"It's the Resources": Work, Governance, and the Institutionalization of an Emergency Food Network

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ABSTRACT

Thousands of loosely connected organizations such as food pantries and soup kitchens constitute the emergency food network. Organizations in this network provide a critical source of food to millions of households each year. This dissertation examines how organizations in one city-level emergency food network acquire, manage, and use resources. It pays particular attention to the relationships that develop between organizations and funding sources.

Utilizing institutional ethnography, this dissertation explicates the ways that everyday food provision in food pantries and soup kitchens is connected to a broader picture of changing modes of governance in the public and nonprofit sectors. The data were collected in Syracuse, New York, primarily using in-depth interviewing. Thirty interviews were conducted with staff and volunteers at food pantries and soup kitchens and fourteen interviews were conducted with staff of agencies connected to food pantries and soup kitchens through funding relationships.

The emergency food network arose primarily to address gaps created by structural inequality and the inadequate government social safety net in the United States. Despite the enormous amount of labor that is dedicated to operating organizations within the emergency food network, this dissertation further supports other scholars’ critiques of the network as inadequate. The context in which the majority of the organizations in the network operate is a religious context—many of the volunteers in the network are committed to emergency food provision because of their religious beliefs. This religious context has implications for ground-level services as well as the overall institutionalization of the network.
The government provides a significant amount of support for the emergency food network, particularly in New York State. New York State’s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program provides a relatively stable source of funding for Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens. This support has helped to institutionalize the local network and bolster the relationship between the regional food bank, which administers the state funding, and its eligible member programs. Even with a relatively stable funding environment, however, workers in food pantries and soup kitchens have been forced to develop limiting mechanisms to help manage their finite resources. These limiting mechanisms restrict the ability of the network to function as an adequate, charitably-based safety net.

This dissertation also suggests that activities in the local network in which this study took place are becoming increasingly coordinated due to funding relationships, particularly with the regional food bank. Most of the approximately 70 food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse are “member programs” of the regional food bank, and as such, they agree to participate in a complex, but hierarchical relationship whereby the food bank guides, coordinates, and monitors much of the activity happening on the ground. While much of this coordination that has sought to improve local services, this complex network is still failing to serve as an adequate response to hunger and food insecurity.
“It’s the Resources”: Work, Governance, and the Institutionalization of an Emergency Food Network

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DISSERTATION

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PREFACE

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Chapter One
Introduction

The inadequacy and fragmentation of the social safety net in the United States has given rise to a patchwork system of emergency food assistance administered through a variety of government, community, and faith-based organizations. According to Feeding America, the number of people in the United States accessing emergency food through its network of community and faith-based member agencies has increased 46% since 2006 (Feeding America 2010). At the same time, many charitable organizations have reported difficulty in obtaining funds to support their activities. It is clear that the economic recession increased demand for emergency food assistance on a national level. The continually expanding emergency food network comprises at least 61,000 agencies that affiliate with one of Feeding America’s 202 member food banks (Feeding America 2011b). Since not all emergency food assistance organizations affiliate with a food bank, this statistic underestimates both emergency food assistance and the prevalence of hunger in the United States.

Hunger and food insecurity in the United States are addressed publicly, privately, and through public-private partnerships. The inadequacy of government-level programs has an enormous impact on the number of people experiencing hunger or food insecurity at any given time. These programs are critiqued by feminist theorists of the welfare state and others for being fragmented, stigmatized, difficult to navigate, and generally inadequate (Harrington Meyer and Herd 2007). Federally funded food assistance programs are not immune from these critiques. Approximately fifteen different federal programs address food assistance. Several scholars argue that the inadequacies of
federally funded food assistance place disproportionate pressure on the emergency food network (Riches 1986; Curtis and McClellan 1995; Eisinger 1998; Poppendieck 1999).

In contrast to federally funded programs, the emergency food assistance network functions largely as a private, philanthropic response to hunger. However, my research suggests that the government heavily subsidizes the work of community and faith-based organizations in the emergency food network. The word, “emergency” in the phrase, “emergency food network,” is critiqued for sustaining an illusion that the problem of hunger on a societal level is temporary and that government solutions are adequate (Poppendieck 1999). Furthermore, the emergency food network is considered by many scholars as insufficient in other ways (see Eisinger 1998 or Poppendieck 1999 for detailed critiques). This dissertation builds on this work, while its specific focus is on the impact of funding processes on everyday life in the emergency food network.

In this dissertation, I utilize a framework provided by institutional ethnography to analytically explore a case study of an emergency food network in the northeastern U.S. city of Syracuse, New York. Institutional ethnographers have developed a distinctive approach to understanding changes in the public sector, focusing on the ways in which organizations are connected within local contexts and to extralocal relations of ruling. Using institutional ethnography as not just a method, but also a source of theoretical insight, encourages me to examine the activities happening in the everyday life at these organizations and connect them to a broader picture of changing modes of governance and accountability in the nonprofit and public sectors. Organizational theorists also provide a theoretical perspective applicable to the nonprofit and public sectors. Organizational theorists might consider the ways that food pantries and soup kitchens
operate in an “open system,” emphasizing the importance of their environments and the ways that organizations change and adapt to their greater environments (Scott 2003). Theories on mission drift and the development of pathologies such as being overly reliant on “rules” may also apply to organizations in the emergency food network.

The accomplishments and shortcomings of the emergency food network must be examined within a broader context of the economic, political, and social environments in which it exists. Critical perspectives on governance and the influence of the new public management will extend the work of both institutional ethnographers and organizational theorists in this discussion of the emergency food network. My primary research question is: How do workers in food pantries and soup kitchens negotiate the demands of acquiring funding and the struggle for organizational survival? In exploring this question, I also consider three secondary research questions. First, how are everyday activities and services at food pantries and soup kitchens affected by the challenges of acquiring funding? Second, how do government funding and the support of external organizations such as the regional food bank affect the local network? Third, do food assistance organizations change or shift through the negotiation of these tensions and processes, particularly in times of resource scarcity?

I begin this dissertation with a discussion of institutional ethnography, my research problematic, and how it is that I came to food pantries and soup kitchens. I follow with a discussion on the theoretical frameworks that have guided this study. Then, I provide a critical overview of different kinds of food assistance in the United States. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.
INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY AND THE PROBLEMATIC

This study explores the impacts of funding processes on food pantries and soup kitchens through drawing upon institutional ethnography. According to Dorothy Smith (2005) and others, institutional ethnography is an alternative mode of inquiry, an “alternative sociology” that has roots in the works of Marx, feminist thought, and ethnomethodology (DeVault and McCoy 2002; Smith 2005:1). Institutional ethnographies often use qualitative research methods to understand “how things happen the way they do” (Campbell and Gregor 2004:16). Using institutional ethnography and qualitative methods such as interviewing, participant observation, and textual analysis allow me to explore the ways that funding activities are deeply interwoven into the organizational life of food pantries and soup kitchens. Using these methods also allowed me to make connections between the activities in food pantries and soup kitchens and the institutional complex that Smith (2005) calls the ruling relations: “that extraordinary yet ordinary complex of relations that are textually mediated, that connect us across space and time and organize our daily lives—the corporations, government bureaucracies, academic and professional discourse, mass media, and the complex of relations that interconnect them” (10).

Institutional ethnographies generally begin from the location of a problematic. Smith (2005:41) states, “A problematic is a territory to be discovered, not a question that is concluded in its answer.” The research problematic highlights the actual activities that happen within a set of social relations or maps “people’s experiences of the local actualities of their living into the relations present in and organizing but at best only partially visible within them” (Smith 2005:39). My research problematic is grounded by
an awareness of the insufficiencies of the emergency food network and the effects of those insufficiencies on people who are accessing the network so that they can have enough food to sustain themselves. By explicating how the inadequacies of the emergency food network connect to Smith’s notion of the ruling relations, I aim to contribute to the body of scholarly work that seeks to explore how people’s everyday experiences are coordinated and organized by a complex set of social relations that are sometimes invisible from everyday life (Smith 2005). I identified my problematic through my own experiences, as institutional ethnographers often do (Campbell 1998; Smith 2002). Campbell (1998) notes that institutional ethnography relies “fundamentally on people’s experience. Not as Truth, nor the object of inquiry, but as the point d’appui for sociological inquiry” (55).

Experience is the entry point and not the object of inquiry because the institutional ethnographer does not remain at the local level of experience. Additionally, institutional ethnographers do not seek to generalize from those experiences, but look for “generalizing and standardizing processes in the ethnographic data” (Smith 2005:135). DeVault (1999) states, “the institutional ethnographer takes up a point of view in a marginal location; she ‘looks’ carefully and relatively unobtrusively, like any fieldworker, but she looks from the margins inward—toward centers of power and administration—searching to explicate the contingencies of ruling that shape local contexts” (48). Institutional ethnographers “look inward” so that they can understand how everyday experience is “coordinated with the doings of others,” often in ways that are not visible to the individuals themselves (Smith 2005:59).
I arrived at food pantries and soup kitchens as a volunteer in 2003. It was in a soup kitchen in Staten Island that I experienced the disjuncture that I later identified as my problematic. At the soup kitchen, a few other volunteers, a staff person, and I were making bagged lunches, which were not to be served in the soup kitchen later that day but instead were to be delivered to a nearby, drop-in HIV clinic. My specific job was to assemble bologna and cheese sandwiches. As we were finishing up, a man walked in the back door, which was propped open for increased air circulation. He said that he was hungry and asked if he could have a piece of lunchmeat. The staff person told him that she was not allowed to give him anything. He left. Then the staff person commented that she felt bad about not breaking “the rules,” but believed that if the rules were broken for some, they would have to be broken for everyone.

I do not know what happened to the hungry man after he left. Did he find something else to eat? Did he come back later in the day? How is he doing now? This experience illustrates the limitations of emergency food well. Entering a soup kitchen and finding cheerful volunteers and a table stacked with sandwiches is not a guarantee to a full stomach. In fact, in order to access emergency food, you must enter it in a certain way, at a certain time, in a certain place, as a certain kind of person. The mission of most food pantries and soup kitchens is generally understood as the provision of food to hungry people, but many factors get in the way of this mission. Awareness of these factors can inspire the sort of guilt felt by the staff person who was obligated to turn away the hungry man. It was also this awareness that motivated me to want to better understand how food pantries and soup kitchens are socially organized. I wanted to know why we could not just give the man a sandwich.
In this dissertation, I explore some of the possible answers to this question, why couldn’t we give the man a sandwich? This question might also be phrased, what gets in the way of providing food? This is my research problematic. In the following chapters, I consider the ways that funding challenges in food pantries and soup kitchens affect daily organizational survival. I discuss where, how, and why these organizations acquire their funding and resources and how resources affect everyday activities in these organizations.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This project links critical analyses of the emergency food network to studies on nonprofit organizations and in the institutional ethnographic literature, areas where scholars have been analyzing the challenges and constraints of organizations for decades. For example, work in organizational sociology has discussed how funding restraints have affected community-based organizations through mission drift (Minkoff and Powell 2006). This study examines whether concepts such as mission drift can apply to nonprofit organizations such as food pantries and soup kitchens. Literature on the pathologies of organizations is also considered.

Scholarly work by organizational theorists and institutional ethnographers examines the impacts of “new public management” on governance structures. For example, scholars more closely aligned with organizational theory have addressed the effects of the “new public management” on nonprofits (Alexander 1999; Anheier and Salamon 2006; Bishop 2007). From a slightly different perspective than scholars of organizations, institutional ethnographers also examine the ways that community-based
organizations are affected by governance and accountability, two conceptual parts of the “new public management” (DeVault 2008).

**Accountability and Governance**

Organizational theories and institutional ethnographies bring attention to the importance of funding processes and relationships in community-based organizations. In addition to producing an environment which can create mission drift, funding requirements can change the daily operations of an organization and introduce new costs, such as recordkeeping and other requirements that create additional work that needs to be done. As a result of entering new funding relationships, organizations are sometimes adversely affected by the emerging relations of accountability in the twenty-first century welfare state. These relations of accountability can adversely change organizational processes in community-based organizations (Ng 1996; Grahame 1998). Previous research has demonstrated that funding requirements based on performance are especially influential. Performance-based funding puts pressure on organizational staff to meet expectations or potentially lose their jobs. Some scholars argue that concepts such as performance-based funding are becoming more common and are a part of a broader ideological shift to the “new public management” (DeVault 2008). Bishop (2007) defines “New Public Management,” emphasizing its “accountability concerns and sound management techniques, [and that NPM] encourages nonprofit organizations to increasingly emulate the practices of their private-sector counterparts (144). Salamon (2002) argues that the flow of practices between the private and nonprofit sectors is more accurately understood as an exchange:
While nonprofits are becoming more ‘business-like,’ the business methods they are adopting have undergone fundamental change in recent years, and many of the changes have involved incorporating management approaches that have long been associated with nonprofit work—such as the emphasis on organizational mission, the ethos of service to clients, and the need to imbue staff with a sense of purpose beyond the maximization of profit (6).

Though Salamon (2002) views the relationship between the sectors as based on exchange, both he and Bishop (2007) would agree that business practices are certainly influencing the nonprofit sector.

The emergence of the new public management is understood by organizational theorists as part of the government’s neoliberal shift to a reliance on the nonprofit sector in the context of devolution (Anheier and Salamon 2006). Anheier and Salamon (2006) argue that due to this shift the nonprofit sector is now considered to be a “central instrument of development and welfare state reform” (93). For example, Alexander (1999) discusses the impacts of devolution and the new public management on social service organizations. She argues that the new public management is based on assumptions that applying business practices and theories of efficiency and competition will improve performance. Though she studies nonprofit social service organizations more broadly, her research shows that some types of organizations, particularly community-based and faith-based organizations, “lack the service capacity, economies of scale, revenue flows, and trained staff necessary to adjust to the new demands” (63). She concludes,

Community- and faith-based organizations with a commitment to service delivery based on need rather than demand are experiencing mission conflict that is difficult to resolve. This study suggests that the capacity of these faith-based and community-based nonprofits to continue as the last safety net for families in distress may be in question (69).
Some scholars argue that the emergency food network has become a shadow of federally funded food assistance programs. For example, Curtis (1997) utilizes Wolch’s (1990) notion of the shadow state and argues that the shadow state is a concept that can be applied to the emergency food network. These arguments are also made regarding the nonprofit sector at-large (Wolch 1990). Rodríguez (2007) and others argue that the nonprofit industrial complex functions as a form of social control for social movements, citing McCarthy, Britt and Wolfson (1991), Rodríguez writes:

Social movement theorists, John McCarthy, David Britt, and Mark Wolfson argue that the ‘channeling mechanisms’ embodied by the non-profit industry ‘may now far outweigh the effect of direct social control by states in explaining the structural isomorphism, orthodox tactics, and moderate goals of much collective action in modern America.’ That is, the overall bureaucratic formality and hierarchical (frequently elitist) structuring of the NPIC has institutionalized more than just a series of hoops through which aspiring social change activists must jump—these institutional characteristics, in fact, dictate the political vistas of NPIC organizations themselves (29 emphasis original).

Furthermore, Rodríguez (2007) argues that the relationship between the state and the nonprofit industrial complex reflects an “institutionalization of a relation of dominance” (39).

Scholars influenced by institutional ethnography are increasingly analyzing the social relations between community-based organizations and the new public management. For example, Ng (1996) studied the ways that state funding “came to function on behalf of the state apparatus in organizing and producing immigrant women as a distinctive kind of labour, as ‘commodities,’ in the Canadian labour market” (14).

Funding requirements, such as recordkeeping on successful job placement rates, undermined the agency’s original mission of advocating with employers to better the situations of immigrant women. That mission was undermined as the immigrant women
who came through this organization were increasingly placed in “minimum wage, assembly-line jobs or as restaurant and domestic help” (Ng 1996:15). Ng argues that, “The funding process, then, did not only reorganize its [the organization’s] work process. In many ways, it dis-organized the work process and seriously undermined its advocacy capacity” (79). Similarly, Grahame (1998) analyzes the ways that performance-based funding structures experience in community organizations that subcontract with the state to provide job training. She examines the ways that potential clients were filtered in or out of the program, based not on their need for skills and training, but on the likelihood that they would be easily placed into a job that met the funding requirements (Grahame 1998). She states: “intake workers favor women without family responsibilities or women for whom family responsibilities would not intervene in their training or placement into the labor market” (87). The performance-based funding requirements essentially reified gendered class relations and prevented the people who needed the training the most from receiving it.

Institutional ethnographers have more recently examined the ways that funding requirements that connect the state to community-based organizations are driven by neoliberal ideologies. For example, Daniel (2008) discusses the ways that funding for students with special needs is situated within a neoliberal climate that focuses on cost-effectiveness and accountability. Campbell (2008) provides another example, examining how organizations located in uncertain funding environments, such as those based on performance and accountability, respond to these pressures. In her study of home support workers in Canada, Campbell found that an agency engaged in cost-reduction due to funding needs often had conflicting interests with the clients it was intended to serve. Yet
another example is provided by Jurik (2008), who studied a microenterprise development organization that was managed under the principles of cost-effectiveness to maintain and acquire funding. She found a tense relationship between program operations and goals, and states: “most practitioners report that they find themselves modifying program goals, target populations, training, and loan modalities to conform to funding trends and specific grant requirements” (Jurik 2008:63).

The impact of changing structures of governance and accountability on the emergency food network has not been examined until very recently. Warshawsky (2010) examines the neoliberal governance of food banking and provides an analysis of its effects on food banks, focusing on commercialization, professionalization, and implications for member programs. This dissertation project contributes to this field of scholarship by looking at the institutionalization and coordination of Syracuse’s emergency food network. Though I found that food pantries and soup kitchens are not subject to many of the penalizing accountability practices that institutional ethnographers and others have documented in other social service settings, I argue that their activities are becoming increasingly coordinated in the local network. This coordination happens through the complex relationship that food pantries and soup kitchens have with the regional food bank and government funding sources.

Organizational Theories

Food pantries and soup kitchens operate in a climate of resource scarcity, a climate in which they must constantly engage in the work of acquiring resources to stay operational. Walker and McCarthy (2010) discuss the importance of community-based organizations appearing “legitimate,” by fitting in with their institutional environments.
“Organizations that are taken as legitimate tend to be rewarded with resources” (Walker and McCarthy 2010:318). Poppendieck (1999) and others have documented the professionalization that has occurred to legitimize the practices and activities of food banking. Legitimization in food pantries and soup kitchens seems to be linked to a set of national-level best practices that organizations are encouraged to comply with in order to improve service delivery and appear as “good stewards” of state and private funding.

Organizational theorists are increasingly studying the impacts of the institutional environment on organizations. Scott (1991) discusses a shift from thinking of “the institutional environment,” to “one of multiple, alternative institutional environments” (167). He also examines the impacts of environments on organizational structure through “imposition,” “authorization,” “inducement,” “acquisition,” “imprinting,” “incorporation,” and “bypassing” (175-181). The concept of “inducement” seems relevant to the practices of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse, which are increasingly shaped by external factors in complex ways, including “inducements” in the form of free, extra food from the regional food bank. “Inducement strategies create structural changes in organizations and organizational fields by providing incentives to organizations that are willing to conform to the agent’s conditions” (Scott 1991:177).

Powell and DiMaggio’s (1991) concept of “normative isomorphism” may also provide insight into the ways that organizations within the emergency food network have shifted over the years (67). Isomorphism is a process through which organizations in a population become more similar to each other; normative isomorphism typically occurs through professionalization processes (Powell and DiMaggio 1991).
The ways in which organizations respond to resource scarcity has many implications. It is possible that resource scarcity contributes to “mission drift” in some organizations (Minkoff and Powell 2006). In food pantries and soup kitchens, mission drift could materialize as the expansion of services outside of the provision of food or the restriction of services to the extent that the organization is no longer following the original organizational mission. It is possible that mission drift exists in organizations that are increasing funding or decreasing services. Since Zald’s much-cited study of the YMCA’s mission “reorientation” from an evangelical organization to one that appeals to wider, nonreligious clientele, organizational theorists have studied the ways that missions and organizations change over time (Zald 1970; Minkoff and Powell 2006).

In a recent review of this work and others, Minkoff and Powell (2006:595) discuss five possible outcomes for organizational missions over time; these include “accommodation,” “proactive change,” “resistance to change,” “reorientation,” and “mission displacement.” Organizations that are financially insecure and vulnerable to external pressures may be more likely to shift or displace their missions to survive or to become compliant with external funding requirements. Minkoff and Powell (2006) also argue that “small, minimalist non-profits, especially those that are volunteer supported, may fly below the radar screen of external influences, and [that] they are so deeply engaged in day-to-day survival that they are possibly shielded from or unaware of many external pressures” (608).

As many food pantries and soup kitchens are entirely run by volunteers and not formally incorporated, it is possible that those organizations may be “shielded” from some external influences. However, most pantries and soup kitchens are members of a
regional food bank and receive some form of government funding, complicating their relationship to external pressures. My research suggests that food pantries and soup kitchens are generally keeping to their original missions to provide food to hungry people, but that they have restricted services in order to manage the demand on their resources. Though most of these organizations have not altered their formal or informal goals over time, it is fair to question how well they are achieving their goals. This question is a point of inquiry for this dissertation project.

Organizational pathologies are a type of externality produced by resource scarcity. A materialization of Vaughan’s (1999) concept of “extreme rule-mindedness” can be found in different types of organizations (281). My research suggests that food pantries and soup kitchens do indeed rely heavily on rules to manage their resources. It further illustrates the constraints and stresses that coordinators of food pantries and soup kitchens are under to manage their resources. Though not ideal, it is not surprising that some of these organizations enforce their rules in ways that could be deemed as “extreme.”

Literature discussing organizational boundaries is useful to consider when entering the organizational world of the emergency food network. A few different types of organizations exist in the emergency food network—primarily food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries. The relationships between these different types of organizations overlap and are complex, particularly the relationship between food banks and food pantries/soup kitchens. Application of concepts from network analysis may be useful. Food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens are each “nodes” in the network, but
what are especially fascinating are the complex relationships between the organizations, or the “ties” that connect them (Scott and Davis 2007:280).

FOOD INSECURITY IN THE UNITED STATES

The emergency food network would not exist to the extent that it does if there was not social and economic inequality and therefore, hunger and food insecurity in the United States. In this section, I discuss recent statistics on hunger and food insecurity in the general U.S. population, and also by race, gender, family composition, age, and region.

The Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey (CPS) measures food insecurity annually and provides the public with an idea of how widespread the problems of hunger and food insecurity in the United States are; the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) publishes annual reports utilizing this data.¹ Data in these reports show an increase in household food insecurity rates between 2000 and 2009 (see Table 1.1). In 2000, approximately 11 percent of households were considered food insecure; this percentage steadily increased until 2004, when approximately 12 percent of households in the United States were food insecure (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2005). In 2005, the percentage of food insecure households dropped back down to about 11 percent or about 13 million households (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2006). However, improvements in food insecurity rates between 2004 and 2005 only occurred within the low food security households. The percentage of households with very low food security remained exactly the same at about 4 percent

¹ Many of the organizations and policies discussed in this dissertation are frequently referred to with the use of acronyms. See Appendix I for a glossary of these acronyms.

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<th>Table 1.1 Household Food Insecurity, 2000-2009</th>
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In the United States, the families that are food secure can most likely afford to purchase the foods that they want. This privilege is structured by several dimensions of difference, including class, race, ethnicity, gender, age, and region. A significant amount of research has connected social group membership with food insecurity status. However, understanding structural inequality requires a consideration of the ways that oppression is interlocking and intersectional (Hill Collins 1991). Most research in the food insecurity literature focuses on how membership in each of these categories affects an individual separately. It is important to keep this limitation in mind when examining data in this area. A brief illustration of this point relates to food insecurity rates and poverty rates, as they are unquestionably linked (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Poppendieck 1997; LeBlanc, Kuhn, and Blaylock 2005). Certain groups experience poverty at a higher rate than
others, highlighting the intersection of class with other social group memberships, such as race and household composition (Shields 1995; Poppendieck 1998; Duffy et al. 2002).

A person’s income and wealth has clear connections to whether a person is likely to be food secure or food insecure. In a capitalist economy, an individual needs money to purchase food. People who have access to ample financial resources most likely can also access a healthy, appropriate diet. The 2009 CPS data showed that rates of food insecurity were higher in households with incomes below the official poverty line, at a rate of approximately 43 percent (Nord et al. 2010). This means that 43 percent of households with incomes below the poverty line were food insecure (Nord et al. 2010). However, the poverty line is not a perfect boundary; there are households with incomes below the poverty line that are food secure and households with incomes above the poverty line that are food insecure (Eisinger 1998). Curtis and McClellan (1995) argue that food costs more for people with low incomes because there is less access to “affordable food sources” and also “reduced purchasing power” due to decreases in the value of benefits from federal assistance programs and participation rates in these programs (96).

In most regions of the contemporary United States, a person that is food insecure probably will not perish from physical starvation because of the presence of a basic social welfare system and the emergency food network, but this does not guarantee families or individuals access to enough food to sustain their everyday lives. Participation in both public and private assistance varies by class membership. In order to be eligible for social welfare programs and much privately offered food assistance, individuals must have an income below a predetermined level. Eligibility requirements vary within the emergency
food network; some organizations require proof of need, while others take the willingness to use the stigmatized system as proof (Poppendieck 1999).

Racial and ethnic background also affects food insecurity and hunger rates around the world. “People of color are represented disproportionately among the hungry in the U.S.” (Shields 1995:3). In 2009, according to the USDA, black households in the United States had a food insecurity rate of about 25 percent and Hispanic households had a rate of about 27 percent. These rates are in stark contrast to rates of food insecurity in white households, which had a rate of about 11 percent (Nord et al. 2010). These food insecurity rates exhibit one of many examples of racial inequality that exist in the United States.

Gender and family composition within households affects levels of food insecurity as well. Some scholars have argued that the “feminization of poverty” has connected gender and class in a way that disadvantages women and woman-headed households (Scanlan 2003:98). The 2009 USDA report supports this argument and reports that households with children headed by a single woman had a food insecurity rate of about 37 percent. Households with children headed by a single man had a food insecurity rate of about 28 percent. Both of these rates are higher than the national average of 15 percent of households (Nord et al. 2010). Duffy et al. (2002) argue that food insecurity is linked with single parenthood and state that “single-parent families overwhelmingly represent the largest demographic group of poor people” (50). Another example of a way that gender and household composition are related to food insecurity is discussed in a study of New York City soup kitchen users, where research showed that
the majority of soup kitchen users were male and living alone (Bowering, Clancy, and Poppendieck 1991).

With popular attention to programs like Meals on Wheels, it may come as a surprise to learn that households with elderly persons had a food insecurity rate of about 8 percent, much lower than the national rate of 15 percent (Nord et al. 2010). However, the structural challenges that accompany an elderly person in the United States, such as limited physical abilities and transportation difficulties, may exacerbate food insecurity issues for the elderly who are food insecure. Frongillo and Horan (2004) discuss the different challenges that food insecure elderly persons experience in rural environments. They also find that elderly persons are more likely to use emergency food assistance than the Food Stamp Program, which was recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, possibly because of perceptions of stigma and confusion over rules and eligibility.

Regional and geographic differences in food insecurity rates have also been documented. In 2009, the USDA reported that the Southern and Western regions of the United States have the highest food insecurity rates at about 16 percent, while the Northeast has the lowest rates at about 12 percent; these differences include a large amount of variation by state. Rates of food insecurity are also affected by geographical locations within regions. In 2009, urban rates of food insecurity were at about 17 percent and rural rates were at about 14 percent; both urban and rural rates of food insecurity were higher than suburban rates, which were at about 9 percent in 2006 and have jumped to 13 percent in 2009 (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2007; Nord et al. 2010).
Little research exists on the ways that differences such as ability, sexuality, and gender identity affect rates of food insecurity. These are areas that should be explored. Furthermore, all of the areas that I have mentioned should be explored in a way that acknowledges the interlocking natures of these different dimensions.

WHAT IS FOOD ASSISTANCE?

Many different responses to food insecurity and hunger exist in the United States. Public food assistance comes in the form of approximately 15 different USDA programs that are often implemented with the help of individual states. The most influential of these programs is formerly known as the Food Stamp Program and now named the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). None of these federally funded programs, however, sufficiently addresses food insecurity by itself—hence the many, many fragmented programs that serve different functions and populations. Because of the fragmentation and inadequacy of these programs and the lack of a broader social safety net, more responses to hunger have risen in an attempt to fill the gaps, namely, organizations in the emergency food assistance network. This network consists of thousands of independent organizations.

*Emergency Food Assistance*

Organizations in the emergency food assistance network are frequently referred to by a few different umbrella terms including emergency food organizations, emergency food programs, emergency food providers, private food assistance, and others. The types of programs generally included under these umbrellas include food pantries, soup/emergency kitchens or meal programs, food banks, and food rescue organizations.
The bulk of the organizations in the network are food pantries and soup kitchens. These organizations are overwhelmingly faith-based or affiliated with a religious organization (Tiehen 2002). Generally, they are privately run, nonprofit organizations that are funded through a combination of government and private support. The number of food pantries and soup kitchens has risen dramatically since the 1980s (Poppendieck 1999; Biggerstaff, Morris, and Nichols-Casebolt 2002). Daponte and Bade (2006) argue that it was during the 1980s when the network was institutionalized through the support of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Before this time, they argue, organizations were sustained on a smaller scale through donations from individuals and businesses (Daponte and Bade 2006). Poppendieck (1999) also argues that it was during the recession of the 1980s that the emergency food network expanded. As the recession ended, organizations in the network grew and institutionalized (Poppendieck 1999).

According to recent estimates, there are over 39,000 such organizations across the country (Tiehen 2002). Feeding America reports that 38,000 of the 61,000 agencies they represent are food pantries and soup kitchens, at 33,500 and 4,500, respectively (Mabli et al. 2010). These organizations vary significantly by the capacity of their operations. Eisinger (2002) researched the capacity of food pantries and soup kitchens and argues that they are fragile organizations and not highly institutionalized given their voluntary nature, amongst other reasons. Regarding their fragile nature, he states, “this finally makes them weak members of the new public-private partnership increasingly assigned the task of holding up the social safety net” (128). Other scholars argue that while the programs on the ground level are unstable and inadequate, the network has increasingly
become institutionalized through government support, food banking, and ideologies of charity and voluntarism (Poppendieck 1999).

*Food pantries.* Food pantries are places where a person in need of food can go and get a bag or package of food to take away with them. Food pantries are extremely diverse. They range in size, the number of days they are open per month, hours of operation, religious affiliation, eligibility requirements, and the frequency at which a person is allowed to use the pantry (Molnar, Duffy, and Claxton 2001). According to the USDA ERS, about 67 percent of food pantries are religiously affiliated (Tiehen 2002). Feeding America reports that 72 percent of the pantry programs affiliated with its network of food banks are religiously affiliated in some way (Mabli et al. 2010). Food pantries are funded from a variety of sources including government and private grants, cash and food donations by individuals, businesses, or groups, and through government commodity programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). Daponte and Bade (2006) estimated the cost of food pantries in 1998 at $1.4 billion.

Food pantries, like most responses to food insecurity and hunger in the United States, have program strengths and weaknesses. The recipient’s ability to take food pantry supplies elsewhere and cook the food as desired is a benefit of food pantry programs; this differs greatly from food that is prepared by others and consumed in a soup kitchen. Another positive aspect of food pantries is that they can fill the dietary needs of a person during the period of time that occurs between an application for emergency SNAP benefits and when a person receives them. Because of this, many food pantries state that they give out only enough food for this time period, about three to five
days. Food pantries distribute millions of pounds of food to food insecure households annually.

Conversely, the amount of food distributed by food pantries is also a weakness. Due to the limitations of monthly SNAP benefits, families often need food for more than a few days (Poppendieck 1999). Also, because of the variability of food pantry hours and requirements, there is no guarantee that someone waiting for SNAP benefits will gain access to food through a food pantry, when they need it. Food pantries often have basic eligibility requirements or require referrals from other agencies (Poppendieck 1999). To give out food procured through government programs like TEFAP, pantries must verify need by income (TEFAP 2007). Another inadequate aspect of food pantries is that households may receive culturally inappropriate foods or foods that are overly processed and high in sodium. A recent study of food pantry food in Massachusetts found that the food distributed in food pantries is low in terms of dairy, fruit, and Vitamin A, Vitamin C, and Calcium (Akobundo et al. 2004). Additionally, food pantries are not always geographically located where there is the greatest need (Eisinger 1998; Nichols-Casebolt and Morris 2002). Daponte et al. (1998) discuss the importance of this factor and found that it is important for food pantries to be located within walking distances from the populations that are using them.

*Soup kitchens.* Soup kitchens or emergency kitchens/meal programs are places where a person can go to eat a free meal, typically in the company of others. Similar to food pantries, soup kitchens are diverse in size, days and hours of operation, religious affiliation, and eligibility requirements. However, unlike food pantries, fewer soup kitchens require identification or proof of need. Soup kitchens also vary greatly in the
extent of their meal service. Some soup kitchens distribute sandwiches and bagged lunches “to-go”; others provide an on-site, extensive cooked meal with salad and dessert. Soup kitchens often receive food and cash donations from restaurants, individuals, and corporations as well as from the local food bank, government sources, and other private nonprofit organizations.

Though the staff and volunteers of soup kitchens across the country work extremely hard to assist people from falling through the cracks of the United States economy by providing meals and basic subsistence, the soup kitchen, like the food pantry, is not without critique. For example, soup kitchens are often criticized for reaffirming class-based stereotypes (Nichols-Casebolt and Morris 2002). Poppendieck (1999) discusses how volunteers and guests in soup kitchens “act out inequality” (249). Curtis (1997) argues that a discourse that focuses on “helping” is present in soup kitchens and draws attention to the social and economic distance between volunteers and the people using the services (7). She argues that there are symbolic and physical boundaries present in soup kitchens and that volunteers often use their experiences to reaffirm stereotypes rather than challenge them (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Curtis 1997). Curtis (1997) also critiques the food served in the soup kitchen as a “minimally adequate diet designed to maximize calories within a limited dollar value” (10). In addition to these critiques, soup kitchens are not always located in geographic areas of need and they are not always accessible to people with disabilities.

**Food banks.** Food banks are generally large capacity nonprofit organizations that solicit and accept food and cash donations from a variety of sources including individuals, corporations, businesses, other nonprofits, and the government. They store the food they
collect and distribute it to local soup kitchens, food pantries, and other organizations and program sites that distribute food to people in need (Riches 1986). Most donated food at food banks is sold to member programs for the price of a shared maintenance fee. However, food banks are increasingly *purchasing* food from wholesale distributors and selling them to food pantries and soup kitchens at cost plus a shared maintenance fee.

In addition to these activities, food banks are involved in advocacy and education work at the national and local levels. Feeding America is a national level nonprofit organization that advocates for the issue of hunger but also solicits donations from corporations and individuals for its member food banks. Feeding America has played an integral role in encouraging the creation of food banks across the nation. Poppendieck (1999) points out that the creation of Feeding America did not rise from a solely private sector initiative, but was initially funded by the federal government, demonstrating the role of the federal government in the institutionalization of the emergency food network.

Food banking is also critiqued by some scholars. One critique of food banks along with other organizations within the emergency food network, is that they do not challenge the existing unequal system and serve as a band-aid approach to food insecurity (Riches 1986; Poppendieck 1999). A related critique of food banks is that they are unwilling to take risks to fight for real social change because they rely on corporations and donors so heavily (Husbands 1999; Poppendieck 1999; Henderson 2004; Heynen 2010; Warshawsky 2010).

*Food rescue, Food Not Bombs, and food sharing.* Food rescue programs solicit food donations from primarily corporations and businesses, such as restaurants and farms. This food is generally perishable and would otherwise be wasted. Food Chain was a national
association of food rescue organizations that coordinated donations with local needs (Poppendieck 1999). In 2001, Food Chain merged with Feeding America (Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest Pennsylvania 2011). Food rescue programs focus on retrieving and redistributing the food to providers, who then distribute the food to people in need. Organizations such as these cut down on food waste and make it easier for places such as soup kitchens and food pantries to distribute food efficiently.

Food Not Bombs can also be considered an emergency food provider of a different type. Food Not Bombs is a worldwide network of decentralized chapter groups that engage in food rescue to share free, vegetarian meals with anyone who wants one. Their principles and practices are typically quite different from other organizations that would be defined as soup kitchens. Food Not Bombs groups are “committed to nonviolent social change” and consider hunger as an expression of violence (Butler and McHenry 2000:71). Food Not Bombs groups attempt to stay out of relationships with local governments and believe that “the revolution needs no permit” (Butler and McHenry 2000:30). They also do not seek large-scale donations because they do not want to be in a position of financial dependency with any potentially manipulating forces (Butler and McHenry 2000). Groups like Food Not Bombs have responded to some of the inadequacies of other responses to hunger. Particularly, these groups respond to the lack of politicization that exists in emergency and governmental responses to hunger. Food Not Bombs is grounded in political commitment to working outside the capitalist system and participating in movements and protests for social change.

Other examples of public food sharing can be found throughout the United States. For example, in Washington, D.C., a meal van drives throughout the city passing out
food to people experiencing homelessness. College groups have also attempted to share food in public (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty and the National Coalition for the Homeless 2007). Mitchell and Heynen (2009) report that “at least 22 U.S. cities since 2003—and at least 15 just since 2006—have either passed new laws restricting free public food distribution or stepped-up enforcement of health and food safety laws to shut down existing distribution programs” (626). In their discussion of the criminalization of food sharing, Mitchell and Heynen (2009) discuss how “making the geography of survival for homeless and hungry people a visible one” makes groups engaging in food sharing such as Food Not Bombs and others a target (625). It seems that the state recognizes its gain in keeping poverty and anti-poverty action out of sight. Organizations that are more typically situated within the emergency food network do their work quietly and mostly out of sight, without challenging structural inequality—these features must be quite appealing to the repressive courts, city councils, and police forces that seek to shut down the basic right of people to gather in public spaces and share food.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Emergency Food Assistance

Within scholarly discussions of emergency food, a small body of scholarly work has addressed the strengths of the network as a whole. Perhaps the most prominent strength of the network is that its organizations help to fill a gap left open by a combination of structural inequalities and a weak social welfare state. People who slip through the cracks of government assistance can often find food assistance in the emergency food network. In addition, it supplements government assistance, and in some cases, may take the place of government assistance (Eisinger 1998). Programs in the
emergency food network have the potential to be more flexible and less “cumbersome and ineffective” than government programs (Eisinger 1998; Molnar, Duffy and Claxton 2001:189). This flexibility brings the possibility for organizations to be less bureaucratic and more informal (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Eisinger 1998). The emergency food network also has the potential to provide citizens with meaningful volunteer experiences in their communities (Eisinger 1998).

