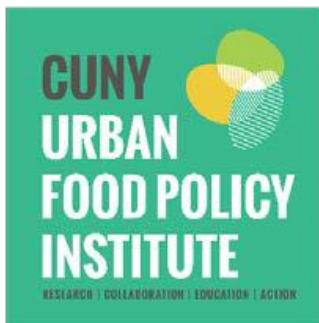


NOVEMBER 2022



Summarizing key findings from an evaluation of GrowNYC Fresh Food Box

EVALUATION BRIEF

GROW^{NYC}

CUNY URBAN FOOD POLICY INSTITUTE & GROWNYC
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GrowNYC Fresh Food Box – USDA CFP Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute has worked closely with staff and leadership at GrowNYC to evaluate the implementation of the organization’s Fresh Food Box (FFB) program in the South Bronx, funded under USDA’s Community Food Project portfolio, for the period of September 2018 - August 2021. With partners Bronxworks, Urban Health Plan, Children’s Aid Society, and Montefiore Medical Center, GrowNYC distributed thousands of fresh food boxes over the three year period to families in the South Bronx.

This evaluation was designed to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent have GrowNYC and its partners implemented the activities described in this proposal? What facilitators and barriers did staff encounter? How did they address these barriers?
2. To what extent does USDA funding increase the reach, participation levels, intensity and duration of exposure to GrowNYC’s activities and the individual and community impact of the overall intervention?
3. Does the short and middle term effects of supported GrowNYC activities vary by level of participation in these activities?
4. What are facilitators and barriers to sustaining this program beyond the current USDA funding? How can GrowNYC and its partners best address barriers and leverage facilitators?

Methods

Evaluation efforts explored operational implementation and perceived impact of FFB for Grow NYC’s Bronx based CFP partners. In years 2 and 3 of the program, data collection tools were designed to also capture the impact of COVID-19 on FFB implementation, challenges and opportunities for the work during the pandemic, and lessons learned. In depth interviews were conducted with key staff at each CFP FFB partner site, and with GrowNYC’s FFB Coordinator. Links to online surveys of FFB clients were circulated at all FFB CFP partner sites, as well as to Bronx based organizations who began purchasing produce from GrowNYC’s Wholesale program to support distribution of free or subsidized food boxes in response to increased community need prompted by economic and food system disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

A total of 72 FFB participants (approximate response rate: 10% of total FFB customer pool) completed the FFB participant survey, representing diverse demographic groups. Survey respondents reported they were 40% Latinx and 60% non-Latinx; 73% white, 20% Black / African American, and 5% Asian / Asian American, reflecting close similarities to the demographics of the South Bronx more generally where 68% are Latinx, 26% are Black / African America, and 1% are Asian / Asian American. The 72 survey participants represented households with more than 285 total individuals, based on reported family size.

Survey respondents reported high levels of FFB participation, with 71% participating “every week” and another 26% participating “2-3 times per month.” Respondents reported high satisfaction with the FFB program, with 98% of participants indicating that they are “satisfied” or “very satisfied.” Further, 97% of participants reported they were “likely” or “very likely” to continue participating in FFB over the next few months, and 93% reported that they are “likely” or “very likely” to continue participating in the program in the long term (through 2022 and beyond.)

The pandemic increased participation among past customers, and among those who had not participated previously (Figure 1.) Importantly, the COVID-19 pandemic increased interest, participation, and client investment in FFB. All partners noted an increase in client participation, with one partner organization reporting that they had engaged at least 1,000 new families since the pandemic began. Clients who had participated previously in the program deepened their level of commitment and increased frequency of participation. This was in part due to FFB’s reliability in the face of food supply chain challenges and increased food costs noted at local retailers, as well as the COVID safe nature of the FFB model. One partner noted the way in which the pandemic disrupted normal food buying habits and “lowered the barrier to entry” for the program.

