

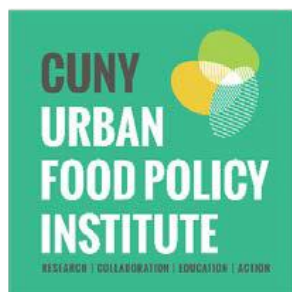
June 2023



West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Digital Choice Online Ordering Pilot

EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



CUNY URBAN FOOD POLICY INSTITUTE & WEST SIDE CAMPAIGN AGAINST HUNGER
cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org wscah.org

Executive Summary

I. Background

In New York City, between 1.5 - 2 million people are food insecure. West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH) is a leader in the emergency feeding space and has been successfully serving low-income New Yorkers for over four decades. WSCAH is best known for innovating the supermarket style, client choice model of food distribution more than 20 years ago. In response to changing client needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, WSCAH sought to pilot a new type of client choice model that prioritizes three key components: technology for advanced ordering, delivery to a community pick up site, modified client choice, allowing clients to select from four options of food boxes. To deliver this work in the pilot phase, WSCAH partnered with three community organizations: Children's Aid Taft Early Childhood Center in Harlem, and Phipps Neighborhoods Crotona Park West and Grace & Peace Church in the Bronx. These organizations were selected based on general neighborhood need and by assessing the existing clientele of WSCAH, or in partnership with city agencies.

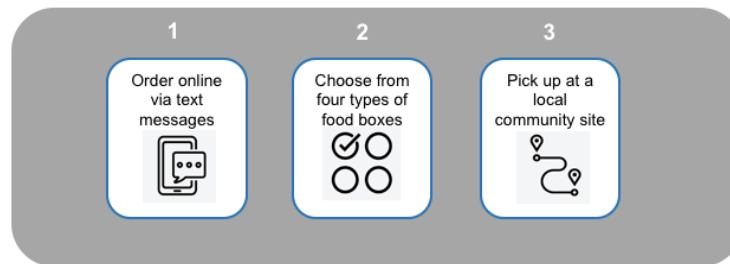


Figure 1. WSCAH Online Ordering Pilot priorities

Methods

The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute (CUNY), based at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy, conducted a multi-year, mixed methods study of this initiative, designed in close partnership with WSCAH. Throughout the evaluation, data collection tools were adapted based on the changing need of the project. Table 1 describes methods implemented during each phase.

Table 1. Phase I & II Evaluation Methods

Method	Target Population	Phase
Survey	Delivery and community hub pilot clients	1
Focus group	Delivery and community hub pilot clients	1
Focus group	Community hub pilot clients I*	2
Survey	WSCAH clients not engaged since March 2021*	2
Interview	Key staff (WSCAH and community hub)	2
Focus group	Community hub pilot clients II	2
Ordering data analysis	Community hub pilot clients	2
Survey	Pilot clients & 86 th Street client list	2

III. Results

Participation by the WSCAH network in evaluation activities is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Participation in evaluation activities

Method	Target Population	Total	WSCAH	86 th St.	Phipps	G&P	Taft	Other
Interview	Key staff (WSCAH & community hub)	8	4	-	1	2	1	-
Focus group	Community hub pilot clients II	30	-	-	19	-	11	-
Ordering data	Community hub pilot clients	418	-	-	157	132	91	38
Survey	Pilot clients & 86 th street client list	326	-	199	47	36	24	20

A. General client experience

Phase II participants reported positive experiences with the program overall, with the food content of orders received, and with the ordering and pickup process. Clients described general satisfaction with the WSCAH online ordering pilot, contextualizing the program’s success by comparing it to prior less-positive experiences at other pantries where they perceived a lack of organization, experienced long wait times and a lack of choice, and sometimes received spoiled or expired food. A testament to client satisfaction: all focus group participants vocalized that they intended to continue participating in the program as long as it is available.

Focus group participants described high levels of satisfaction with the *variety* and *quality* of food provided through the program. Clients reported satisfaction with the four food box options available to them through the program, and when prompted, did not have specific suggestions for expanding these options to include different types of boxes.

B. Tradeoffs in Food Pantry Preferences

To better understand how clients value certain characteristics compared to others, three different scenarios were presented (Table 3). Of the three scenarios, most participants (59%) preferred the online option offering some choice “a lot” or “a great deal.” The supermarket style scenario followed closely in degree of preference with 53% preferring it “a lot” or “a great deal,” with grab and go / no choice being the least preferred.