A much larger body of scholarly work has critiqued the inadequacies of the emergency food network. For example, many scholars and people using emergency food services agree that scarcity is often a problem and not only in times of economic crisis. Pantries and soup kitchens often run out of food or are forced to regulate portion sizes (Petchers, Chow, and Kordisch 1989; Poppendieck 1999). In food pantries, the amount of food given to a family does not always reflect family size or composition, providing an insufficient amount of food (Poppendieck 1999). Much of the food used by emergency food providers is donated and some of it is the result of corporate mistakes. This factor makes this system unreliable and “disposal driven rather than need driven” (Poppendieck 1994:73; Poppendieck 1999). Some users of the programs may find that the food given out is incompatible with their dietary needs (Petchers, Chow, and Kordisch 1989). Others may find nutritional inadequacy and a lack of fresh produce. Poppendieck (1999) reports that meals at emergency food providers are hard to assess nutritionally, but recent studies illustrate deficiencies in some nutritional areas (see Akobundu et al. 2004). Food distributed at emergency food providers is also sometimes “inappropriate” with little account for cultural food traditions or taste preferences (Poppendieck 1999:213).
Further critiques of emergency food are related to the daily operations of organizations within the network. Between organizations, huge variation in the number of hours and days sites are open and in the size and scope of organizations, exists. Some food pantries or soup kitchens are open once per week, some once per month, others every day. Some also have different limits on the number of times per year that families can access food (Poppendieck 1999). Transportation to sites can be a problem for many people, as emergency food providers are not always located in places where the need is most concentrated. There are holes in coverage, especially in rural areas where there is more distance between people’s homes and emergency food providers (Poppendieck 1999). Finally, if a person knows where there is an open site and can get there, the atmosphere at program sites can be unpleasant, including long lines, crowding, and uncomfortable temperatures (Petchers, Chow, and Kordisch 1989; Poppendieck 1999).

Some scholars critique the emergency food network at-large. These scholars argue that the system is a band-aid approach, inefficient, and a “duplicate food system” (Poppendieck 1999:225). Curtis (1997) asserts that the emergency food network is growing into an “institutionalized shadow government” and “parallels the bureaucracy, the rigidity, and the depersonalization of government agencies” (1). Others critique the fact that there are no “legally enforceable rights” to food in the emergency food network, nor is there much regulation (Poppendieck 1994:73; Eisinger 1998). Many of these critiques suggest that more attention and energy should be devoted to improving the comprehensiveness of social welfare programs rather than providing emergency food. The ways that support of the emergency food network detracts efforts from those that would bring about actual social change are also critiqued (Poppendieck 1999).
Federally Funded Food Assistance Programs

Though also inadequate, federally funded food assistance programs have a large impact on food insecurity in the United States. In 2009, federal spending on these programs was at about $79 billion (USDA ERS 6-7 2010). According to a government report released by the USDA, 95 percent of spending on these programs is attributed to the five largest programs: SNAP, the National School Lunch Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Child and Adult Care Food Program, and the School Breakfast Program (USDA ERS 6-7 2010). A few of the smaller federal assistance programs include the Summer Food Service Program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) (FRAC 2006). In this section, I give brief overviews of the five largest programs and also the TEFAP program, since it has a large impact on food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly named the Food Stamp Program, commonly referred to, as EBT or Electronic Benefits Transfer, is the largest of the federally funded food assistance programs. It accounts for 68 percent of all federal spending on food assistance and is the only food assistance program that is considered an “entitlement” (Poppendieck 1997; USDA ERS 6-7 2010). SNAP gives participants monthly voucher assistance toward food purchases at government approved retail stores and markets (USDA ERS 6-7 2010). Participation rates in SNAP generally follow economic trends (FRAC 2006). In 2009, the

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2 In 2010, the entire federal budget was estimated to be at $3.6 trillion. Spending on defense was to comprise 20 percent of that spending, at $715 billion (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2010).
American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) funding made it possible to raise monthly benefits per person and the program also experienced an increase in the number of people enrolled, raising the federal expenditure on the program from about $38 billion in 2008 to $54 billion in 2009 (USDA ERS 6-7 2010).\(^3\)

Eligibility requirements for SNAP have changed over the years. Some of the most significant changes in eligibility requirements occurred after the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted in 1996. Low-income legal immigrants and unemployed adults without children were two of the groups most impacted by these eligibility restrictions (FRAC 2006). These changes along with economic growth led to a significant drop in SNAP participation rates during the mid- and late-1990s. FRAC (2006) also reports that decreased participation rates were due to harsh benefit restrictions at the state level. In 1998, some of the restrictions that were implemented in 1996 were eased and more recently the federal government has increased food stamp outreach efforts. These actions and fewer eligibility restrictions helped raise SNAP participation to approximately 26 million people in 2005 (FRAC 2006). In 2008, the Farm Bill was renegotiated and with this version of the bill came a new name for the program. FRAC (2010c) notes that the changes include, “the first ever increase in the minimum monthly benefit (from $10 to $14), an increase in the standard deduction of households of three or fewer, and taking into account the full amount of dependent care costs households incur. Retirement and education savings accounts were no longer counted against a household’s SNAP eligibility.” ARRA raised benefits by about 19

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\(^3\) The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) was created to stimulate economic activity and promote jobs, through providing tax cuts for individuals and businesses as well as federal monies for a variety of programs including those related to education, employment, health, infrastructure development, and others (Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board 2011).
percent and also “eased eligibility for certain jobless adults without dependents, and provided states with extra funding to administer the program” (FRAC 2010c). Additionally, some states have raised the income limit for eligibility to a higher rate and/or also removed or raised the asset test; New York State, for example, raised its limit to 200 percent of the federal poverty line for certain households and eliminated its asset test (FRAC 2010a, 2010b).

SNAP has a complicated history and has many strengths and weaknesses. Perhaps the biggest strength is that it aids the diets of millions of people by providing monthly in-kind government assistance. A related positive aspect of SNAP is that it allows participants to access food through non-stigmatized market channels (LeBlanc, Kuhn, and Blaylock 2005). Participants are empowered to purchase culturally appropriate food of their choice at their convenience in one of the many approved retail locations. Also, the transition from actual stamps to Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards reduced the stigma associated with using the benefits (FRAC 2006). Because of the EBT cards, today, SNAP users are less conspicuous in the checkout process.

Many households in the United States depend on monthly SNAP allotments to avoid experiencing hunger. Unfortunately for many families, SNAP benefits often run out by the end of the month (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Poppendieck 1997; Eisinger 1998). Some scholars argue that SNAP benefits were not designed to last the entire month for most households and are inadequate (Eisinger 1998; Daponte, Haviland, and Kadane 2004). Many soup kitchens report that attendance rates increase at the end of the month, when government assistance runs out (Riches 1986). Berner, Ozer, and Paynter
(2008) found that “receiving food stamps more than doubles one’s odds of needing long-term nonprofit food assistance” (416).

Monthly SNAP allotments are based on the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP). The TFP was developed to determine how much money a household needs to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet. Some scholars and activists critique this plan because it is based on a participant having “optimal circumstances for food purchase, transportation, storage, and preparation” (Poppendieck 1997). Poppendieck (1985:126) also reports that the “USDA’s own studies show that only one family in ten spending at the level of the TFP actually obtains a nutritionally adequate diet.” Eisinger (1998) argues that the plan is inadequate because it is based solely on the size of the household, not taking specific dietary needs of household members into consideration. The TFP was based on a diet for a household of four, composed of a middle-aged man and woman, a child aged 6-8 and, a child aged 9-11 (Daponte, Haviland, and Kadane 2004:66). It also does not consider geographical differences in food cost, such as the higher cost of food in urban areas (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Eisinger 1998). Other critiques of the plan include the amount of time necessary to prepare the meals it was based on and the fact that it does not account for household waste (Daponte, Haviland, and Kadane 2004).

Many critics of welfare policy point to the institutionalized obstacles and red tape that keep many people from receiving public assistance (Riches 1986). Despite the recent improvements in eligibility policies, SNAP is not an exception. It has been critiqued for its lengthy and confusing application process and strict eligibility requirements that often leave out populations in need (Poppendieck 1998). People who need immediate food may not be in a position to navigate this complicated system and it may take too much time.
The time and energy that it takes to find transportation to the SNAP office, fill out the forms, gather the necessary paperwork, and attend an interview can be overwhelming and deter participation from the program. Further, expedited SNAP cases can take up to seven days to go into effect, while a non-expedited case can take up to thirty days to be approved (SNAP 2010). During these periods of time, families are left to fend for themselves or access the emergency food network, if possible. Also, in the past, “resource tests” and assets requirements have made it difficult for persons to be eligible for SNAP (Duffy et al. 2002). Previously, owning a home or a car was a factor that kept people ineligible for SNAP; however, that policy has recently changed (FRAC 2006). Another critique is that a person needs an address to apply for SNAP, making it difficult for people experiencing homelessness to easily access SNAP benefits (Algert, Reibel, and Renvall 2006).

National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) subsidizes lunches at a low cost or provides lunch for free to qualified low-income school children (LeBlanc, Kuhn, and Blaylock 2005; USDA ERS 6-7 2010). The School Breakfast Program (SBP) provides similar services for in-school breakfasts. The eligibility requirements are the same for both programs (USDA ERS 6-7 2010). The entire cost of the lunch is covered for children in families that have a family income below 130 percent of the poverty level (FRAC 2006). In other words, in 2006, a household of four would qualify if it earned $26,000 or less (Ralston 2007). Children from families with an income between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level receive reduced price lunches (FRAC 2006). Children from families that are above 185 percent of the poverty level pay full price, but there is a small subsidy on the price. School
participation in each of these programs is not mandatory. Student participation has risen steadily to approximately 31 million children in the NSLP and about 11 million children in the SBP in 2009 (USDA ERS 6-7 2010).

Families and children benefit from these programs in several ways. First, some families could not afford to feed their children breakfast and/or lunch without this program (FRAC 2006). Also, the SBP allows parents and guardians who cannot physically be present during breakfast time to ensure that their children receive breakfast. Studies have shown that eating a school breakfast “promotes healthier eating to fight obesity; improves students’ achievement, behavior and test scores; and reduces absenteeism, tardiness and visits to the school nurse” (FRAC 2006:14).

These programs also have many weaknesses. A significant weakness of this program is that participation is not mandatory for schools; many eligible children do not attend a school that offers the NSLP or SBP. The programs have been critiqued for the complicated administrative requirements that deter schools from participating (Poppendieck 1997). Also, studies show that some children, especially older children, have felt stigmatized because of their participation in the program. As schools incorporate more electronic means of payment this feeling of stigma may lessen (Ralston 2007; Poppendieck 2010). Another negative aspect of this program is that enrollment rates do not match eligibility rates. In 1993, it was estimated that approximately five to seven million children were eligible for these programs but not enrolled (Eisinger 1998). Furthermore, strict income eligibility requirements do not ensure that all children who do not have access to healthy breakfasts and lunches, for whatever reason, receive them. For this reason and others, some scholars and activists advocate for universal free lunch and
breakfast programs (Poppendieck 1997). Finally, the food that is served in schools is under critique. Research shows that nutrition studies on programs such as these are dated and report mixed nutritional benefits (LeBlanc, Lin, and Smallwood 2006). Others critique the nutritional value and general healthiness of food available for consumption in schools and the ways that food choice in schools has been negatively affected by outsourcing and large corporations (Critser 2004; Poppendieck 2010).

*Child and Adult Care Food Program.* The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is another federally funded food assistance program. It provides free meals and snacks to children and adults in places like domestic violence shelters, Head Start, other child care sites, and after-school programs (FRAC 2006:20). Approximately two billion meals were served in sites such as these in 2009 (USDA ERS 6-7 2010). The program ensures that many children and adults receive meals in places where they may not otherwise exist. The primary downfall of this program is its limited scope. In 1996, an income-based eligibility requirement was placed on family-based childcare providers, and this restriction contributed to a decrease in participation for these service providers (FRAC 2006). Program requirements and participation rates also vary widely by state, further limiting the capabilities of this program. Like the NSLP and the SBP, this program has many promises, but is generally limited in its scope and abilities to keep people food secure.

*Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children.* The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) also provides important services to low-income people across the United States. It targets “low-income
pregnant, breastfeeding, and postpartum women and infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing a package of supplemental foods, nutrition education, and health care referrals” (USDA ERS 6-7 2010). Studies have shown that the program “increases the number of women receiving prenatal care, reduces the incidence of low birth weight and infant mortality, reduces anemia, and enhances the nutritional quality of the diet of participants” (FRAC 2006:22). Eisinger (1998) reports that WIC is not an entitlement program, “thus participation is limited by the amount of funding appropriated by Congress, as well as any supplemental funds provided by the states” (59). Critics have argued that the WIC program is under-funded (Whitaker 1993). Like all of the food assistance programs mentioned so far, WIC participation rates also show that many eligible persons are not benefiting from this program (FRAC 2006).

*The Emergency Food Assistance Program.* The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) bridges federally funded food assistance with private food assistance. TEFAP distributes commodity foods to states based on each state’s unemployment rates and poverty level (TEFAP 2007). States then distribute the commodities to organizations in the emergency food network, often food banks, food pantries, and soup kitchens. These local organizations must ensure that recipients of TEFAP foods meet state eligibility requirements. In 2006, approximately $190 million was appropriated for TEFAP, about $50 million for administrative costs and $140 million to purchase commodities. In addition to this appropriation, surplus commodities valued at about $67 million were distributed through TEFAP (TEFAP 2007). These values increased after the Farm Bill was reauthorized in 2008. In 2010, about $298 million was appropriated to TEFAP.
ARRA provided additional financial support for this program in 2009 and 2010 (TEFAP 2010a).

One critique of TEFAP is that it relies on the emergency food network too heavily without providing adequate support for its operation. Organizations within the emergency food network become responsible for storing and distributing these commodities (Eisinger 1998). Others have critiqued the use of this program to remedy the consequences of government subsidized agricultural commodities. In the past, TEFAP was used to unload “surplus commodities that the federal government was obligated to purchase under price-support agreements in the early and mid 1980s, when more than a billion pounds a year were distributed through the emergency food system” (Poppendieck 1998:142). When TEFAP is used in this way, there could be a disconnection between the types of food people need and are able to use and the types of food they are receiving through TEFAP.

The Impact of Public Assistance

Many critiques of emergency food assistance suggest that more attention and energy should be devoted to improving the comprehensiveness of social welfare programs in the United States. Improving the social safety net would ensure that everyone has the ability to access food, amongst other much needed services that would help equalize structural inequalities. Critics of the welfare state point to its weaknesses as a distributional system (Acker 1988). Distribution is broadly defined as the ways that individuals gain access to the “necessities of survival” (Acker 1988:478). Orloff (1996) argues that if the welfare state’s goal is to equalize, it fails, and that the welfare state may not be “aimed at, or actually produce, greater equality among citizens” (52). Furthermore,
in a discussion of state-operated distribution systems, Acker (1988) suggests that the redistributive function of the government exists because the government has “established the initial conditions that require a redistributive policy” (490).

Social welfare states have both universal and means-tested programs. A universal program is one that is “available to all citizens or to all citizens of a certain age or condition” (Orloff 1993:311). A means-tested program is “based on a calculation of need,” such as income level (Acker 1988:491). Every single government food assistance program in the United States is a means-tested program, as are most government assistance programs in the United States. Means-tested programs have obstacles to qualification and deterrents built into their structure; these programs are critiqued as having numerous gatekeeping issues. Eligibility rules are often confusing and application processes are difficult and time-consuming. They require applicants to already have access to certain resources, including time, knowledge, transportation, childcare, and recordkeeping skills. Poppendieck (1999) critiques the Food Stamp Program (SNAP) for its lengthy and difficult application process. It is one of many programs known for its obstacles to eligibility and access.

Social welfare programs in the United States have problems other than those of gatekeeping. Quadagno (1987) points to the ways that welfare programs in the United States have developed as less generous than some European welfare programs. She also argues that the United States has “a bifurcated program of benefits distinguishing the deserving majority from the nondeserving poor” (Quadagno 1987:120). Acker (1988) argues that the welfare system has developed in racialized and gendered ways. This development has affected the ways that welfare programs have come to fruition and the
ways that interest groups attempt to dismantle them. Quadagno (1987) argues that the most significant attacks on the United States’ welfare system have been on programs that “disproportionately aid women and minorities” (125).

The social welfare state is fragmented and underfunded, making it inadequate for the needs of many. My overview of federally funded food assistance programs demonstrates how a relatively high number of food assistance programs can be inadequate. No program by itself can ensure that a family has access to an adequate amount of nutritious food. In general, programs within the social welfare system cannot actually lift any person out of poverty and may not be designed to do so.

Other critiques of the welfare system include the detrimental effects it has on social movements. Quadagno (1987) suggests that the deradicalization of class politics and institutionalization of welfare programs may have contributed to assuaging class conflict. The ramifications of government piece-meal solutions to poverty may include quieting public unrest just enough to dislodge the momentum of social movements. Efforts to improve welfare programs and decrease inequality in the United States enter a highly charged political arena where competing stakes exist for advocates, politicians, lobbyists, corporations, and other groups.

As in the case of private assistance, public assistance programs are also critiqued for the attention that they divert from larger social issues. Some critics argue that fragmented public assistance programs divert attention away from programs that could have the potential to actually lift families and individuals out of poverty (Poppendieck 1999). More government attention to the policies that impact a living wage, housing costs, unemployment rates, medical insurance, childcare, and other far-reaching social
issues could make a more substantial impact on the lives of low-income people in the United States.

*Intersections in Food Assistance*

A consideration of the impacts of public and private food assistance on the lives of hungry and food insecure people in the United States should be accompanied by a discussion of other factors that might complicate the health and well-being of food insecure people. Access to an affordable and healthy diet is one of these factors. Before I discuss the challenges of accessing an affordable and healthy diet, it is useful to understand the ways that scholars define nutritional health. Gardner and Halweil (2000) differentiate between different types of malnutrition: hunger, micronutrient deficiency, and overconsumption. Hunger is defined as a “deficiency of calories and protein”; micronutrient deficiency is a “deficiency of vitamins and minerals”; and overconsumption is an “excess of calories often accompanied by deficiency of vitamins and minerals” (Gardner and Halweil 2000:7). They argue that micronutrient deficiency affects both the “underfed and overfed,” and “typically results from a lack of dietary variety” (Gardner and Halweil 2000:14).

Several factors affect the ability of people to access healthy and affordable food. Cost analyses of foods that negatively affect the health of modern day people show that these foods are generally cheaper than fresh fruits and vegetables and other less processed food choices. Processed food is less expensive and lasts longer on pantry shelves, but has fewer nutritional benefits. A diet that is centered on fresh food is more expensive and brings higher levels of food waste because fresh food expires more quickly. These qualities complicate individuals’ choices between fresh food and
processed food, particularly for the food insecure. On a structural level, the cost and appeal of processed food is influenced by the effects of government crop subsidies and corporate marketing and lobbying.

Postindustrialism and culture have also influenced the typical diet in the United States. Due to the demands of the capitalist economy, emphases are placed on efficiency and speed of food preparation and consumption over general health. Fast food restaurants are ubiquitous and frequented often by a large portion of the population. Many people argue that the modern diet in the United States is one that is full of empty calories, an excess of meat, and unhealthy fats (Gardner and Halweil 2000; Critser 2004). If this argument is true, micronutrient deficiencies may be more common within western countries than commonly thought.

Other Directions

This dissertation is informed by and supports scholarly work that proposes that the social safety net in the United States should be strengthened in the short term. Advocates of welfare reform argue for more universal programs and fewer means-tested programs. Countries such as Sweden have had success with universal child allowance programs and others (Acker 1988). Universal programs have the potential to benefit the income of everyone and are redistributive. The social security program is an example of an already established universal program in the United States.

Some scholars and activists have specific ideas regarding how to strengthen the safety net. Berg (2008), an anti-hunger activist, argues for combining all of the federal assistance programs into one single entitlement program with a centralized application process for families at or below 185 percent of the poverty line (238). Berg (2008) also
suggests raising the minimum wage, having universal free breakfast and lunch programs, decreasing corporate crop subsidies, and raising taxes on wealthy U.S. citizens.

Over the years, stakeholders have also argued for a stronger SNAP or food stamp program. DeVault and Pitts (1984) reviewed the history of the food stamp program and pointed out that it was upheld at a critical moment in the early 1970s when guaranteed income programs were also being proposed by politicians and stakeholders, including former President Nixon. Some stakeholders were concerned that the guaranteed income would not be high enough, others believed that food stamps would be more effective (DeVault and Pitts 1984).

Today, anti-hunger lobbyists and scholars still argue for stronger federal food assistance. For example, Daponte and Bade (2006) outline how the growth of TEFAP, the changes in the requirements and benefits of SNAP over the years, and the institutionalization of Feeding America have helped to further entrench and create a reliance on the emergency food assistance network. In their conclusions, they argue for a strengthening of the food safety net and provide specific recommendations such as simplifying SNAP eligibility requirements, increasing SNAP eligibility levels to 185% of the poverty level, and combining various food assistance programs into SNAP (Daponte and Bade 2006:685-686). They also argue for a reinstatement of the mandatory purchase requirement that was formerly required of SNAP recipients—a suggestion that would raise the amount of money spent monthly by households on food, but one that would certainly be exclusionary and may create additional barriers. As a scholar motivated by a perspective that deems food as a human right, I do not agree that requiring SNAP
recipients to purchase food in this way is a feasible method of strengthening the food safety net.

The work of anti-capitalist scholars and activists further complicate critiques of the welfare state and my project is also informed by and supports these critiques. For example, some scholars question whether hunger and poverty can ever be eradicated within capitalist systems. This argument questions the utility of efforts to improve the social welfare system within a capitalist economy. Wisner, Weiner, and O’Keefe (1982) state, “Marxists argue that a solution to world food problems is impossible within a national framework of capitalist relations of production nor within the framework of trade, aid, and investment of a capitalist world system” (9). These scholars highlight capitalism’s reliance on a pool of unemployed laborers and the unequal relationships that are created as a byproduct of the separation of workers from the means of production (Wisner, Weiner, and O’Keefe 1982).

Henderson (2004) uses a Marxist framework to argue that an expansion of the social welfare state may not be the most or only effective response to the problem of hunger. He argues that the existence of charity demonstrates the failure of capitalist systems. Further, he asserts that advocates who argue that the state is the responsible actor and not capitalism view the dismantling of the welfare system “as a morally illegitimate move, a reneging of the social contract that obligates the state to ensure that those basic goods are provided” (Henderson 2004:496). Henderson (2004) suggests that critics like Poppendieck actually inadvertently support anti-capitalist arguments by showing “the capacity of the state to withdraw as it has [precisely] because this too, is consistent with political liberalism” (498).
As has been the case historically, scholars differ in their opinions about the best ways to eradicate hunger in the United States. Scholars such as Henderson (2004) open space for debate while problematizing power. For example, he examines stereotypical depictions of hunger that come from organizations like food banks while trying to understand the processes by which different “articulations” and “disarticulations” of hunger become constructed by different groups and positions within the anti-hunger movement (2004:510). Poppendieck (1999) argues that charitable responses to hunger detract from efforts to strengthen the safety net and/or mobilize actual social change. These are all tensions that must be addressed in the long term.

The debates that I have discussed in this section create a challenging dilemma for people who are interested in ending hunger. If problems of hunger and food insecurity are so intertwined with other forms of social inequality, is it possible to end hunger without ending other forms of social inequality? Possibly not, so then should efforts to end hunger be redirected towards social movements that address economic and social inequality? Several different theoretical perspectives address economic inequality. Should movements for change focus on strengthening the welfare state, dismantling capitalism and other structures of oppression, or some combination of both? “The food justice frame highlights the focus on systemic change and the necessity for engaging in political and policy processes as well as consciously addressing issues of movement mobilization and strategies” (Wekerle 2004:379). As the food justice movement continues to gather strength, it may become more difficult for policymakers and the public to ignore connections between hunger and other forms of social inequality. These kinds of analyses have much to contribute to scholarly work on the emergency food
network. Though scholars such as Poppendieck, Riches, and Henderson have connected their analyses of the emergency food network with broader social inequality, much of the work in this area of research has tended to focus on hunger and its responses in insular ways.

ORGANIZATION OF CHAPTERS

In this chapter, I introduced this dissertation project and situated it beside other scholarly work on the emergency food network, institutional ethnography, and organizational sociology. In Chapter Two, I discuss my research design and methodology as well as describe the context in which this research took place. In Chapter Three, I begin to discuss the work and the workers on the ground level of the emergency food network in Syracuse; I focus on the considerable amount of labor that operating a food pantry or soup kitchen requires and the workers’ motivations. In Chapter Four, my analysis moves from the ground level and into the level of coordination. I discuss how the policies and activities of the regional food bank impact services on the ground level. I also examine the role of the food bank and government funding in helping to institutionalize the local network and consider the impacts of the new public management on food pantries and soup kitchens. In Chapter Five, I shift to a discussion of how the broader climate of resource scarcity impacts services in detrimental ways. Additionally, I argue that the ways in which local food pantries and soup kitchens manage their resources further serves to entrench the inadequate network. In Chapter Six, I conclude the dissertation with an extended consideration of the arguments of this project and its contributions to the study of the emergency food network.
Chapter Two
Methods

This dissertation utilizes qualitative methodologies to analyze the ways that food pantries and soup kitchens negotiate the processes of acquiring funding and support, particularly focusing on the tensions and challenges that organizations encounter. In this chapter, I discuss the research design that I used along with the methodologies that informed my study. I begin this chapter by restating my research questions and subsequently, I discuss my methods, sampling procedure, recruitment process, sample, data collection, and data analysis.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided this dissertation project:

1) How do workers in food pantries and soup kitchens negotiate the demands of funding processes and the struggle for organizational survival?
   a. How do government funding and the support of external organizations such as the regional food bank affect the local network?
   b. How are everyday activities and services at food pantries and soup kitchens affected by the challenges of acquiring funding?
   c. Do food assistance organizations change or shift through the negotiation of these tensions and processes?

METHOD

The methods utilized in this dissertation are qualitative and draw from institutional ethnography, a framework that is used to explicate the ways that people’s
everyday experiences are coordinated and organized by a complex set of social relations that are sometimes invisible from individual locations in everyday life (Smith 2005). Using institutional ethnography enables me to explore how complex funding processes come to structure the everyday activities in Syracuse’s emergency food network. So that the research questions posed could be explored in an in-depth and contextualized manner, this study draws upon this unique way of exploring the social world. Qualitative methods, broadly, are understood as a pathway to a deeper understanding of social processes and meanings. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) assert that qualitative researchers “look at settings and people holistically” (8). Institutional ethnography, through activities such as mapping out the social relations that organize people’s lives, also seeks a similarly holistic understanding of everyday life, but with a more specific goal—to consider and explicate the ways that power affects the everyday (Campbell and Gregor 2004).

My investment in this research is inseparable from my own investment in social change and institutional ethnography is particularly well suited for researchers with an investment in social change. This is because it “begins from the standpoint of those outside ruling regimes, but...is directed at empirically determining how such regimes work—that is how they are socially organized” (G. Smith 1990:631). By discovering “how regimes work,” activists for social change can better understand the systems that they seek to change (G. Smith 1990:631). Dorothy Smith states, “a knowledge of just how forms of domination are being put together can make resistance and progressive change more within our reach” (Smith 2005:220). Institutional ethnographers can bring attention to particular places or moments where change should occur (Smith 2005). This project
examines the emergency food network with this goal in mind: the identification of particular moments where change can occur from the inside.

To explore how funding processes come to affect life at the organizations in this study, I use three overlapping methodological approaches: participant observation, interviewing, and textual analysis.

**Participant Observation**

Participant observation provided me with a strong knowledge of the everyday activities of soup kitchens and food pantries. As Taylor and Bogdan (1998) suggest, participant observation can be an illuminating phase of research in the “pre-fieldwork” stages and as a component of fieldwork (24). I spent a significant amount of time conducting participant observation and volunteering at a soup kitchen in Syracuse in the beginning stages of this research project. These experiences provided me with an introduction into the everyday activities of these organizations and also illustrated many of the ways that they are coordinated and organized by a variety of texts. Formal observations at this soup kitchen lasted for a period of three months and ranged from one to four hours weekly. Additionally, I conducted informal, less frequent observations at the same soup kitchen in the role of volunteer for the next five years. I also conducted participant observation at two local food pantries and was able to take detailed fieldnotes of my experiences. During fieldwork, I was able to volunteer at the Food Bank of Central New York twice; these experiences also informed my work. Finally, at monthly meetings of the Syracuse Hunger Project, I participated as a notetaker for approximately

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4 From this page forward, when referring to the Food Bank of Central New York, I may abbreviate it as the Food Bank (first letters capitalized). When I refer to food banks, in general, I use lower-case letters.
two years and then later conducted some formal observations at meetings. These experiences also informed this study. The participant observation component of my research supplemented the analyses presented by my interview data by providing a rich picture and background of some of the organizations in Syracuse’s emergency food network.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were the primary methodological component of this study. During interviews I learned from informants’ experiences and what Smith calls their work knowledges (Smith 2005). Researchers drawing on institutional ethnography acknowledge that people themselves are the experts of their everyday experiences (Smith 2005). Smith (2005) argues that at least two types of knowledge are discoverable from people’s accounts of their everyday experiences: “a person’s experience of and in their own work, what they do, how they do it, including what they think and feel” and “the implicit or explicit coordination of his or her work with the work of others” (151). By meeting and talking with the local experts in the Syracuse emergency food network, I gathered information of both types.

During interviews I asked a variety of open-ended questions that explored each organization’s activities, mission, funding processes, and the work that takes place. Appendix A contains copies of my initial Interview Guides. So that I could trace specific funding streams, I paid close attention to references to other organizations that were involved in funding processes. Interview moments such as these directed me to additional interviews and observations.
Textual Analysis

The textual analysis component of the study was driven by the information that I collected through interviews and participant observation. Generally, nonprofit organizations are extremely textually mediated. In other words, these organizations frequently use texts and documentation to regulate, organize, coordinate, and standardize their everyday activities. Smith (2005) and others argue that texts must be seen as active coordinators of experiences; they also provide researchers drawing on institutional ethnography with specific, localized moments to analyze within complicated institutional processes. Texts travel within and between organizations and are taken up by organizational participants in a variety of ways. These movements and functions are important to researchers using institutional ethnography because they can provide a better understanding of the ways that institutions are interconnected through texts.

During interviews and participant observation, I asked informants to discuss texts that they encountered on a daily basis, particularly those related to funding relationships. Following the work of institutional ethnographers, I watched where the texts came from, what happened to the texts after they were engaged with, how they were filled out, and what kinds of language appeared in the texts (DeVault and McCoy 2002). The types of texts that appear in the daily work at food pantries and soup kitchens include grant applications, intake forms, reports, databases, consent forms, mission and policy statements, ads and flyers used for outreach activities, written rules posted on-site, ordering forms, and letters to private donors, among others. Appendix B contains a list of texts that I obtained from various organizations that I specifically discuss in this dissertation.
DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONS

Every day across the nation, thousands of food pantries and soup kitchens are giving out food. Most urban communities have dozens of these types of organizations. To illustrate, New York City has at least 620 food pantries and 195 soup kitchens according to the website of the Food Bank for New York City (2010). In rural areas, there are fewer food pantries and soup kitchens due to lower levels of population density. For example, in all of Herkimer County, New York there are 10 food pantries listed as members of the Food Bank of Central New York (FBCNY 2010a). Syracuse, New York has over 60 food pantries within the city limits and about 80 pantries in all of Onondaga County. The city of Syracuse is also home to about 11 soup kitchens.

Due in part to widespread public support and the government’s acceptance and encouragement of these organizations as a sufficient response to hunger, the emergency food network has become an institutionalized charitable response to the problems of hunger and food insecurity in the United States. About 30 years after the large-scale emergence of these programs in the 1980s, programs in Syracuse occupy a range of levels of formalization. Some have few clients, little funding, and very little infrastructure. Others are formalized nonprofit organizations with paid staff, grants, properties, a Board of Directors, and hundreds of volunteers. In terms of everyday activities, there is great variation among food pantries and soup kitchens, as most of the 70 or so programs in Syracuse operate independently of each other and have differing capacities.
**Food Pantries in Syracuse**

I visited about 23 of the approximately 60 food pantries that were operating during my research. My experiences visiting pantries differed immensely from organization to organization because of the significant variation in the way those pantries exist and function, despite the obvious commonality—they are all distributing food. Some of the ways that pantries differ from each other include the type of organization that it is, such as church or agency based; the people involved, for example, who is running it, working in it, and accessing it; the capacity of the organization; the physical space including size, accessibility, and atmosphere; and the food distribution practices that it employs.

Most of Syracuse’s food pantries are physically located inside, affiliated with, and/or sponsored by a church. Churches in the city of Syracuse represent a range of denominations and are predominantly Christian. They are located in a range of neighborhoods and serve local neighborhoods and congregants who commute from outside of the city. Many churches in Syracuse have notable histories. For example, Onondaga County’s oldest, historically African American church, People’s AME Zion Church, was started in 1841 by abolitionist, Reverend Jermain Loguen (Moses 2010). Reverend Loguen was a conductor in Syracuse’s Underground Railroad (BlackPast 2011). The city of Syracuse is home to several churches that serve predominantly African American communities and a number of these churches operate food pantries and/or soup kitchens.

The capacity of food pantries varies significantly in terms of hours of operation, budget, and number of clients seen in a month, but some of the biggest and most well-
supported pantries are affiliated with churches or temples. Locally, Assumption Church, St. Lucy’s, and Temple Concord are known to host some of the busiest and biggest pantries in town. Church-based pantries also make up some of the smallest pantries in Syracuse. Several of the smaller church-based pantries operate out of small closets with extremely small budgets. One small pantry that I visited gives food to only one or two families per month and does not store any food on site. The majority of pantries operate somewhere in the middle with limited hours of operation but still relatively high service numbers. A church affiliation has other impacts on food pantries; for example, it is more likely that these organizations have a religiously influenced mission and environment. Church-based pantries also appear to be more reliant on volunteer labor than agency-based pantries and a large number of volunteers come from the supporting church.

Church-based pantries span a greater range of capacities than agency-based pantries, which generally operate on the medium to large end of the range. Generally, agency-based pantries are open more frequently, have one or more paid staff members involved in the operation of the pantry, and have the capacity to apply for more grants and funding. There are fewer agency-based pantries than church-based pantries in Syracuse, but they have a large impact on the local emergency food network and also typically offer their clients a range of services in addition to food. The Salvation Army, for example, has provided food to as many as 1,000 people in a month from their food pantry and also does facilitated enrollment for programs such as Child Health Plus, Family Health Plus, Medicaid, and others.

The leadership structure at food pantries does vary, but generally, one person holds the position of director or coordinator. I observed that agency-based pantries more
frequently use the language of “director,” whereas church-based pantries use the language of “coordinator” more, perhaps reflecting their varying degrees of integration into the more formal world of nonprofit management. All in all, though, the terms seemed relatively interchangeable. I visited one organization that has a team of four co-coordinators, but the other pantries I visited relied heavily on one person to do the work of coordinating. The majority of coordinators at smaller capacity church-based food pantries are unpaid volunteers, but some of the larger church-based pantries have a paid coordinator. All of the agency-based pantries I visited have a paid staff person in the position of coordinator. Depending on the organization’s capacity, coordinators have a number of responsibilities. At three of the larger agencies that I visited, the coordinator runs the food pantry and several other programs at the site. In the smaller church-based pantries, the coordinator dedicates the majority of their labor to the operation of the food pantry.

The number of volunteers at each organization varies greatly; I visited a few agency-based pantries that do not use any volunteer help. Almost all of the church-based pantries have at least one volunteer in addition to the coordinator, but I did meet a few volunteer coordinators who have little to no assistance from others. Some of the larger pantries, both church and agency based use a dozen or more volunteers a week.

The number of households that pantries distribute foods to per year also varies widely. Some pantries serve less than 100 households a year; others serve more than 4,000 households. I learned early in my research that the frequency of a pantry’s hours of

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5 Another interesting language choice by food pantries and soup kitchens is the use of the word “guest” rather than “client” or “consumer” to refer to the people receiving food from these organizations. This language choice is employed widely in the network and is probably rooted in notions of Christian hospitality. Also, the move away from the language of “client” to that of “guest” emphasizes the voluntary nature of the relationship.
operation is not necessarily an indicator of higher service numbers. This is partially due to the equalization that takes place because of a widely enforced rule that dictates that a household cannot use a pantry more than once a month. Being open more often does not necessarily mean that you serve more households.

The number of people working in and using a given food pantry affects the capacity and pace of an organization. These two factors are visibly discernible in the pantries. Some pantries run extremely smoothly; jobs are delegated, records are kept, spaces are clean, “guests” are attended to in an efficient but unrushed manner. Other pantries I visited seem disorganized and unstructured; it may be quite a feat that they stay operational given the lack of general support.

Physical space is another factor that affects pantries. Not only is there much variation in the aesthetics of spaces, but there is also much variation in the amount of space that pantries occupy. Some pantries operate out of a series of large rooms and others are limited to small storage closets; many are located on the basement level. The size of the storage area affects the variety and quantity of food that a pantry can keep in stock. Refrigeration and freezer space is also a challenge for pantries. One basement-level, church-based pantry that I visited is located in an old garage; it has concrete walls, poor lighting, and freezing temperatures that keep the volunteers and guests cold in the winter, but the produce fresh. Because so many pantries are in basements inside of old buildings, people who use wheelchairs or have difficulty on stairs have a hard time physically accessing food pantries. The coordinators that I spoke with about this insisted that they were more than happy to bring food up to people who could not come down. A few even mentioned that they do deliveries for a few of their guests. Despite their
accommodations, this is a barrier to some potential pantry users who are unable to physically enter the pantry and it is a fact that is unlikely to be changed in most spaces.

The issue of pantry access extends beyond the physical accessibility of the inside of the pantry. I occasionally became lost on the way to a pantry, scouring fruitlessly for a church sign or a pantry sign to indicate that I was in the right place. Finding the right building is not the only challenge; the actual door to the pantry can be even harder to find, as they are sometimes intentionally discreet.

Another factor that changes from pantry to pantry is the food itself. The food in stock at a pantry is impacted by the factors that I have just discussed—staff, number of clients, and storage capabilities. By the end of my research, I came to understand what pantry food looks like. Though the quantity and variety varies much from pantry to pantry, a typical pantry area has a shelf full of off-brand cereal boxes, an area for pasta or rice and other grains, jars of peanut butter and jelly, canned fruits, canned vegetables, maybe some bags of dried beans, some cans of fruit juice, some canned soup or boxes of Hamburger Helper or some other dehydrated pasta dish combined with a meat in a box. Pantries with a larger selection of food usually have more varieties within categories, but also more “extras” like cakes, pies, salad dressings, brownie mixes, or maybe some donated Thai soup broth. Most of the food at pantries is non-perishable. Perishable options often include breads, frozen desserts, or frozen meats. A few places carried dairy products, eggs, or fresh produce, but many did not. Many of these limitations are due to the lack of refrigeration or frozen storage available at a given site. Most pantries had at least one refrigerator and freezer, but they fill up fast. Additionally, because some pantries are only open a few days a month, it is difficult for them to distribute perishable
foods before they expire, especially since the perishable foods in the network are often close to expiration at the time of donation.

