, and other items; they distributed 200 baskets to residents. Another grantee distributed more than 1,000 pieces of PPE equipment to shoppers in their market in addition to their installations of safety infrastructure (as abovementioned). The Detroit Food Policy Council also provided PPE/safety installations through their Grocer’s Safety Kit distribution program. 151 markets and 68 grocery stores received Grocer’s Safety Kits with PPE, hand sanitizer, signage, and floor decals. They also distributed 158 hand sanitizing stations to stores and markets. Combined with the one grantee installing safety infrastructure, 220 stores and markets were made safer for Detroit residents.



^[1] Not all grantees documented their participant counts by demographic categories, so those reported here are undercounted.

Outcomes

“You have no idea how much this food means for our kids”

--Resident

The most immediate outcome from Food Secure Detroit activities was that vulnerable individuals and families received food and cooking equipment. They also learned how to grow healthy food and prepare healthy meals. In our survey, we received a several responses from participants from one project (cooking classes). Twenty out of 24 participants agreed that the techniques they learned in the class helped them to eat healthy foods. Other grantees discussed comments they received and observations they made about residents’ current struggles with hunger and food insecurity and how the distributed boxes and equipment would help make their days and holiday season a bit easier.

“I am eating healthier.”

“I really do feel safe coming here.”

“My kids loved the kid size mask.”

--Residents

Food Secure Detroit: Outcomes

Provided access to healthy foods
Promoted healthy eating
Taught residents to grow food
Promoted caring and concern
Provided job training
Developed leadership skills
Nurtured community connection
Promoted safety/PPE use

The projects also promoted PPE use and increased safety from COVID-19 infection. For example, 84% of individuals responding to a feedback survey for the Grocer’s Safety Kit project reported that the contents of the kit would continue to influence store employee safety over time. Other grantees provided feedback from residents who appreciated having cleaning supplies to disinfect their homes.

One of grantees’ informal goals for these projects was to promote caring and concern. We found evidence of multiple instances where residents shared some of their appreciation for grantees’ efforts to make sure as many people as possible would have food. We also found examples of instances in which residents promoted grantees’ services to their neighbors, thus expanding the impact of the work:

“Can I tell my neighbor about this? They lost their jobs and have kids and are having a really hard time making ends meet.”

--Resident

The projects also had a positive impact on grantee partners, including volunteers and staff responsible for distributing the food.

“We did participate in the Thanksgiving meal distribution, and it was awesome! very organized upon arrival, and the presentation of the food was great, I was proud to give it to the families. The pot that came with the food was an added surprise, that was very thoughtful. I requested 20 meals, and once handing out those, I received a call regarding a senior complex that needed help. I called requesting more meals and was told I could get 10 more. However, once returning for pickup, they doubled the amount, allowing for more seniors to have a Thanksgiving meal. This made my holiday extra special, thank you so much.”

--Partner

One bright spot from the projects was that there was and will continue to be a ripple effect from most of the projects due to the influx of funds. For example, many families received cooking equipment and extra food that were not normally included in the food boxes. For one grantee, the project expansion allowed them to distribute food not only to cooking class participants, but families via the extra cooking ingredients included in their food boxes.

There was also evidence of the potential long-term impact of the food distribution and cooking classes. As abovementioned, some participants learned new skills that promote healthy eating. Others obtained materials that would allow them to plant and grow their own food, which may increase the likelihood that they eat healthy foods. In addition to these facilitators for future healthy eating, some grantees' project components were designed to address broader conditions for promoting food security.

Grantees utilized residents to staff projects. Three grantees discussed their purposeful hiring from the community, not only to be culturally responsive but also to build capacity for residents to have marketable skills. In other projects, grantees followed the direction of their participants to make decisions about project implementation, such as the types of food cooked and distributed. Two grantees discussed how they designed projects to build residents' leadership skills in this way. Finally, grantees also valued the role of distribution sites as community centers. Although they could no longer gather individuals in the physical space, they still were committed to building community through grant activities. Four grantees talked about the importance of community connection and how food distribution and cooking classes were designed to facilitate that.

Implementation

All grantees accomplished their goals, although some had to adjust their original plans. In part, this was due to emergent needs in the city. Some grantees identified that residents were struggling with socioemotional needs. Most, however, discussed the specter of rising food insecurity. According to grantees, increasing food insecurity undoubtedly created new organizational needs in response. They needed to produce, convert, and/or distribute more food in Detroit's food ecosystem. One grantee also discussed an auxiliary need--technology support for cooking classes.