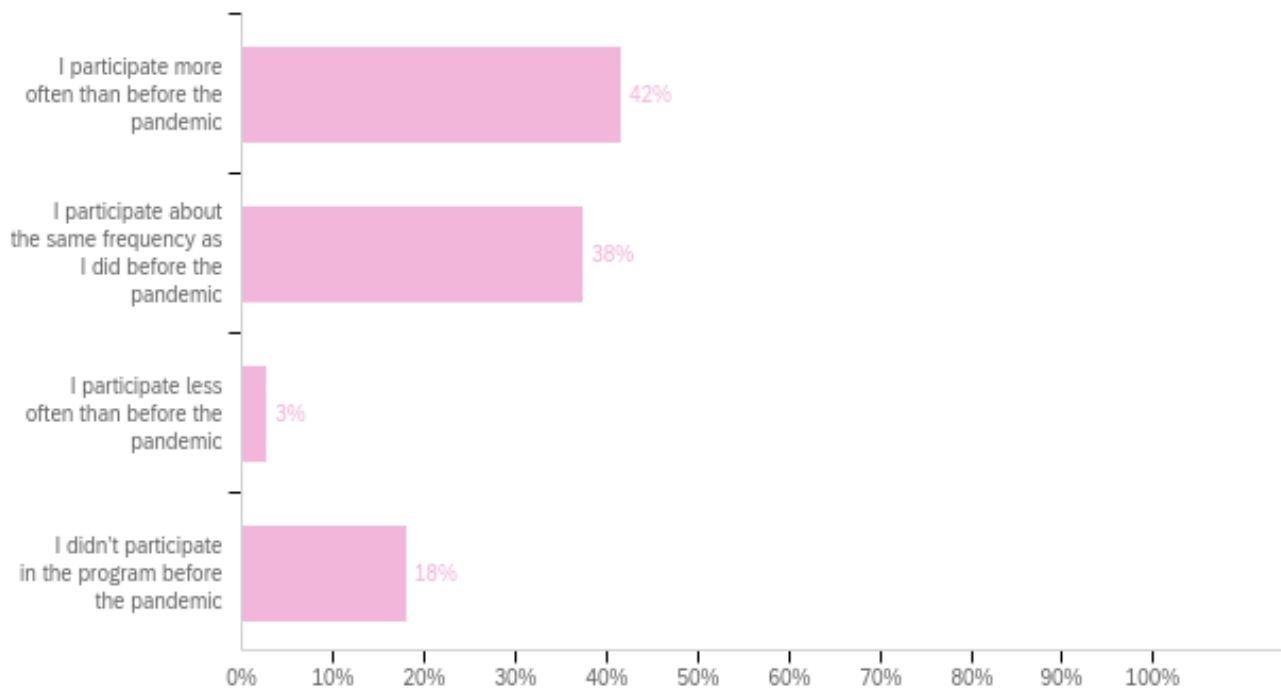


Figure 1. Change in Fresh Food Box participation due to COVID-19 pandemic, by percent of respondents.

All project staff independently stated that they believed the FFB program offered an essential source of fresh product for the South Bronx community it served. One staff member stated:

We [FFB] are one of the main suppliers, if not the only, of affordable, high quality fresh fruits and vegetables in the area. People express to us that the affordability piece is critical.

Another staff member highlighted the convenience the program offers as an essential aspect of its impact: *It's meeting an irreplaceable need for members of the community. The proximity and convenience [are] important for exposure and feasibility.*

Survey respondents reported frequent consumption of fruit and vegetables, and a somewhat higher daily intake of vegetables than fruits. Participants credited the FFB program with increasing their fruit and vegetable intake: 83% of respondents indicated that they consume “more fruits and vegetables because of participation in FFB.”

Community partners noted that their clients were largely satisfied with GrowNYC products: 93% of organizations reported that clients were “somewhat” or “extremely satisfied” with the quality of food provided through the program. When asked to rate their overall experience interacting with GrowNYC, community partners reported largely positive experiences:

- 93% of organizations reported “somewhat positive” or “extremely positive” interactions with GrowNYC staff;
- 79% of organizations reported “somewhat positive” or “extremely positive” experiences with the program distribution process;
- 93% of organizations reported “somewhat positive” or “extremely positive” experiences with the quality of service;
- 86% of organizations reported “somewhat positive” or “extremely positive” experiences with the value of the product.

Discussion

While the COVID-19 pandemic brought distinct challenges to FFB implementation in the second and third years of the project, it also created positive disruptions that lowered barriers to entry for new clients, and increased frequency of participation among the already active pool of FFB clients. As a result of an increased attention to food access and food security issues brought on by economic hardship related to the pandemic, FFB generated new and unanticipated community partnerships that brought added value to program implementation and ultimately grew the initiative’s impact and the impact of the USDA CFP funding.

Acknowledgements

We appreciate and acknowledge the efforts of all GrowNYC staff and customers, past and present, who contributed to this evaluation. Specifically, we thank Olivia Branchflower, Angela Davis, Jessica Douglas, Cheryl Huber, Siobhan Keys and Ida Yu. We also thank Fresh Food Box’s implementation partners Bronxworks, Urban Health Plan, Children’s Aid Society, and Montefiore Medical Center for their critical role in this effort.