*Soup Kitchens in Syracuse*

There are about eleven operating soup kitchens or hot meal programs operating in Syracuse; there is a minor fluctuation in the number of soup kitchens operating at a given time because some smaller organizations are susceptible to temporary closures. During my research, I was unable to contact one soup kitchen because they were never open during their stated hours of operation. I heard from a local contact that the coordinator of this organization was having health problems and that they had temporarily closed. The soup kitchens of Syracuse, like the food pantries of Syracuse, also vary from program to program, but the biggest differences are between the larger agency-style soup kitchens and the smaller church-based programs.

There are two agencies that run large soup kitchens in Syracuse: the Rescue Mission and the Samaritan Center. The Rescue Mission meal program serves three meals a day and is one of many programs that they offer within a large organization that employs hundreds of people (Rescue Mission 2010). The Samaritan Center (2010) focuses entirely on their daily meal program, which ranges from one to two meals a day; they have about seven full-time staff. Both programs serve over a hundred people a day, often a few hundred people, who eat their meals on site, in cafeteria areas. Both of these organizations utilize volunteer labor and have staff dedicated to the coordination of volunteers.

The soup kitchens located in churches tend to be smaller undertakings. They are usually open once per week or twice per month and are more reliant on volunteer labor.
They also serve fewer people at meals. One small soup kitchen that I visited feeds less than 20 youth per week. Another program serves around 40 people every other week. Despite the smaller scale of these programs, they still take a lot of work, planning, and resources to operate. These programs usually share space with the church that houses them and take over the church gymnasium or cafeteria room during the meal service. One program distributes bagged lunches for people to take away with them.

The food served at meal programs also varies from place to place. Though most of these program coordinators put much effort into serving nutritious, well-balanced meals, in reality, the foods served are limited by cost, the donations on site, preparation time, storage capabilities, and other factors. In my experience, the food at soup kitchens is not so different from the food found in school cafeterias—highly processed, high in calories, and not the freshest of foods. At the sites I have visited, I observed the portion sizes to be large and most places seemed to take pride in this as they recognize that the meal they are providing may be the only meal of the day for some of their guests.

Accessibility is always an issue in soup kitchens. Some activists and scholars have critiqued soup kitchens for being overly institutionalized and for reifying the power structures between the staff and the guests (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Curtis 1997; Poppendieck 1998). These are issues that soup kitchens in Syracuse also grapple with; in general, I found the amiability of soup kitchens in Syracuse to shift depending on which staff were present. Some staff members have friendly relationships with guests; others seemed aloof, even exhibiting behaviors that might be deemed as “grumpy.” Because staff in the soup kitchens are in the business of allocating resources fairly, there are many rules to be followed. Only one dessert, for example, was a rule at both of the large soup
kitchens. When guests asked for two desserts, they were often gruffly informed that that was against the rules.

Some of the staff seemed to try to balance firm enforcement of the established rules with not sounding grumpy; this skill is helpful in many occupations, but particularly management and supervision. One time, during a volunteer experience, I was asked for a tray after the point in time when trays were “allowed” to be given out, to keep the dishwashing from being too overwhelming at the end of the shift. I was so afraid of getting yelled at by the staff person that I quickly told the guest “no,” without noticing that this particular guest was using a walking cane. Some of the guest’s friends rather angrily told me that I was being unreasonable and I was clued into how my experience of institutional capture kept me from noticing why he needed a tray, so I gave the man a tray. This example clearly illustrates how rules can be unjustly applied and how easy it was for me as a volunteer to lose my ability to think for myself. This was not my proudest volunteer moment, but it does illustrate how soup kitchens can be unfriendly, rigid places full of well-intended, though slightly out-of-touch staff and volunteers.

The leadership structure at the large soup kitchens works very differently than at the smaller soup kitchens and most of the food pantries, partially because there are so many more staff people. At many food pantries, one coordinator is doing all of the work and this is the case at the smaller soup kitchens, as well. But at the two large soup kitchens, there is an executive director, a development director, a volunteer coordinator, a kitchen manager, an assistant to the kitchen manager, volunteers, and so on. Generally, I would suppose that it takes much more labor to run a soup kitchen that is open every day than to run a food pantry that is open every day.
The Food Bank of Central New York

Food banks have a significant influence on food pantries and soup kitchens. Locally, the presence of the Food Bank of Central New York has a strong impact on the majority of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse. The Food Bank of Central New York is a nonprofit organization that was started in 1985 that works with food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other organizations such as day care centers and senior centers. They have over 500 “member programs” that span 11 counties. According to one of their brochures, The Food Bank of Central New York,

Is a not-for-profit organization that supplies food to hungry people through a network of food assistance programs in Central and Northern New York. Our core competency is moving food from a variety of sources (donations, USDA commodities and wholesale food purchases) to individuals in need. Whether a regional disaster or the every-day dilemma of struggling families, the Food Bank is there to meet the need. We like to say, “We work for food,” and we work with a diverse group. Our member programs include soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters, as well as non-emergency not-for-profit agencies. Altogether, we provide food, technical assistance, and nutrition education to 575 different programs in eleven counties.

The Food Bank was initially sponsored by the Syracuse Area Interreligious Council, currently known as Interfaith Works of Central New York, before it attained its own 501c3 designation. A variety of local organizations were a part of the creation of the Food Bank including Catholic Charities, the Rescue Mission, Salvation Army, the Day Care Directors’ Association of Onondaga County, the Metro Commission on Aging, the Interreligious Food Consortium, and PEACE, Inc. (Niedt 1985).

At the time of the Food Bank of Central New York’s establishment, other New York food banks had already been founded in Albany, Elmira, Rochester, and Buffalo (Hedgion 1984). Some of the first publicized support that the Food Bank had was from P&C Foods, a regional grocery store chain that in 2010 was bought by Tops. The United
Way, New York State, and Onondaga County supported the Food Bank in its initial phase as well. Bruce Springsteen, who gave a concert in Syracuse a few months before the Food Bank opened in 1985, donated $10,000 to the Food Bank. His donation was solicited by the founding director, Cathy Cohen and was widely publicized in the local media (Niedt 1985; “Springsteen Concert Raises Money for Needy” 1985; White 1985). Springsteen was not the only famous musician to support food banks at the time; Prince and others also organized canned food drives and raised money during the early days of food banking (“Food Bank to Gain” 1985). The first space that was occupied by the Food Bank was an unused Air Force building (Niedt 1985). Since then the Food Bank has occupied other independent spaces and in fall of 2010, it moved to its largest warehouse space yet.

The mission statement of the Food Bank of Central New York is that they are “working to eliminate hunger through nutritious food distribution, education, and advocacy in cooperation with the community” (brochure). As the mission statement suggests, the Food Bank does a lot more than simply food distribution. This is a national trend in food banking (Poppendieck 1999:117). Though the distribution of food is still the primary purpose of food banks, food banks are involved in education and advocacy work of various forms.

The Food Bank of Central New York has many different programs that impact the local community and that are related to issues of food security external to food pantries and soup kitchens. For example, they operate a food buying club called “Food $en$e” and also do cooking demonstrations and nutrition education in schools through their “CookShop” program. They provide after-school meals for low-income children through
the Kids Café program and sponsor the feeding sites of the Summer Food Service Program, a federally funded food assistance program. They also support various local community food security initiatives and participate in the state’s Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP). The purpose of NOEP is to increase enrollment in SNAP and also the Summer Food Service Program.

In relation to food pantries and soup kitchens, the Food Bank supports their work by providing them with increased access to resources and training. These services are the ones on which I focus most of my attention in this project. The Food Bank increases access to resources by serving as a contractor for state funding and federal TEFAP allotments. They also serve as a store for food pantries and soup kitchens where organizations can purchase food at wholesale prices or access donated foods for a per pound maintenance fee. In order to access these resources, organizations must be “members.” Membership comes with an agreement to follow certain practices.

SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The ground level of the emergency food network in Syracuse comprises primarily soup kitchens and food pantries. These organizations maintain connections to a variety of other organizations including governmental organizations, nonprofit organizations, and organizations/networks that bridge the two sectors. The sheer number of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse illustrates the importance of their services in this region. Syracuse has over 60 food pantries, approximately 11 soup kitchens, a large regional food bank, and a faith-based hunger consortium.

Food pantries and soup kitchens are sustained by a variety of public and private funding streams. This study’s sample includes a variety of local organizations so that the
project comprehensively addresses the ways that organizational strategies and funding processes influence activities in the emergency food network as a whole. My fieldwork was conceptualized and completed in two overlapping phases. The first phase consisted of interviews at food pantries and soup kitchens and the second phase consisted of interviews with organizations that provide funding to food pantries and soup kitchens.

**Phase I**

The first phase included formal interviews with representatives of organizations that were engaged with direct food provision, namely soup kitchens and food pantries. Within these organizations, I conducted interviews primarily with the coordinator or director of the organization, though in four organizations I also spoke with an additional volunteer/staff person who was highly involved in the organization’s operation. At one of the large organizations that I visited, I did not speak with the director, but instead, I interviewed two staff persons. Altogether, in this phase, I visited 26 organizations and interviewed 30 people. Of these organizations, 17 were food pantries, 3 were soup kitchens, and 6 operated a food pantry and a soup kitchen.

To address issues of reliability and validity, 17 of the 26 organizations I visited were selected using stratified random selection. I compiled a list of organizations using information published by the Food Bank of Central New York, the Syracuse University Community Geography website, and a county office that distributes Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funds. The final list contained information on the type of organization, such as whether it was a food pantry or soup kitchen, and on the hours and days of operation of each organization. I stratified the list using these two categories. Because some organizations operated both a food pantry and soup kitchen, they appeared
on the list more than once, increasing the chance that I would select them. I initially presumed that organizations that had a food pantry and a soup kitchen would run them as separate programs, justifying the increased chance I had of selecting the organizations listed twice. However, I found that organizations that had both kinds of programs integrated much of the operational work. Despite my personal attempt at keeping the programs separate, a “food pantry” interview at an organization that had both programs typically covered information about both programs, not just the food pantry.

The number of days an organization was open per week was used as an approximate indicator of the degree of institutionalization and the level of funding that was present. I reasoned that organizations that had a higher level of institutionalization were likely to need more resources and have paid staff. This was correct to an extent, but I also learned that some organizations that were open less frequently served as many people as some organizations that were open five days a week. Consequently, using this type of stratification did assist me in finding organizations at a variety of levels of institutionalization, but it was not an accurate gauge, overall.

Based on the characteristics of the organizations that were randomly selected, I supplemented the sample with a few pantries and soup kitchens that varied with regard to religious affiliation, geographic location, or a special funding situation. For example, I sought out interviews in a suburb of Syracuse and a small town 45 minutes outside of Syracuse for a reference point. I also sought out an interview at a food pantry in East Syracuse that supports its entire program through the operation of a small second-hand store. Additionally, I sought out an interview at a food pantry that had recently revamped its food distribution model and also an interview at an organization that operates a “soup
“kitchen” that serves regularly but that is not completely open to the public and therefore does not appear on any of the lists that I used. These supplemental interviews provided me with much useful information.

Because my research questions aim to uncover the processes at work at the organizational level, I did not formally collect demographic information on the participants of this study. This study was not designed to make comparisons between the experiences of particular social groups in running food pantries or soup kitchens. However, in retrospect, I wish that I had collected basic demographic information on age and race, as well as demographic information about the clients at different organizations and also the congregations of the church-based organizations. Based on my own estimations, the majority of coordinators at church-based organizations in my sample were near or past the age of 65. The paid coordinators at agency-based organizations appeared younger. Of the interviews conducted at Phase I sites, approximately 20 percent, or 5 of the 26 sites were at churches that served predominantly African American communities. Of the 30 interviews that were a part of Phase I, approximately 23 percent of the participants interviewed were people of color, while the remaining participants were white. Approximately 30 percent of these interviews were conducted with men, the remaining were conducted with women. Estimations such as these leave room for error, but are relevant to discuss. I regret my lack of foresight in collecting this information as I did not provide the participants in this study the right to self-identify. This information should not be considered representative of the demographics of ground level coordinators in Syracuse, as I supplemented my stratified random selection with non-randomly selected organizations.
Phase II

In the second phase, I contacted specific institutional funding sources that were identified in the interviews conducted in the first phase. The interviews that took place in this phase of the study were data-driven; though at the start of the research, I was certain that I would need to contact a few of the well known organizations such as the Food Bank and the Interreligious Food Consortium (IFC). Specifically, I conducted four interviews with three different people at the Food Bank and interviewed the director of the IFC twice.

I was not aware of all of the funders supporting the local network, however, and several of the interview contacts in this phase were unknown to me at the start of my research. For example, I interviewed a representative from the office of the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and the local Board of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP). I also interviewed representatives from the United Way, two locally-based private foundations, and two hunger-related organizations at the state level. During my research, I learned about a relatively new farming project that was growing food for food pantries in Syracuse, so I interviewed the director there. In total, I conducted 14 interviews with 12 people at 10 organizations in this second phase.

Again, I did not systematically collect demographic information on the participants of this study. However, approximately 42 percent of these interviews were conducted with men, the remaining participants were women. Approximately, 2 of the 12 participants in Phase II were with people of color and the remaining 10 participants were white. This information, though based on my estimations, indicates that funding sources
may be more populated by white persons than by people of color. White persons may be present at higher rates at the level of funding than at ground-level organizations. Future research ought to systematically examine the racial diversity of staff working at funding sources compared to the organizations that are being funded. Phase II participants occupied a greater range of ages than Phase I participants, and were probably on average, younger than the coordinators of food pantries and soup kitchens.

RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

I recruited participants primarily by calling the organization’s phone number. Some phone numbers were included on the lists that I derived my sample from; others, I located in the phonebook or online. Throughout my fieldwork, I occasionally learned that I had inaccurate information regarding the hours of operation or contact information. For example, I attempted to visit one church-based food pantry that did not have a working phone number only to find a boarded-up building. It looked as if it had been closed for years. Another church-based soup kitchen without a working phone number that I attempted to visit was only available to me by foot, due to six blocks of construction closure surrounding it. I walked from several blocks away only to find the church completely closed; apparently, it had shut down for the period of time that the construction was happening. I visited another organization without a working phone number three times, trying to catch them while open and I never succeeded. About six of the coordinators that I interviewed I had to visit in person during operation to schedule a later interview because my messages were not returned or there was no working phone number.
When I had a working phone number for an organization, my procedure was to call and ask to speak to the coordinator or director of the food pantry or soup kitchen. Because workers in these organizations are quite busy and many of the phone numbers went to a church office and not the pantry, my attempts at making contact were frequently delayed in long rounds of phone tag. But, after getting in contact with the person in charge, I was usually able to schedule an interview within a week. Once reached on the phone, coordinators seemed more than willing to meet with me. Only one coordinator turned down my request for an interview; she said she was too busy to meet with me and that she had just done an interview with a person doing the same project last month. I am not sure whose project she was referencing, but regardless, she was clearly overwhelmed. All in all, the willingness of the coordinators to meet with me demonstrates the dedication they have to their work and to talking about their work with others. The number of difficulties that I experienced in scheduling interviews suggests a shortfall in the system from the perspective of a potential client trying to speak with someone from an organization over the phone.

The location of the interviews was determined by the participants. All but one of the interviews conducted took place at the organization itself. Occasionally, the coordinator would make a special trip to come in and meet me at the organization; other times, I came during their hours of operation or directly before or after the organization was open to the public. Because of this, I was able to experience food pantries and soup kitchens during a range of activities. During some visits, the spaces seemed eerily quiet, but more often the interviews took place in a bustling environment full of volunteers, clients, and many interruptions.
When I arrived at the site, I often faced a challenge of trying to figure out exactly where the pantry or meal program was located within a building. It was easier at community center programs, where there was usually a helpful receptionist at the door to point me in the right direction. The churches, on the other hand, were often quite large and confusing. Once, I found myself wandering the halls of a large Catholic church looking for the pantry. I eventually met someone who informed me that I was on the wrong side of the building entirely and that there was an outside entrance to the pantry from the parking lot on the opposite side. Church-based programs were often located in a basement or off to the side, usually with a rather non-descript door and a small sign on it declaring it “The Food Pantry.” These discreet locations enable clients to enter quietly if they wish, but on the other hand, if a client cannot find the door, they cannot enter at all.

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The majority of the food pantries, soup kitchens, and other organizations that I visited were located in Syracuse, New York. That I decided to focus on Syracuse’s emergency food network makes this a unique study. As I conducted my research, I learned that the local context matters significantly in the way that the local emergency food network operates. For example, the policies and practices of the local food bank have a huge impact on the everyday operations of soup kitchens and food pantries. Many of the practices in Central New York are considered by other organizations such as the Hunger Action Network of New York State (HANNYS) and Feeding America to be model practices. For example, the Food Bank of Central New York has been credited with being at the forefront of many cutting-edge trends in food banking, including their decision to decline all donations of soda and junk food.
The location of this study in the state of New York, where organizations are the beneficiaries of funding from the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) has also influenced this study’s findings. HPNAP funding has provided a significant portion of the budget for food pantries and soup kitchens in New York. Many other states do not have programs such as this and as such, this study is somewhat particular to the unique funding environment of New York State.

It is useful to consider the historical context of Syracuse as well as its current socioeconomic environment and the ways that this context may have impacted this study. Syracuse’s economy was initially built on the salt trade and bolstered by the creation of the Erie Canal. After the Civil War, the economy transitioned to industry and manufacturing until the mid- to late-twentieth century when a great deal of manufacturing firms located in the northeastern United States moved south or outside of the country, forming an area known as the rust belt (New York Comptroller 2004). In Syracuse, residents lost a significant number of job opportunities when businesses such as Carrier Air Conditioning, of which Syracuse University’s Carrier Dome is named after, moved the majority of their operations south. Since these losses, Syracuse has been attempting to invigorate the city’s technology and service sectors. Jobs in the service sector tend to be lower wage, part-time, and without benefits such as health insurance.

Along with economic hardships such as these, Syracuse also has a history of racial inequality and segregation, despite its rich record as a stop on the Underground Railroad. White residents of Syracuse were primarily the descendents of Irish, Italian, German, and Polish immigrants (Stamps and Stamps 2008). These white ethnic communities dominated blue-collar jobs until the decline of manufacturing (Stamps and
The communities historically resided in the north side of the city, though according to some of the participants in my sample, the north side population is currently shifting to include higher numbers of refugees that are being resettled in the city.

Syracuse’s black community endured significant hardships in the twentieth century. In the 1960s, urban renewal and the creation of Interstate 81 destroyed the 15th Ward, which was considered the center of Syracuse’s black community (Sieh 2003). Many houses, black-owned businesses, and churches were lost during this time period (Stamps and Stamps 2008). Since the destruction of this neighborhood, black residents have predominantly resided in the south and west sides of Syracuse. Along with “urban renewal,” redlining and other forms of housing discrimination helped contribute to the current level of racial segregation in Syracuse. A 2010 study by the Brookings Institution found that Syracuse has the 9th highest housing segregation between black residents and white residents, in the entire country (Knauss 2010). The majority of the Latino and Hispanic population of Syracuse live on the west side of the city.

Injustice has continued into the twenty-first century for Syracuse’s black community. The placement of the Midland Avenue Sewage Treatment Plant in a low-income, predominantly African American neighborhood on the south side has recently been lambasted by the local community and local activists as an example of environmental racism. The Syracuse City School District is plagued by inadequacies, including low graduation rates. Fowler High School’s graduation rate for 2009 was at an abysmal 33 percent (Nolan 2010). Racial disparities exist for arrest and sentencing, particularly impacting the futures of Syracuse’s African American men (Rosenthal 2001).
Rosenthal (2001) documented that in 1997, “Onondaga County spent $38,382.00 per year per prisoner to keep them locked up at the Onondaga County Correctional Facility and only $8,883.00 per pupil for a year of public education.”

In 2010, the population of the city of Syracuse was estimated around 145,000 (Weiner 2011). According to Census 2010 data, in 2010, approximately 56 percent of the city population was white, 30 percent was black or African American, 8 percent was Hispanic or Latino, and 6 percent was Asian (Weiner 2011). In the general U.S. population, approximately 72 percent was white, 13 percent was black or African American, 16 percent was Hispanic or Latino, and 5 percent was Asian (Humes, Jones, and Ramirez 2011). Over the course of the twentieth century, the percentage of the total population that identifies as black or African American has grown in Syracuse. This was in part due to white flight out of the city, but also due to an in-migration of black persons moving to the area from the southern United States (Stamps and Stamps 2008).

Accompanying the loss of manufacturing jobs has been a decline in population as residents have left the city over the years due to the rise of the suburbs and white flight from the urban center. With this has come a decline of property values (New York Comptroller 2004). At its peak, Syracuse’s population was at 221,000 in 1950; since 1950, Syracuse has lost over 30 percent of its population (New York Comptroller 2004). Census 2010 data suggest that the decline in population may finally be slowing, showing a loss of less than two percent of the population since 2000. This was a much lower rate than was predicted (Weiner 2011).

Syracuse’s poverty and unemployment rates are higher than the national levels. According to the Census Bureau, the unemployment rate in Syracuse was about 11
percent in 2006, 9 percent in 2007, 8 percent in 2008, and 11 percent in 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009a). The percentage of people in the city of Syracuse who had an income below the poverty level between 2006 and 2009 hovered between about 30 percent and 32 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2009a). These figures demonstrate that even before the recession began in 2007, the city of Syracuse, like many U.S. rust belt cities, experienced economic challenges. These hardships have likely impacted the ways that the emergency food network has developed locally.

DATA COLLECTION

As noted previously, semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data for this project. I conducted approximately 44 formal interviews between October 2008 and June 2010. Interviews typically lasted about an hour, but ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours. My research participants determined where and when the interviews would take place. One interview was conducted over the phone. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and the study, provided participants with the informed consent form, inquired about their confidentiality preferences, and asked for permission to digitally record the interview. Appendix C contains a copy of the informed consent form that I used. All but one participant consented to be digitally recorded.

Participants were asked whether or not they wanted me to use a pseudonym in any publications or presentations that I gave using this research. Less than half of the participants wanted their names to be kept confidential. One participant requested that I use her legal name but specified that she wanted to approve any inclusions of data from our interview after I had written the analyses. In this dissertation, I do not indicate which participant names are actual names and which are pseudonyms. I am also careful not to
include identifying information about the organization at which participants who wish to remain confidential work. This has created some inconsistencies in the text where I at times mention the names of organizations and at other times avoid them. The staff at the IFC and at the Food Bank did not want me to disguise their identities, so I have not changed their names or attempted to disguise which organization they worked at. Additionally, I provided names of some of the larger organizations in Syracuse in the context of discussions of general information about their practices that I discovered not through interviews, but on their public websites.

Because the interviews took place at the participant’s work, I often met other staff or volunteers while I was there. When possible, I introduced myself as a researcher. Occasionally, an organization was open to the public and clients were nearby. I was careful to stay out of the way and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the clients. Most of the interviews proceeded without long interruptions, though short interruptions were common. One exception to that was when a food pantry coordinator had to do intake for two clients while I was there. I turned off the recorder, packed up my notes, and sat in the hall until she was finished with each client. I tried to be aware of the ways that my presence was impacting the sites.

Since the majority of the interviews were digitally recorded, I did not spend time hurriedly taking notes during interviews. This allowed me to remain present and to pay more attention to our conversation and opportunities for further probing. I did, however, make jottings and brief notes to indicate which questions or topics I should follow up on later or that I thought might be important to future interviews. At the beginning of my research, I created an interview guide that I used throughout my interviews, though I did
adjust questions as appropriate. As with many standardized forms, I learned that some of the questions proved irrelevant to some organizations. For example, if during an interview I found that one person operated the entire pantry with no help from others, I did not bother to ask questions related to group decision making, Boards of Directors, and so on.

Generally, the participants in this study were open regarding their experiences. Some participants were, of course, more open than others. Perhaps expectedly, I did find that interviews with participants closer to my own demographic, young and female, seemed to proceed more effortlessly, though many interviews with participants dissimilar to me due to race, gender, age, sexuality, education, religion and so on went smoothly as well. Scholars have written about the ways that insider or outsider membership to communities affects research (Zinn 1979; Griffith 1998; DeVault 1999). Issues of class, race, and gender certainly affected the dynamics of the interviews in this study (Riessman 1987; Arendell 1997). I cannot determine exactly how much my own social location and that of my participants has impacted my findings, but I can confidently state that I had to learn to develop rapport more quickly with all of the participants during these relatively short interviews. This was difficult to do in such short periods of time, but I do believe that my rapport development skills improved over the course of my research. For example, I learned to make more small talk at the beginning of interviews. I also learned to frame my interview questions in ways that encouraged elaboration and storytelling rather than short answers. I also became better at judging the relevance of questions so that there were fewer awkward moments produced by questions from my guide that could not be answered.
During interviews I asked to see copies of any documentation that came up in our conversations. Often times, participants provided me with copies of texts that I have catalogued along with my interview data. When possible I also supplemented interview data with any information that may have been available about an organization online. Some of the larger organizations maintain public websites with general information about their programs, staff, and events. Both of these types of texts have proved to be valuable sources of supplementary data.

Participant observation was another form of data collection that I used. Though I have not discussed these experiences at length in the substantive chapters of this dissertation, they certainly informed many of the conversations that I shared with participants during interviews and my subsequent analyses.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis for this project occurred in stages. Due to the data-driven nature of this research project, I began analysis while conducting my first interviews. For example, I created conceptual maps of funding processes while still conducting interviews with workers at food pantries and soup kitchens. Writing analytic memos throughout the process also helped to guide initial analyses and interviews that I had not yet completed.

Each of the 43 digitally recorded interviews was transcribed. After the interviews were transcribed, I read each closely with the following question in mind: “What does it tell me about how this setting or event happens as it does?” (Campbell and Gregor 2004:85). In other words, what does this interview tell me about what gets in the way of providing food? After this stage, I started to “write up the data,” as “analysis in institutional ethnography is done in your writing and as you write” (Campbell and Gregor
The goal of projects framed by institutional ethnography is to “get to an account that explicates the social relations of the setting” (90). At points, writing up the data became a descriptive venture, but through attention to the original problematic of the project, “what gets in the way of providing food,” I was able to explicate different workings of the social relations that organize the everyday activities of food pantries and soup kitchens. Generalizability is not viewed in the same way that it is viewed in some sociological inquiries; rather, “generalizability in institutional ethnography relies on discovery and demonstration of how ruling relations exist in and across many settings, organizing the experiences informants talked about” (89).

In order to illustrate the social relations at work in food pantries and soup kitchens, I include quotations from interview transcriptions. These quotations have been edited for readability and for confidentiality purposes. For example, except for when these words seemed relevant, such as in the case of demonstrating thoughtful hesitancy, I removed “um’s,” “you know’s,” “so’s” and repeated words. I indicated any deleted sections other than those deletions with an ellipsis (...) and used [brackets] to indicate when I changed the name of a person, place, or organization that was referenced in the quotation or added words to assist in the readability of the quotation.

*Ethics of Representation*

Issues of representation are important in any qualitative study. Many researchers choose not to divulge their true research goals so that they do not influence their findings. I did not deceive my research participants in any way regarding the nature of this study so that I could facilitate research interactions that respect my informants’ work knowledges (Smith 2005).
One of the challenges of qualitative work is the obligation that a researcher feels to the research participant’s emotions, experience, goals, and position in the community. One interesting finding that other critics of the emergency food network have learned is that people working within the emergency food network are often its biggest critics (Poppendieck 1999). Despite this, I have often worried about critiquing the people who I work with and respect. However, institutional ethnography has the potential to take the particular experiences and activities of individuals and move from those experiences to generalizing processes. Using institutional ethnography, I am able to avoid engaging with individualized critiques or generalizations and to seek to “find and describe social processes that have generalizing effects” on the experiences of my informants (DeVault and McCoy 2002:753). This is not to say that some of my analyses are not critical towards the emergency food network; indeed, many of them are. However, I seek to explore the ways that funding and other institutional processes as part of the “ruling relations” have contributed to the everyday realities that make the emergency food network an inadequate response to U.S. hunger and food insecurity.
What is everyday life like in Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens? What kinds of labor must be done to keep these organizations functioning? Why are workers motivated to do this work in the first place? In this chapter, I begin to answer these questions, illustrating what life is like in the grassroots or ground-level sites of Syracuse’s emergency food network. I outline the labor that happens in food pantries and soup kitchens and discuss the religious context in which much of this work happens.

The primary task of a food pantry is to acquire and redistribute food to people who need it in the form of packages or bags of food that are to be taken home and prepared for consumption. In contrast, soup kitchens generally prepare food on site and serve meals to people in mass, at the site. In order to complete these tasks at food pantries and soup kitchens, much labor must be done. I discuss three kinds of work that I found in common between organizations: acquiring food, food distribution, and volunteer coordination. For example, before food is redistributed to the public, regardless if it is distributed in the form of bags or a hot meal, an organization must acquire the food and store it. Managing the flow of purchased and donated food is a large undertaking; food must be organized and stocked before the distribution even happens. Different types of work come along with different types of food. For example, organizing food collected from a community food drive requires a different kind of labor than unpacking boxes of food that is purchased from a wholesale distributor. In order to complete this work, many organizations rely on volunteer labor, which must be coordinated and managed.
Following my discussion of volunteer coordination, I shift my focus from the work that happens to examine how the religious-based context of emergency food impacts the organizations and the work itself. I argue that this context is important to consider due to the sheer number of religiously affiliated food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse and the many volunteers who are motivated to do this work because of their religious commitments.

RESOURCEFULLY GATHERING RESOURCES

The resourcefulness and innovation that the workers in this network exhibit in their daily work cannot be ignored. It is without doubt that the work that gets accomplished to acquire funding and support helps to keep the food pantries and soup kitchens of Syracuse functioning during hard economic times. Workers in food pantries and soup kitchens spend a great deal of time gathering resources in different ways. In this section, I discuss some of the strategies that workers use to obtain and maximize their resources, as well as the work that it requires to operate a food pantry or soup kitchen.

Source Matters

Acquiring, storing, and preparing food in food pantries and soup kitchens occupies much of the time of workers in the emergency food network. The source of the food acquired impacts how much and what kind of work that emergency food workers have to do in order to get it ready for distribution to their clients. I begin this section by highlighting the challenges created by different food sources. Unbeknownst to many, much of the food being used in the local network is purchased from places like grocery stores and the Food Bank. Food pantries and soup kitchens do receive donations of food
from churches, schools, local businesses and other sources, but due to a general decrease in donations, especially from the corporate food industry, purchasing has become more and more common in the system. See Figures 3.1 to 3.3 for a series of conceptual maps regarding where food in the emergency food network originates. Streams of donated and purchased food can come directly to food pantries and soup kitchens or can come by way of the local Food Bank. The Food Bank of Central New York primarily gets food through wholesale purchasing, but also receives donations from corporations, businesses, and government commodity programs such as The Emergency Family Assistance Program (TEFAP).

![Figure 3.1 The Donation System](image1)

![Figure 3.2 Purchasing Food](image2)
Purchasing food. Purchasing food creates a different type of labor for staff than acquiring donated food. Through purchasing, food pantries and soup kitchens can control their stock better and avoid many of the pitfalls of dealing with donated food. The majority of the food purchased in the local network is bought from the Food Bank. Peter, who at the time of our interview, had been working as the director of his organization for a short period of time, talked about ordering food from the Food Bank:

The last menu that I did this, I wanted to order the large cans of orange juice and I got the little and it was my fault. My wife did most of the grocery shopping, so but, they’re [the Food Bank staff] very, very helpful…Put in my, (logs onto online ordering system). I’ll put the whole list up…so this is telling me that they have the, “DN” stands for donated. So they have donated butternut squash by the pound. It’s dry, bulk. And I can, they’ve got 68 items, it’s only 7 cents a pound or a unit. They have dinner rolls. Donated orange juice. Now that’s a big, big item! You are only paying $6.00, $3.64 if, 520 cases (points to different items on order form). In each case there are six 59-ounce jars, and it’s a refrigerated item…Now these are all donated items, they’re donated by the USDA and they’re almost dirt cheap…Now you get into the regular wholesale items and I don’t know how they buy these, ok, or acquire them, but this is what I would order. This “14-02006,” whole apple juice, ok? So if, I’m gonna pay $18.97, I’m gonna order maybe ten cases, it’s gonna cost me $189.78. Ok? And then they bill it to me. And they have a very sophisticated system of billing…they apply your grants first, tell you how much you got left on your grant. I okay the invoice, send it across the street and it gets paid and forwarded by the people. [Staff person], he runs the back operation and he and I are gonna put in this food order because I want a delivery. The Food Bank sends you a schedule of when there are deliveries for October. In fact, I’ll get September’s [schedule] with this order. And the next time they’re delivering
in Onondaga County is on the 10th. But I’ve got more volunteers on the 14th. So I’ll get 250-270 cases of food, my bill will be about $4,000. I need somebody to unload that and put it on the shelves and then somebody’s gotta open the case, take it out of there, and put it in grocery bags. [Staff person] and some volunteers. [Staff person] is a paid member [employee], so, that’s how I, and then there’s another way to get....

As Peter demonstrated, purchasing from the Food Bank requires much specialized knowledge regarding how to read the menu. Through no fault of Peter’s, I initially found his overview of the process quite confusing. As Peter mentioned, he occasionally makes mistakes, which he seemed to partially attribute to the fact that his wife usually did the shopping at home. As someone who does shop for their own food, I still find the process confusing. The Food Bank provides training sessions to ease coordinators into this work and supplies a “cheat-sheet” to help coordinators decipher the different codes that appear on the form. Even with that assistance, it is a complicated system that someone new to the job will certainly be challenged by, unless they have a background in the food industry.

Workers can order food from the Food Bank using the online system, a telephone, or a fax machine and if enough non-TEFAP food is ordered, organizations can receive a free delivery of their food. Delivery was a feature that was cited by many of the coordinators that I spoke with as a great saver of time and labor. Many coordinators reported that they only purchased food from the Food Bank because of the delivery factor. Some also stated that the foods at the Food Bank were cheaper.

Another way to purchase foods from the Food Bank is to go to the Food Bank’s “Shopping Area” during its hours of operation. Food in the Shopping Area can be purchased for 14 cents per pound, but is ineligible for delivery. Many of the workers that I spoke with reported that the Shopping Area is much less stocked than it used to be. I
volunteered in this section of the Food Bank one day and observed the shelves to be rather empty. There were many spices and seasonings available that day; I recall a significant amount of crab bake seasoning on the shelf. The stock also included quite a lot of orecchiette pasta and a dozen or so of this item or that, but many of the shelves in the area were actually empty. Tim, a coordinator of a small pantry, talked about what it is like for him to use the Shopping Area. He uses the cash support that his church gives him for the pantry to buy foods in this way:

It’s like a warehouse, you walk in and there’s just shelves and they have… whatever is donated to them or what they can buy and you really just walk in and there are shopping carts. You take a shopping cart and you pick out whatever you want. There’s freezers, there’s a section of freezers where there’s usually some kind of meat, you know frozen pizzas or ice cream. And then there’s a refrigerated section, a lot of times there’s milk, juice, usually you don’t get too much of that, ’cause we don’t have a refrigerator but, but some things I can freeze, like juice I’ll get. And then, there’s just, it’s really, I mean just whatever happens to be on the shelf that week, lately…there’s been a lot less food than there has been just in the past two [years], as long as I’ve been doing it, three years, I’ve never seen it this low, as far as the shelves, are pretty bare. So it’s a little more challenging now, but they are still able to get some things, yeah. And so it’s really so, you just go in and fill up your cart and then it’s by weight. It’s 14 cents a pound, they charge, so then you go, there’s a scale and you go weigh it and then the worker at the Food Bank will write down the weight, say it’s usually like 200 pounds or then and I’ll go back to the office and they’ll give me an invoice, say 200 pounds equals, however that, I don’t know $30. So I’ll get an invoice and that’s how I keep track. So what happened this month is, I spent the budget and I still have two weeks left, so I just really, I just gave out less food and you know…

Tim and others reported that the Shopping Area had less food in it now than it used to. A few coordinators said that they used to shop in the area, but no longer bother. Other coordinators said that they asked the Food Bank why the area was so low and were told that the Food Bank has experienced a decline in donations. Beth, the Director of Member Programs at the Food Bank, said that in the past they put more of their larger-sized donated shipments into the area, but that they now put those donations on the order menu
when possible so that all of their programs have access to the donated foods. She said that the Shopping Area privileges the organizations closest in proximity to the Food Bank, but that they were trying to ensure that organizations in their entire 11-county service area had access to the donated foods. She did also say that overall, donations to Food Banks are down. According to Beth, the Food Bank has considered closing the Shopping Area completely and they discuss the possibility of this on an annual basis.

Not all of the coordinators do all of their shopping at the Food Bank. Some report that the Food Bank does not always have the lowest prices or the highest quality foods so they frequently shop at grocery stores or discount sellers like the Dollar Store or Aldi. Betty, for example, prefers shopping at grocery stores because the food is always “current” and is of higher quality. Her clients do not like the tomato soup that is sold at the Food Bank, so she purchases Campbell’s brand tomato soup at the grocery store instead. She believes that her clients benefit from a greater selection when she shops at the grocery store and said that contrary to popular belief, shopping at grocery stores is not more expensive than the Food Bank for many types of items. Susan, another coordinator, feels similarly and also argues that some items are cheaper at grocery stores than at the Food Bank, so she will buy those particular items at the store instead of at the Food Bank. Once, Susan compared Aldi prices to the prices at the Food Bank and took her findings to the Director of the Food Bank. She said that his response was that Aldi can sell things cheap because they grow, process, and package everything themselves. She says, “That was the end of that, nothing changes.” She seemed upset by the lack of responsiveness of the Food Bank to her complaints. On a positive note, she mentioned that hot dogs from the Food Bank are a good deal and that lately they have been receiving generous boxes of
donated meats. Since the meats are donated food, she can get meat for only 14 cents per pound and they can get up to 35 pounds each month.

Purchasing food does not necessarily take coordinators less time than trying to acquire donated food, but it is time spent differently. For many coordinators, the work of purchasing involves going to several stores in a month and transporting the food back to the organization in their own vehicles. Doing this work is a significant time commitment; it requires travel and much experience-based knowledge.