These adjustments included **COVID-related adjustments, service delivery changes, and outreach-related changes.**

COVID-related adjustments, due to the pandemic and its accompanying regulations were at the forefront of grantees' planning and implementation. One way they adjusted was to

Adjustments	
COVID-related adjustments	To account for COVID regulations and reduce transmission
Service delivery changes	To account for increasing food insecurity and sense of isolation
Outreach-related changes	To reach the most vulnerable residents

follow scientific guidance in developing and implementing procedures. One grantee noted how they started their farmers' market season by taking temperatures from all visitors. By the time of the grant's initiation, they learned that mask-wearing was more effective in reducing transmission, so they reduced temperature monitoring and put more staff energy into encouraging mask-wearing. We also found evidence that grantees adjusted their distribution procedures and channels to reduce transmission between staff and participants. One grantee discussed placing boxes in trunks for participants rather than having them get out their cars to receive boxes. Grantees also adjusted their volunteer management based on COVID. One grantee noted only allowing volunteers to serve in work that took place outdoors or in open spaces like storerooms. It was more common, however, for grantees to pause their volunteers' involvement.

Another type of adjustment was **service delivery changes**. Some grantees responded to greater food insecurity by increasing the amount of food they included in boxes.

Organizations also aimed to connect with residents more to address their socioemotional needs. One grantee discussed speaking with residents behind screen doors on their porches to promote caring and concern, including those who were living alone and at risk for a sense of isolation. Another grantee working with youth created more space for youth to socialize during cooking classes, allowing them to connect informally and express their concerns.

Grantees made **outreach-related changes** to reach the most vulnerable residents. To reach the most vulnerable residents, one organization decided to distribute directly to homeless shelters instead of continuing the adoption of a system where residents requested food by text. Another grantee found that with previous outreach campaigns, they





Grantees identified a set of **systems-related challenges** in project implementation, both of which are pervasive in Detroit--transportation and technology access. Regarding transportation, residents and staff alike cannot rely on the public transportation system to distribute food. One grantee illustrated the problem using the example of a participant:

did not connect with low-income Detroit families as much as they would have liked. For services during this grant period, they changed their communication channels to reach more families. While a consequence of this was distributing less boxes, they were able to reach a greater proportion of low-income families.

Implementation Challenges

For some grantees, the only challenges came before this grant period during the onset of pandemic. For them, the hard lessons had been learned and mitigated. However, others identified new or ongoing challenges that affected their implementation of the Food Secure Detroit projects. These ranged from **systems-related challenges**, **implementation-related challenges**, **financial issues**, and tensions in the intersections of different project goals and activities.

Challenges	
Systems-related challenges	Challenges arising from local systems (e.g. transportation, technology access)
Implementation-related challenges	Challenges arising in the implementation of the projects
Financial issues	Challenges arising from limited fiscal resources

“The lady that lives on [a street], she got to walk, if she was going to take the bus anywhere. She’s right in the middle of the street. So I think she would have to walk 10 blocks one way or 10 blocks the other way just to get to the bus stop...she’s older. So it’s not like she can just walk a couple of blocks and get on the bus or something like that.”
 --Grantee

The grantee went on to discuss additional challenges with the way the city is “cut up” and how that affects where bus lines go. Another grantee highlighted lower rates of internet access and how that hindered some youth from taking cooking classes.



Grantees also discussed a set of **implementation-related challenges**. These included the time from grant initiation to completion, staffing/volunteers, food supply issues, and crowd management. Multiple grantees discussed the challenge of incorporating the grant activities in their previous plans. As welcome as the funds were, spending them required unanticipated activities.