Table 3: Scenarios presented to gauge client choice preferences

	Scenario A	Scenario B	Scenario C
	Supermarket style shopping in which you select every food item received	Online ordering in advance of pickup to select types of food	Local grab-and-go food box pickup
Level of Choice	Lots of choice; select all foods you receive	Some choice; e.g., choice of protein type and produce type	No choice; receive a pre-packed box of food items
Time Required	High; 60-90 minutes	Moderate; 2 minutes to order + 5-20 minutes to pick up	Moderate; 5-20 minutes
Tech. Required	None	Text message and internet access via phone	None
Location	Upper West Side	A community site near where you live/work	A community site near where you live/work

In response to the question “How does your current experience with WSCAH meet your food needs?” 45% responded with “very satisfied” and 45% “satisfied.” Satisfaction levels were similar across all pick up locations.

C. Client outcomes

Food Security

Receiving the food box addresses an immediate need for people experiencing food insecurity, but several staff interviewees felt the program provides more than simply food, by providing a level of empowerment (a term used by multiple people) and enabling clients to improve their overall situation. This was reinforced by clients during focus group sessions. Focus group participants described the impact of the program on family food security, with most families relying on monthly food boxes as a supplement to their monthly grocery purchases and participation in federal food programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program).

Diet Quality, Cost Savings, and Mental Health

While improvement in food security was the primary outcome noted by WSCAH clients, clients also discussed individual outcomes related to improved diet quality, cost savings, and positive mental health outcomes to a lesser extent. Multiple participants stated that they are eating healthier and trying new things. Focus group participants also commented on the cost savings they experience through participating in the program. Participation in the program also provides “peace of mind.”

D. Enabling and challenging factors to program scale

A key objective of the evaluation was identifying enabling and challenging factors to scaling the pilot. Major enablers of the program were related to strong relationships at the client, community partner and WSCAH level, as well as clear alignment of all parties with the values of the initiative. Challenges typically related to limitations in human capacity. These findings are summarized in Figure 2 below.

	CLIENTS	COMMUNITY PARTNER	WSCAH
ENABLERS/ SUCCESS FACTORS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment • Box contents • Time-saving • Sense of community • Follow up from community partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligned goals with WSCAH • Strong relationship with clients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone aligned around company values • Teamwork • Clear lines of communication • Strong volunteer base
CHALLENGES/ AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of tech skills • Hesitancy providing personal information • Client circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of sufficient staff/resources • Lack of leadership buy-in • Onboarding process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standardization • Space /schedule coordination with other WSCAH programs

Figure 2. Summary of enabling and challenging factors for Online Ordering program growth.

IV. Discussion

Participants were overwhelmingly positive about their experience participating in Digital Choice Online Ordering Pilot. Data collected through surveys and focus groups with the clients' group corroborate the impressions that staff shared related to how the program was affecting clients. The program provides WSCAH clients with healthy food they may not otherwise be able to access, offering an appropriate level of choice in what they are receiving, providing them with peace of mind in knowing that they have consistent access to healthy food, and finally, providing them with a level of convenience through advanced ordering and technology and saving them time.

Conceptually, people place a high importance on the ability to choose, and regardless of the survey question, any option reflecting less choice was not preferred. However, choosing categories and types of food (as offered in the digital choice program) appears to provide the level of choice that meets the need for most. Despite some clients expressing appreciation for the Supermarket Style approach, the Digital Choice experience was consistently rated more highly and was more preferred than the Supermarket Style experience among the responding sample of clients. Overall, when looking at characteristics of the food pantry experience across multiple domains (level of choice versus location versus time), people are willing to give up some convenience to ensure some level of choice. Pick-up locations close to participants' homes were also highly valued. The primary takeaway regarding the choice and time/convenience tradeoff is this: While some WSCAH clients prefer the supermarket style experience and maximum choice, most prioritize convenience and are happy with a limited choice of box types. The current digital choice option being offered provides the appropriate balance of choice and convenience and is preferred by most WSCAH clients.

Acknowledgements

The study team wishes to acknowledge the efforts of all WSCAH staff and customers, including the community hub partner staff and customers who contributed to this evaluation.