*Using donated foods.* Donations of food create different challenges for workers. Though donations from local businesses can be consistent in terms of food quality, for example, most of the bread donated is consistently day-old, the food donated to food pantries and soup kitchens is often at the end of its shelf life and must be distributed quickly. Some of the donations that are purchased at the Food Bank are also of outdated foods. One food pantry coordinator, Janice, expressed displeasure at this. She thought that using outdated foods requires more work of emergency food workers, as they are responsible for sorting through it and determining whether it is usable or not. The Food Bank is currently working on a project to educate food pantry and soup kitchen coordinators about the differences between “expiration” dates, “use by” dates, and “sell by” dates and how long food can be used after those dates pass. Learning to apply these complicated designations to foods is a challenge, especially because it is tedious work—pantries have hundreds of different food items on site at any given time. Also, a few workers mentioned that they are ideologically opposed to distributing food that they understand as being of inferior quality.
Despite the tediousness of the task, sorting through donations is a necessary part of the work. Not only do coordinators and volunteers have to look out for expired foods, but foods also arrive at organizations in other unusable states. Brother Joseph, the coordinator of a large food pantry and sandwich program, told the following story about donations from food drives such as the Postal Carrier drive:

I’m not thrilled with it but, you know, the problem with that, is the food is all outside. And some of the stuff we get is great, a lot of it is just people’s garbage, and a lot of the food is really great but it becomes garbage by the time we get it… because some dog has peed on it. Oh yeah, oh you just, people put things out in the rain or put things out and animals have come by, a skunk, or a squirrel, or, you know, some varmint from the neighborhood or whatever and things are chewed up or whatever… You never know what you’re going to get with the Postal Drive. But, I’m glad they do it and…you sift through it and you do what you can with what you got and if you have to throw stuff away, you throw stuff away but and you never know what you’re going to get. Because they just give you bins when you go there, you know, you see all the food pantry, all your neighbors are there from the other food pantries. “Oh, we’re getting 10 cases,” and “Oh, we’re getting 5 buckets,” you know, whatever. You never know what you’re going to get when you take it home and take it apart but, oh, people give you the darnedest stuff.

Brother Joseph’s story points to the negative aspects of food drives. They are unpredictable and the food is often ruined or substandard by the time it arrives at the organizations. Despite these challenges, he is still grateful to receive the food at all, though he mentions that food drives at places like the local hospital are better because the food is stored indoors and is therefore more secure. He also reported that food donated directly from individuals is unpredictable and sometimes unusable:

And you get these phone calls, “Well, my mother died and I’m cleaning out her house. I was wondering if you could use any of the food?” Some people give you great stuff and other people, why did you even bother? Why would you even bother putting this in a bag and carrying it out to your car, drive it all the way down here and come in and walk in with this bag and put it on our counter? I would have just thrown this in the trash. But people have this thing, they can’t throw it out and they would rather go through all that trouble and it’s like, why? This expired four years ago! “If you wouldn’t give it to Jesus, don’t give it to Brother Joe,” ’cause I don’t want it either. I tell people that, you know.
“If you wouldn’t give it to Jesus, don’t give it to Brother Joe.” This statement clearly illustrates his feelings on the issue of substandard donations. He suggests that donors not give their food to the pantry, if it is not good enough to give to Jesus. This was a very humorous way to talk about this very real problem—he points out an important tension in the emergency food network and the issue of donations. Donations are often unusable and not just because a “dog has peed” on it, but because the food is sometimes too old, too damaged, too difficult to use, or too catered towards a particularly uncommon food taste.

Donated foods, in short, are unpredictable. Brother Joseph talked about how he tries to control for these issues in food donations involving his church’s pantry:

When I go and talk to kids, you know, school kids, I do a lot of going around to the suburban schools and I got this box of cake mix and I always use it as an example or something like this where it’s complicated and you gotta have other ingredients and then on the top it’s got the expiration date and the expiration date is like November 1998. I’ll say, “How many of you kids were alive in November of 1998? Anybody here born before that?” You know, and the kids don’t raise their hands and you look at the teachers, “Come on ladies, you know.” They raise their hands; it’s like in two more years this cake mix will be old enough to drive. If you wouldn’t give it to Jesus, don’t give it to Brother Joe! “And anyone ever seen this in the store, did anybody make this at home? You didn’t? Why? They don’t make it anymore; this is about 20 years old.” But I got it as a donation, someone gave it to me, I’m not going to use it. (laughs)

By explaining to students what is useful to their pantry and what is not, Brother Joseph is saving time later. Other organizations also try to control their donations by giving a list of suggested donations when they organize food drives. By doing work on the front end of a food drive, these workers save themselves time and labor because they will have to sort less and will not waste as much energy transporting foods back to the food pantry that they consequently have to throw out.
Getting Food, Getting Funds

The work that is accomplished in order for food pantries and soup kitchens to have the money or food donations to operate varies much from organization to organization. For example, many of the smaller organizations do not search for external donations, relying completely on a small budget provided by their hosting church and the small amount of Hunger Prevention and Nutritional Assistance Program (HPNAP) and TEFAP support that they get through the Food Bank. Other organizations spend a significant amount of time raising funds and collecting donations. In this subsection, I discuss the different ways that food pantries and soup kitchens gather funds through fundraising activities, solicitation of donations, and grant support.

Fundraising. Workers in food pantries and soup kitchens fundraise in a variety of creative ways, including selling things for cash. Ann, a paid part-time employee at an interfaith soup kitchen, discussed a hot fudge sauce fundraiser they once conducted. They coordinated with local churches that sold $7.00 jars of fudge sauce for $1.50 of the profits from each jar. Ann’s organization made $2.00 from every jar, which eventually netted about $4,000. They would have continued the project if their source of hot fudge had not closed down. This fundraiser was successful for their organization because they only had to do the work of connecting the churches to the bottler of the hot fudge and provide them with marketing materials. It is likely that only a larger organization has the capacity to organize a fundraiser like this, but smaller organizations do sell things as well. For example, Susan, a volunteer coordinator at a small pantry reported that they sell Gertrude Hawk chocolate bars in the spring to raise money for their pantry.
Another pantry located at a church in East Syracuse is supported by a second-hand store that members of the church operate. The profits from the store, which sells mostly clothing, but also some household goods, provide enough financial support to the food pantry that they barely have to undertake other sorts of fundraising. Barb, the coordinator at that pantry, did not want the store’s earnings widely publicized, but suffice it to say that the thousands of fifty-cent items that they sell in their store every year go a long way and make their food pantry one of the best supported in the area.

The Rescue Mission, a large organization in Syracuse that has a hot meal program amongst other services, also supports its programs with 13 “Thrifty Shopper” stores that sell donated clothing and other goods. These stores are located across Central New York, but are primarily in Syracuse. According to their 2009 Annual Report, the sales of donated items in their stores made over seven million dollars for the organization during the October 2008-September 2009 fiscal year. This amount is almost double the amount that they collect in annual contributions.

Still other organizations undertake fundraising that is not as labor intensive as a second-hand clothing store, but that is still more involved than selling candy bars. For example, Nancy, a paid coordinator of a food pantry outside of Syracuse, said that their pantry was raising funds by creating and selling a cookbook that commemorated the pantry’s 25th anniversary. Another example includes when the Interreligious Food Consortium had small orange rubber bracelets made with the imprint, “Syracuse Partners Against Hunger,” following the trend of the Livestrong organization, which popularized the concept of wearing rubber bracelets for a cause. The IFC sells the bracelets for one dollar each to raise awareness for hunger and a small amount of money.
Michele, the director of the IFC mentioned that “orange” is the color associated with hunger. At the time, I was not aware that hunger had an official cause-related color. After looking into the subject further, I learned that orange is the color of many causes. According to a website of a company that manufactures these bracelets, orange is not only the color for hunger, but also the color for motorcycle safety, feral cats, cultural diversity, and leukemia, amongst others (Personalized Cause 2007). As evidenced by material products such as the rubber bracelets, in today’s fundraising climate, effective marketing is important for nonprofit organizations. The IFC bracelets market their cause by raising awareness about the issue of hunger and also raising awareness of an arm of their own organization, the working committee, Syracuse Partners Against Hunger (SPAH). This working committee helps to support the IFC through organizing events and fundraising.

Raising awareness about issues through public relations work certainly helps to increase donations to these organizations. Organizations such as food pantries and soup kitchens do varying degrees of public relations work. A large organization might have a billboard, a website, promotional materials, and other ways to publicize the services that they offer and the funds that they need to support those services. Smaller organizations may focus on more micro-level public relations work, such as making one-on-one connections with nearby churches and businesses.

Yet another example of organizational fundraising includes holding an event. Organizations make money by selling tickets to the event and then by additional fundraising that takes place at the event, such as holding a raffle or a silent auction. Planning fundraising events takes a certain amount of organizational capacity, making
this an effort that the larger capacity organizations tend to make more often. The Samaritan Center holds several event-based fundraisers a year including an annual awards banquet and silent auction, a golf tournament, and a country club style barbeque. The IFC also holds a few events a year, though they vary from year to year. In the recent past, they have organized a film showing of a student-made documentary on hunger in Syracuse. They have also participated in “Empty Bowls” events and help to organize the annual Crop Walk. The Food Bank of Central New York raises money through events; in spring 2010 they held a “Savor Syracuse” event that raised over $54,000 (FBCNY 2010c).

Holding a canned food drive is another way to gather resources. Though holding a food drive may require significantly less preparation than an event, it is still a labor-intensive undertaking. It must be properly advertised. A method of physically collecting the food must be devised. After the collection, the food must be transported to the pantry or soup kitchen. Holding a food drive is probably still too demanding for some time-strapped food pantry and soup kitchen coordinators, but some do consider it worthy of their effort. Megan, a paid coordinator at a community center-based pantry, discussed holding canned food drives to support their pantry:

We are looking for a little more creative way, we are thinking, like a canned food dance…You know, especially with our senior population, bring a can of food, they’d probably bring me mine, but (laughs). The other thing is, we’re looking to do a pizza competition in the schools and we’re gonna ask like, maybe the 5th grade class. Can you bring, we want everybody to bring in a can of corn. And the class that brings in the most cans of corn or soup…gets a pizza party. $40, $50 is a small price to pay for 1500 cans of food.
Despite the amount of time it takes to coordinate events like these, Megan seemed excited about the possibility of bringing in 1500 cans of food. She also spent much time developing ways to encourage community involvement in the work of the organization.

Some coordinators do not organize events, food drives, or even solicit food donations. At least four of the coordinators that I spoke with did not fundraise at all; two of the four expressed interest in fundraising but had not tried it yet. I surmise that these coordinators, both of whom ran food pantries almost entirely by themselves, may have been too busy or lacked the necessary help to successfully organize an event or food drive.

Other organizations focus on getting funds from their supporters by building relationships with their donors through the mail. Some organizations keep a mailing list of supporters and send out monthly or quarterly newsletters that include information about their current needs and a donation envelope. Many also conduct letter-based annual appeal fundraisers. One staff person at an organization told me that they use a software program called “GiftWorks” that helps them keep track of donations over time and also the affiliations of their donors, which helps them to “discover” new circles of potential donors.

_Soliciting and receiving food donations from businesses._ Another method of acquiring donations is to solicit them from local businesses and grocery stores. A relatively large number of the local food pantries and soup kitchens receive donations of bread and desserts from restaurants and bakeries like Panera Bread. Others receive regular donations of perishable foods from Wegman’s, Price Chopper, or NoJaim’s. Many of the
relationships that exist between these stores and organizations were established many years ago.

The issue of soliciting nonfood items such as plastic bags from local businesses was an ongoing task for a few of the pantries that I visited. As much as food pantries need food to give away, they also need something to put the food in. Peter, the director of a large, religiously affiliated organization that has a food pantry and a weekly breakfast program made the process of solicitation sound easy:

We take a paper bag and put it inside a [plastic] bag from Wegman’s ‘cause it has handles and our people, a lot of them are walking here to get groceries and that was the sturdiest bag that we found. Wegman’s has been extremely generous to this community and has given over six million dollars a year to our Diocese in food… I did not ask them directly for the bags, I went to the manufacturer of the bags. I looked them up on the Internet, a company out of California, they told me to call their salesman in… Rochester. I called him and he says, “What do you need?” I said, I told him just what I told you [Wegman’s bags are the sturdiest] and he sent me 4,500 bags and said when I run out, call him and he’ll send me more.

Peter seemed very pleased with the ease at which he established this relationship and also applied this confidence to other donations that he solicited.

In contrast to Peter’s experience, other coordinators discussed difficulties in getting donations from businesses. Betty, a coordinator of a large food pantry, worried about the strain on local businesses if all the local pantries were asking too much of a few businesses:

[Asking for donations puts the] businesses in a bad position. If everybody goes, let’s say to Central Restaurant or to Maine’s, and says, “Can you donate a box?”… I mean if everybody did that, I mean what business? And who do they decide? “Oh yes, you can and you can’t” (points). I mean it just, it puts a burden, it spreads that burden out into the community, yes, but you know, does that mean higher prices for consumers? And it just goes on and on.
Betty was uncomfortable putting the “burden” of supplying plastic bags to all of the pantries in town onto local businesses. She also discussed difficulty in getting other donations from local businesses and the issue of competition between pantries for donations. Pantries that find local businesses to support them do this in an environment where many local businesses have longstanding relationships with other pantries and are not interested in establishing any new donation-based relationships.

*Relationships with churches and personal support.* Food pantries located in churches with active congregations have much support to draw upon. Churches with pantries often take up collections of food and cash support during services. Several pantry workers mentioned that they post notices in church bulletins or make verbal announcements during services when they need particular items. Other pantries receive donations through memorial funds set up when someone connected to the church dies or through other church-related events. Kathy told this story about getting donations:

> We did have this one couple came in, and they had gotten married, this was about a year ago and her mother, or his mother had worked down here for quite a while and he said that when they had their wedding reception, they asked people, instead of giving them gifts, if they would bring food in their mother’s name, for their mother’s food pantry that she had worked for so many years. And they did and then they brought it into us…

Pantries that are able to take advantage of the opportunities that a church affiliation provides may have a steadier supply of resources than those that do not.

Churches support the food pantries and soup kitchens that they house in other ways as well. Emma’s church supports their church’s food pantry and soup kitchen:

> If it wasn’t for the church, we would not be here…We burn the lights, there’s the gas, there’s the water and just the wear of the building, opening and closing and everything else. So, yes, the church is an integral part because if it wasn’t for the church there would not be an outreach ministry so we work hand-in-hand. Okay,
just like when I did an event here the family was very generous. So half went to the church and half went to the outreach account, so we just wash each other’s hands, you know?

The pastor of Emma’s church also acts as an advisor. Several pantry coordinators mentioned that they talk with their church leadership for guidance and help in making decisions. One large church-based pantry even has an advisory board in place to help counsel the coordinator. The assistance that these organizations receive through their relationships with their host churches is essential to their survival.

In addition to financial, emotional, and other types of support, churches also serve as a recruitment site for volunteer labor. All of the coordinators at church-based organizations, in the sample, were members of the congregations that hosted the pantry or soup kitchen. Most of the other volunteers working at these organizations also came from the congregation.

Church-based organizations that are well networked also frequently receive food donations from other churches in the area. Many of the pantries located in the city have support from a suburban congregation that has “adopted” their pantry as a project that they support through food and cash assistance. Some pantries had as many as six different churches that donated food or money to them.

Personal support by the coordinators is another way that work gets done in the local system. Bernie said that not only does the church help them out financially when they need it, but that the four co-coordinators of their pantry give personal money to support the pantry or soup kitchen during a time of need:

[Something] that has become a burden on our hearts, to help, and there has been many times, we have gone in our own pockets, and got food and whatnot, because we want to serve in a variety of things…And the church has been very thoughtful in that also, from week to week, when we need certain things, you know, we ran
out of this, we run out of that. They come through; they help out as much as they possibly can. You know, I wish we had, we were a megachurch with 20,000 members and half of them were doctors and lawyers (laughs). But it’s not that church. But, where God steps in and you’re doing something good for him, he steps in to, and he will help us, and that’s been happening, we’ve been making it.

Other workers also talked about giving personal funds to their organization. Two coordinators who each run small soup kitchens discussed regularly buying the food that they need out of their own pockets. One paid staff person at a large soup kitchen receives a part-time salary but does full-time work. It seems that many of the paid coordinators in the emergency food network are doing more work than they are paid for, demonstrating their strong commitments to their work.

*Grants and paperwork.* Looking for, applying for, and being awarded a grant is another way that workers in food pantries and soup kitchens get resources for their organizations. The types and number of grants that organizations have the capacity to apply for varies considerably between organizations and is certainly connected to the number of staff that they have and the level of professionalization at that organization. Also, larger and more professionalized organizations with multiple programs are more likely to have grants unrelated to emergency food that still help support food pantries and soup kitchens indirectly.

The majority of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse receive at least one grant, the HPNAP grant that is administered by the Food Bank and funded by the New York State Department of Health’s Division of Nutrition. Applying for the annual HPNAP grant through the Food Bank is one of the few sources of regular paperwork for local food pantries and soup kitchens. Ed said,
Every year I have to fill out a form for HPNAP, if you don’t fill out the form properly, the most you’re gonna get is the thousand dollars, so you have to take your time and it usually takes about two hours to fill out, but we send it in to the Food Bank and then the Food Bank takes care of it...

Two hours is not a significant amount of time to dedicate to this application given the amount of funding that this grant brings to many organizations in the local network. Tim also discussed the application:

Well, every [year], they send out an application and it’s sometime early in the year and it’s…due, I think it’s due in June or July, I can’t remember…I just basically fill out, it’s a questionnaire about your hours, who you provide food for and then I think. Well, what I’ve heard is from them, that basically they look at the number of people, ’cause every month I have to fill out a form that says how many people I gave food to, how many meals it worked out to. And I think what they do is take those numbers and then they give the grant… On my end, I really just fill out the form, pass it in, and then in a couple weeks, then they let me know and they send me a letter saying you’ve received whatever. And the first year, I applied for that freezer, that freezer and some money also. And the last two years I’ve just applied for the monetary grant…Yeah, it’s very basic. There is space where you can explain things, if you want to, I usually don’t write too much. But, yeah it’s pretty basic, basic questions.

Tim feels that the application is not too much work, though successfully filling it out does require accurate records and being able to follow directions and convey basic information about the practices of your organization.

HPNAP primarily provides support for purchasing food by way of a line of credit for a certain amount of dollars to be spent on food available for purchase at the Food Bank. HPNAP also provides support for equipment and operations, such as shelving, paper plates, staff salary, or gas reimbursement for trips to the Food Bank. Most food pantries and soup kitchens receive at least a minimum amount of food support, which is around $100 to $200. Fewer organizations receive operation and equipment support, for which there is a separate application that requires more information and justifications than the food support application. An organization does not have to be a member of the
Food Bank to apply for HPNAP support, but according to Beth at the Food Bank, an organization must:

[Be] open for 6 continuous months, you have to have a 501c3, you need to meet the guidelines of a food pantry, soup kitchen, or a shelter, you know those types of things, you know, serving the majority of people that are low-income.

Through the HPNAP application and review committee process, the Food Bank re-articulates what they consider to be “best practices” for food pantries and soup kitchens. Many of the questions on the application ask specifically about these practices. For food pantries and soup kitchens, the work of meeting the Food Bank’s best practices is probably more intensive than the work of filling out the application or the monthly reporting requirements that accompany the HPNAP grant.

Though no other grants are as widely used by workers in food pantries and soup kitchens in New York as the HPNAP grant is, some organizations do receive grant support from other sources. A few of the organizations receive a few hundred dollars a year by participating in a fundraising challenge administered by the Feinstein Foundation. The Feinstein Foundation distributes one million dollars to food pantries and soup kitchens every year. The allotment for each organization is dependent on the amount of money and food that the organization raises during a special two-month fundraising drive. Organizations who raise more money receive a bigger portion of the one million dollars. Cathy, a coordinator at a church-based pantry, talked about her experiences applying for the Feinstein Foundation support—she said that they got about $400 that year for their participation but that they had misunderstood the “challenge” by mistaking it for a fund-matching challenge. She said that the reporting and application process were light, however, so it was still worth participating.
A few of the larger organizations received funding from the United Way. The local branch of the United Way focuses on different “Vision Areas” during their funding cycle, one of which includes programs designated as part of the “Safety Net.” One of the five outcomes of the “Safety Net Vision Area” is that “Individuals/families in need of food receive assistance.” During the 2008 to 2011 funding cycle, seven organizations received funds under that outcome (United Way 2008). According to the report, a food pantry program at the Dunbar Center was allocated $11,598 of support. Emergency and Practical Assistance Services houses the food pantry at the Salvation Army and received $47,430 of support. The Samaritan Center received $33,480 for their hot meal program.

Applying for a United Way grant is a more involved process than applying for the HPNAP grant, which may explain the fact that it is the mostly larger capacity organizations or multi-program agencies that apply for and receive this funding. Receiving United Way funding creates additional reporting for organizations, particularly regarding client demographics.

Other local foundations do occasionally support food pantries or soup kitchens, if their programs fit the visions and goals of the particular foundation. The privately-run Gifford Foundation awards capacity-building grants to local nonprofit organizations and though they do not typically allocate these to places like church-based food pantries, some of the larger organizations, especially the ones with multiple programs can apply for a grant of this type. The Gifford Foundation has been involved with food justice projects over the past few years, as well. A recent initiative at the Gifford Foundation is the “Mobile Market,” which is a roving vehicle that travels the Southside of Syracuse with fresh produce for sale. They view this project as addressing the issue of fresh food
accessibility in the Southside section of Syracuse. Also, the Gifford Foundation partially funded Syracuse University’s Community Geographer position when it was first created. The Community Geographer works on many different community projects involving Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping to address issues of space and inequality in Syracuse. One of the Community Geographer’s first projects was the completion of a large-scale mapping project of food pantries and soup kitchens in the Syracuse area (see Appendix D for an example of one of the food pantry maps produced for this project). This project involved a number of local organizations and is understood in the local community to be one of the greatest accomplishments of the now defunct group, the Syracuse Hunger Project.

The Community Foundation is a local public foundation that also occasionally awards grants to local organizations in the emergency food network that fit its goals. In 2008, the Samaritan Center was awarded $22,000 to “support the expansion of its breakfast meal program” (CNYCF 2008). The Community Foundation also partially funded the Community Geographer position at Syracuse University and has given start-up money to projects such as a farmers’ market in a low-income neighborhood.

The Allyn Foundation is a family-based, private foundation located in Skaneateles, New York. They also regularly award funds to organizations doing emergency food work in Syracuse. The Allyn Foundation has provided start-up funding for organizations in the area and helped to fund the Samaritan Center early in its history. Meg, the Executive Director of the Foundation, stated that they allocate more operations support to organizations such as the Samaritan Center than some of the other local foundations. According to Meg, though the Allyn Foundation does regularly support
organizations like the Samaritan Center, the Rescue Mission and the Food Bank, they
tend not to get involved with funding church-based pantries. They have, however, been
involved with creating a stronger network of pantries in Cayuga County and pushed a
“case management” approach in those pantries because, “the pantry system as we know
it, and soup kitchen as we know it, is not the best model for ensuring that people are not
hungry…we need more food stamps.” Meg believes that pantries need to collect better
data so that they can effectively lobby for more funds in the local area. She said that the
Allyn Foundation is also more likely to support food pantries tied to community centers
because they have more consistent hours and more services available for their clients.

The paperwork required at food pantries and soup kitchens varies by the amount
and type of outside funding that an organization applies for and receives. Most of the
organizations that were on the small to medium end of the capacity spectrum completed
very little paperwork. Given the literature on reporting and funding requirements, this
finding was a surprise. All of the programs were members of the Food Bank of Central
New York and therefore were responsible for keeping track of their monthly service
numbers and sending those in once a month. This was the only outside reporting required
of many of the organizations. Though it requires minimal work to do this reporting, it is
of large consequence as it helps the Food Bank staff determine the “good-standing” of
programs and how much grant support they will receive from the annual Hunger
Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) allocation. Programs are also
required to keep records of food purchases and of course, client records. Tim talked about
what his reporting was like:

Well, let’s see, for the Food Bank, I have to fill out the monthly, this is what I fill
out. I have to tell them what, how many people I served, and break it down into
children, adults, number of households, and total meals. And so, that’s what I have to do, and I believe that’s for the USDA. But, I have to fill this out, yeah every month and report this. That does affect my grant, I think this is what they go by. And so, there is a, I have to turn in by the 10th of next month. I have to send in October’s one, by the 10th of November. So that’s really the only paperwork that I have to do for the Food Bank.

He does not have to complete any formal reporting to the church, which financially supports the pantry, but his work in the food pantry is overseen by a church elder who he informally keeps up to date on what is happening.

Some food pantries and soup kitchens in the area will probably never gain the capacity and staff to apply for funding outside of the HPNAP grant. A few coordinators mentioned that the task of writing grants was too difficult, that it was like writing in “another language.” Even large agencies that have professional staff still divide up the work of grant writing and reporting because it is such a large task. Two of the agency-based pantry coordinators mentioned that they provided the data for their agencies’ grant applications to their directors, who did the actual work of writing the grant. Both of these coordinators said that without the extra help, they would not be able to write a strong application.

Grant writing itself has become a professional skill, so it should be of no surprise that many of the members of this mostly volunteer workforce do not have the skills or time necessary to complete a successful grant application. Other than the HPNAP grant, which does have a huge impact on the everyday operations of these organizations, no other grant source seems to widely affect the majority of organizations in the local network. Some scholarly work suggests that as organizations acquire more external funding, they are more susceptible to mission drift and becoming overburdened by paperwork. In some ways, the lack of external support available for the emergency food
network may have protected these organizations from having to deal with the negative aspects of external support. But at the same time, organizations in the local network are always working to keep the shelves full—a task that is virtually impossible for them if they are without adequate funding, which many of them are.

Relationships with other organizations. In addition to these other sources, donations and support are accessed through organizational involvement with the Interreligious Food Consortium (IFC) and the Food Bank. The IFC organizes several annual events and food drives in the community each year. For example, they coordinate the local Postal Carrier food drive when it occurs and are charged with the task of distributing the food collected by the postal carriers to the individual food pantries. The Food Bank also receives donations of food that gets rerouted to the food pantries and soup kitchens for the cost of a “shared maintenance fee” of 14 cents per pound of food.

Funds provided by the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) also support food pantries and soup kitchens and are funneled through the IFC and the Food Bank. According to the “Operating Principles” of the EFSP, EFSP funding should not be used as seed money for new programs, but rather to “supplement and expand current available resources” (EFSNBP 2010). Interestingly, the Operating Principles also state that the focus of EFSP should be on “emergency” not “structural” programs. The use of this language is notable given the debate on the institutionalization of organizations like food pantries into the broader safety net.

EFSP funds are distributed to local organizations through a Board that includes members of the community and representatives from several local agencies that do anti-hunger work. Each year the Board determines how much money to allocate to what type
of funding and then they determine how the money will be allocated within categories. In Onondaga County, the IFC receives a small portion of the food support money to allocate in the form of cash support to pantries. The Food Bank receives the majority of the money marked for emergency food support and uses this money to purchase wholesale food and assemble “Community Supported Shipments” or supplemental standardized food packages for the pantries. Qualified pantries can schedule up to four supplemental food package deliveries per year.

TEFAP foods are also funneled through the Food Bank to the food pantries and are probably the steadiest form of “free” food that pantries acquire. Pantries are allocated a certain number of cases of TEFAP foods based on the number of people they serve a month and local poverty statistics. All of the pantry coordinators in the sample took advantage of the TEFAP foods as much as possible.

Maximizing Strategies

Workers in food pantries and soup kitchens have developed strategies to navigate the challenges of acquiring and maximizing resources. “Stretching” resources is one way that coordinators in these organizations maximize their organizational resources. Coordinators also engage in networking and share resources with other organizations.

Stretching dollars. Stretching dollars involves a number of creative strategies that coordinators use to maximize resources. Most of the workers are invested in “maximizing their dollars” in some way. The work around strategizing to do this seems significant in their daily work and materializes in a few different ways. Some coordinators discussed shopping to look for the best deals at local grocery stores or discount sellers. Others use
coupons to acquire the best deals. For example, Susan reported that she is as “frugal” with her money as possible. She practices “couponing” and frequently finds herself sitting on the floor at home, cutting out coupons. Members of her church and a neighboring church also save coupons for her. She said that at the local Dollar Store, you can take coupons in for one dollar off and get a whole tube of toothpaste for free. Sometimes she uses multiple coupons at a time. One time, she received 40 rolls of toilet paper for free with one-dollar coupons because the rolls were 89 cents each. The store managers do not mind that she uses her coupons in that way because the managers know that she works at the pantry and are “nice about it.”

Other workers maximize their resources by regularly searching through all of the store advertising circulars that come inside of the local newspaper. Susan said that she does this so that she can get “the biggest bang for her buck.” Janice also searches the local stores for the best deals and prefers to buy her food wherever it is cheapest, which is sometimes at the Food Bank, but sometimes not.

Other coordinators maximize their resources by using a combination of strategies, including shopping at several different locations each month. Arnie, a volunteer who does the shopping for one large pantry discussed how he makes decisions on where to shop:

Obviously we want to try to support our neighborhood grocer, who is very, very important to that neighborhood and as a dear friend to [the church] as a community and certainly a supporter of the food pantry. They deliver, which is kind of important. It minimizes the impact on our all-volunteer or mostly volunteer organization. But yet Wegman’s and the Food Bank and Nojaim’s can’t beat Aldi’s when it comes to frozen concentrated juice. So I go to Aldi’s for that. But I do, again, trying to be a good steward of what’s donated to us or granted to us, I’m trying to maximize. I come from a business background, so I kind of look at this piece from a business perspective, unlike others, I think that again, it makes our pantry a little more unique and has a resource that others don’t have… it’s very transparent, I’d have no problem with anyone tagging along or seeing what I do and comparing with what others do and they’ll see that we get a pretty good
bang for our buck… And so I dedicate time resource of my own to go, to maximize that same dollar by shopping at two or three different places. It’s a choice that I make and I’ve been able to sustain.

By mentioning their goal of supporting a neighborhood business, Arnie’s comments illustrate yet another way that organizations decide where to shop. This form of reciprocation gives them opportunities for special sales on food. Arnie, like Janice, also goes where items are the cheapest. He credits his skill at this to his seven years of purchasing practice and also to his personal background in the business sector. All of this shopping around seems like a large time investment. Arnie reflected,

I don’t have a set number of hours that I devote to it or certain days of the week, it just kinda ebbs and flows. This week, just to use this past week as an example. So I spent three hours yesterday on food pantry matters. Having shopped at Aldi’s and then had a delivery or pickup at Wegman’s and then while at Wegman’s we have, they gave us perishables they donate every Saturday, this is brand new, this is the first time I’ve done it. But every Saturday we can go there and pick up perishable items that are near or just past expiration date that are still good…. And so I was part of that yesterday when we got back to the pantry, there was inventory work to do, go through stuff, some of it was not good, we have to go through it and throw out what’s not good. While we were there, someone else came to donate vegetables. We helped them unload their truck. I mean it was a three-hour morning…

Arnie travels for his full-time job, so he does much of this work on the weekend. As a member of the congregation connected to the pantry, he is a dedicated volunteer and has been keeping track of their accounts and doing the shopping for this pantry for many years.

Many coordinators view finding good deals as part of their job. They continually look for sales, cut coupons, and try to take advantage of as many free services as possible. Margaret talked about “going over the [Food Bank] menu with a fine-tooth comb” so that she was able to get the most food for the least amount of money. Allison
also takes this part of her job seriously and credits the Food Bank’s online ordering system with facilitating her success. She reflected,

And when I first started here, the volunteer was doing the ordering … you know, looking at it every two weeks and just placing kind of the same orders: apple juice and cereal and you know, just the same four or five things. And now because I can just go on [to the online ordering system]… I go on there every day, I can update every day up until three days before, so I’m constantly maximizing, because there’s new free stuff put on there all the time… So like, I just got a case of Fruit Loops for $2.50… Whereas you know, it’s a box at the store… so I really maximize and I think that’s why we don’t run out of food now. Because of the online ordering.

By maximizing resources, coordinators are able to acquire more food to distribute, an effect that benefits their clients and looks favorable to funders and supporters of the organization.

*Sharing resources and creating a supportive network.* Much networking and sharing happens between organizations in Syracuse’s emergency food network. Not all food pantries and soup kitchens “share,” but many Syracuse organizations do, particularly the larger organizations. Food pantry and soup kitchen coordinators have the opportunity to meet, network, and share strategies regularly at meetings held by the Food Bank and the IFC. Members of the Emergency Food/Financial Assistance (EFA) network seem particularly well connected to each other and have additional meetings on a monthly basis.

Participating in a network provides several benefits for coordinators. Margaret, a paid pantry coordinator at a community center discussed the emotional benefits of attending meetings:

Sometimes, [I] feel like I’m in my own world here, that’s why I like the EFA… We’re really good friends, the network system and we’re really close, I
look forward to the meetings, some meetings I don’t want to go to, I always look forward to this, because it’s just like wow, you did? And this? Oh wow!

She continued, commenting on the support she gets from the staff at the IFC:

We work very well. It’s Michele and Dawn…they’re awesome, we’re really good friends, you know and we work well together…they can help and then …we [the EFA network] meet once a month so we can air our concerns or you know, about other, it’s just really, it’s great… Yeah, I mean it’s great, because if we have certain things that we’re unhappy with or whatever we can discuss it and feel that it’s a safe place to express our concerns.

Margaret’s comments demonstrate the value she places on having a supportive environment to talk about her work at the pantry. She experiences the EFA network meetings as places of support where concerns are expressed and others can offer shared experience.

Attending meetings also helps coordinators stay on top of local programs and benefits that can be passed on to the clients. Peter, a paid coordinator at an agency, attends not only the meetings held by the Food Bank and IFC for information, but also meetings held by the local Homeless Taskforce. Margaret also finds informational benefits to the meetings and said:

My goal here is to help people…that’s what I’m here for, it’s like if I’m not off, I’m going to meetings or whatever… I like to know, I like to keep on top of things and know what’s going on. So, it does help.

Some of the organizations that have presented at the local EFA meetings include National Grid, the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), and the Department of Social Services. Many of the program coordinators and also the Food Bank view having this information and dispensing it as one way to reduce demand on local organizations and thereby “stretch” resources.
Being involved in the network brings resource related benefits as well. Members of the IFC can call Michele anytime to see if she has any food available for pantries. Several coordinators mentioned doing this when they thought their pantry shelves were getting too low. Margaret mentioned that she calls Michele at the IFC to request some extra help in the form of food when she needs it. The IFC maintains a small pantry for these purposes. Margaret reflected, “They were a real help, they gave us the food to at least hold us over until I can get a delivery.”

Regular networking also gives coordinators a chance to share resources. Margaret said that the coordinators regularly let each other know if they have extra items like diapers or clothing available. Some excess food items are also passed back and forth. Another way that resources are shared happens when one coordinator calls another to find resources for their clients. Allison commented,

I mean we all meet together and talk about the new trends and things… This agency itself, I mean, maybe not just the pantry, but this agency has collaborations all over this County. So we do better, you know? We want to work together with people, so we do better when we do projects together, so as a whole; we’re connected with everybody… Just the pantry though, I mean, we have good relationships, I mean we all share. If someone says, I ran out of meat, you know, they’ll just call [staff person] and say, I gave my client everything else, but I don’t have any meat, could you give them meat? And that happens all the time.

Allison and others agreed that it is a benefit to be connected to other organizations and that these types of relationships sometimes offer material benefits like more food.

Sharing in the community does not just take place by way of meetings, though. It is also regularly done between organizations that have a longstanding relationship with each other outside of the meetings. Familiarity with other local organizations and programs is common throughout the local network, perhaps because of the information shared at the various meetings. The larger organizations seem particularly engaged in
regular sharing with other large organizations. Peter told two stories about sharing, once as the giver and once as the recipient:

We used to collect food [from] the Wegman’s on Onondaga Boulevard, [who] gives to a charity almost every day and our [day] was a Saturday and I used to get a lot of fresh fruits and sometimes milk, but I’m never open ’til Tuesday and I was worried about it turning, cause you know, they’re getting rid of it because it’s close to expiration. So St. Lucy’s has a food pantry that is open on Sundays and it’s a client choice food pantry… So I turned that collection over to them, we all network and help one another… I just got a call from the Salvation Army…she said… “We’re having our annual coat drive and we will…end up with a number of coats for women and children,” she said, “you can come, send someone.” I said, “Well I happen to have an abundance of men’s coats that I got from an industry, so you can send the men over to us.” So that’s how it works, you know.

Peter also spoke about how their pantry was connected to additional resources by way of the Syracuse University Library’s “Food for Fines” Amnesty Day:

Now, how does that happen?... Well, apparently a parishioner of ours worked at the library… And whoever came up with the idea, she said, “Well, I know a perfect place to go.” That is why you want publicity, you want all of the parishioners to know what you do, you want the community to know because if someone decides that they’ve got extra money to give away or they want to start something with their business to help an organization, you want them to think of you. And feeding the poor and the hungry is always on everyone’s mind.

Brother Joe, a coordinator at a large church-based program also commented that their food pantry has several sharing-based relationships:

We have a…bunch of other places that help us out with different stuff and then sometimes other food pantries will get too much and they’ll give stuff to us and when we get too much, we give it to other food pantries or other soup kitchens or whatever. And sometimes people will come to us and say I’ve got these big, big bins of baked beans or whatever and it’s like the best place to go would be to take it right to the Salvation Army or the Samaritan Center ’cause they feed lots of people and we’d have to repackage all that and we’re really not supposed to, so. You try to direct people, you know, I’ve got 6,000 dinner rolls, okay, well we can take a few but, you know, [the] Rescue Mission they serve dinner every day. They can use them there easier than we could, so…The other neighboring food pantries, you know, and we get together for meetings and things like that periodically, but then also like I said, if something’s more appropriate for a soup kitchen, I’ll call Rescue Mission or somebody. Or we’ll drop the stuff off for them or whatever. We have a van.
Evelyn also has a regular sharing relationship established with another organization and talked about sharing and also trading items back and forth. The organization that Evelyn’s organization shares with provides them with extra storage space when they need it:

We tag team with [agency]…we do a lot of trading of, like if I get 80,000 cases of Twix bars, you know, we keep 10, we give them, you know what I mean? So there’s a lot of that sort of trading. When we get large donations of meat that need to be refrigerated, because our capacity is so limited downstairs, we can store stuff at [agency]… And then go over and kind of access it, as we need to. When we get extra [donated] bread, we’ll take it to [agency] or [another agency], or [another agency], [another agency], any of those sorts of things, [another agency], we do a lot of kind of trading with their day centers, if we have extra stuff that we need to kind of pass around.