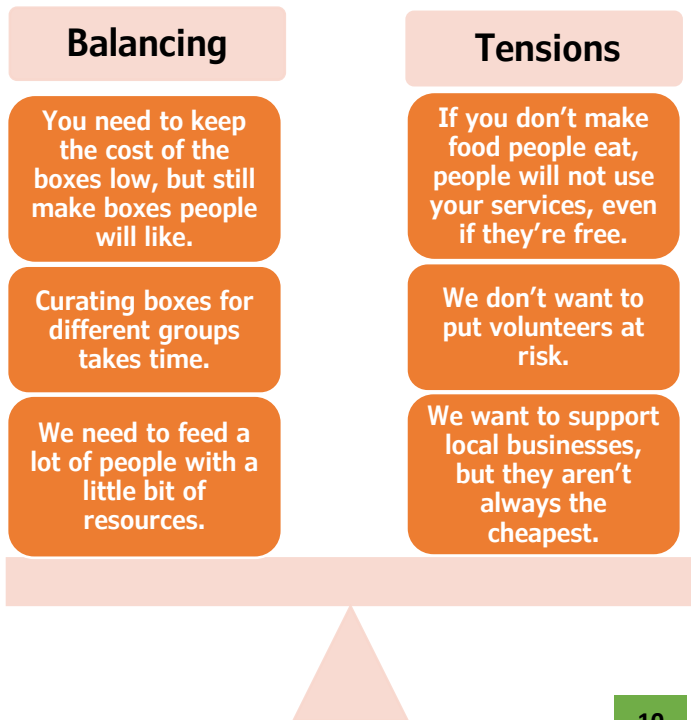
Grantees also mentioned challenges related to staffing. While grantees' staff and volunteer management succeeded, the challenge was in pivoting how to manage staff and volunteers through ever changing conditions. Other challenges were associated with food supply. Specifically, some grantees found it difficult to find the food and equipment they needed for boxes or found it difficult to find them in quantities that made them cost-effective.

Finally, grantees brought up challenges with crowds--namely the need to enforce mask-wearing and social distancing. These grantees described this in the context of outdoor activities, which may account for crowds' tendencies to not maintain COVID protective behaviors.

Another set of challenges pertained to **financial issues**. One challenge was finding the resources to fully administer the grant. The terms of the

grant allow only minimal coverage for its administration. Auxiliary functions of grant administration, such as auditing, was not covered by the grant. This placed a high burden on the Detroit Food Policy Council staff to manage grant activities. For some grantees, they would have like to have more coverage for staff time. This was particularly relevant given that organizations have not been able to rely on volunteers as heavily as they had in the past. It is worth noting that one grantee appreciated the flexibility in the budget to pay for staff time, so this may be a function of the activities the grantees had been contracted to complete. Unsurprisingly, grantees also discussed the great need for food in the city and how even more resources were needed for both short-term and long-term relief.

Embedded in these collective challenges is a broader issue--the *tensions* in the need for grantees to balance competing goals and implementation activities. For example, one grantee discussed the challenge of desiring to be fiscally responsible via achieving efficiencies of scale with the boxes while also supporting local businesses, whose costs are sometimes higher because they do not have that efficiency of scale.



Implementation Facilitators

Despite their challenges, grantees were able to achieve their project goals, in part thanks to various organizational and community facilitators. By far, **partnerships** were the most helpful resource for grantees. Grantees benefitted from partners in several ways. Some received guidance from partners about how to engage in large scale food production and distribution. Some were able to obtain food, food-related resources, and in-kind support from their partners. Others relied on partners to outreach to potential participants. Finally, some grantees supplemented their current offerings by giving participants additional program services that were offered by partners.

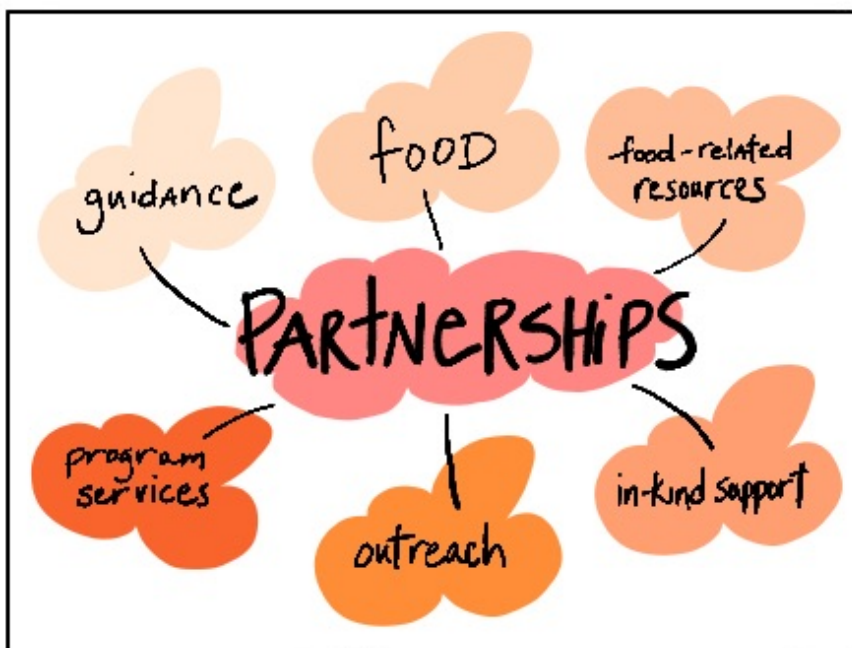
The bright spot about partnerships was that they were critical in helping grantees fulfill the terms of the Food Secure Detroit grant. Whether it was supplying food, helping with distribution, partners smoothed what could have been a much bumpier path. Because of these pre-existing partnerships, they were able to identify ways to spend the grant dollars in a short period of time quickly.