Sharing happens not only between food pantries and soup kitchens, but also between food pantries, soup kitchens, and other types of organizations such as churches. Several of the larger organizations have a network of unaffiliated churches that regularly conduct food and money drives for them. Emma, a coordinator of a church-based pantry and soup kitchen, has relationships with several churches:

Once a month there’s a suburban, there’s a church in North Syracuse who brings a lot of canned goods down…and other things that they have available. During Thanksgiving there’s a church out in Liverpool who goes to Price Chopper and gets gift certificates so that the client can go and they want to purchase a turkey that will $10 or $20 dollars go towards the purchase of the turkey and then we will give them the canned goods and the things that go to make a meal for Thanksgiving… Actually there’s about five who does on a monthly basis and we just have one that does coming up to Thanksgiving and Christmas, okay, that’s their forte to do that. But, the other churches they come in every first Sunday, there’s so much canned goods, pasta, rice and stuff that they bring here. This is what they do during the month and then the first of the month they brings it down here.

Emma said that there is no particular church denomination that supports them the most:

It’s [an] inter-faith thing, because hunger affects all, okay…and that’s what this ministry is all about, crossing the barriers. You don’t look at a particular color of
a person. You’re trying to eliminate hunger, you know, we cannot completely eliminate but we sure can take a bite of hunger…

Sharing resources did indeed seem to be a way that organizations assist each other in their common goal of “taking a bite of hunger.”

THE WORK OF DISTRIBUTING FOOD

The amount of resources that an organization has access to has a large effect on the services provided. Organizations in the local network vary widely in terms of their capacities to distribute foods. Of course, there are some commonalities between organizations; for example, perhaps obviously, their work revolves around the distribution of food, as this is the core mission of these organizations.

Soap Kitchens

At soup kitchens, much of the work that must be completed in order to distribute foods revolves around planning menus, ordering food, and assessing donations that are in stock. Then, of course, is the actual cooking and serving of food, which is no small undertaking, given that some soup kitchens in Syracuse serve 200 to 400 people per day. Even the smallest soup kitchen I visited, which serves about 20 youth on a weekly basis, requires much work to organize, prepare, and serve the meals. The coordinator at that church-based soup kitchen did most of the preparation herself on the morning of the meal and had only a few volunteers assist her during the meal service. This is in sharp contrast to the larger organizations that could rely on as many as 15 people to complete the different steps of meal preparation on a daily basis.

One church-based program with a pantry and a soup kitchen serves about 60 people every other week and has a team of four co-coordinators. Bernie explained how he
and the other three coordinators share the labor of running the program, including getting 
the food, planning the meals, and preparing food:

So, you know, we practice, balance off each other. Ok, since you are doing that, 
I’ll do this, and it works out. It works out. So but together, they all are working 
together. Beatrice goes out and she also picks up pastries and bread and she brings 
them to the church. Ok, that’s one of things that she does. Gloria and Elizabeth 
are the ones that will go down to the Food Bank and fill out an order of things that 
we need. Ok, if there’s any food shopping, they’re basically the ones that go 
ahead and do that. But everything comes in, we’re all in the pantry stacking and 
stocking up everything, ok? But it’s really, soup kitchen, what we do, since we all 
cook. One of us is the head chef and the others become sous chefs, so that the one 
person is running the kitchen and the way that they want to do it, we just follow. 
Ok, when it’s my turn, I do it the way I want to do it, and they become my 
assistant, and that sort of thing. And that works out well. Each one plan their own 
menu of what they want to do. We fix that, so everything we do, we work 
together, and it’s, so far it’s really good. We’ve been doing it for now, about how 
long, four years (yells to another volunteer)? Yeah, yeah, it works out good.

Their system of sharing labor seems to work well for this organization. None of the other 
church-based coordinators reported having as much support as Bernie and his co-
coordinators. Sharing labor with others and delegating tasks are strategies that 
coordinators use to decrease the burden on themselves, but this is only possible when a 
program has enough volunteers to allow for sharing the responsibilities.

The agency-based organization where Peter works runs a weekly breakfast 
program that is entirely volunteer run and supported. Peter said that as the coordinator he 
stays out of the way of the breakfast volunteers who have been running the program 
independently for years. The volunteers coordinate every part of the meal planning, 
including deciding on a menu and purchasing the foods or finding donations with which 
to purchase the foods. This leaves Peter more time to run the other parts of the 
organization, which include one of the larger food pantries in Syracuse.
The two large, nonprofit soup kitchens in Syracuse rely on volunteers and paid staff to distribute the food. Generally speaking, the paid staff coordinates the meal planning, ordering, and food preparation, and the volunteers come in to serve the meal and clean up, though volunteers sometimes help prepare the meal as well. One of these organizations serves one to two meals per day, depending on the day, and serves about 200 people per day during their dinner meal. This organization has a paid staff of about seven employees and also relies on a considerable volunteer base to do the work of serving the meals. On Saturdays and Sundays, they have volunteer groups provide and serve the food. An even larger soup kitchen in Syracuse serves three meals a day to over 100 people at every meal and is part of an organization with multiple services or programs and almost 200 paid employees across their entire organization. A small percentage of those employees are involved in the meal program, which is a large undertaking for staff and volunteers.

The procedure for getting a meal appears less formalized at smaller soup kitchens than at the larger ones. At smaller soup kitchens, typically anyone who wants a meal has to come, get a plate, find a place at a table, and eat. The larger soup kitchens have workers or volunteers that distribute tickets to persons wanting a meal, either at the front of the cafeteria or in a nearby building. The tickets are distributed to anyone who wants one and are collected by another worker or volunteer who keeps an accurate count of the number of people coming through the line. At one organization, the ticket taker records the approximate age group of the person getting a meal; this information is used to report back to one of their funders. After getting a ticket, guests generally have to wait in line for 5 to 20 minutes before reaching the cafeteria-style line where the food is distributed.
Volunteers typically serve the food and are directed by paid staff as to what to do and how much to apportion.

Because of the large numbers of people coming through the lines to get food, the process of serving the food is highly compartmentalized. One volunteer scoops out vegetables, one distributes the meat, another gives out the bread, and so on for the salad, dessert, utensils, and beverages. It functions as a cafeteria line, similar to those found in a school setting. Some volunteers wash dishes or wipe off tables. There are usually rules posted in the room regarding how much food a person can get and in what combinations. Sometimes, second portions are distributed if the staff deem that there is enough food. Generally, guests have a 60-minute window to wait in line, eat their food, and possibly get a second portion. This creates an atmosphere that feels a bit hurried, but allows workers to get all of their work done during a semi-typical, nine-to-five workday.

Food Pantries

At food pantries, the procedure for getting food from the guest’s perspective is typically more complex, partially due to a greater need on the part of food pantries to document and regulate who they distribute food to. Only two pantries reported having no formalized client intake or food distribution procedures. At those pantries, people who need food show up, wait in line, and receive food without having to fill out any forms or show any identification. Isabel, the coordinator of one of those two pantries thought that the requirement to show identification at pantries was “crazy.” She thought that if “people were hungry, they’re hungry” and that they should be able to get food whenever it was available.
In contrast to the two pantries that do not require any documentation from their clients, the rest of the food pantries use a formalized intake process that is quite standard across the system because the Food Bank has strongly encouraged pantries to use a standardized intake form that they provide. Appendix E contains a copy of the Intake Form. Most local pantries use this form and the pantries that do not use it use a form that is quite similar, perhaps with an added question or two. Here is a brief step-by-step overview of what the process of getting food at a food pantry is like:

1. Learn about the pantry from a source such as the Food Bank or a sign or a person
2. Find the pantry address and entrance
3. Enter food pantry (often have to walk down a set of stairs)
4. Wait in line by standing or sitting on a bench or chair
5. Meet with intake worker
6. Give personal information to intake worker for them to record on form or if it is your second visit, go over intake form information to make sure it is still correct
7. Show documentation such as a driver’s licenses, birth certificates, social security cards, bills to prove that you are who you say you are and that you live where you say you live; you must do this for everyone you state is in your household
8. Possibly wait in line again for your turn to receive food
9. Receive food through one of the following procedures:
a. Shopping for it by looking at items sorted by food group and available on shelf
b. Shopping for it by looking at items written on a list
c. Getting a pre-made bag
d. Getting a pre-made bag and getting to make substitutions if there is something in it that you don’t like
e. Getting a pre-made bag and adding extra’s to it, like cake mix or salad dressing

10. Transport food home (often three to five heavy bags)

The personal information that clients are requested to give includes:

- The names of all adults in the household, their dates of birth, and their ages
- The names of all children in the household, their dates of birth, and their ages
- Address
- Phone number
- School district
- Whether the client has access to a stove, a refrigerator, and/or a microwave
- Whether the client is receiving Food Stamps, WIC, HEAP, Unemployment, Disability, SSI, Public Assistance, or Free Reduced Lunch
- Affirmation that annual household income is below 185% of current U.S. poverty line

There is also space for additional comments and for the intake worker to indicate that they made a referral to Food Stamps, WIC, HEAP, or Health Insurance. On the back of the form, the client must certify their income eligibility by signing that their household
income is below 185% of the U.S. poverty line. This is required by the federal government to ensure that the client is eligible for TEFAP foods available at the pantry.

In addition to verbally giving their personal information, clients are typically required to show an ID or other document for every person in the household as well as proof of address. The Food Bank mandates that pantries must give out food the first time a person comes to a pantry even if they do not have the required documentation or are not zoned for that pantry, but after the first date of service, pantries can refuse service to anyone not complying with these rules. As an illustration, Jennifer summarized the intake process at the food pantry where she works:

When a person comes in, they need to have identification for everybody in the family and proof that they live there. And all we ask them for is a piece of mail that comes to them through the post office, ’cause if it’s getting mailed there, we’re assuming that they’re living there. They do sign, they do sign a piece of paper that says that they are within the limits of...but we don’t ask anybody for proof of that. We assume that if you’re here asking food, you need food and that’s what we do. If somebody comes who doesn’t live in our area, we do serve them and then we give them a referral which means we give them the phone number of the Interreligious Food Consortium and they can by the address, tell them where the pantry is that they should be going to and what the hours are and that kind of thing.

Jennifer talked about their documentation requirements for ID and address, but pointed out that she does not require proof of income for the TEFAP eligibility certification. None of the pantries in the sample required evidence of income, only a signature.

Jennifer’s overview of the process brought up the issue of zoning or geographic service areas. Food pantries require proof of address so that they can ensure that the person receiving food is within their geographic area or service area. Michele, the Director of the IFC, explained that many years ago Syracuse was divided into neighborhood-based “pie pieces” that were served by the church-based pantries. This system is still used by the
majority of the pantries today, though many of the boundaries have changed to keep up
with population shifts and pantry closings.

The intake procedure at the food pantry where Patricia works is similar to
Jennifer’s. She points out that like most other pantries, they allow their guests to come
only once a month and that that is part of the reason they keep records of service:

And when they come, each time they come they have to verify their information
and sign on the back. And so our volunteers get them to do that and I also have, I
have a little file box that has index cards in it…for each guest and the only reason
I have that is because, um, our guests can only come once a month. That’s all the
volume we could handle and we keep track of the date when they came and how
many bags of food we gave them. And then that helps me when I do my report for
the Food Bank that has to go in every month, the 10th.

Many of the coordinators reported that they use the intake forms not only to help them
keep track of their clients but also to help them prepare a monthly report that they are
required to send to the Food Bank. Though not a significant amount of paperwork is
required of the coordinators, this paperwork is necessary in order to maintain the
organization’s status as a member organization in “good standing.”

In addition to using the intake form and requiring documentation, seven of the
larger food pantries in Syracuse belong to a small network called the Emergency
Food/Financial Assistance Network (EFA). This membership adds an extra step to the
intake process. Historically, the EFA represented agency-based pantries that were located
in places like community centers and other multi-program organizations. These pantries
use a centralized online database to store their records for case management purposes and
also to track their clients’ pantry usage. By looking in the database, coordinators can tell
if their clients have used other pantries in the database during the month. So in addition to
the typical intake requirements, these workers also log into the EFA system and enter
each client’s information before giving out food. Its use seems to double the recordkeeping for these workers. It also creates another piece of paperwork that must be signed by clients during the intake process because they are asked to sign a consent form stating that they are willing to participate in the tracking system of the pantries listed on the form and to provide the last four digits of their social security number to use as their ID in the system.

The actual distributing of food in food pantries varies depending on what model of food distribution is used. I observed three commonly used models in the local network: pre-made bags, client choice, or a modified client choice. Many pantries have recently adopted the client-choice model, in part due to the urging of the local Food Bank and also because of its appeal as a model that affords more choice to the clients and reduces waste. Reducing waste by allowing clients to choose what foods they are taking home was the most frequent rationale pantry coordinators cited for implementing the change. Many of the coordinators mentioned that before they started using client choice, they would find discarded food outside of the pantry. After making the switch, they no longer find discarded food. Using client choice provides clients more choices between foods within food groups and is arguably a more respectful way of giving out food.

The Food Bank considers client choice a “best practice,” and uses the HPNAP funding to help pantries make the switch. A few coordinators commented that people who cannot afford to buy food have tastes, preferences, and cultural norms just like everyone else and that asking clients to suspend taste and culture to get food from a pantry is unreasonable and disrespectful. Given the amount of support that the client-choice model has, I expect that the number of pantries using this model will continue to
increase nationwide. One employee of the Food Bank hopes to have all of their member pantries using this model in the future.

In local pantries, the food that a client takes home is determined primarily by a set of guidelines used by the local Food Bank. Appendix F contains copies of the Food Bank’s suggested food package guidelines. Typically, clients receive enough food for three to five days, based on the number of people in their household. The work done to prepare for food distribution involves sorting foods into food groups and determining how many servings are in a large can of pears or a two-pound bag of pasta, for example. After the work of organizing, stocking, and storing the foods, the next step depends on which distribution model the pantry uses.

If a pantry is distributing pre-made bags, clients coming to the pantry are given bags that have been pre-packed by staff, volunteers, or the coordinator. The bags are packed either before the hours of operation or during them depending on the ebbs and flows of the workers available and also the number of people accessing the pantry. The Food Bank guidelines suggest the amounts of food in each food group that must be represented in each food package, giving workers a formula to follow in deciding what to pack in the bags. Whether the worker decides to pack a can of peas versus a can of corn as a vegetable serving is entirely up to them.

In the client-choice model, the client “shops” around shelves or tables full of food, often with a “personal shopper,” usually a volunteer, who makes sure that the client receives the appropriate amounts and types of food in their package based on the number of people in their household per the Food Bank’s guidelines. Jennifer said,

Our goal is to offer people choice, when they come in, somebody walks around with them; a personal shopper walks around them. There’s a certain amount of
food they’re limited to at each kind of station, if you will, but they get to choose what they want.

Jennifer points out that the client-choice experience is not exactly like going to the grocery store as clients can only take a certain amount per food group. The limitations on the food are meant to ensure that there is only three to five days worth of food in the package, that they cover the basic food groups, and that one person does not walk out with all of the canned peaches. This is an interesting tension in the notion of “choice” in the client-choice model. It seems entirely appropriate for food pantries to include different food groups in meal packages that are not packed by the clients themselves. This guideline prevents pantries from sending someone home with eight pounds of pasta and nothing to cook with it. It also satisfies the nutritionists on staff at the Food Bank who want to ensure that clients are given foods that constitute “well-balanced” meals. But when these rules are applied to the client-choice model it seems paternalistic. If a person really loves pasta and wants eight pounds of it, they cannot get it. The empowerment of clients to choose their foods in the client-choice model is certainly commendable as compared to the pre-made bags model, but it still is not equal to “shopping” or “choice.”

The experience is not the same as purchasing foods at an actual store with money or even purchasing foods at an actual store using an EBT card. In terms of work, the client-choice model saves workers from the labor of having to pre-pack bags, which is a task that requires a lot of lifting, pulling items off of shelves, and paying attention to the food group guidelines. On the other hand, the client-choice model creates a new kind of work as stocking and display become more important as does training volunteers to be able to guide clients around the pantry.
The third model that I observed in the local network is that of a “modified” client choice where pantry workers create a list of foods available that day and give the list to the client for them to indicate their preferences. After indicating what they would like from the list, a volunteer packs the bags according to the client’s wishes. The pantry where Patricia works uses this system:

We give them a sheet and they circle what they would like… And then there’s more on the back. We don’t always have everything on this and we tell them that, “what we have we’ll share.” So, they fill out that sheet and sign it and then our volunteers fill up the bags of food according to their requests… So, then they [the volunteers] take the list and they fill our bags of food from that… We do milk and eggs, we have someone that shops every week for milk and eggs and we will offer them the milk and eggs. Some of them will take them, some of them for dietary reasons won’t. But we at least offer it to them and any other refrigerated items we have we’ll share that. We have a man who works for a bread company and every Monday morning we have at least six racks of bread and we put that out and anyone is free to take it. During the school year we also get donations from Panera Bread on Friday mornings. We have a volunteer who picks that up and we sort and bag it and put that out and then anyone is free to take that too.

This method may create the most work for workers because by honoring client preferences in that moment, volunteers must be on hand to do the manual labor of filling those bags immediately by request. Workers must also constantly reassess the stock in order to have an accurate list to give to clients.

VOLUNTEERS

Food pantries and soup kitchens as they are currently organized rely heavily on volunteers. According to the Food Bank’s report, “Hunger in Central & Northern New York 2010,” which was produced from data made available from Feeding America’s “Hunger in America 2010” report, 97 percent of food pantries and 88 percent of soup
kitchens in the Food Bank’s 11-county region rely on volunteers. Also, 58 percent of food pantries and 48 percent of soup kitchens in the area are completely volunteer run. Eisinger (1998) reports that a poll conducted of voters in 1992 found that 79 percent of registered voters polled had volunteered at or donated to the emergency food network at some point in their lives, demonstrating the pervasiveness of the emergency food network in U.S. culture.

Since the network’s expansion, volunteers willing to work in food pantries and soup kitchens have been relatively easy to come by, though organizations in Syracuse are worried about future volunteerism. Currently, thousands of people volunteer their time at organizations such as food pantries and soup kitchens every day. Poppendieck (1999) suggests that there is “something for everyone” in the emergency food network because the opportunities are so varied, relatively convenient, and require little training (27). She also points out that many of the volunteers find the experience rewarding. Others volunteer for the social aspects. The fact that food pantries and soup kitchens are often amenable to group-based volunteering gives church groups and others a chance to bond and feel good about their work at the same time (Poppendieck 1999).

The United States has a long history of volunteerism, in general. Scholars who study trends in volunteerism argue that there is no consensus on how the current volunteer rates differ from the past and if they do differ, why (Musick and Wilson 2008). Scholars do agree, however, that religion and religious institutions have had a large effect on volunteerism in the United States. Congregations act as volunteer recruitment sites for

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Required statement: “This information has been provided by the Food Bank of Central New York and I acknowledge that they are the source of this information and graciously thank them for their assistance in providing this information and allowing me to use it.”
church-based projects and other nonprofits (Musick and Wilson 2008). Given how many food pantries and soup kitchens are based out of churches, it should be of no surprise that this religious context has a large impact on the emergency food network.

Many of the coordinators directing the local food pantry and soup kitchen volunteer workforce are of course, volunteers themselves. In addition to filling the role of coordinator, volunteers fill other roles as well. They pick up donations and make deliveries. They organize and sort stock. They help food pantry clients select food. They serve meals at soup kitchens. At two of the larger food pantries that I visited, I spent several hours placing brown paper bags inside of plastic bags to get them ready to be filled with food—another common volunteer task.

Having volunteers to help with the day-to-day tasks of running these organizations is important for the sustainability of the organization and also for the sustainability of the coordinator’s workload. Many coordinators and directors reported that they are able to stay “behind the scenes” thanks to their volunteer workforce. Because they do not have to do tasks such as stocking and distribution, they can focus on writing grants, getting more resources to distribute, and other tasks. Patricia works at a food pantry that illustrates this well. Patricia is the full-time secretary and pantry coordinator at a church located in the suburbs of Syracuse. Because of Patricia’s church responsibilities, she relies on volunteers to run much of the pantry. She has several regular volunteers and some of their guests help out, as well. This pantry, like others, also benefits from the group-based community service that groups like the Girl Scouts and confirmation classes come to do:

I get people to come help me sort that out. When we get food from the Food Bank, that usually comes either Thursday or Friday afternoon and I will go over.
There’s a man that’s very good about coming down to sort food and he goes through the food and he straightens up the shelves for me and if he sees things that are outdated, he takes them off the shelf and he’ll help me sort that food. Sometimes the food pantry guests will help carry the boxes back and forth and that. So, there’s a variety of ways that we get that sorted out. I had Girl Scouts who, a troop of Girl Scouts who love to come to help sort the food…They’ve come different times during the year. They help with the Thanksgiving baskets, they’ve helped with the Easter food, they help sort different times of the year and they love to do it. They’re really, really good…and when we fill the Thanksgiving baskets and the Easter baskets; we have the confirmation kids, a lot of them will volunteer. It’s part of their service project and they will also come over and help either sort the food or fill the basket, either way, so that’s good too. Yeah, we get a lot of help.

Many coordinators pull their family members into volunteer roles, expanding the contribution that their household is making to an organization. Three coordinators mentioned that their family members help them regularly. One coordinator, Louanne, enlists the help of her spouse and their five children during food distribution day, in addition to several regular volunteers.

Conversely, other coordinators do not have much volunteer help at all. Tim, a coordinator of a small church-based pantry said, “I have one person helping me on and off. Right now, she’s in the hospital, so, so sometimes I get help, but basically I do most of it.” Isabel spoke of a similar experience. She has one other person who works in the pantry with her, but finds that her co-coordinator is often away on vacation. The day that I interviewed Isabel, her son brought down several loads of food from the car to the basement pantry.

Some coordinators mentioned that their work would be impossible without volunteer support. For example, Betty said that she has a lot of volunteers at her disposal, but that it can be difficult for other pantries to find volunteers:

I have a wonderful crew of volunteers. Fantastic. Without the volunteers it would be, well, you can’t do it. And that’s one of the things that other pantries, so I
understand, have the hardest; one of the hardest tasks for them is to find people who are available during the day. Or even the early evening, for those folks who might be working and pantry hours in the evening would be better.

The pantry where Betty works is well supported, in part because a network of churches is involved with the administration of it. Betty also reflected on the work that managing volunteers requires:

[Some volunteers are] one shot deals. So, but it takes a lot of time just to reassure people that, volunteers are great, but they do take a lot of work…just making sure everybody is kind of happy and feeling needed and you know, there’s nothing worse than having, it’s nothing worse than having volunteers and not having anything for them to do… So we try to coordinate right down to the, “we need you for one hour.”

As Betty pointed out, making sure that volunteers are happy and feel helpful is important, especially for the development of long-term volunteer commitments.

Some organizations in the local network use volunteers so much that they have dedicated staff to the job of coordinating volunteers. One large soup kitchen in Syracuse applies for a full-time Jesuit Corps worker every year and assigns them to the role of volunteer coordinator. This soup kitchen uses the labor of over 400 volunteers a month. When I volunteered at another large soup kitchen in Syracuse, I had to meet with the volunteer coordinator in their office before my shift. It was a brief meeting in which I was pressured to commit to a regular volunteer schedule; I was also asked to sign liability forms and an agreement that I would not take any pictures of guests or breach their guest’s right to confidentiality in any way.

A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Emergency food work in Syracuse takes place in two types of contexts: 1) community centers or agencies and 2) churches or faith-affiliated nonprofit organizations.
All of the soup kitchens in Syracuse are religiously affiliated in some way. The food pantries of Syracuse are primarily in church or religiously affiliated organizations, though there are about 10 secular community centers that have food pantries. The religious context of the majority of the food pantries and soup kitchens affects the ways that programs are run and services delivered. It also affects the meaning that workers place on their work and their motivations. In this section, I discuss the impacts of the religious context on the local network and illustrate how this context also contributes to the overall coordination of services.

Religion and Spirituality in Emergency Food Work

“There’s an enormous spirituality of the people who work in this business...I mean, if you’re not spiritual...you’re not doing the work we do.”

Peter, a paid director of a large food pantry in Syracuse, reflected on the spirituality involved in his line of work. This interview was my first formal interview and it certainly foreshadowed some of the conversations that I would have related to different aspects of Christianity and emergency food work. I recall, in that particular moment, that his claim regarding the inherent spirituality in emergency food work caused me not to ponder the significance of the religious context for the majority of the organizations that I was researching, but to pause and reflect to myself: does this mean I am doing this work for some spiritual motivation? I started thinking about how long it had been since I distanced myself from my own Christian upbringing and found myself wondering if despite that piece of my own experience, we could both possibly have a spiritual connection to food

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7 The only exception to this is the weekly Food Not Bombs sharing that has taken place in Syracuse off and on over the years of this study. I do not include Food Not Bombs in my accounting of soup kitchens in Syracuse because their model of providing food is different from the more typical soup kitchens in this study. Food Not Bombs does not have a religious orientation, though they are dedicated to nonviolent direct action.
justice issues. In that brief moment, I decided yes, it was possible that I had this in common with many of my research participants. Though we may not agree on why hunger exists, the fairest ways to eradicate it, the fairest ways to run an emergency food organization or the appropriateness of mixing religious beliefs into the provision of social services, we do share a deep spiritual commitment to people eating. I was glad to have realized this early on, because unsurprisingly, given the religious affiliation of most of the organizations that I visited, this context emerged out of many of my interviews.

About 23 of the interviews at food pantries and soup kitchens were at religiously-affiliated organizations. Though not all of the representatives from these organizations made specific reference to religious themes or spirituality, the religious context was impossible to ignore. Most of the religiously affiliated soup kitchens and food pantries were physically located inside of a church. A few organizations were interfaith efforts. The types of churches represented in the sample include: Reform Judaism, Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist, and a few nondenominational Christian congregations.

*Religious impact.* The impact of the religious context on emergency food work and service provision is variable. Some scholars have questioned the potential impacts of the religious context of emergency food assistance organizations (Eisinger 1998; Poppendieck 1999). In order to be a member of the Food Bank of Central New York, organizations must not require any participation in religious services in order to receive food. Also, Food Bank member programs and organizations receiving any form of government assistance may not discriminate based on religious beliefs. Appendix G
contains a copy of the Food Bank’s “Guest Bill of Rights.” Beth reflected on the history of religious discrimination and proselytization in the Central New York network:

I think sometimes people don’t realize that that’s what they’re doing and the idea is that you don’t realize that you’re making, you could be making someone uncomfortable if that’s your religion, but forcing someone to pray before a meal isn’t appropriate. So it’s a hard thing, because sometimes people take religion very personally but it’s our job, I mean, even though it could offend someone and you can’t have literature put into the bags and stuff like that... So we have pretty strict guidelines about, yes, you can have materials out, but it has to be out to the side, you can’t ask people if they want it, they can take it if they want it, and really, the question is why are you doing this, is it to feed people, or is it, why are you doing this question, and when we get people to answer that they start to kind of see our way, but, it’s, I mean it’s something that happens in the churches but it’s not as bad as people think.... And you know, there’s really a small pocket of people and once you kind of get to it with them, then they, the problem goes away.

Despite the Food Bank’s attempts to control this issue, one pantry director named Betty mentioned that some of her clients reported that there were pantries on the other end of town that required you to attend religious services before getting food. A few church-based pantries in Syracuse are not members of the Food Bank, so it is possible that they engage in direct proselytization outside of the governance and coordination of the Food Bank. Betty stated,

I mean, that to me, is just coercion of the worst kind. But people that I talk to, I mean people who use the pantry, and they’ll say, I, you know, “Did you get a turkey?” “Oh yeah.” “Well, did you have to sit through any?” “Oh yeah, we sat through a 20 minute thing about Jesus.” And I said, “Well you know, how do you feel about that?” “Oh that’s alright, we got a turkey.”

In the conversation that followed, she expressed wonderment that the guests did not feel “coerced” and upset over this forced proselytization. Though I myself, representatives of the Food Bank like Beth, and many others completely agree with her perspective that it is unfair to require attendance at religious services in order to access food, it is possible that some of her feelings over what these “other” churches were doing were connected to the
struggle of her own church to survive financially and to what she saw as the nationwide
decline in the old “mainline churches” and the rise of non-denominational Christian
churches. She said,

   It’s me from the outside that is saying, look at [requiring clients to sit through
   religious services], and say it’s coercion. I mean it’s not what Lutherans would
do, that’s not what Roman Catholics would do either or Presbyterians or most of
the mainline churches. I can’t say mainline anymore, I’ve been told that I can’t
use that…

I ask her what she meant by “mainline” and she responded,

   Well, it used to be mainline was, you know, the big, the Lutherans, the
Methodists, the Presbyterians, and now… the mainstream is probably more non-
denominational. We are… we are not mainstream anymore, we’re kind of the
eddies off to the side.

Her comments reflected a trend that has emerged over the twentieth century (Chaves
2002), affecting food pantries and soup kitchens located in the formerly mainline
churches. As their congregations have decreased in numbers, so has the amount of
resources that the churches have and are consequently able to funnel into their outreach
programs like food pantries and soup kitchens. Betty mentioned that it was likely that her
church may not be financially solvent enough to stay open for more than five years,
despite their many efforts to remain solvent including renting out space in their church to
other community organizations.

   Given the policies of the Food Bank, I do not think that any churches would have
told me if they did require their guests to sit through religious services. But, I also did not
find evidence of this in any of the organizations I visited. What I did find was a lot of
religious art, information about church services, and quotes from the Bible hung or
painted on the walls of these organizations. Organizations with membership to the Food
Bank are not allowed to pass out religious leaflets or literature, but nothing discourages
them from hanging it on the walls in the areas where guests would pass through or sit and wait to get their food. Again, I was not surprised to find something like a mural of a Bible story painted in the food pantries; in fact, one food pantry occupied an old Sunday School room that brought back memories of my own childhood experience in a church.

Though no organizations claimed to require anyone to sit through religious services for food, in one interview, a coordinator did comment that she tried to give guests “spiritual food as well as physical food” by milling around during the meal program, talking to guests, and inviting them to come back for a church service. She said that this part of her work was of “high importance” to her and the seriousness with which she took her commitment to evangelizing included engaging me in an awkward conversation about whether and where I attended church.

Judeo-Christian values underpin much of the dedication of workers in the emergency food network. Passages from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible inspire workers to dedicate volunteer time and sometimes to pursue paid careers in emergency food work. Poppendieck (1999) also discussed the impact of religion on emergency food workers. For example, she discussed how the organization, Mazon, A Jewish Response to Hunger, uses a passage from the Old Testament to motivate their work, “if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noon-day” (Isaiah 58:10, quoted in Poppendieck 1999:191). This passage highlights not only the Biblical directive to give to others, but also that in doing so, the giver is to be benefited as well.

Missions and organizational goals. Nonprofit mission statements are often thought to act as a call to “rally, engage, or enroll workers, volunteers, and donors” (Minkoff and
Powell 2006:591). Given the religious roots of many of these organizations, I was unsurprised to find that religious references or calls to service were often present in organizational mission statements. The organizations varied in terms of how formalized their organizational goals and missions were. Most of the larger agencies had formal mission statements, but many of the smaller food pantries and soup kitchens operated more informally. For example when asked about their mission statements, a few pantry coordinators simply responded, “to feed people.”

Some organizations had secular mission statements, but were strongly motivated by religious beliefs. I spoke with Jeff, the founder of Matthew 25 Farm, a two-year old farm with a very easily identifiable religious name. Matthew 25 Farm specializes in growing food primarily for local emergency food assistance organizations; his personal mission is, “To give people food so that they can see the love of Christ.” However, it is more formally stated on their website as:

Our mission is to ensure that no Central New Yorker who is unable to completely provide for themself [sic] will go without fresh food. We expedite this mission in two ways: by growing food and giving it to those in need through local food pantries and by teaching our community how to grow and store their own food.

Though both the informal and formal mission statements of this organization reflect the central goal of giving people food, it is notable that this organization’s formal mission statement lacks any religious references, a choice that might have been made to attract more secular support and grants to the farm.

The mission statement of a large interfaith soup kitchen provides another example. Their mission states that “providing food and assistance to the hungry and homeless without precondition” is their core mission and illustrates a very secular mission statement, compared to some. After many hours of participant observation at this
organization, I observed that their environment is also very secular and similar to many non-religiously affiliated nonprofits. However, their newsletter and fundraising materials frequently contain religious references, perhaps pointing to the usefulness of appealing to their base, which is predominantly made up by faith-based communities. A staff member there discussed targeting faith-based communities as their source of potential financial donors. She told a story about the first big push for financial donations at her organization:

So we tried to kind of, took a look at, what is, where was, and where could be, the support for [agency name], and we knew it was in the, primarily in the religious community… And faith communities, not relegated only to Christians, but Jews and Muslims and anybody else, because they’re already predisposed to believe that you have to help people who are hungry or people who are, and I use the term, hungry, but that could be hungry for a lot of different things. And that’s, it’s almost, like their job.

Two of the larger organizations had formal mission statements that directly reflected the religious roots of their work. One organization’s website said,

In Keeping with [agency’s name] Mission of Service: [Agency] is a downtown pantry serving those within a specific geographic area. Following Christ’s example, we strive to serve those in need with a consistent and respectful approach. We welcome all with non-judgemental [sic] and positive attitudes. We advocate for our clients and help them to utilize other agencies and social services. As the Gospel teaches, we encounter Christ in the act of ministering to others. “I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me.” Matthews 25:35

The reference of religion in this mission statement is connected to the organization’s commitment to providing a “consistent and respectful approach” to providing services. This mission also makes use of a quote from Matthew 25:35 from the Bible. This quote underlies the spirit of much faith-based attachment to emergency food work and frequently appears in literature as a motivation to serve others. By providing food to the
hungry, many Christian emergency food providers feel as if they are “encountering Christ.”

Another website of a large-scale organization reported, “Our mission is to share Christ’s love and provide biblically-based services that meet the spiritual and practical needs of the poor.” Providing food through their soup kitchen is one such “biblically-based service” that meets the “practical needs of the poor.” A paid employee of this organization explained that while their organization is religiously rooted, they do not have any religious requirements for their clients,

The [agency name] is a Christian organization, you know, our faith in God is what we do, why we do everything every day. But we, it’s never a requirement to have faith in Christ or to have any faith at all, before we help you. That’s never, never an argument but it is why we’re here and so we’ve been in existence for over 121 years just helping the homeless and hungry and hurting, as we say, in Central New York.

This organization has strong religious motivations which show up frequently in their daily operations. They provide a variety of services to people experiencing homelessness including a soup kitchen, a few different shelter programs, and a van that delivers warm drinks and blankets to people sleeping outside in the winter. In addition, they offer Bible study, an on-site chapel, and a count of how many of their clients have “dedicated their lives to Christ” each year. Their historical dedication to these religious services are explained by this quote, taken from their website, “Spirituality and its importance in the healing of broken lives has been the focus of the [agency name] ever since it was started in 1887 by a group of Christians willing to reach out to the needy in God’s love.” Despite the lack of religious requirements, this organization’s openness about their religious beliefs and services certainly affects their everyday operations.
Some emergency food workers discussed the spiritual aspects of their work in more general terms that were still rooted in religious beliefs. Arnie, a volunteer at one of the larger food pantries in town talked about why he feels their work is important from a spiritual perspective:

Food is just a vehicle, by which we can live out, you know, our teachings, gospel teachings, so I mean that’s, kind of really important, is, that we have people and people that are working in the pantry, people that are supporting the pantry, and people that come to the pantry to be served, get the bigger picture and get the vision of the place. That it’s about peacefulness. It’s about dignity. It’s about people whole, and in the process, yeah, we’ll feed you food, but we’re trying to feed you other things too, and it’s not, we’re not evangelizing, we’re not telling people they have to be Catholic. But rather, you have value.

This organization’s philosophy in acting out their faith is more indirect. They do not engage in such an outward sharing of religious belief, though I recall that there may be some religious decor hanging on their walls. As Arnie expressed, they believe that their spiritual mission is to treat clients as human beings with respect and dignity, so that clients will consequently feel valued and leave feeling “whole” and not “diminished.”

Religion and everyday operations. Religious beliefs and spirituality impacted other aspects of the work in the pantries as well. For example, one food pantry director made a comment about his program being “very blessed” in reference to having a lot of funding and support. Well-supported, religiously-affiliated organizations often talked about their support in terms of “blessings.” Another example of religious influence in the programs is illustrated by Brother Joe, a coordinator at an organization that runs a food pantry and a sandwich program. He talked about how utilizing their financial support in the best possible way was a part of good religious stewardship. Finally, my interview with Jeff, the youthful founder of Matthew 25 Farm, which exists primarily to support the local
emergency food network, was one of my more interesting discussions in relation to the issue of religion. In our interview, we discussed a variety of topics from his personal struggle in finding the right balance of evangelism in his everyday life to the 22-foot cross on the farm that bears witness to the growth of the food, one of at least two ways that the food would “have a touch of Christ.” The other way that their food would “have a touch of Christ” is through their decision to pass out the majority of the food through organizations that are religiously affiliated.

A religious theme that I did not expect to find was that of “saying things out loud,” though Poppendieck (1999) also discussed a similar finding in her study when she documented workers crediting the “hand of God” with supporting them in times of organizational need (193). Four research participants explicitly talked about a synchronous relationship between saying their needs “out loud” and shortly thereafter receiving them. Jennifer, a food pantry operator at a large Catholic food pantry, described it as almost magical:

And it seems like, if we’re in need of something, I swear to you and this is gonna sound really weird, but if I say it out loud it shows up… It’s honest to God, and it’s happened so many times that it’s not just a fluky thing, happened once, do you know what I mean? It’s like, if I say, “oh my gosh, we’re really low on whatever,” literally this happened one day. I was like “Bobby, we gotta get toilet paper, we’ve, we have like no toilet paper” and this woman comes in with like three garbage bags of toilet paper and I don’t know where she comes from, but it’s like the end of the rolls and they roll it onto new… And they bring it all here. It was like, the same day, it was like Twilight Zone weird. You know what I mean? I was like, oh my gosh, I just said that!

Peter told a similar story about the synchronicity of donations going in and out, discussing the daily struggles of keeping up with the numbers of people coming to their weekly breakfast program when he said,
So they, and the number of people has drastically increased, so I’m thinkin’ how am I gonna get this paid for? You know I got to buy more eggs and buy more hams, and I walk in here and the Secretary across the street came over here with my daily mail and she says, “Do you know so and so?” And I say “yeah,” and she says, “Well, he just sent you a check for $10,000 for…” It’s just every time we turn around worried about something, God seems to take care of the problem. So it’s been absolutely phenomenal… I don’t know how you describe that in your raising funds but it did, and I’m sure it happens to every pantry.

Bernie, a co-director of a soup kitchen and a food pantry at a small church also attributed good fortune in resources to God’s hand; he said, “God has helped us out, he has helped us out, when they seen there was no way, comes through.” Another pantry coordinator, Betty, told a story of a person who simply drove by and came in to donate $500, but she seemed to attribute it more to the synchronicity between need and the community’s generosity. She said,

And you just never know, I mean, you just never know. It always amazes us around here. The person who just walks in the door and says, “I was driving by and saw the children eating out in the yard during the summer, and here’s $500 to pay for lunch.”… “Ok, thank you very much.” But it happens frequently and you just don’t know who sees and who experiences what, you know, and especially when they’re in the neighborhood or when they’re around.

Another example came from Jeff when he told a story about his beliefs in the power of words and putting ideas out for God to hear, good and bad. He remarked that once when he was younger he told his mother that he was going to get into a car accident and sure enough, a week later he did. He attributed much of the success of the farm to putting his dreams “out there.” He also explained to me that he did not do much typical fundraising to acquire the money to start up the farm originally; rather, he just talked to as many people possible about his desire to get some land and start a farm and things just came together. As Poppendieck (1999) argues, “the point is not to debate whether these examples reveal the hand of God or effective networking,” though Jeff did illustrate his
excellent networking skills in our interview, but that we should consider the implications of the fact that these attributions work as “evidence of God’s favor” and that this “reinforces the conviction” that emergency food workers “are carrying out the will of God” (194-195). Regardless of whether these narratives point to divine providence, coincidence, or effective fundraising and networking by these organizations, it is clear that this type of experience is extremely meaningful to emergency food workers in a highly motivating way.

Faith-based communities are a major source of donor support for emergency food work. Resources garnered from religious communities are frequently used to run these organizations. Almost all of the religiously-affiliated organizations had support from their congregation, at the minimum in the form of rent-free space. More often the hosting church covered not only the space needed to run the program, but also the cost of utilities. Some congregations even provided a small salary for the coordinator and/or a budget to supplement the donations and grants that the programs brought in themselves. Also, the majority of the coordinators and volunteers in church pantries were members of the host church’s congregation.

**Unity Kitchen Community of the Catholic Worker**

One organization in Syracuse was explicitly religious in almost all of the aspects of their operation. This organization is known as Unity Kitchen Community of the Catholic Worker. I contacted Ann at Unity Kitchen for an interview after a volunteer at another organization told me about their unique program. Their model is quite different from any of the other organizations in Syracuse and Ann believed that it was quite possibly unique, nationally. The workers at Unity Kitchen dis-identify with the phrase
“soup kitchen” quite strongly. Though they do feed people in need of food, they consider what they do to be “dinner hospitality,” based on a broader notion of Christian hospitality practiced by organizations aligned with the Catholic Worker movement.

Christian hospitality in the context of the Catholic Worker movement can be understood as situated in opposition to professionalizing and bureaucratic relations that have been argued to adversely affect human relationships in the social services, making interactions more impersonal and objectifying (Murray 1990). Ann talked about their dinner service and how it differed from many of the other establishments that feed the hungry. She emphasized the religious roots of their work and how they come into conflict with the institutionalization and professionalization of emergency food work:

Our dinner hospitality first of all, is based on our faith as a Catholic community where scripture says, Bible says, Jesus said, “I was hungry and you fed me.” Now the Church, the Christian Church has always taken that very seriously, in the earliest centuries of the Church, those who were in need or afflicted or wounded in anyway would be considered what they used to call the hidden Christ. ’Cause Jesus said, “what you did for so and so, you did for me.” So the Church always tried to treat the wounded person, the afflicted person as they would treat Christ, so that meant what’s beautiful and what’s dignified and what’s respectful and so we did a study of Christian hospitality going back to the beginning, going back to the gospels and that’s why we’re doing what we’re doing here. And also in the Church they served small numbers of poor people. This whole big congregation of people you know, and soup lines and big institutions, is not necessarily Christian. You know, but it’s modern. It’s the modern way of doing things. The bigger, the better. You know, get them all together in one place, you know? So, what we’re doing here is limited in number, but is lavish in what we’re doing. So um, that makes it different than a lot of places.

Her comments reveal their motivations for doing their work and the way that they do it.

She continued, saying more about the ways that they resist institutionalization and increases to their service numbers:

So we treat each person who comes to us and other places too, where we are as, with kindness and respect and dignity, whether it’s just to talk for a minute on the street or whatever the reason is for. Someone we’re more deeply involved or
helping with care with or whatever, to us they are Christ. And they’re also a human person, one you come to know and like. And so anyway, that’s a very strong principle for us, which gives us very clear guidelines about how things should work, you know, it’s not a big deal about how should we do this and that. Can we add 50 more people here? And you just begin to realize that 50 more people would degrade service. And we learned a long time ago that you can’t serve large numbers of wounded people in a fast and efficient way so to speak. There’s too many wounds and very often that makes their wounds worse. And when I say wounds, you know like wounds of the heart or mental wounds. You know something along that line.

Unity Kitchen did not always serve food using this model, however. Ann said that they received a lot of criticism from the community due to their decision to go from a large-scale soup line to a small dinner service for around 30 people. This shift happened about 30 years ago. She reflected,

We weren’t doing large numbers; people don’t care how you treat ’em, so long as you give them some soup and a cup of coffee. You know, and it was hard for a lot of the people involved in the discernment. We had to really admit that we have to say no to people and that we can’t save the world, we can’t save the Westside, so we’re not meant to, as a Christian community we are not meant to do that. We’re meant as Christians, to be a sign to the world that the poor are very valuable and that they have a lot of dignity, innate dignity that they have as human beings, that’s all we’re meant to do, you know? Let the Lord take care of the rest. Cause we are very limited and can’t save the world. So, that took a lot of trouble for a lot of us to accept that idea because we just had an open door, we had the place jammed half the time, it was terrible.

As Ann said, changing the way they did service was a hard decision for them to make.

She said more about their process of discernment:

We went through a long process of what we call, Christian discernment, after about nine years of a soup kitchen and a crowded dormitory, we said, you know we’ve burned our workers right and left. And I said, well what are we doing here? You know? ’Cause these guys, mostly men, were leaving the kitchen more degraded than when they came. You know the soup line, the craziness, the meager meals, you know what are we doing? Huge numbers of people and you know, we’re not treating people with dignity here at all. Throwing people out that were violent. So we went through a long process of discernment about what is the Christian way of serving on the poor. You know. And that’s when we began our study and finally arrived at this [method].
In the beginning of Unity Kitchen, there was disagreement within the organization about their alignment with the Catholic Worker movement. She said,

We asked Catholic Workers, they say we definitely are, so then we began to say we are, then we began to act like we are, but then, because we do our hospitality the way we do, a lot of Catholic Workers didn’t like it. You know, because they do large numbers and so, the Catholic Workers are divided about who we are and what we’re doing. The Catholic Workers are very much anarchistic like we are, but we are a different kind of anarchism, we call ourselves Christian anarchists. And so, there’s no form in the Catholic Worker movement for kicking anybody out, ’cause everybody’s welcome (laughs) and anybody can believe what they want and anybody can do what they want. You know, it’s anarchist! (laughs)… so we’re definitely a Catholic Worker. But that became clear as we began to question what we were doing. Isn’t that interesting? We started talking about, are we Catholic Worker, just about the time we stop doing large numbers, which is acceptable in the Catholic Worker movement. So yeah, so that’s what we are and that’s the problem for many of the Catholic Workers around the country. But there are some who support us and they accept what we’re doing, but they don’t do it themselves. They won’t, Catholic Workers, generally, can’t say no, you know? But what they are doing now more and more since Kitchen changed, so much, is that they have a soup line at a local public building somewhere or local church even, maybe in the basement or something and they’ll do large numbers, but then they’ll try to do a small hospitality at a house that they might live in, you know?

Unity Kitchen is also unlike other organizations in Syracuse in terms of how they seek funding. They do not have 501c3 status and do not want it. They also do not want government involvement with their activities, though they do cooperate with the Health Department. Even the language they use to talk about donations is different as they use the language of “alms” rather than donations, a choice that they also root in Christian history. Ann reflected, “Dorothy Day said once that she’d rather have a thousand people give her a dollar each than have one person give her a thousand dollars.” This statement illustrates their perspective on funding as well. They do not wish to be indebted to any one source and prefer to cultivate personal relationships with supporters.
Religion in the Broader Anti-hunger Movement

Given how strongly emergency food work is supported by religious organizations, it is important to consider the impact that this support has on anti-hunger philanthropy and organizing nationwide. Many of the well-known, nationally-based, anti-hunger advocacy groups are secular; Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and World Hunger Year (WHY) serve as good examples. Deb, a New York State advocate for anti-hunger work and a staff member of the Hunger Action Network of New York State (HANNYS), a secular organization, said that being a secular organization in a religious context was not problematic for them:

The major religions of the world have philosophies that really dictate to them that the kind of work that we, everyone, is to do this. That we’re not just supposed to be throwing food at the problem. That we’re supposed to be addressing the underlying, the justice work and you know, because of that I think that we, that’s one of the reasons why it’s such a nice fit that we have with people from the faith community. I mean yes, there are some people from, from some faiths that believe that charity is the only necessary component but I think that they’re the minority part of the religious community. I mean they’re, how can you help but respect (laughs) you know, people like… You know who do make it their life work, work on feeding people on a daily basis which is a struggle, keeping food on the shelves and also go the step beyond that and work on, you know, they just, to keep plugging along doing more and getting better and it’s not easy, it’s not, yeah.

Deb held a positive view of the overall involvement of religious organizations in hunger relief work. It is impossible to deny the fact that food from religiously affiliated emergency food providers feeds thousands of families a day in the United States, making a huge impact.

While acknowledging the positive impacts that faith-based organizations have made in the emergency food network, scholars and anti-hunger advocates should still ask some difficult questions. If it is an assumption that the status quo is not acceptable and that government-based solutions to hunger, like the expansion of SNAP benefits and
other improvements to the safety net are desirable, how does this enormous amount of religious support for the emergency food work further entrench it? Poppendieck (1999) discusses how the feelings of “doing good” serve to ameliorate the nation’s anxieties around the issue of hunger. How have these well-intended organizations helped to spread the notion that hunger is “solved” without challenging the systems of oppression that create the poverty that generates hunger and food insecurity?

The government has supported the institutionalization of religiously affiliated emergency food programs through programs like TEFAP, HPNAP, and federal support of faith-based initiatives. Should it be surprising that sometimes these same organizations try to recruit new members through their social outreach programs? Recent research by Sager and Stephens (2005) examines the effects of sermon delivery at faith-based soup kitchens. Through talking with self-identified religious and non-religious clients, they found that clients overwhelming felt averse to these practices. Sermons were viewed as coercive and neglectful of the clients’ own beliefs. Sermons also had “a tendency to blame the homeless for their problems” and posed religion as a solution to homelessness rather than structural responses (309). More research such as this should be conducted in this area, so that the effects of faith-based initiatives on service delivery in the emergency food network and in other social service organizations are better understood.

SMALL LOCAL INFLUENCES: THE IFC & THE EFA

In Syracuse, two networks serve as sources of support and direction for food pantries, the Interreligious Food Consortium (IFC) and the Emergency Food/Financial Assistance (EFA) network. In this section I discuss the ways that the IFC and the EFA contribute to the coordination of Syracuse’s emergency food network.
In the 1980s, there was a growing sentiment that hunger was a problem in Syracuse. The IFC was formed to address it, as their website states:

The Interreligious Food Consortium (IFC) began in 1982 as an effort by the religious community and other concerned people to relieve the hunger problem in the greater Syracuse area. Currently, seventy food pantries and meal programs are part of a network… (Interreligious Food Consortium 2010).

Michele, the Executive Director of the IFC, provided more context on the founding of the IFC and said that at the time, a large, Syracuse-based, hot meal program had closed and that many of the existing food pantries and meal programs were concerned about local funding “drying up.” The IFC predates the Food Bank of Central New York by about three years. According to newspapers published at the time, the IFC was part of the effort to start the Food Bank (Niedt 1985).

The IFC primarily serves as a resource for food pantries in Onondaga County. They operate a hotline that potential food pantry clients can call for referrals to their correctly zoned food pantry; they solicit donations on behalf of their member organizations and serve as a supportive agency for the food pantries. They have also played a historically significant role in Syracuse by being the local organization that keeps track of and coordinates the local geographic/service area zones between food pantries.

The IFC considers raising awareness about hunger in Syracuse to be a primary purpose of their organization. They frequently sponsor fundraising events that have an awareness component built in, such as the Crop Walk and Empty Bowls. The fundraising that happens at the IFC is at a much smaller scale than that which happens at the Food Bank, making the relationship between the IFC and the food pantries much more optional. The IFC does provide extra, free food to pantries that need it and they still
administer a small portion of the County’s EFSP funding, but local food pantries are much more reliant on the Food Bank than the IFC for funding support.

One quality that the IFC lends to food pantry coordinators is a source of emotional support. Michele has developed relationships with many of the coordinators in the community and her ability to do this may be because the IFC tries to keep the organization “grassroots,” as Michele often says. They do not go after large grants and government support, partly because they lack the capacity to do so, but also because they feel that being funded by those sources would hurt the “grassroots” appeal of their organization and the freedom that comes with it.

Though the IFC may be the “David” to the Food Bank’s “Goliath,” as Michele told me once, they do have a significant amount of influence over many of the pantry coordinators in the County. The coordination of geographic/service areas is one of the ways that the IFC has greatly influenced the local network. The IFC also collaborates with the EFA network which has a membership of about seven large food pantries in Syracuse. Though not many of the approximately 60 food pantries in Syracuse are members of the EFA, the pantries that are members utilize a centralized database system to track their clients. This tracking system serves to coordinate much of the food distribution that happens at these organizations.

Through activities such as tracking or setting service areas, these organizations, though more “grassroots,” do have coordinating effects on Syracuse’s food pantries. However, the relationship between organizations and these networks is much more voluntary than the relationship between the organizations and the Food Bank. This is
because organizations are much more reliant on the increased access to resources that they gain from membership to the Food Bank.

CONCLUSION

Workers in food pantries and soup kitchens spend much of their time acquiring resources for their programs and this is a task that requires a significant amount of experientially-based knowledge. Knowing where to look for resources, how to fundraise, and how to fill out a grant application are skills that are drawn upon regularly in the local emergency food network. During my interviews with workers, I often asked about their work connected to getting resources. Very often, workers would quickly list off the different ways that they do it. When I probed further, many coordinators, especially those working in smaller organizations seemed to have a difficult time describing the specific work that they do to accomplish acquire resources. It was as if saying that a person “did a food drive” was enough to convey the work involved to do a food drive. In actuality, it takes a great deal of work, planning, and labor to conduct and reap the benefits from a food drive. It seems that much of the work happening behind the scenes at food pantries and soup kitchens is partially invisible.

In small organizations, the work of getting funds seems to pale in significance to the work of actually doing the distribution of food. This indicates that much of the labor which I discussed in this chapter gets done within a framework that positions the provision of food as the central task, rather than the gaining of resources as the central task. This is no surprise, as most nonprofit organizations probably position their missions above their fundraising, in theory. But because obtaining resources is necessary to be able
to provide food, this is a telling tension, especially in the smaller, more vulnerable food pantries and soup kitchens that lack basic staffing and operation support.

In general, challenges in acquiring resources produce unevenness in the local network, where some organizations are well supported and others are not. Residents of Syracuse are zoned to particular pantries depending on their place of residence. The unevenness of resources and support has clear implications for the services that food pantries provide—especially for the clients that are zoned to pantries that are experiencing greater challenges in acquiring resources.

As evidenced by the frequent difficulty I had in getting in touch with emergency food workers and the myriad tasks that these workers have to complete to keep a program running, everyday life in food pantries and soup kitchens is busy. Several of the workers pointed out that a good deal of their work takes place outside of the hours of operation and the workplace. Clipping coupons, completing paperwork, and shopping for food are just a few tasks that are often not done at the site because of time constraints or the need to “maximize dollars.”

Though work related to acquiring food, food distribution, and volunteer coordination are the main tasks of emergency food workers, other work happens as well. Spaces need to be cleaned, organized, maintained, and sometimes painted. Some of the larger organizations work on public relations by creating and improving websites. Brother Joe mentioned that their website was a huge help for them because they are one of the few local organizations to appear when businesses, individuals, or other groups “Google” food pantry in Syracuse, looking for a place to donate.
The religious context of emergency food work has a clear impact on not just the work itself, but why workers are motivated to do it. Pantry workers serve as informal social workers for their clients. They make referrals to government programs. They troubleshoot problems. They listen. Most of the workers are in this work because they truly care about the well being of their clients. Pantry workers are participating in carework on a massive scale. Kathy commented on how she likes this aspect of her work:

Although I do enjoy doing one-on-one with people who come in. Because they, you know, sometimes they do have problems and you just look at ’em and you’ll say, “How’s everything going?” and they just need somebody to tell... They just need someone, so I guess a little bit, we also become counselors sometimes too.

Kathy and others reported enjoying the work of listening to and helping their clients. Working with people was certainly a highlight of the job for many coordinators and provided a sense of fulfillment. Workers get other satisfactions from their work as well. Ernie, a co-director of a food pantry at a local temple, reflected,

It [the volunteer work] gives us, it gives all of us a distinct sense of satisfaction in doing this, very much so. It’s, uh, it is a Jewish tradition to what they call tzedakah and, uh, we enjoy doing it. All of these volunteers enjoy doing it; they’re not all Jewish either.

The sense of satisfaction that Ernie and his co-volunteers receive from doing emergency food work was mentioned in other ways by other coordinators. Whether workers are committed to emergency food work because of their religious beliefs or their sense of justice, they contribute much to the diets of Central New Yorkers who need food.

So much creativity, labor, and dedication is poured into the emergency food network every day by its volunteers and paid employees. However, I am still left to ponder some lingering questions. One of the arguments that supporters of devolution have used to justify the gradual move away from government social safety net programs
is that the private nonprofit sector can do this type of work more efficiently. Voluntarism and private assistance are held up as the appropriate solutions to societal problems such as hunger.

In response to this argument, first, it seems apt to ask if the thousands of food pantries and soup kitchens in the United States are really doing this work more efficiently. An examination of the labor that organizations in the network require to survive reveals that even smaller organizations in the emergency food network take an enormous amount of labor to operate. Imagine that work multiplied by 38,000, a low estimate of the number of food pantries and soup kitchens in the United States. This hardly seems efficient. Secondly, it seems appropriate to ask—from whose perspective is this work considered efficient? It may not be appropriate to place the task of mass feeding on small churches that are barely managing to keep their congregation doors open. Questions of fairness also emerge, as in the case of people being assigned to a pantry that gives out less food than other pantries, perhaps because that particular pantry does not have the capacity to organize fundraisers or write grants.
Chapter Four
The Influence of Food Banking, Best Practices, and Policy on Syracuse’s Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

How do government funding and the support of external organizations such as the Food Bank of Central New York affect food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse? How do these sources of support serve to coordinate local practices? Are food pantries and soup kitchens impacted by discourses of the new public management by way of their relationship to the Food Bank and government funding? Can evidence of accountability and management practices be found in Syracuse’s emergency food network? These are some of the questions that I address in this chapter.

This chapter moves this discussion of the emergency food network from the grassroots level to the coordinative level. Food Bank and government support serves to bolster ground-level responses to hunger and create a coordinative layer of funding and governance for food pantries and soup kitchens. First, I include a general discussion of food banking and its growth over the years. Following, I discuss the practices and policies of the Food Bank, paying attention to the ways that they coordinate activities in the local network. Finally, I discuss federal and state policies that have had a large influence on food pantries and soup kitchens primarily by way of the Food Bank.

Food banking has evolved much since the first food bank was founded in the late-1960s. Trends in food banking circulate through the food banking network, which is facilitated by a national nonprofit organization, Feeding America. The food banking industry, at large, has many coordinative effects on food pantries and soup kitchens. Many of the practices and policies of the Food Bank have been modeled on practices
considered to be “best practices” nationwide. In turn, the Food Bank requires and incentivizes food pantry and soup kitchen practices that it considers “best practices.”

Government support at the federal, state, and local levels influences the practices in Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens. This support almost always reaches the ground level funneled through the Food Bank in the form of grants, cash support, and/or commodity support. Federal programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and New York State’s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) not only affect the practices of food pantries and soup kitchens, but they also provide a significant amount of monetary and food support. Additionally, programs like the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) also have large impacts on the local network and are administered by a local Board.

Government practices strongly influence food pantries and soup kitchens in indirect ways, as well. For example, the economic system and the weakness of the current social safety net is in large part what necessitates the emergency food network in the first place. Also, federal tax law makes donations to the organizations in the network more plentiful as companies take advantage of tax deductions and write-offs. The government has also had a historical role in encouraging faith-based responses to hunger and this encouragement continues into the current administration.

THE FOOD BANKING INDUSTRY

Food banks generally specialize in collecting and distributing foods to other organizations that are doing direct distribution to clients. When food banks proliferated at the national level, they specialized in soliciting and gathering edible excess or damaged foods that came from corporate manufacturing and grocery stores. They acted as liaisons
between businesses and the organizations like food pantries or soup kitchens that were actually giving out the food, taking on the bulk of the solicitation, warehousing, and fundraising work on the behalf of, or in addition to, food pantries and soup kitchens.

The first formalized food bank was St. Mary’s Food Bank, in Phoenix, Arizona. John Van Hengel founded it in 1967, with the support of some Franciscan priests (Poppendieck 1999). At first it was just a space that they had acquired to store food that had been gleaned, but Van Hengel quickly realized the potential of corporate donations and St. Mary’s Food Bank grew into a model that was soon replicated by others. See Appendix H for a timeline of important national and local events in the emergency food network. This timeline illustrates the growth and institutionalization of the emergency food network over the latter half of twentieth century.

Food banks have a complex relationship with their member programs; it is probably fair to suggest that food banks need food pantries and soup kitchens to survive and vice versa. Beth, the Director of Member Programs at the Food Bank, described the relationship between food banks and food pantries and soup kitchens:

A lot of them [food pantries and soup kitchens] are volunteer-run and there are not as sophisticated grant writers on staff. They’re not paid staff people. So the idea is, what they’re going to do is, they’re gonna outsource their food needs and funding needs to their local food bank. And then we’re going to access the bulk of their funds and the food for them. And in return, they’re gonna help support us to do that. And by doing that they’re supporting us with the 14 cents per pound shared maintenance fee. And so the whole basic [idea] of that is, that we’re all creating a partnership with one another and that way we’re able to take in things that, you know, all those products that are either too big for one food pantry to handle. We’re able to go through things like contracting and audits and things that they’re just not capable of doing. And that way, that’s how we’re able to sort of sustain this sort of partnership and this network of food.

According to Beth, in addition to outsourcing their food needs, organizations are also outsourcing some of their grant writing and other fundraising tasks to the food bank. Her
comments illustrated another important piece of the food banking system that many in the general public are unaware of—the shared maintenance fee. This fee is required by Feeding America of its member food banks and Beth was quick to point out that it was an IRS approved activity. Feeding America suggests that food banks charge up to 29 cents per pound for maintenance and delivery fees.

Though food banks originally focused on collecting food that would otherwise be wasted, this focus has shifted over the years due to the technological improvements that have occurred in the food industry and the emergence of a secondary grocery market. Beth reflected on the changes that have occurred in the system at large and about the three different kinds of food that food banks specialize in now:

One is the donated foods, which are why food banking got started. So, all those products that sort of got damaged in the grocery store, or say that, you know, like a machine is printing cereal boxes and all of the sudden the cereal boxes are getting printed upside down. And they can’t sell those anymore. Things like that. Which is why food banking got started, was just retransferring those sort of damaged products that couldn’t be sold. But over time, computers have gotten a lot smarter and those donated products aren’t coming through anymore so, you know, people aren’t making those inventory mistakes that they used to because of the computers as well as local grocery stores have gotten a lot better at inventory control, things like Shopper’s Club cards are now being able to better tell what consumers are buying. So they’re not having like an abundance of products as well as, redemption centers have sort of moved out of the state. And then the third thing has been the emergence of secondary markets. So things like dollar stores, now if you go in there, you see that they’re selling food and that would be food that originally would have been donated to a food bank, so all of those things have sort of led up to a dry-up of donated food. And so we’ve had to replace it with other types of food and the other two types are your USDA foods, which are funded through, they’re federal commodities that are funded through The Emergency Food Assistance Program, it stands for TEFAP, through USDA and those are the federal commodities that come through, sort of like the Reagan era, when they always talk about like government cheese, that’s USDA commodities. But it’s so much more than cheese, it’s like meats, fruits and vegetables, chicken… You know what I mean, pork, canned pork, like all sorts of different things and staple items. And then one thing that we’re doing as a Food Bank is because of the donated products have dried up, is we’re getting into wholesale purchasing, which is to help replace the items that we’ve lost in terms of the
donation changes. So those really make up the three types of food that our food bank offers.

The “dry-up” of donated foods across the country has had a large impact on food banks and consequently, on food pantries and soup kitchens. TEFAP foods such as the ones that Beth mentioned are available for food banks and organizations across the country. But there is much variation in terms of the amount of other support that organizations have, along with the degree to which organizations have transitioned into wholesale purchasing. According a recent study by Feeding America, food pantries get about 76% of their food from food banks and soup kitchens get about 50% of their food from food banks, so the impact of the food available for these organizations in food banks is high (Mabli et al. 2010).

There are over 200 food banks in the United States, according to Feeding America, a national-level organization that acts as a network, advocate, and food solicitor for the nation’s food banks. Most of these food banks were formed in their respective communities in the late 1970s and 1980s. In New York State there are eight food banks that cover the state and an organization that represents New York food banks named the Food Bank Association of New York State. The Food Bank Association of New York State (2007) works to advocate for food banks on the state level and connects New York food banks to sources of donations, such as farming associations, businesses, and trucking companies. For example, their website shows a map which illustrates all of the major highways within the New York food bank regions, so that any truck driver who may need to get rid of their stock can find a food bank more easily.
THE FOOD BANK OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

Previously, I introduced the Food Bank of Central New York and some of its programs. In this section, I discuss Food Bank programs that directly affect food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse, in terms of coordinative and supportive effects. For example, the Food Bank operates a “Fresh Foods” program where they solicit and rescue perishable foods from grocery stores like Wegman’s and then deliver them by truck to different community centers throughout the area. Though this program does not directly supply food pantries or soup kitchens, it provides an additional source of regular, fresh, free food assistance in the community—possibly reducing demand on food pantries and soup kitchens. Additionally, they have a prepared food rescue program called “Second Helpings” which takes excess prepared foods from restaurants and other businesses and redistributes them to soup kitchens. As Beth mentioned, the Food Bank also participates in the USDA’s TEFAP program and distributes over two million dollars worth of food per year to their member programs. They are also a contractor for New York State’s HPNAP program, a program that gives the Food Bank the stability and resources to implement many of their programs. HPNAP funding has huge impacts on the overall budgets of food pantries and soup kitchens in New York State.

In addition to all of these programs, the Food Bank also has a supplemental order program for food pantries that helps organizations supplement their food stock at regular intervals and also in times of need. There are two types of supplemental orders: “Emergency Shipment Orders” and “Community Supported Shipments.” Emergency Shipment Orders are given to pantries that are running low on an emergency basis. Beth said that through this program, they are able to act as a “safety net for the programs”:
You know how the Emergency Food Network is a safety net for the people? The Food Bank is the _program_ safety net. We never want one of our member programs to be on the news saying they couldn’t open because they had no food. That is just not going to happen, so we offer Emergency Shipment Orders to prevent that from happening. We will fill your shelves if you can’t… we never want someone getting turned away because they didn’t have any food… For example, a pantry was supposed to participate in the postal drive in September, they went to go get up their portion of the food and it was gone, they didn’t have any, so they panicked and they called me and they didn’t know what to do, so we sent them a shipment. ’Cause that was, they didn’t do any fundraising that month because that’s what they thought they were going to be able to have, so we sent them a shipment, ’til they got back on track, so that’s like kind of how it works.

The Emergency Shipment Orders are mostly funded by support that they get from the HPNAP program. Community Supported Shipments are more regular shipments that food pantries can access. Some years programs can get up to four of these kinds of shipments, which are funded by various sources such as the Emergency Food and Shelter Program, the Eastwood Rotary, the St. Patrick’s Hunger Project, and ARRA funding.

Beth thought that these shipments help pantries plan better and also reward organizations that do not run out of food:

And then what they’re able to do is they’ve got six months over the course of the year and they have four shipments from the Emergency Food and Shelter Board, they can take those shipments whenever they want, over those six months, so whenever they’re, so it’s not an emergency situation, this way it allows them to plan. And what, the way we make up the package is put together by our Food Service Coordinator and our Registered Dietician looks at it, you know, to make sure that it, ’cause basically for a $500 shipment, it’s enough food to feed 85 people three meals a day for three days, that’s 765 meals in one shipment… basically we set up a basic package of core products, fruits, vegetables, pasta, cereal, and what programs are able to do is when they schedule that shipment, they’re allowed to substitute within food groups, in case, so say like someone called the other day and got me by mistake ’cause I don’t really schedule them but, they said you know, I don’t want any spaghetti, I’ve got tons of spaghetti, so then we’ll be able to say, ok, so we won’t send them spaghetti, we’ll send them rice… The goal though is for us, if we can get them the core products, then they can use the money that they have to go buy the special things that people like, but let us take care of the core stuff, it’s not supposed to be everything, but if we can give you the basics at no cost to you, the money you have left over from that, you can go buy those special things that people like.
According to Beth, in the 2008-2009 fiscal year, they distributed 461 supplemental orders in Onondaga County at no cost to the programs. She estimated that these shipments are valued at around $245,000. There are also other types of supplemental orders including “Model Program Shipments” which get allocated to programs that score high on their HPNAP food grant. Additionally, the Food Bank distributes a “Bare Essentials Package” which they use to reward organizations that attend their county-based best practice trainings. In their 2009 Annual Report, the Food Bank reported that 135 of their programs received the bare essentials package for attending seminars (FBCNY 2010b).

The availability of Emergency Shipment Orders is a source of stability for food pantries in the local network. Beth said that they typically get fewer than five requests a month. She continued,

It’s really not very often, you know, because we have so many other options and you know, that’s the beautiful thing, it’s like when you read the New York Times and people saying food bank shelves are empty and stuff like that, we’re so unique in New York, that because they have the lines of credit [through HPNAP], because they have, we have more TEFAP foods coming through because of the higher TEFAP funding. There’s more food out there than ever before, so the emergencies are fewer and fewer ever since I’ve started here and then we’ve been able to really build up this program, so you don’t need an emergency shipment because they’ve got three to use before the end of the year, so they just use those.

Even with the support that Beth referred to, I was surprised to hear that so few of their member programs request Emergency Shipment Orders. The regular additional shipments of food from their Community Supported Shipments program seemed to have a positive impact on the pantries’ resource stability. Beth also said that their member programs do not close due to lack of food, though she acknowledged that programs do run low on certain foods.
Shared maintenance fees are part of the financial support that the Food Bank relies on to operate their programs. Fees are not uncommon in the nonprofit world (Young and Salamon 2002). The Food Bank of Central New York charges 14 cents per pound for donated foods, 12 cents per pound for wholesale foods, and 7 cents per pound for dairy and produce. They do not charge for delivery and according to a presentation given by Beth at the 2008 Annual Member Program Conference, shared maintenance fees account for about 20 percent of the Food Bank of Central New York’s revenue (Slater 2008). The Food Bank is proud that their shared maintenance fee has remained lower than the Feeding America guideline; Beth said that they view finding funding to offset the fee to be part of their responsibility:

We haven’t raised ours in over 14 years, so we’re still at the 14 cents. We’re sort of able to access donations or government grants to sort of help cover the cost, because the whole thing is that our agencies don’t have a lot of money to spend, so it’s our job to get the cheapest prices available and find the sources that can help provide them for their needs, because that was our whole original partnership in the first place, is that they were outsourcing those things for us and in the interim we would do those things for them.

Finding additional sources of food is important to the Food Bank, in general, as well. Beth discussed how the Food Bank has experienced the changes in funding and donations over time:

I would say probably in the last 10 years, there’s been a drastic decline [in donated foods]. I would probably have to double-check the statistic, but I would say we were maybe, maybe like 70/30 donated versus not and I would say that’s probably switched… Fortunately, our Executive Director has a Masters in Information Technology, so for some reason he sort of foresaw this happening and we got into wholesale purchasing a lot earlier than other Food Banks. So it never really hit us like it hit food banks across the country, some of which are still operating on a donated only, so a lot of times in like the New York Times or The Washington Post you’re seeing a lot of articles about how food bank shelves are empty and they have no foods. And you don’t see those articles here, because it’s not the case because we went into wholesale purchasing and also because we have state funding, which most food banks don’t have. So there’s a lot of, it’s definitely
been a challenge, that’s been huge to food banking overall, but it was something that we’ve sort of been able to sort of side-step and replace with the wholesale purchasing program.

As Beth stated, the Food Bank of Central New York has transitioned from a reliance on donated foods to proactively acquiring the funding to support the purchase of wholesale foods on behalf of their programs which then purchase the foods from the Food Bank at cost plus the 12 cents per pound fee. This is the second time that Beth mentioned that the Food Bank of Central New York and its programs are not usually featured on the cover of national newspapers discussing the dearth of food in food banks. The first time she mentioned this she credited this feat to their state and federal funding; here, she credited it to their early transition into wholesale foods. Later in our interview, she thoughtfully pointed out that the two sources of their stability, government funding and wholesale purchasing, are interrelated because it was the government funding that gave them the ability to start investing in wholesale purchasing in the first place.

With the help of their steady sources of funding, the Food Bank keeps 92 core products on their menu for programs to order at all times, according to Tom, the Executive Director. In order to accommodate the increase in this kind of purchasing and to allow the Food Bank to purchase and receive more donations of refrigerated or frozen foods, they moved to a new location in fall 2010. The new location is much larger than their previous location and has 25,000 square feet of freezer and refrigeration space (Sharkey 2010).

Tracking the trends in food banking enabled staff at the Food Bank of Central New York to realize that corporate donations would not sustain their organization indefinitely—their transition into wholesale, bulk purchasing is viewed positively by the
organization. Now, they can buy the food that they want, by the truckload, and take advantage of the cost savings that comes with bulk purchasing. They recently conducted a price comparison of their own food prices and the same foods at the grocery store and found that their prices were lower in almost every case. Their ability to demonstrate this cost effectiveness has helped them to increase their funding.

These shifts and practices are not free from critique, however. Food banks are beginning to appear more and more like grocery wholesalers and this is a significant shift from their original focus on collecting and soliciting donated food. Also, the structure and practices of food banks are not without critique. Warshawsky (2010) critiques the commercialization of the food banking industry, using data that he collected in Chicago. He argues that in an attempt to distance themselves from the instabilities of government funding, food banks have turned to private support, which has affected their governance structures and abilities to advocate (Warshawsky 2010). He argues that the widespread implementation of shared maintenance fees in food banks is one way in which corporate accountability has affected food banking. He quotes one of his research participants who works at a food bank:

[The] (shared maintenance fee) sort of injects accountability into the food distribution system...If a pantry can’t (pay their bills)...then they are not a viable source of support for the community in which they operate...It’s our moral responsibility to be fiscally strong and to use all of the methods and practices that the for-profit sector uses to deliver shareholder value (Warshawsky 2010:769).

As his participant illustrated, shared maintenance fees perform functions other than raising revenue for service. They provide food banks with a method of ensuring accountability, a feature of the new public management discourse.
**Best Practices**

The Food Bank has invested significant resources and energy into the promotion of what they understand as the “best practices” in the emergency food network. This is one of the most significant ways that the Food Bank coordinates activities in Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens. Their “Model Programs Education Series” is a collection of handouts and information designed to help their member programs implement particular best practices. Annie, the Member Programs Coordinator at the Food Bank, discussed the educational series, which consists of trainings and informational sheets on several “tools and techniques” that programs can use to improve their services.

According to the Food Bank, “A model program is an emergency food program that goes beyond distributing food to the hungry and empowers its clientele to move towards self-sufficiency.” The informational sheets also state that programs should want to be a model program because:

> The Food Bank’s 2006 Hunger Study showed that the problem of hunger is increasing in Central and Northern New York and that more people are accessing emergency food services. Given the challenges many programs are facing with increasing expenses and decreasing food supplies, many programs can no longer sustain the work they do. As a result, programs want to proactively work to move people off of the emergency food network while providing the best possible service.

According to this paragraph, the Food Bank has developed this series to help programs meet the demands of decreased funding and increased numbers. The solution proposed here is to “move people off of the emergency food network while providing the best possible service.”

The language of “self-sufficiency” in the definition of the model program also illustrates discourses of the new public management. Funders are increasingly interested
in the ways that programs encourage self-sufficiency. Simply distributing food is not enough for some funders. Keeping track of case management and referrals to social services outside of the emergency food network are more and more important to funders as evidence of accountability.

The topics of the Model Programs Education Series include: “How to be a Client Choice Pantry,” “How to Expand Access to Your Emergency Food Program,” “How to Set a Defined Geographic Area,” “How to Financially Sustain Your Program,” “How to Provide a Referral,” and “How to Increase Your Service Numbers.” According to the Food Bank’s 2008 Annual Report, they also developed a program on “meticulous meal record-keeping.” The back page of each informational sheet contains the general information on the Model Program Series that I quoted above. The front page of each sheet contains brief information that defines the issue, why it is important to think about, and what pantries can to do improve in that area. Interestingly, only one of the topics seems to focus on “moving people off of the emergency food network,” and that is the topic on “How to Provide a Referral,” which points out that programs that refer clients to government services can reduce demand on emergency food programs. The majority of the topics seem to focus on providing the “best possible service.” One topic actually focuses on expanding service (“How to Increase Your Service Numbers”).

The Food Bank’s 2008 Annual Report mentioned that in the previous year, the Food Bank incentivized improvements in these areas with 58 extra shipments of food. The Food Bank gauges program engagement by asking questions on the HPNAP application that demonstrate how programs have implemented the practices covered in the Series. For example, the application asks if pantries practice client choice, if they use
geographic areas, what their hours of operations are, how many meals they give out per package, if they provide referrals, and what the sources of their budget are. These questions connect to the topics presented in the Series, so the Food Bank is aware of which pantries are using “best practices.” The application itself actually states that part of the scoring process will consider the “agency’s ability to meet and/or exceed the Food Bank of Central New York’s best practices”—another incentive for pantries to participate in these programs.

HPNAP impacts more than just the funding levels of the programs, as evidenced by the application’s scoring system, which includes a program’s use of best practices. For example, Annie believes that it is possible that HPNAP will make the client choice food distribution model mandatory for pantries receiving the funding:

They [HPNAP representatives] are really pushing us to do client choice, so they’re, you know, we set a goal of how many we were going to change on an annual basis. I think I said I would change 10 last year; I think I did, I think I might have done 12 even. I actually haven’t done my final counts for the year, but I also get money from HPNAP to help them change over by purchasing shelving, shopping carts, refrigerators, freezers, so it’s an extra money besides the regular grant money that they get, it’s an extra allotment that I get just for client choice…if this is your barrier, let’s see what we can do, if I can get you some shelving in here, then maybe that would work. And so that’s been working, it’s great.