Another helpful resource according to grantees was **staff**. For example, grantees made was that they were appreciative that staff were able to pivot given rapid regulatory and epidemiological changes:

“I wouldn't be able to do this work without my team. Because we have to, we're adapting to the things that are happening in the environment.”

--Grantee

Regarding pivoting, there was a contrary perspective from a grantee whose organization pivoted to food security work in response to the pandemic. This grantee discussed how multiple staff, while appreciative of the grantee's community service, did not feel they had the capacity to transition from restaurant to large scale food service. This experience lifts up the potential challenges any organization new to food security efforts might face in transitioning their work. Given the increasing need seen in the city, other organizations might move to incorporate food security efforts in their work.



Grantees also shared that they had to stretch staff capacity to complete activities regardless of the number of hours it took. This was typically done to compensate for lack of another resource. In some cases, this was to replace volunteer hours. In other cases, this was to compensate for time a partner did not have.

“Assembling the boxes and distributing the boxes was like, really a lot of labor. And, you know, the grant would have paid someone else to do it, but not us to do it. And so we ended up, you know, taking one for the team with a lot of staff time in order to, you know, make these resources available.”

--Grantee

While it was important that staff get fair compensation, grantees also acknowledged the tension inherent in balancing compensation with the need to get their communities resources in the face of increasing levels of food insecurity.

Finally, grantees and DFPC staff were guided by **cultural responsiveness** in project design and implementation, thus supporting conditions for

success. In addition to abovementioned community input in the planning for the FSD program, the projects were also culturally responsive in their outreach and implementation. For example, when designing the radio commercial campaign to increase SNAP enrollment, the DFPC targeted multiple local radio stations to ensure that messages were broadcast to residents from various age groups. One grantee also discussed the value of cultural responsiveness in outreach.



Lessons Learned

One lesson grantees learned was how to provide culturally responsive services. The FSD activities gave grantees an opportunity to put their values into action. Some grantees talked about learning how to be more respectful of residents when asking about interest in project services:

“And one of my team members told me this, with seniors, when you're delivering to them, you want to be respectful. And what I mean by that is, don't just knock on my door. And here's a box of food. That's not how we work. So how we work is we...have a pre conversation with them, explaining to them what this is, who we are, why we're doing this, and what you want to be a receptive recipient. Okay? Because they have pride. Yeah, they have pride and they don't want you to assume that they need this, even though they need it. But don't make that assumption. You know, ask me, give me my respect, give me my preference.”

--Grantee

Other examples included curating boxes to accommodate dietary needs and taste preference as well as making sure the food inside of them are healthy.

Another lesson grantees learned was the value of cooperating and collaborating with partners. As described above, partners helped grantees expand their capacity. But they also learned more about their strengths and how those could be leveraged to serve other organizations:

“And what I've learned is, we've had food delivered, like donated to us from farmers. Most of these food banks won't take food that is not prepared, because they have no capacity to prepare. And so we're the exact opposite, we have all the capacity in the world to prepare it...”

--Grantee



Grantees also discussed how they learned to plan ahead. Doing so helped make the implementation easier, but also would have helped them to support their partners. For example, planning ahead would have allowed one grantee to better communicate expectations ahead of time about compliance. But they also learned to stay nimble. The context of their work changed often, requiring them to pivot.

To a lesser extent, grantees shared other lessons. These included managing the delivery process, doing food preparation, hosting online classes, and reporting.