The “push” for client choice is clearly an initiative that is supported not only by the Food Bank, but also by the state. It is also possible that some of the other best practice initiatives originated from the interests of the state or other funders of the emergency food network.

Best practices promoted by an institution such as the Food Bank have a standardizing effect on their member programs, indicating that the activities of the programs in the network are more coordinated than would be obvious at a first glance.
Interestingly, many of the model programs such as the client choice program, seem to have the client’s best interests at heart, unlike some of the funding effects that have been documented in the nonprofit sector. This is not to say that the model programs have only positive effects on pantries. For example, the local method of determining and enforcing geographic/service areas has many flaws. Also, at smaller organizations, the already overburdened volunteers may struggle to meet the expectations of the Food Bank. For example, one pantry coordinator said that he was encouraged by the Food Bank to expand his hours of operation and attend two trainings so that he could qualify for more shipments of free food from the Food Bank. He expanded his hours and then learned that there was not another training session planned for months, leaving him with higher service numbers but no additional food.

Still, some standardizing in the emergency food network around issues such as increasing access and switching to client choice does have positive effects on the network which has been historically plagued by what Poppendieck aptly named the “seven deadly ‘ins’”: insufficiency, inappropriateness, nutritional inadequacy, instability, inaccessibility, inefficiency, and indignity (1999). Regardless of whether the best practices being promoted by the Food Bank are positive or negative, it is clear that they are coordinating the activities of their member programs at higher levels than they have in the past. Perhaps this is because the Food Bank views these practices as the most dignified ways to provide service, but they may also be responding to changes in their own funding environments. It is possible that implementing these practices in the local network legitimizes the activities of food pantries and soup kitchens, as well as those of
the Food Bank, making all of these organizations more “fundable” from the perspective of funders.

*Monitoring*

Another way that the Food Bank coordinates the practices of its member programs is through monitoring. The Member Programs Department at the Food Bank is charged with the task of monitoring all of their programs. They conduct site visits on an annual basis at soup kitchens and shelters and every two years at food pantries and other types of programs. The purpose of these visits is to make sure that programs are complying with health regulations, Food Bank policies, and to make sure that programs are “treating people well” and “getting a good grasp on how to run their program.”

In addition to formal site visits, the Food Bank also uses “secret shoppers” to monitor programs. Beth talked about how and why they send undercover Food Bank representatives to their member programs:

> We have staff who the programs aren’t familiar with go through the line, if we get some sort of complaint, or allegation. It’s very hard to, always hard to try things third hand, especially like if a program says something about another program, we kind of have to get the information first-hand. We get some things directly from a client, then we’re able to sort of, that’s a go-to thing to kind of experience that, so we just have a staff person go through, pose as someone in need, and see what their experiences are. And then based on their results, we’re able to go and say congratulations, you passed and you did this really well, and this really well. Have you ever thought about doing this? ’Cause this would be nice, or I’m sorry, we found this, this, and this, and this is incorrect. So it’s a really nice thing to have, and then what we’re able to do is, we bring the food back that same day or the next day and then we go over the results with them of their secret shopper program, so… It’s something to always keep in mind that we’re out there. But you know, because you never know what’s happening, so it’s always good to have someone out in the field, kind of doing stuff like that, so I’ve got two staff out there right now, doing something up north today.
The Food Bank uses secret monitoring not only to assess programs that are under investigation for a negative allegation, but also to provide occasional feedback. Until this conversation, I was unaware that the Food Bank was “out there” keeping a quiet eye on their programs. This tactic is one method of keeping programs in line with Food Bank standards—which again is invisible to the outside observer who might assume that because the 60 or so food pantries of Syracuse are each their own independent entities and are mostly volunteer run, they would lack any sort of oversight.

In order to set up clear expectations between the programs and the Food Bank, the Food Bank has published a “Guest Bill of Rights” and a “Program Bill of Rights” to clarify the policies of the Food Bank and what responsibilities clients and programs have to each other. Appendix G includes copies of these policy statements. A HPNAP representative suggested that the Food Bank establish a “Guest Bill of Rights” after a representative of HPNAP discovered another New York program implementing a similar practice. The Food Bank of Central New York was happy to implement the policy and went one step further to create the “Program Bill of Rights” to reflect their allegiances to both the “guests” and the “programs.” According to Beth, these sheets must be hung in a visible place at each program:

[They] clarify the roles and responsibilities of people and programs because some of these things, you know like, the EFA network that we spoke about, was all run on social security numbers. Well, they [the clients] don’t have to provide social security numbers so that was something that went into the Client Bill of Rights, but one thing that programs can do, is not serve people that don’t live in their area, once they’ve explained to someone that it’s not their area, so someone that lives in the city of Syracuse, should not be going to a food pantry in Jamesville, they just shouldn’t. There’s tons of pantries in the city of Syracuse. So, if they go to Jamesville the first time, obviously they don’t know they’re in the wrong place. And they don’t know if they’re supposed to bring documentation or whatever rules those pantries have set-up. So our rule is that, if it’s the first time—you have to give them food, there’s just no other way, you just have to serve them. They
don’t know that they’re in the wrong place, they’re not psychic, you don’t carry around kids’ report cards with you every day. Or whatever it is that you do. So, but what they can say, I’m sorry but you don’t live in my area, or next time, I need you to bring this, so that was one of things that the Bill of Rights was able to do, that on a second visit, as long as you’ve explained those things to them and as long as you’re fair to everybody, some of those things you can do. So that was the whole Bill of Rights thing, was, trying to show that our responsibility is to both sides of this whole service delivery. And it was just, you know it actually went over really well. A lot of people liked it and I only had really like one issue, but it really, I think for the bulk of our programs, they actually thought, it really clarified a lot of things on both sides of the aisle, of what people could and couldn’t do because that’s you know, and sometimes it is sort of a referee situation, so it’s interesting.

Having their programs post these sheets helps the Food Bank to monitor program practices indirectly. By making it clear to the clients what programs can and cannot do they are protecting the client’s interests and vice versa. This strategy and the others that I have discussed contribute to making client experiences more consistent between programs in the area by coordinating local practices.

_Professionalization at the Food Bank_

The Food Bank has an organizational structure similar to that of many other large nonprofit organizations. They have a Board of Directors and a staff of over 40 full-time employees; they are audited annually by independent auditors and receive funding from a combination of government and private sources. Over the years, the Food Bank has grown and become more formalized. When visiting the Food Bank, I could not help but observe that it felt like many businesses that I have visited—there was a reception area with two female workers behind a tall desk, a conference room, a lunchroom, a long hallway of offices, and a bustling warehouse. Not much distinguished it from a business environment, except maybe the colorful, hand-painted mural in the reception area. It was a picture of faceless people of varying skin tones. On my first visit, Beth explained that
the picture was meant to symbolize the idea that anyone could experience hunger. This mural is an effective example of what Henderson (2004) calls “socially necessary representation” in food banks. This representation depoliticizes the issue of who it is that is more likely to be hungry in the United States. In discussing the absence of race in one food bank’s newsletter, Henderson states, “we have no mention of why particular groups show up more than others as members of the ‘working poor,’ no representation of a more specific identity which will bring us closer to naming underlying causal mechanisms” (505).

The Food Bank is understood in the local emergency food network to operate “like a business,” a factor that is positively viewed by the Food Bank itself, but occasionally brings critique from people working in local organizations. During my first visit to the Food Bank, Beth took me on a tour of the facilities and took care to point out an award that was displayed in the conference room—a plaque from the Syracuse Chamber of Commerce declaring the Food Bank of Central New York to be the Business of the Year in 2004. Beth said that this award was given to them partially due to the fact that they spend 94 cents of every dollar on programming and not on administrative or salary costs and that this demonstrated their high level of efficiency. The Executive Director of the Food Bank is known throughout the community for being a “businessman” at heart, a comment that seemed to be considered both a compliment and a critique. One pantry coordinator called the Food Bank an “empire,” when reflecting about a recent change in how the Food Bank would receive a major source of local bread donations instead of the pantries:

And that, in a way, the Food Bank has, as much as I, and it’s just, I’m always ambivalent about the whole thing, ’cause it’s like they’re building their own little
empire… I mean it’s a huge organization. I mean huge. And it’s not like they’re not doing good work, but, I’m not sure that people really would like hunger to disappear. I mean it’s their job. What if we didn’t have to have the Second Harvest [Feeding America], what if people actually had their own resources? I mean it would be, it would also have impact on the larger society, because a lot of people would lose their work.

Later in our conversation, this coordinator said that they knew that the staff at the Food Bank worked hard on policy advocacy, but they seemed to have doubts about the efficacy of that work. Tom, the Executive Director, seemed aware of these sorts of critiques of the food banking industry because he said, unprompted and quite confidently,

I would love not to have this job. As much as I am blessed to have it and appreciate everything that I have, there’s other things that I could do and I just think that it’s an inefficient way of feeding American citizens… But, I think given a broken system, we’ve made the most of it.

His comments seem to sum up the philosophy at the Food Bank—be critical, but “make the most of a broken system.” Despite this philosophy it is quite understandable that some workers on the ground feel trapped in the daily grind of running organizations such as food pantries. There is no end in sight for food pantry and soup kitchen workers. Additionally, it must seem odd to observe the differences between the local Food Bank and the local grocery supplier continually blur.

In addition to the business-like atmosphere at the Food Bank, the staff at the Food Bank keep up with business environments in other ways, as well. For example, they have become more technologically advanced over the years. Programs can now place their food orders online. The Food Bank also recently received a donation of computer equipment from Feeding America to pilot new food banking computer software.

The language that is used at the Food Bank also demonstrates their place in the broader business environment. Terms like “best practices,” “efficiency,” and “fiscal responsibility” all circulate in language used at the Food Bank. They refer to their
member programs as “customers” and view them as such—Beth mentioned that their
goal was to keep their “customers” happy. Tom mentioned that the problem with their
“business” is that their “customer base doesn’t have any funds.”

Poppendieck suggests that the “corporate style” of food banks is connected to the early relationships developed between Feeding America, food banks and corporations (1999:269). Whether because of the need to seem welcoming to the corporate world or because so many representatives of the corporate world sit on the Boards of these organizations, it seems that many food banks have adopted a business style of operation. This makes food banks a rich site of analysis for scholars wanting to research the effects of new public management on the nonprofit sector.

FEEDING AMERICA

Throughout my research, I observed some of the ways that Feeding America, the national organization that represents food banks influences the local environment. The establishment of Feeding America, or “Second Harvest” as it was formerly named, happened in the late 1970s due to a partnership initiated by the federal government with one of the early food banks, St. Mary’s Food Bank (Poppendieck 1999). According to Poppendieck (1999), the establishment of this network helped to expand the number of food banks nationwide from about 13 in 1979 to over 200 in 2010.

To be in Feeding America’s network of affiliated food banks, a food bank must meet certain standards. According to Tom, when he was hired by the Food Bank in 1995, they were deficient in 19 of 26 areas that were designated by Feeding America. Their suggestions were a “blueprint on how to be a good food bank.” Beth said that Feeding
America audits them every two years to assess their practices. She talked about some of the benefits of being an affiliate food bank:

It’s someone who just has national perspective, who comes in, to sort of make sure that we’re doing everything in accordance with them and then they give us suggestions on how to improve from what they’ve learned from other food banks and then we sort of have this national network, so you have someone in Washington advocating on the Farm Bill or you know, food stamps and TEFAP and they’re able to have presence in Washington and they’re able to give me direction to know to call Congressman Maffei about this topic and we’re able to really work together in that way as well as the whole benefit of Feeding America is they can access sort of national donations. So you know, you see a lot of stuff with them lately, like Biggest Loser or Hot Pocket or, their stuff is everywhere now and they’re able to sort of distribute donated foods through their network of food banks. They do it through like a choice system, which I’m not very familiar with. But it’s something where in terms of the amount of food that you’re serving and people that you’re serving and pounds that you distribute you get points and once you acquire so many points you’re able to access things on the Choice System, I don’t have a lot of background on that, but that’s kind of how the food that they get donated to them is distributed to the local food bank.

Not only do food banks benefit from the lobbying that Feeding America does, they also receive donations from national-level corporations. For example, Feeding America recently facilitated a relationship with Wal-Mart stores that the Food Bank is now able to take advantage of on the local level. Generally speaking, Feeding America pursues food and funding donations from national-level corporations, like “Hot Pockets.” Beth pointed out, though, that Feeding America does not store or transport food, they simply facilitate the connections between their member food banks and the businesses that make donations through the “Choice System” that she referenced.

Food banks reap other benefits of being a Feeding America affiliate. The affiliation provides legitimacy to their organization, which can assist organizations in garnering more support. Organizations also benefit from the data collection that Feeding America conducts with their “Hunger in America” studies. These studies provide
information about national and local hunger to food banks which can help them target areas that need further assessment locally and also justify the need for additional funding. Affiliate food banks are also able to benefit from the authority that the stamp of Feeding America stamp has. For example, both of the Bills of Rights that I discussed have the “Second Harvest” logo stamped on the bottom of the form. Additionally, organizations may benefit from opportunities such as the one that the Food Bank had in piloting food banking software. They received $295,000 worth of free computer hardware for their participation in this pilot program, in addition to the free software. The local Food Bank was one of three food banks nationwide to have this opportunity, a fact that the local Food Bank can now use to demonstrate its status as a “model food bank” across the country.

POLICY INFLUENCES

The practices and policies of the federal government have a substantial impact on food pantries and soup kitchens. From a broader perspective, the efficacy of programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and SNAP affect the level of need for people to access emergency food in the first place. But federal government programs also directly impact food pantries and soup kitchens through funding supplied by USDA programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which distributes commodities to food banks and other emergency food providers. The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) is also a form of federal funding that is distributed at the county level for disbursement to a variety of organizations including food pantries, soup kitchens, and food banks. Also, in New York State, additional funding is made available through the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance
Program (HPNAP). In Syracuse, TEFAP, EFSP, and HPNAP funding is funneled through the Food Bank of Central New York, illustrating the importance for food pantries and soup kitchens to maintain good standing with the Food Bank.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

TEFAP is one of several nutrition and food assistance programs housed under the USDA. This program is funded by the Farm Bill which is reauthorized approximately every five years. Funding for TEFAP comes from two sources in the Farm Bill, mandatory funding and bonus commodities. The mandatory funding portion of TEFAP is not quite “mandatory” because the allocation is reauthorized annually through the discretionary appropriations process in Congress. Even though the amount of mandatory funding is determined every five years or so in the Farm Bill, Congress has the power not to fully fund it on an annual basis. The bonus commodity portion of the support is even more in flux as bonus commodities are only routed into the emergency food network when the government deems that it is beneficial for the market.

Before 2008, when the current version of the Farm Bill was enacted the amount of food coming to the Food Bank from the bonus commodities portion of the program had decreased because the market did not necessitate the removal of these commodities from their typical chains of production and distribution. Beth said that this factor combined with the flat funding of the mandatory funding in 2002 hurt their food supply at the Food Bank during this time period. They had fewer bonus commodities and the cost of inflation was not reflected in the mandatory funding. Food banks and organizations such as Feeding America and the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) worked together to advocate for a better funded TEFAP in the 2008 Farm Bill. The lobbying was
successful as the mandatory funding for TEFAP was increased significantly in 2008. According to Beth, mandatory funding for TEFAP increased from $140 million to $250 million to make up for the drop in bonus commodities.

The increase in TEFAP funding has had a huge impact on the local emergency food network, which now has access to a steady and varied source of free food through this program. In February 2010, Tom said that since the increase went into effect, the percentage of TEFAP foods distributed through the Food Bank has increased to close to 32 percent of the food they distribute. Beth remarked on how the increase has impacted their member programs:

The USDA foods just flow through the network at no cost to the programs… So the increase in the USDA food has been just awesome… So it’s really great for the programs, to kind of help, you know, stock up on those foods and add on just what’s not available in their own thing. So I think it’s really made a really big difference the last couple of months and we’re really excited you know, when they’re saying oh, this is great, you guys get so much USDA but now we’re in a five year spending plan from the Farm Bill, so it should stay this way for a while. So we’re pretty excited about that… And it’s been just a fantastic difference, again, because it’s no cost to the programs, it’s healthy food, they can fill up a lot of the core products that they want, through USDA. It’s just a win, win, win for everybody. And we are able to again purchase, what we’re able to do, we use our money for, is not so much purchase a higher quantity of the same product, we’re able to get more variations of products in. So that’s been working out very, very well… You can never go wrong with more. No one is ever is going to complain about having too much USDA food. That’s just not gonna happen, that’s like having too high of a HPNAP grant (laughs).

Beth said that the first quarter that the new bill went into effect, their TEFAP food poundage for that month was higher than the entire quarter before the increase was implemented. Under the previous funding cycle, I heard quite a few complaints from pantries about there being fewer TEFAP foods available to them. Beth responded that in the past the percentage of TEFAP foods at the Food Bank was as low as 17 percent and
that “when you figure that we’re a ten million pound organization that much of a percentage difference is going to be a lot for the programs.”

Once TEFAP funding is appropriated annually, the federal government makes allocations to states based on poverty and unemployment rates. Commodity foods are purchased, processed, and packaged by the USDA, dependent on “the preferences of States and agricultural market conditions” (TEFAP 2010a). TEFAP predicts that it will have “more than 60 products available for Fiscal Year 2011 including: canned fruits, canned vegetables, fruit juice, dried egg mix, meat/poultry/fish, dried beans, pasta products, peanut butter, rice/grits/cereal, and soups” (TEFAP 2010a). In New York State, these foods are routed through the New York State Office of General Services, which subcontracts with New York food banks. The Office of General Services creates a menu that food banks are able to order foods from—the amount of their allocation depends on local poverty levels. Because the availability of bonus commodities is completely market driven, the Food Bank is only given the opportunity to accept or refuse commodity foods that are available.

The Food Bank allocates TEFAP foods to their programs in Onondaga County based on each program’s service numbers. They set a monthly case limit for each program. Beth remarked,

So if we’ve gotten six different items and you have eight cases… that’s eight cases of all six items that you’re allowed to get… and we just base it on the number of people that they’re serving, just to kind of make it fair… They can come and get it [or] we will deliver it to them as long as…you have to have a minimum of 40 cases, half of them have to be something other than USDA foods in our other counties. In Onondaga County, the limit’s only 25 cases.

I inquired if the foods coming from the bonus commodities were similar in type and quality to the foods that they order through the mandatory funding portion. Beth believed
that they did not vary much and she said was pleased with the nutritional quality and the
variety of foods available to them, generally:

    The more variety we can offer, the better… In our state, we [FBCNY] get about 8 percent of the funding, 60 percent of it goes straight to New York City. And then the rest is kind of broken up amongst the seven of us (laughs). So we get about eight percent and then what we do is we get a cash allocation and then you’re able to pick what types of foods that you want and it just takes away from your cash allocation, so that’s how it works. So a lot of times people will say they want dairy, so we’ll get the USDA aseptic milk, because that’s what we know our people want, those types of things. So we do get a choice in terms of USDA food. We just don’t get a choice with how much money we get.

The Food Bank tries to order foods that it knows that the programs want and need, a fact that seemed appreciated by the programs that I visited. In fact, all of the food pantries and soup kitchens that I visited received TEFAP foods to some extent. Most of the coordinators mentioned maximizing their TEFAP foods at every opportunity and several mentioned stocking up on TEFAP foods.

    If a food pantry distributes TEFAP foods, they are required to certify that their clients’ income level is less than 185 percent of the federal poverty line; this level is determined by New York State. All of the pantries that I visited accomplished this by asking clients to sign that their income is less than the required level by household size. There is a chart on the back of the intake form that most of the pantries use to facilitate the certification. Beth discussed the requirements for receiving the TEFAP foods other than the income guidelines:

    They [pantries] have to sign a contract every single year and they have to follow the TEFAP guidelines and you have to be a member in good standing, so if you’re suspended because you haven’t been turning in reports you can’t access any of the bonuses of being a member. But other than that, yeah, you just have to sign your TEFAP contract every year and you have to submit your service reports, then you have to follow your guidelines of membership.
Re-qualifying for TEFAP foods is not difficult for programs that stay in “good standing” with the Food Bank—as Beth said, being in good standing means that you are turning in your monthly service numbers on time, that you are following Food Bank policies, and that you re-sign the contract every year.

Emergency Food and Shelter Program

Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) funding is federal monetary support available to city and county jurisdictions that meet the EFSP’s designated unemployment and poverty rate levels. The funding for the EFSP is appropriated by Congress and is administered to jurisdictions and states by the EFSP National Board, which is chaired by a representative from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), now part of the Department of Homeland Security (EFSNBP 2010). The National Board includes representatives from national-level nonprofit organizations such as Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army. The United Way administers the program on the local level. If a city or county does not qualify for national funding, additional funding can be appropriated on the state level by way of a state set-aside that can be used at the state’s discretion (EFSNBP 2010). According to the EFSP Phase 28 Manual, EFSP funding started in 1983 as part of a Jobs Stimulus Bill (EFSNBP n.d.). The EFSP website states that Phase 29 is funded through the Department of Homeland Security’s Appropriations Bill (EFSNBP 2010).

FEMA provides support and administers funds to the EFSP National Board; the agency also serves as chair of the National Board. EFSP funding was designed as a government and private partnership (EFSNBP n.d.). EFSP funding is informally known
in the community as FEMA funding; though many actors in the local community have started to use the name EFSP.

EFSP funds are eligible for allocation by the Onondaga County Board to local organizations for the following purposes: to fund food, equipment, or repairs in emergency food organizations and/or shelters, the cost of lodging, and assistance in the form of rent, housing, or utility support. In Syracuse’s emergency food network, EFSP funding helps support food pantries and soup kitchens. In 2009, about $50,000 was allocated to mass feeding facilities including soup kitchens and programs such as Meals on Wheels in Onondaga County (EFSNBP 2010). This funding is an increase from the 2008 level of about $38,000. In 2009, about $121,000 was allocated to food pantries, food vouchers, and food banks, an increase from about $92,000 in 2008. In 2009, additional funding was provided to EFSP by Congress due to the economic downturn; this increase is reflected in the allocation increase between 2008 and 2009. Also, more funding came into the EFSP program through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, which was also allocated by local Boards (EFSNBP 2010). In 2011, budget cuts will mostly likely affect the EFSP funding, potentially reducing funding by $100 million (Feeding America 2011a).

In the local community, EFSP funding is allocated to about six to eight agencies, annually, according to a representative from Onondaga County’s EFSP Board. Organizations such as the Food Bank, the Interreligious Food Consortium (IFC), Salvation Army, and Catholic Charities were named as typical recipients of the funding. In recent years, there have been changes in the way that the EFSP funds were distributed between local organizations.
In the past, the IFC received a larger portion of the share designated for emergency food, which it distributed to pantries in the form of cash support. A few years ago, the Food Bank proposed that they receive a larger share of the allotment to expand their supplemental order program. Their proposal was successful and this pattern of allotment continues into the present day, but the decision created some discord in the local community. A representative from the EFSP Board commented on the process:

The Food Bank was able to demonstrate that they were able to have greater purchasing power, if you will, and part of it is the meals are supposed to be nutritious and they were able to demonstrate what they were actually putting in their packages so the culmination of the two, two pieces, and it was more difficult to get real clear data from the separate food pantries and so on for a variety of reasons. So, the dollar issue was a significant, the purchasing power and then the issue of what would be in those packages from the Food Bank was under discussion. Some of the pantries were saying that the unique demographics of the people we serve, limited, you know, a supplemental food package from the Food Bank limited their ability to purchase certain products that may be liked by their neighborhood folks… So I think, right, the Food Bank stuff is more standardized. I think there was a lot of discussion around some of those issues. And I think the Board decided that since the EFSP was still supplemental that the pantries etc., still had to generate at least 51 percent of their product either through purchase that they did or food donations and a lot of those pantries are parish-based or things of that sort. So, they were relying on a lot of in-kind stuff anyways. So, that was sort of a lot of the discussion. Follow-up surveys were done with a number of the pantries and many of them seemed to be pleased. There were a few, particularly larger ones who struggled with that decision. But the feedback we had, the Food Bank also had surveyed pantries they served and by and large seemed to be fine… My understanding is that as some of the issues revolve around, you know, pantries running out and needing a quick delivery of something and I believe the communication between the pantries and the Food Bank has improved and that those issues have certainly decreased is my understanding, so… The Food Bank does have a greater capacity of being able to document what they’re doing and so.

This representative remarked on several arguments that I heard from the Food Bank regarding the decision—the Food Bank could demonstrate more accountability regarding what it was putting in the packages and they showed a “bigger bang for their buck,”
which also makes them more efficient from the perspective of funders. Beth agreed with the FEMA representative’s comments:

The Local Board determined that, you know, looking at the price analysis and things like that, that if the crisis is that they are serving more people and that there’s not enough food, the responsibility of the FEMA board is to get the most bang for your buck. So the board determined that the best way to do that was to not give individual cash awards, but to do supplemental orders. Because $500 spent by us is a lot different than $500 spent at the local store.

Beth also explained what was in the supplemental orders because the standardization that happened as a result of the change was part of the reason that some of the pantries were upset:

Basically, it’s a stable supply of food, so they actually get cases of things like that, what we do is we’ll allow like substitutions within food groups, because the orders are put together by our registered dietician and our food purchaser, so we were able to analyze the package that we put together to show that each package would feed 85 people, three meals a day for three days. So we allow substitutions as long as it’s within food groups, to kind of keep that nutrition… So that way, someone could say, “Well you know, I just had a postal drive, I have a ton of pasta, can I have rice instead?” Rather than someone just saying, “cause you know, if you analyze some of those FEMA receipts or the, I mean people buying like condiments, they’re buying donuts, they’re buying like, there was no real checks and balance and this way, you know, you’re able to get nutritious core items. And that was the whole argument of the pantries was that there were more people and they didn’t have enough food. So, the board decided to make this sort of shift, which was pretty controversial at the time.

Controlling what types of foods EFSP funding is spent on seems to be part of the issue. Some stakeholders in the community, like Beth, seem critical of organizations that use their money to purchase foods that are not deemed as nutritious or necessities. Some of the pantry coordinators remarked, however, that the condiments, salad dressings, and desserts were items that everyone wanted and who were they to decide what a person should eat. The degree of control that is exerted over what foods are distributed seems to be an issue of debate in the local community.
The changes in allotments for EFSP funding was such an issue in the local community that when I began my research, some members of the Syracuse Hunger Project, a local network who organized around local anti-hunger issues for several years, were interested in finding out how pantries were feeling about the changes. Over the course of my fieldwork, the Syracuse Hunger Project dissolved. However, I did ask some coordinators about their thoughts on the issue. Some did not mind the changes; they certainly appreciated the supplemental orders and seemed to have a “funding is funding” perspective on the change. However, one pantry coordinator said that they missed having the ability to decide:

Just having a choice, you know, our thing here, is that we give people choice and now we’re not being given a choice. You know? And not only that, but part of it, for us was and I don’t know if this should be off the record or not, but whatever, I’ll take it. Some of that money, we were able to use it to buy stuff from [store] or buy stuff from [store] and both of those places support us, really well, as far as, you know, accommodating us in different ways and [store] donates all our bags and stuff. By doing that, by just giving us those packages instead of that money, we can no longer support these people that support us, it’s so important, it shouldn’t be just a, you know what I mean, we should be able to do that. We should be able to reciprocate and now we have no choice but to spend all of our money at the Food Bank and I, I don’t like it, I feel very restricted by it, you know one of the things, that I always say, is that you know in those packages last year, we would always get ground turkey, these people do not know what the hell to do with ground turkey (talks quietly), what do you do with it? They’ll come and tell me, that meat there’s no good, it tastes terrible, because they think it’s supposed to be hamburger, they don’t know what to do with it. So what good is that, to put on a shelf, if people don’t know how to use it, can’t use it, or don’t like it, and I have no choice, that’s what’s in the package, that’s what I get.

This coordinator was upset that she no longer had choice in the matter of how the EFSP funding was spent. She also argued that some of the foods included in the supplemental orders were unpopular with her clients, which was hard because their pantry uses the client-choice model, creating a situation where they could be stuck with the “ground
turkey.” She also seemed to resent the fact that she could no longer support the local businesses that supported her pantry.

Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program

The Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) is a program of the Division of Nutrition, Bureau of Nutrition Risk Reduction within the New York State Department of Health. This program is “dedicated to improving the health and nutrition status of people in need of food assistance in New York State” (HPNAP brochure). HPNAP realizes this goal by providing technical assistance, funding, and educational resources for New York food banks and food assistance organizations. The program began in 1984 when it was funded for one million dollars; since that time the funding has increased drastically, in part because the state uses a portion of its TANF funds to support the program. According to one HPNAP staff member, in 2009, the program was funded for around 30 million dollars, but since then the program has undergone some budgetary cuts.

The bulk of HPNAP funding is used to increase the quantity and nutritional quality of food available to food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters. The program also funds supplies, monetary support for salaries and building space, and training to support the work of those organizations. In 2009, HPNAP contracted with 48 organizations. Eight of these were food banks, which received the majority of the funding; the rest of the organizations provided direct service or were involved with food recovery projects (HPNAP brochure). Allocations to organizations were based on poverty levels and service numbers in the area.
The Food Bank of Central New York greatly benefits from the funding that they receive from HPNAP. HPNAP funding makes up about one third of the Food Bank’s budget. The Food Bank uses the funds that they get from HPNAP to purchase food wholesale, which they then sell to the food pantries that purchase it using a line of credit that is established for programs at the Food Bank by their HPNAP grant.

HPNAP funding drastically increases the amount of food available in New York’s emergency food network and therefore the stability of the network. Its location within the Division of Nutrition provides a foundation for its goals to increase the nutritional quality of foods distributed in the emergency food network. One way that HPNAP supports its nutritional goals is by funding nutrition-related staff at food banks. The program also sets purchasing guidelines for food banks to use when buying foods with HPNAP funds. The current guidelines stipulate that food banks must use 10 percent of their food allocation on fresh produce, 2 percent of their allocation on 1 percent or less low-fat milk, and 15 percent on whole grain cereals. They also strongly encourage their contractors to buy products from New York State. HPNAP funds cannot be used to buy foods that they have judged to lack in nutritional quality, items such as junk foods, coffee, and so on.

HPNAP has other guidelines and initiatives that they support in the emergency food network, such as the encouragement of food pantries to switch to the client-choice model. They support this initiative by providing extra funds to food banks to help food pantries purchase shelves and to assist pantries in actually making the transition. Beth spoke about the Food Bank’s early push of the client choice model and how HPNAP gave them funding to provide incentives for pantries:

Well, when we first started the project, we were at about, probably a little over 50 percent and then what happened with HPNAP, is client choice is something we
were always trying to promote, but luckily with HPNAP, what they asked us to do was, to provide some incentive with some funding. So now, we’re able to, you know, provide incentive to programs, by saying, well what equipment do you need to do this? And we’re able to purchase the shelving on their behalf.

Many of the food pantries in Syracuse have taken advantage of this support to transform their pantries to client choice. One large pantry that had recently switched to client choice, received shelving from the Food Bank and Annie, a staff person there, actually came out to help them physically set the new area up. The pantry volunteers there were very excited about the change.

Non-food HPNAP support is also very important to the food pantries and soup kitchens of Syracuse. Beth discussed the operations and equipment support that they are able to fund because of HPNAP:

We can give money for a staffer, we can give money to help pay utility bills, we can give money for paper products for soup kitchens, we can help a pantry pay any rent that they might have, we can do transportation. So the cost of, like a mileage reimbursement, or to lease a van for someone to go pick up food, as well as equipment. We buy brand-new refrigerators, freezers, ovens, hand trucks and hand carts to help sort of transport deliveries, shelving, all of these things we can help pay for, for the programs. We’re really lucky because we’ve sort of been able to build up an infrastructure with a lot of the pantries, so they have freezers and they have refrigerators and things, we can move through those fresh fruits and vegetables…

HPNAP also pays for food safety trainings and sanitation supplies such as hair nets and meat thermometers for soup kitchens. Additionally, it helps pay for Food Bank staff such as their Nutrition Resource Manager. They can also use HPNAP funds to support wellness-related activities:

We did one thing this year that was called CNY Health Bucks…we put forth money and got coupons that are specifically called CNY Health Bucks… A registered dietician, they’re going to go out and do classes at local food pantries and soup kitchens and…for sitting through a class, we give out five, two dollar coupons to your local farmers’ market, so like ten bucks to go buy fresh fruits and vegetables. And then they’re doing things like how to read nutrition labels or how
to eat healthier and things like that, which is really important, because a lot of times, people don’t realize that the obesity epidemic and low-income people are actually very highly linked. And so that was something that HPNAP really focuses on…

HPNAP contracts out the program application process to the eight food banks that they work with. However, HPNAP staff are involved in each food bank’s application and scoring processes. Each region in the state has a HPNAP staff person assigned to it, who oversees the food bank and the programs with which the food bank subcontracts. The HPNAP representative monitors food pantries and soup kitchens by conducting periodic site visits and overseeing the application process. HPNAP influences the activities in local networks in other ways as well. The program encouraged the establishment of the Guest Bill of Rights and they have other guidelines that programs must follow. For example, in order to be approved for HPNAP support, a pantry cannot turn clients away the first visit even if they are technically ineligible because of residency or other requirements. A program cannot require clients to give social security numbers. Also, a program has to have been open for six months and have 501c3 designation or sponsorship.

Food Bank programs who apply for HPNAP must submit an application annually. The Food Bank itself bids for the HPNAP contract every five years, a process that is “competitive” despite the absence of other local organizations who could handle the grant. Beth talked about how their programs apply for the funding:

Yeah, so there is two separate applications and they come in the mail late April/early May and we always have them due the first Friday in June. So basically, I design the application, I create a scoring system for it, I get it approved by HPNAP, that they’re ok with it, and then I spend the month of May helping them [the pantries or other organizations] fill out the application. You know, it’s a very open process. We can schedule appointments, we can do trainings, we can do sort of one-on-one, and then they’re all due back here and
then we kind of do two separate processes. Sort of what I’m in the midst of right now, so when it comes to the food grants, we get evaluated on three different things, so this year I’m very excited to say, we are going to do one million dollars in food grants…which is the highest that we’ve ever done… It’s about $25,000 more than last year. But we originally had started out, we were doing about $218,000 in food grants, probably about 10 years or maybe 15 years ago.

HPNAP funding decreased after Beth and I spoke, but it is still funded at a much higher rate now than it was when the program started. Beth reflected on the relatively high level of funding and how it has affected their member programs:

So it’s really increased exponentially, which has been helpful, ’cause when you think about things, with the wholesale food coming in, now they’re getting higher grants to help cover the costs of the wholesale food. So that’s what we’ve been trying to do, when we can’t change things like the lack of donated foods, what we can do is advocate in Albany to get more money to give out higher grants. So those are sort of the things that we’ve been trying to do… Basically everybody applies for a food grant, so last year we funded 277 programs, this year it’s probably going to be about the same. And everybody who applies gets something and then operation support and equipment is a little bit more competitive.

The HPNAP application review process is coordinated by Beth. Each year she organizes a review committee for each type of HPNAP grant:

We allocate those as a committee and it’s made up of member programs. We each read applications together and we sort of allocate the dollars as a group and then we do about a quarter of a million dollars in operations support. And with the food grants, I also have a review committee come in for that, that’s made up of member programs and we talk about the process and they see how we do it and what each county gets and then they’re able to sort of make recommendations. So, we never really make like unilateral decisions. It’s always, we have some sort of member program advisory board of some kind, which I think is always really helpful and a lot of times it’s really eye-opening for the programs, because they’re so used to, our relationship one-on-one that a lot of times they don’t realize that as a Food Bank I have 300 programs to worry about and I have to be fair to all 300. And so I think it’s always really interesting and eye-opening to get people involved in that process, because they get to sort of see, what it is that we have to do, in that, we have to sort of look at things from 100 feet above and figure out what is the best way to serve the community versus, you know, what that individual program needs.
The grant allocation process includes the review committee that Beth spoke about, but she also decides how the scoring will happen:

Basically, I come up with best practices. So we’re looking at things with, you know, HPNAP, by definition is supposed to be supplemental to your program, so what is your budget? And are you a program that is relying 100 percent on your HPNAP or is it actually supplemental? How often, access, is important, so you know, how often are you open and how often are you serving people? Because you can have a pantry that’s open on the third Thursday from 4:00-6:00pm and then you could be a Salvation Army who’s open every day, but both pantries are only serving people every 30 days, so…you have to take both of those things into consideration and also, the Salvation Army, maybe not Salvation Army, but another program that’s open Monday through Friday isn’t going to do emergencies, they’re not available on nights and weekends, versus the volunteer ones that are, so access is important. And then, best practices, are they duplicating services or are they complementing one another? Are they all serving the same area or are they working together and not serving the same people? Referrals is a big thing for us, are they providing referrals to government services? Because really that’s the solution to this entire problem. This whole problem will go away if we can get everybody who’s eligible for food stamps on food stamps and then if we can advocate with the government and get food stamp benefits [that] actually reflect the cost of food today-hunger is solved. So at our level, we can advocate at Congress for them and then at the local level, our people can make sure that people who need food are being referred to the Food Stamp office, and not just food stamps, you know, HEAP, WIC, health insurance, so it’s big points in the application, if you are actually giving those types of referrals. And we’ve been able to provide all these materials to people so we have little referral booklets of what information to provide and things and then, how are they networking with each other? Do they meet with each other? Do they come to things that are sponsored by us? What healthy initiatives are they involved in? Are they providing fresh fruits and vegetables and milk and low-fat milk and things like that? For pantries, are you client-choice, are you open for emergencies? All those types of things.

Beth is also challenged by some parts of the task:

I think what’s definitely challenging to me, when I’m creating a scoring system is we have such a wide variety of programs, I mean you have these older ladies, who are doing this for their life work to get into heaven. My grandmother used to volunteer at a local food pantry way before I worked here and my grandmother never finished elementary school, you know what I mean? And then we have sophisticated agencies like Catholic Charities and Salvation Army, so when you create a scoring system and application you have to be fair, to give both programs the same opportunity… The scoring system is always very interesting… I’m always very conscious about education levels and not setting the ceiling too high.
The scoring process of the HPNAP application illustrates the kinds of practices that the Food Bank values from their member programs. Beth seems to balance keeping the application simple enough with her desire to gather information about best practices that she and the Food Bank have determined to have importance. Many of these practices connect directly to ideas about accountability and efficiency. For example, the Food Bank rewards programs that have a diversified source of funding. This is interpreted as an indicator of stability. This type of valuation is not specific to the Food Bank as many funding sources want to know that they are not the only source of a program’s funding.

Beth explained why this was important to the Food Bank in the context of emergency food:

If we were to lose our state funding, I need to be concentrating on programs who are going to be open tomorrow and so if you are only relying on a state grant and our funding get’s zero’ed out, that’s not an effective way to be a program.