Recommendations and Takeaways

In the big picture, we learned that a strong thread of food sovereignty and community resiliency ran through these projects and organizations. Many grantees believed in the strength of their communities and, where possible, looked beyond the simple provision of charity. They sought to, as one grantee put it, “respond, recover, and rebuild” by supporting local growers and producers and utilize local staff and volunteers whenever possible. Along that theme, our recommendations emphasize building the capacity of the grantees, their partners, and communities. While this grant was designed to offer short-term COVID relief, it is likely that the organizations will be doing food relief for the long run.

The first recommendation is **to endorse the use of grant funds to support local growers and producers**. While they are not conducting new COVID efforts, they are contributing needed economic relief to local communities and residents. Grantees were inclined to support local growers and producers through grant activities but were concerned about the cost. Explicitly endorsing the use of local business encourages all grantees to use them and invests into long-term economic sustainability in the city and region.

The second recommendation is **to include a line item for both short-term and long-term administrative costs for organizations that administer the grant**. For example, administering federal pass-through grants subject organizations to stringent audit requirements. The relief funds do not cover these costs. Smaller community-led organizations do not often have the capacity to cover these costs with general funds but are well-suited for ensuring that project funds get to the most vulnerable residents in need. Covering administrative costs gives these organizations the capacity they need to do the work most effectively.

The third recommendation is **to facilitate project sustainability**. Grantees were concerned how they might sustain their programs past the grant period particularly given the great need in the city. They were also concerned about how to decrease their reliance on grant funds. For example, two grantees proposed market-based models, including introducing a pay-as-you-can subscription model for neighborhood residents. Such models have the potential to provide short-term relief but also build long-term community sustainability.

The fourth recommendation is **to expand what is allowable in staffing line items**. Because the grant was restrictive with how much staff time could be covered and for what reasons, organizations needed to make different types of trade-offs to ensure they would complete proposed grant activities. For some, this meant stretching staff. For some, this meant relying on volunteers. Should another grant be released, we would recommend that staffing be covered more comprehensively to cover implementation activities.

The fifth recommendation is **to nurture organizational and community partnerships**. The partnerships were essential to the successful implementation of the Food Secure Detroit initiative. They were useful for collective action and quick mobilization. In the future, a solid network of food security and sovereignty organizations will allow for the successful implementation of emergency relief efforts. But this type of network would also build the collective capacity of Detroit neighborhoods and the organizations that serve them.

Methodology

Due to the rapid nature of the project, we conducted an implementation and outcome evaluation with a descriptive design. We employed the following data collection methods.

Method	Brief Description	Respondents
Semi-structured interviews with FSD Staff and Grantees	JFM staff conducted semi-structured interviews to learn more about implementation, outcomes, challenges, facilitators, and lessons learned.	Eight (8) respondents from seven (7) organizations One (1) respondent from DFPC
Secondary Analysis of Monthly Reports	JFM staff analyzed grantee monthly reports for output and outcome data as well as information on implementation.	17 reports from 10 organizations
Participant Survey	JFM staff developed a participant survey to capture outcomes related to access to healthy food, safety, satisfaction	24 respondents from one (1) organization

Semi-structured Interviews

JFM staff developed an interview tool. Two staff members conducted the interviews. Interviews were recorded using Zoom and transcribed using Otter.ai. A JFM staff member first read over each interview transcript, identifying initial themes within the individual interview. The staff member then tabulated the themes by interview question in Excel. The staff member reported all themes, including outliers, in the report.

Secondary Analysis of Monthly Reports

JFM staff requested and obtained October, November, December, and Final Reports from all grantees. Because some grantees partnered with each other on projects, some reports documented activities for two organizations. This was accounted for when tabulating outputs and outcomes where applicable. One limitation of this analysis was that JFM staff did not receive reports for all grantees for all time points, leading to undercounting of services provided.

Participant Survey

JFM staff developed a draft electronic survey with questions about participant satisfaction, access to food, learnings from classes, eating behaviors, and health status. The draft was reviewed by DFPC staff, with edits incorporated into the final version. This survey was distributed to FSD grantees with the request to distribute the link to past and current participants. The quantitative data was then used to tabulate percentages. One limitation of the survey data is that we only received responses from participants in one project. As a result, we only used the survey data to report on examples from that particular project.