She takes a fairly tough stance on the issue because she views it as connected to the sustainability of the entire local network.

HPNAP is a New York State program and it seems that the emergency food network in New York is uniquely supported by this funding source. A HPNAP representative believed that no other states have programs like HPNAP supporting the emergency food network. Beth also believed that New York State was unique in this way and that it made a huge difference in Syracuse. She said that a lot of the pantries in Syracuse “really survive by it.” Beth discussed her thoughts on the status of pantry survival here compared to other states, recalling a story about a conversation that she overheard at a national conference:

It was really interesting, I was at this conference in Chicago last year and we were all sort of sharing a shuttle back to the airport and there were these two food
bankers in a row ahead of me and the way they were talking they sounded like they were food pantries. ’Cause they were talking about the Boy Scout drive and the Postal Drive and how they were going to have turkeys for Thanksgiving. I mean those are conversations our programs have, I mean, Postal Drives are technically supposed to come to us, but we don’t get involved, we just say, we let them go directly to the pantries because it’s actually a Feeding America partnership. But we let the Postal Drives go directly to the pantries because it’s a logistical nightmare and they build those local relationships and they get a lot out of it. So, things like that we don’t even get involved in. Boy Scout drives, as well. The woman said…you know, “One of our biggest programs called us the other day and they said ‘Listen, but I’m sorry but we’re not going to be open tomorrow, we don’t have any food.’” And she goes, “And I didn’t know what to tell them, because it’s not like we had any food to give them.” And it [this experience] was so eye-opening for me, how lucky we are, because of the state funding and the system that we had in place, so we don’t have that problem. And our programs don’t have that problem because we have that relationship with them and last year we did over 1300 supplemental orders. In varying amounts and varying funding sources that help us do that...

It is clear that food pantries and soup kitchens, as well as the Food Bank benefit from a greater level of stability from state funding like HPNAP. If HPNAP were to ever be completely cut from the state’s budget or even drastically reduced, it would have a huge impact on the local emergency food network.

**Federal Tax Law**

Corporate support of the emergency food network in terms of food donations has diminished over the years. When food banks and food pantries were multiplying in the 1980s there were more corporate donations circulating. Now, businesses sell their excess to the secondary grocery market or they simply do not make the manufacturing and stocking mistakes that they formerly made, due to technological improvements. Scholars such as Poppendieck (1999) have critiqued the emergency food network’s dependence on corporations because it creates a disposal-driven system instead of a need-driven system and also because businesses almost always make decisions based on their profit margins.
Federal tax law enacted in 1976 facilitated the partnership between businesses and the emergency food network, as corporations were then entitled to receive a tax deduction in return for their donations. At the time, this deduction made it more economical to donate excess or damaged food stock to the emergency food network rather than paying for disposal. This was before the secondary grocery market became another, more profitable alternative. According to the Food Bank website, “The 1976 Federal Tax Law (H.R. 10612) permits you to deduct all of the costs of producing, packaging, and delivering your products – plus up to 50 percent of the difference between cost and the fair market value” (FBCNY 2011). Formerly, this only applied to businesses with a ‘C’ designation, but in 2005 legislation passed to extend those deductions to all businesses (Food Donation Connection 2010).

*Faith-Based Initiatives*

The emergency food network could not function without its large workforce of volunteer laborers. Poppendieck (1999) suggests that the government’s promotion of volunteerism in the 1980s was a contributing factor to the institutionalization of the emergency food network. Most U.S. Presidents of the past 30 years integrated a push for faith-based initiatives into their programs; George H.W. Bush was especially famous for his encouragement and creation of a “Points of Light” initiative that recognized volunteers on a daily basis (Poppendieck 1999).

The Obama administration has continued to support faith-based initiatives. He established an Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships within the White House and the USDA website also houses resources on how to “help end hunger” within communities using faith-based and neighborhood partnerships (USDA 2009). The USDA
website gives information on how to “support food banks and food pantries” by making donations, organizing virtual food drives, and volunteering.

It is difficult to determine what kind of impact these efforts have had on food pantries and soup kitchens over the years. Most of the coordinators who participated in this research would probably volunteer in the network with or without government support of their own “faith-based initiative.” The subject did arise in one interview with a pantry coordinator. Betty and her church have struggled to determine how they want to support the local community and though years ago they decided that running a food pantry would be their primary mission, they question this decision regularly:

Have we created a monster in our society at large? How many millions of people don’t have enough food? I mean to me, that is a fact, it’s a stigma for our society. I mean, I don’t want anybody in Europe knowing that that’s the fact in the United States. And it shouldn’t be! To me, there’s not simple correctives, but if people actually received enough food stamps to do their own buying, there would be no need for pantries… We have thought about simply closing… and actually seeing. Part of this, the guilt and because of the fact that we feel called in a sense, I mean because… part of our Christian calling is to feed the hungry. And you can assume that there’s always going to be hungry, no matter what. I mean it’s gonna be somebody, somewhere who needs food. It’s, we don’t like being used. I mean the whole idea of separation of church and state. Lutherans happen to believe that government is part of God’s plan. I mean, we don’t say that government is bad. We talk about it as the Third Kingdom. I mean there’s even language for it… So it’s not in the sense that we shun all things government. But, the whole, I don’t know, push for Points of Light and all that that’s been coming from the government, the faith-based initiatives. And ugh. I mean it’s not something that all of us wanted.

Betty felt that they were trapped into running their food pantry and that they could not close it, even though the church might rather take on other social justice issues. She seemed resentful that churches like hers have had to take on the burden of “feeding the hungry” and this has given her a relatively critical perspective on the role of government and hunger.
A few of the actors in the local network seemed to share Betty’s perspective on the government’s role. Even staff at the Food Bank understand that despite all of their innovative programs, they are not the solution to hunger. Beth reflected on how easy it is to get swept up into the daily operation of the network and how she recognizes that improvements to programs like SNAP go further than more funding for the emergency food network:

I mean, people forget that a lot of times when you work for the Food Bank or work for a food pantry or soup kitchen you get so caught up in the day to day, without realizing that we’re not the answer to this problem (laughs). We’re the short-term answer. Like the long term answers are those, like Food Stamps, and you know, so when they increase the benefits, increase the minimum benefit, made it more accessible and stopped counting things like education, made the program easier to apply for, as well as you know, how they determine eligibility, they changed a lot of those inside rules. All of those things are going to have a much bigger impact on the issue of hunger, versus increasing TEFAP by $5 million. You know, the increase that Obama did to the Food Stamp benefits in the ARRA bill. That was awesome, you know like, that’s so much more of a long-term solution than providing us with more money.

As Beth states, it is clear that the entire picture of the social safety net has much influence on the emergency food network. Whether or not the “public will” as Tom called it, will emerge to strengthen the social safety net so that the role of food pantries and soup kitchens decreases or disappears remains to be seen.

CONCLUSION

Everyday operations in food pantries and soup kitchens are shaped by a variety of social, historical, political, and cultural factors; in this chapter, I discussed the impact of particular coordinative dynamics that operate through food banking and government support to support and direct the everyday work in food pantries and soup kitchens. The activities of food pantries and soup kitchens have become increasingly coordinated by
Food Bank policies that originate at the Food Bank or are required by their contracts with various funders. HPNAP’s policy on programs not requiring the use of social security numbers is one example.

The funding sources that I have discussed serve to structure the everyday work and operations at food pantries and soup kitchens in other ways as well. Though the funding requirements that are enacted in the network may not be as detrimental to services on the ground level as they are considered to be in other settings, it is clear that funding sources have contributed to an increasing level of coordination. Food pantry practices have become increasingly standardized. In many ways, the standardization that has taken place has impacted services positively. For example, most people would agree that food pantries and soup kitchens should not have discriminatory practices. At the same time, despite the relatively grassroots nature of the food pantries and soup kitchens of Syracuse, their activities are increasingly dictated and coordinated from actors outside of their organizations. Though the relationships of food pantries and soup kitchens with organizations such as the Food Bank are voluntary, the resources that are provided through that relationship are indispensible to most organizations.

Discussions of the impacts of the new public management on nonprofit organizations focus on how business practices of accountability and efficiency have impacted nonprofit organizations. Evidence of accountability and discourses of efficiency can be found at the coordinative level of the emergency food network. These practices filter down to the grassroots level where food pantries and soup kitchens demonstrate their own accountability and efficiency by following Food Bank guidelines on best practices and reporting.
In the next Chapter, I discuss how resource scarcity in food pantries and soup kitchens has led to a context where service-limiting and resource management practices such as limitations on the amount of food distributed per month, who is eligible for particular pantries, and so on are quite widespread. These practices help food pantries and soup kitchens stay open by reducing demand. At the same time, these practices call attention to what it means to be “doing ok” in the local network.
Chapter Five
The Impact of Resource Scarcity on Syracuse’s Emergency Food Network

How do workers in food pantries and soup kitchens negotiate the demands of acquiring funding and the struggle for organizational survival? How are the services that food pantries and soup kitchens provide impacted by these negotiations? In this chapter, I begin by describing the nature of resource scarcity in Syracuse’s emergency food network. Then, I examine the ways that resource scarcity impacts organizations, focusing particularly on the resource management practices that are observable in food pantries. I argue that in many ways, Syracuse’s food pantries are structurally protected from swings in the economy through these management practices. Lastly, I discuss the fragility and instability of food pantries and soup kitchens, despite the network’s overall institutionalization.

Coping with resource scarcity has brought about many of the stretching and maximizing practices that I discussed previously. The climate of resource scarcity has also produced some organizational responses that limit services available to people needing access to food. Some examples of limiting strategies include the implementation of rules that limit food packages to five days worth of food or less per month and tracking to catch “double-dippers,” or people who attempt to access food at a food pantry more than once a month. Resonating with the work of scholars such as Poppendieck (1999) and others who argue that charitable responses to hunger in the United States are inadequate, I argue that despite the number of innovative strategies that food pantries and soup kitchens have developed to survive in a climate of resource scarcity, they should not be upheld as an adequate response to hunger in the United States.
A PICTURE OF RESOURCE SCARCITY

During the period of time in which I conducted my fieldwork, unemployment rates in the United States increased from about 5 percent in 2007 to 9 percent in 2009. The percentage of people living below the poverty line in the United States increased from about 13 percent to 14 percent. Household Food Security Reports from the USDA showed that about 15 percent of U.S. households were food insecure in 2009, an increase from about 11 percent in 2007. Certain social groups are more likely to experience food insecurity. In 2009, 25 percent of black households were considered food insecure, while only 11 percent of white households were considered food insecure (Nord et al. 2010).

Reports also showed an increase in the percentage of households accessing food pantries and soup kitchens. Five percent of households in the United States or about six million households reported accessing a food pantry in 2009; this is an increase from three percent or about four million households in 2007 (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2008; Nord et al. 2010). The Chronicle of Philanthropy reported that donations dropped by 11 percent at the 400 largest U.S. nonprofits in 2009 (Barton and Hall 2010). Feeding America reported that 48 percent of its pantries said that funding issues threatened their organization and 56 percent of soup kitchens agreed (Mabli et al. 2010).

The amount and quality of resources available for use in the emergency food network has varied since the large-scale expansion that the network underwent in the 1980s. Ebbs and flows in government commodities made available through the Farm Bill have had a large impact on the foods available. Also, the availability of corporate donations has declined over the years as technology and stocking methods have improved and a secondary grocery market has emerged.
The picture of resources in Syracuse’s emergency food network is inconsistent. Though the level of corporate donations in the early 1980s may have been higher, the Food Bank of Central New York, a major funnel and solicitor of resources, did not exist until 1985. From 1985 until now, the Food Bank of Central New York has increased its output of food from around 300,000 pounds a year to over 11 million pounds of food a year (FBCNY Newsletter 2010). Despite the major increase in low-cost food available at the Food Bank for food pantries and soup kitchens to purchase and recent increases in the availability and variety of foods available through TEFAP, two long-time food pantry coordinators reported that they have experienced an overall decline in the amount of food available to them since they started running their respective pantries. Margaret, a coordinator at an agency-based pantry reflected on the changes she has experienced:

It’s really changed over the years…I’m looking at when I first started, we had a whole downstairs pantry filled with food and I’d never think there would be a day that would come that we’d be like, oh yeah.

Despite the challenges that Margaret has in keeping the pantry stocked, she tries not to run completely out of food. She commented, “But sometimes it’s hard to tell, because by the end of the month, there are literally lines of people coming in.” Though no organizations reported that they run completely out of food, most coordinators did report running out of certain types of foods that they consider necessary for their food packages.

The majority of food in Syracuse’s food pantries is sourced from the Food Bank’s channels. Decreased stock at food pantries and soup kitchens is probably due to the decline of free, corporate-donated food, as much of the food at the Food Bank is now purchased by the food pantries for the cost of wholesale prices plus a 12 cent “shared maintenance fee.” TEFAP foods remain free for qualifying food pantries and soup
kitchens and make up the primary source of “free” food at the Food Bank. Overall, the amount of food that is available to food pantries and soup kitchens is limited by their TEFAP case allotment, what they can afford to purchase through cash or grants, and what they receive in the form of donations that they collect themselves. Organizations are also limited by the space they have available to store the foods. Though the status of these challenges has not changed much over the years, these factors vary from one organization to another. In general, there are probably few food pantries and soup kitchens that never have to worry about where their resources are coming from and whether they will have enough food to distribute to their clients.

Despite the rather bleak national-level picture, most of the food pantries and soup kitchens in my sample were managing to stay afloat. Surprisingly, some few pantry coordinators said they did not have any financial problems at all—their organizations were doing “fine,” “ok,” or even “good.” In the beginning of my research, I found these statements to be a bit incredible. How was it possible for these organizations to be financially secure with all of the increased demands that surely must have been placed upon them during the recession? Initially, I suspected that this had something to with deindustrialization and that this U.S. rust belt city had been coping with economic hardship for a few decades. It is possible that the worst of the recession did not have as much of an impact in Syracuse as it did in places with lower unemployment and poverty rates to start. This may be accurate, but I was still curious about the coordinators that said they were doing “ok” in the midst of the numerous discussions about increased demand and decreased funding in the national-level emergency food network and the nonprofit sector at large.
How did pantries get to “ok” in a climate that is clearly one of limited resources?

In the next section, I will outline some of the practices that contribute to this outlook in the local community. I argue that these practices undermine the network’s abilities to function as any kind of a systematic response to hunger and food insecurity in the United States despite the network’s increasing institutionalization.

THE LIMITATIONS PRODUCED BY RESOURCE SCARCITY

The food pantries in Syracuse use a combination of different practices that serve to intentionally or unintentionally manage demand on their limited resources. For the most part, emergency food workers are doing the best they can with limited resources, but to survive, organizations have developed coping mechanisms and rules to keep their service numbers down and to ensure that they have enough food to last throughout the month. These mechanisms ensure that limited resources in the community are equitably distributed. At the same time, these mechanisms may keep the organizations from serving the needs of the community adequately. Other scholars have addressed the limitations of some of these mechanisms (see Curtis 1997 or Poppendieck 1999 for examples), but to the best of my knowledge, no studies of the emergency food network have systematically studied the impacts of these mechanisms in one locale.

Managing Resources through Maintaining the Rules

Food pantries employ many rules that assist them in the rationing of local resources. In this section, I discuss how rules on residency, documentation, and how many times a client can use a pantry per month are upheld and sometimes broken. One remarkable facet of these rules is the extent to which they have been standardized across
Syracuse and enforced relatively consistently from pantry to pantry, despite the independence that exists between pantries and the overwhelmingly volunteer-based leadership that they employ. This standardization is partially due to the influences of coordinative actors such as the Food Bank and the IFC.

*Geographic/service areas.* The majority of food pantries in Syracuse have a “service area” or a “geographic area” that determines which city residents are eligible to come to the pantry. Coordinators seemed to use the phrases “service area” and “geographic area” interchangeably; the IFC prefers the language of “service area” and the Food Bank seems to use the language of “geographic area” more commonly. The IFC has historically coordinated the boundaries between pantries; this has been an ongoing project of theirs for many years. Michele, the Director of the IFC, explained the rationale behind the system. Originally the service areas were,

> A way for them [the pantries] to serve those in their community and have the resources. This was back when before the Food Bank became huge. There was limited resources, so a system had to be devised so people wouldn’t run out of food.

Michele principally deems the service areas as a way to keep pantries from running out of food. At the same time, she believes that it is important for pantries to be geographically close to the people that they serve, “you don’t want someone from Camillus coming to [a city pantry].” She once explained that the boundaries serve not only to control the number of people coming in, but also to help coordinators to be able to say “no” when they need to say no. Michele remarked that the system of service areas has always been a source of criticism of the local pantry network: “Why can’t anybody go anywhere?...the resources, people don’t understand it’s the resources.” She considers controlling and
managing the limited resources to be the most important function of the service areas. It is not a simple matter of gatekeeping for her or the others in the network but a strategy that they use to make sure that everyone who needs food has access to it, in a limited, but equitably distributed fashion.

The Food Bank of Central New York and the IFC both support and strongly encourage the use of service areas, though there is some tension in the local network as to which organization should be helping the pantries determine their boundaries. Currently, the IFC serves as the primary service/geographic area coordinator within the city of Syracuse. They use a system that was developed by a former IFC coordinator where individual areas of streets were allocated to particular pantries. Michele once exclaimed, “We’ve been using the same system for a million years!” Beth remarked that the Food Bank would like to be involved with the coordination of geographic areas but that Syracuse food pantry coordinators do not support their involvement because they consider it a task of the IFC:

Onondaga County is tough because we’re not the primary source that sets the boundaries… So, it’s something that we want to get involved in, but we’re getting a lot of pushback for getting involved. Outside of Onondaga County, we work with programs in trying to do that, to complement one another, rather than overlay each other and compete. And then you get overwhelmed, so what we do is we treat them all equally, agencies versus churches or whatever and we ask people to set a geographic area that they can handle and that way they are all serving separate areas and they’re working with one another, and things like that. Onondaga County is very, very different and really, really tough. We weren’t really a part of the process of putting it together, so I just, anything I say would be my own thoughts. To me, it makes sense for everybody to have a piece of the puzzle and to have streets that… I would love to start from scratch and kind of do it logistically in a way that makes cohesive, geographic sense. And all the agencies take part, but since it’s not historically been our issue, that hasn’t been a welcome initiative.
Beth’s comments imply that the current boundary system has overlapping territories and is not geographically intuitive. The relationship between the Food Bank and the IFC seems strained over issues like this; the two organizations do not currently collaborate on issues such as the service areas, even though it may make sense to do so since both organizations do regularly refer clients to pantries. The lack of coordination seems to cause incorrect referrals on occasion. The IFC had a physical map at one point that visually showed each pantry’s area, but that map is no longer up to date. Instead, Michele and the other staff at the IFC work out of a binder that lists streets in alphabetical order. Using this list-based system seems to work for them, though it may actually obscure the overlaps that exist between organizations and any illogically shaped service areas.

The Food Bank is increasingly becoming more technologically advanced. For example, they use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to help them map out their member programs. At this point, they have all of their member programs on a mapping program, but they have not yet specified each pantry’s service area on their map. The Food Bank does not have access to the IFC’s street system. When I asked how they gleaned which pantry had which service area, they said that they assemble that information from the annual HPNAP grant application.

One sentiment that the IFC and the Food Bank have in common is that each believes that initiatives are difficult to accomplish in the local network when you try to strongly regulate the pantries and force them into practices that are not supported. Michele said that though she does coordinate the service areas, the pantries themselves determine them in the end. Beth talked about mandates as often counterproductive:

I think one of the things that’s very unique about what we do, is when you work with volunteers, you’re not going to get anywhere unless it’s their idea, I mean,
we’re not. You don’t get a lot of success when you’re mandating things and I think that’s a really important key with us. So, it won’t do us any good to say, “I’m sorry but you can’t serve that zip code, you have to do it here.” And they’re not gonna do it, they’re gonna say ok, yeah, and then they’re gonna just go back to serving everybody.

Beth and Michele both have a realistic view of the limitations of mandates, which they connect to the volunteer status of most of the coordinators. Staff at the Food Bank, however, have discovered that they can persuade pantries to change their practices after they have helped them out a few times:

One thing we have found to be successful is when people start, their numbers start rising and they don’t know how to fund everybody and we’ve sort of helped them out, get them through a couple of months and give them extra shipments of food, then we kinda say, you know what, I think it’s time that we get everybody together and let’s figure this out.

The Food Bank also uses emergency bonus shipments to encourage or induce pantries to change their practices to those supported by the Food Bank, which they see in the best interests of the clients and the pantries themselves. The IFC operates on a more hands-off basis, not wanting to add any more burdens to the already overburdened pantry coordinators that they support.

As Beth mentioned, the Food Bank does coordinate geographic areas outside of Onondaga County. One church pantry coordinator, Nancy, discussed how they recently implemented a system of geographic areas in a town that is about 40 minutes outside of Syracuse. They made the changes with the help of Food Bank staff and the urging of a few of their funders:

Some of the people who fund us, like some of the foundations, went to the Food Bank and said how can we make sure that our funds are being used to the best of the ability? Because you’re double-dipping, it’s people that don’t…they’re going from one pantry to the next. So, the Food Bank, they come to our meetings too… And they said that they thought this would solve the problem and then our funders would be happy with this, because some of the funders will say, “Well, maybe we
don’t want to fund this one if, you know, if everybody’s coming to all of ’em.”
You don’t need to go to five different food pantries every week, you know.
’Cause you’re not learning responsibility, you’re not really. We’re emergency food providers, in other words, if you’re having a problem fine but it’s not a grocery store and people need to. So, this was how they were seeing it and they didn’t want people… They wanted people to be fed and taken care of but they didn’t want people taking advantage and not using the other resources like their Food Stamps or getting whatever they were entitled to get, you know. Which I can understand ’cause a lot of them are giving us $10,000, they’re giving us some money… So, they really need and I could understand that so the Food Bank approached the [town] food pantries and said, “Would you like us to come and explain the geographical [areas], how it works?” So they came and we agreed for a pilot program for four months. We had our ups and downs about it but I think we pretty much hashed them out and so we pretty much agreed to keep this. We still get, there are some people that we still get that they have good reasons and they can’t get to another one but we sort of really screen ’em and really say look, you know, but, so. Which is fine, you know, they said that’s okay.

Nancy understood that their funders wanted to ensure that they were not supporting organizations that did not encourage “responsibility” and made the changes that they thought would address that concern. Nancy is correct when she says that $10,000 is “some money” for a food pantry. But given that the Food Bank also encourages pantries to have geographic areas, it is not surprising that the pantries in her town made the changes.

The Food Bank supports the use of geographic areas for reasons other than the rationing of resources. Like some of the foundations, the staff at the Food Bank view the zones as a way to avoid the issue of double-dipping, though perhaps because they are less worried about “double-dippers” taking advantage of the system and more concerned that the local pantries worry about double-dipping too much. Beth commented on the Food Bank’s involvement in the service areas:

I definitely think it’s something that we’re gonna probably focus more on in the next couple of years, but it’s, it’s definitely a challenge I think… It’s something that we’re starting to get a little bit involved in because of the cry of, “There’s too many people, there’s not enough money.” And it’s, it really is a good solution to
help sort of cut down as well, as that fear of double-dipping, which I’m sure you’ve heard about it, with a lot of the programs that you talk about, individually, and it really eliminates that fear. And it’s [a] minimal amount of work, and it doesn’t violate the confidentiality of people because you know, we don’t believe in client-sharing information and stuff like that. Instead, this is a problem-free way that is [a] minimal amount of work. Again, when you’re working with volunteers, if you just carve up the city and show, ok this is your area, this is my area, if someone in your area comes to me, I’m gonna serve them once and I’m gonna tell them that they go to you. It’s a minimal amount of time and it’s, it really eliminates that fear which seems to be a pretty prevalent fear, among our people.

Rather than talking about geographic areas as a strategy to cut down on double-dipping, Beth talked about it as a strategy to cut down on the “fear” of double-dipping, which she correctly understands is a prevalent concern amongst the food pantry workers.

One of the clearest critiques of limiting clients to one pantry concerns the inconsistent and varying hours that the local pantries keep. This is one way that the network-wide coordination has failed. If a client is zoned to a pantry that is only open the first and third Tuesday of the month from 1:00pm to 3:00pm and that client works during those times, they would have to go through extra steps to access food. Most church pantries respond to this problem by coming in for “emergency calls.” But this requires an extra step for the client and the worker, perhaps deterring clients from making the call or deterring pantry workers from widely advertising their willingness to do this. It does seem illogical that a client who could never make the limited hours of their zoned pantry could not go to another pantry. Whenever I asked about this limitation, I was always assured that the coordinators would work it out somehow because they did not “want anyone going hungry.” My continued concern with this issue is that the majority of these cases are worked out individually and perhaps often, subjectively.
A few pantries that I visited did not use geographic/service areas. Allison, a paid staff person at a large agency, reported that the pantry where she works used to use service areas but that they do not use them anymore:

We did when I started here...we were kind of 13205, 13207, 13208, I think, but it was just, I mean, someone comes in and one of the other pantries closes at 3:00, it’s 4:00, they just got out of work, what do you do? Turn them away? We can’t do that...So, we, in the spirit of the [organization’s name], we try to serve as many as we can. We say doing the most good, so we try to stick to that.

Allison’s comments show an understanding of the gaps in service caused by the zoning issues. She views service areas as a challenge to the spirit of the organization’s mission, which is, “to do the most good.” Allison believes that her pantry can handle the increased demand that not having a service area can cause. She uses her agency status to garner more resources than many of the church pantries are able to gather. Allison still steers clients to the pantry closest to their home because she feels strongly that it is important for food pantries to forge relationships with their clients. Many of the other pantry coordinators are aware that the organization where Allison works is open five days per week and has no service areas, so this pantry often serves as a back-up for many of the gaps in service.

Some pantries do not use geographic/service areas because they consider it a limitation on their potential client base. Ernie is the co-coordinator of a Temple pantry in Syracuse. The Temple pantry was originally started to serve the “constituents” of Reform Judaism, but now, they serve everyone. The Reform Temple in Syracuse is one of only a few in the region, so Ernie views service areas as an obstacle to serving all of the people that they want to serve:

We don’t have any boundaries at this particular pantry and the reason is because we are [a] Reform Synagogue and our clients, our constituents come from all
over. We’re the only Reform Synagogue in how far? Up as far as Watertown I believe, over as far as [the] territory… I think there is another Reform Synagogue in Binghamton and I think there’s one in Watertown. So, our constituency has overlaps but it’s quite possible, it certainly is at least 11 counties.

Despite their openness to anyone needing food in the area, Ernie reported that the pantry at the Temple was keeping up with the demand.

Using service areas is an effective way to cut down on demand for those pantries that need to do so. The IFC strongly encourages their member pantries to use service areas “because we’ve seen too many pantries where they’ve been open and anybody comes in and they can’t keep up with the demand, they really can’t. So, we would just prefer that they have a service area.” Michele’s statement is based on years of experience in the community and it seemed accurate in the case of two pantries that I visited, one at a church and one at an agency. These pantries were working on establishing service areas for the first time. Each of these pantry coordinators was struggling to determine the appropriate size and the specifics of the service area for their pantry. Tim, the coordinator of the church-based pantry was initially concerned about setting service areas because of concerns that his clients’ needs would not be met. But because clients could come to this pantry more than once per month if they needed to and they accepted everyone, he was struggling to keep enough food on the shelves:

And I’m a little wary of that simply because, say I say, ok, you call [the Food Bank for a referral], what if they don’t? Or what if they just keep coming to this one even if they’re closer to another one or, so I’m gonna find that out, because I really haven’t, up to this point, I really haven’t looked to closely at that, but I’m gonna have to start because we’re just trying to help too many people for what we have, for our budget and the amount of food.

Tim knew that he had to change something if he was going to be able to keep up with the demand. Peter, the coordinator of an agency pantry was having similar challenges,
though their pantry does only allow clients to come once per month and participates in the EFA database tracking system. Peter’s main challenge with setting service areas was figuring out the specific streets to include without overlapping too much on other pantries or causing gaps in service.

*Documentation.* Most of the pantries that I visited required clients to show documentation to prove their place of residence and the number of individuals in their household. The Food Bank mandates that pantries cannot turn anyone away for not having documentation on their first visit to the pantry, since a first-time client may not know about the rules. But, pantries can turn people away after the first visit. The enforcement of this policy varies in strictness from one pantry to another. One coordinator, Janice, said that she follows a strict “no proof, no food” policy after a client’s first visit. Commenting on her policy,

And it’s name and address, what I require in, for the adults, for possibly the first time they have it is proof of address. And to me, proof of address is something mailed to you in the last 10 days. No driver’s license, no nothing, because you can move and if they don’t have it the first time, they definitely have to bring it the second time. Have I ever turned anybody away? Yeah, after several times that I’ve given them a break. Yeah, ’cause I know they, they’re not tellin’ me the truth. I take names and ages of the children. I don’t take the ages of the adults… If you came in and this was your name and you know that I pull your file and I check to see, see like this person was here and they didn’t have any proof so I told them that next time you come, “No proof, no food.” Then I highlight it and I show ’em the card and they have to sign.

Janice seemed tougher on the rules than most of the other coordinators. Natalie said that client IDs are not important at the agency pantry where she works because she personally knows most of the people who come in for food:

But, we’re very flexible down there, you’re supposed to show ID. Most of the people I know, so if they forget their ID, I know who they are, so it’s not a concern that they’re trying to pass off as somebody else… First time food pantry
clients they don’t need anything… They don’t need anything, they just show up. We will serve you, we’ll only serve you food for one. The more dependents you have the more food you get.

Though Natalie’s familiarity with her clients does remove the need for clients to constantly prove who they are, the pantry does still enforce the rule with new clients, but Natalie considers this to be reasonable. She was upset by stories that she heard about the practices of other pantries:

Well, I’ve heard horror stories, people come into me crying, talking about how the other food pantry won’t give ’em food because they lost their ID and I’m like “Well, how long have you been going to that pantry?” [The client answers], “Two years.” You’ve got to be kidding me! You know? It’s so upsetting to me.

Natalie’s comments indicate that she is offended by the rigidity with which some coordinators enforce the rules, which she seems to connect to a lack of a caring ethic. Natalie strongly believes in building relationships with her clients and some of her loyalty is probably due to the fact that she spent part of her childhood growing up in the neighborhood that their pantry serves. Though I did not collect data on each pantry coordinator’s relationship to the community that they serve, it is possible that coordinators like Natalie, who have roots in their service area, have a different and more engaged relationship with their clients. If the people coming into a pantry are one’s friends and neighbors, some of the power differential between the staff and clients may disappear.

One of the documentation-related controversies in the local pantry network is regarding the issue of pantries using social security numbers for recordkeeping purposes. Years ago many of the pantries collected this information, but the Food Bank has since mandated that pantries are not allowed to force clients to give them any part of their social security number in order to protect clients’ confidentiality and prevent identity
theft. Most food pantry records are not stored in what would be considered a very secure location. This rule is one of the rules listed in the Food Bank’s “Guest Bill of Rights” and is also mandated by HPNAP. The EFA, however, has used the last four digits of their clients’ social security numbers to create a unique identifier for their tracking system. Allison said that in the past they used these numbers because of the limited technology available; if they revamp the system, they will determine another way to make identifiers for the clients.

Recently, members of the EFA have started to ask their clients to sign a form stating that they give consent to the pantries to use the last four digits of their social security number to enter and track them in the database tracking system. Though EFA pantries cannot turn clients away for refusing to sign, the optional nature of this consent form may seem unclear to some clients. I am not aware if the EFA always treated this certification as optional or if this policy was implemented in response to the prohibition of the requirement of social security numbers. The Food Bank does not support the optional collection of parts of the social security number either, but they have not yet mandated against it.

The issue of using social security numbers is so sensitive locally that when I was piloting a survey for the local pantries with the IFC, I was instructed to remove a question about whether pantries were using social security numbers for documentation because the inclusion of that question would immediately cast suspicion over the purposes of the survey. Since everyone knew the Food Bank policy, it was not okay to ask that question. If even asking about the practice, where pantries would have an opportunity to say “no,” would cause such a reaction, the extent to which pantries are still using social security
numbers seems debatable. At the same time, it is also possible that workers are simply sensitive about the contention around this debate in the local network.

*Number of visits.* Another highly enforced rule across the network is that clients can only go to a pantry once per month. A few pantries do not enforce this rule, but the majority does. And similar to the issues of service areas and documentation, this is a rule that is understood by the local community as a way to manage resources. One pantry that I visited recently changed their policy from one where clients could come and receive food twice per month to only once per month because they were having trouble keeping up with the demand.

This rule is also a source of critique of food pantries; it is understood that pantries usually only give out enough food for three to five days—this may not be enough for some clients. Coordinators do often speak about breaking their own rules with regard to this issue. For example, Margaret, an agency-based pantry coordinator said that though she does enforce this rule, she also breaks it when she sees that her clients need more food than the three days worth that they typically give:

That’s again, case-by-case and I know some of the workers in other agencies and I see some are so rigid, they’re not even listening and it’s like, “it’s once a month, that’s it, forget it, they shouldn’t be there.” You know, I give them a bag. It should last a month? No. So, but I will obviously, I’ll, it doesn’t happen too often is what I’m saying, usually if they’ve gone to [another pantry] and they come here, I’m really not supposed to help them.

Even though Margaret enforces this rule on a “case-by-case” basis, she does seem to feel some pressure regarding it, as this “doesn’t happen too often.” Beth, at the Food Bank, also said that many pantries break this rule:

Same thing with the three-day, the once-a-month is the most common and what most of the pantries do, is they’ll say you can come once a month, but if a family
comes to them and they just lost their job, what people will do, so they’ll have a
general rule and then they’ll, if a family is really in an emergency, most pantries
will work something out. So it’s not as black and white as it appears. The once-a-
month thing, and it’s the same thing, ’cause we allow them to set it, based on
what they can. Because what we don’t want, is if someone comes on the 4\textsuperscript{th} of the
month, to get all the food in the world, if a different family comes on the 27\textsuperscript{th},
they’re only getting three days worth of food, where the person on 4\textsuperscript{th} got five or
seven [days].

The issue is not “black and white” because the pantry coordinators do break the rule, but
Beth also commented on the purpose of this rule, to keep pantries from running out of
food and to ensure consistent service across the month. The issue of consistency goes
beyond the food given out at one pantry, to the issue of consistency among pantries, as
one particular pantry can give out drastically different amounts of food than another,
despite the Food Bank’s attempts to regulate the consistency of food packages.

\textit{Hours of service.} Limiting or increasing the number of hours that a pantry is open during
a month is another way to manage resources, though there is considerable variation with
regard to how hours of operation impact service numbers. For example, a pantry that is
open less frequently could serve as many clients or more, than a pantry that is open more
frequently. In general, though, it is understood that by increasing their hours of operation,
a pantry will increase its service numbers. In fact, the Food Bank’s Model Programs
Education Series suggests expanded hours as a way to make sure that a pantry is meeting
the needs of all people in their geographic area.

The majority of pantries in Syracuse are only open during the day, though a few
pantries also have evening hours on a regular basis. This is a limitation on who can
access a pantry. Jennifer rightly stated, “It’s like we assume that poor people don’t have
anything else to do but go to the pantry, in the middle of the day.”
Breaking the rules. Much emotional work happens on the part of pantry coordinators around decisions to break the rules. I learned that despite the increasing coordination of pantry practices and the many rules, pantry coordinators do also make many exceptions. They stay open late, they give families extra food, they save things for people with special dietary needs, they give food to families that they know are not in their geographic area, and so on. Allison provided an example of a context in which she would make an exception:

So they’ll [a client will] come, they’ll, they could bring a letter, and say, look, you know, now I’m, only down to this ’til April. That changes things. We’d give them more food or tell them to come back in a certain amount of time. Yeah, we’re very flexible, we do not want people to go hungry, we’re not going to let that happen.

Allison’s example illustrates a situation when a client has documented evidence of their circumstance that causes them to need more food than the typical allotment. Coordinators are probably more prone to approve these types of cases across the network. Natalie, however, told me a story that illustrates the flexibility she uses in making exceptions, even without documentation:

They’ll [a client will] call me on the phone, “Hey, Natalie, can I come for food today?” You know, ’cause they don’t want to come in for no reason at all. I’ll look ’em up in the computer and let them know. But I always ask them, “No, you’re not eligible, but do you need something now?” “Well, yeah, I have my kids coming this weekend,” you know. And I tell ’em, come on in.

Natalie, like some other coordinators, tries to accommodate her clients’ needs outside of their hours of operation. Natalie tries to work with her clients’ needs in any way possible, in fact. She said that this is in part because she is on a mission to increase their service numbers to what their records tell them is an appropriate level for their geographic area:

I’ll have people who will say I can’t get there till 2:00pm. The food pantry closes at 12:30pm and I’ll tell ’em okay, I’ll bag it up for you and you can just come
pick it up and I’ll just set it off to the side. So, I try to help every single person who comes through ’cause I really want our numbers up. I really want our numbers up; I want them back to what they were back in 2006 and ’07. ’Cause they were in like the 200, 300s, which is great and if we can do it then, we can do it now.

Not all food pantry coordinators have the support or the desire to be quite as flexible as Natalie, however. Generally, church-based pantries seemed more likely to accommodate a client’s needs outside of the pantry’s hours of operations. Agency-based pantries were less likely to discuss doing that, but were also open for a much longer time span each week.

Though pantry coordinators as a group are very generous and kind hearted, the power that they hold regarding making subjective decisions about when to break the rules for a client is an issue that ought to be discussed in the local community. Some coordinators do exercise their power more generously than others and it is important to consider the types of experiences and identities that are subjectively deemed as “deserving” exceptions. Emergency food workers, like many people, hold prejudices and negative stereotypes about their clients. I have overheard a number of judgmental statements in the community that demonstrate that notions of the deserving and undeserving poor are still commonly held. One worker in the local network offered this analysis on the subject of clients that may need more than three to five days worth of food to get them through the month:

Yeah, I don’t really know what the answer is, I think there’s also the rules about what you’re supposed to do and then there’s sometimes what you do, too. ’Cause I know there’s an awful lot of pantry people who say “Well, you’re not in my area, I can’t help you, but here take this.” (laughs). So there’s, informally, there’s a lot of that going on… You don’t want to deny people but you want to make sure you have enough for everybody that… It’s incredibly hard to know what the answer is, you know? And I get the other rules there are, you know, how many days of food over what period of time and I would guess that there is certainly a
portion in anything you do, of people that are scamming the system, always, always, always, always, but why build the system to address the minority, you know? And those kinds of things keep us away from understanding real need, because we refuse to serve or we, so we don’t know, we only know what we’re able to see walk in the door.

This worker’s comments illustrate the tensions that people working in the emergency food network feel over “the rules.” Some workers see the rules as necessary for the system to function, even survive; others see them as misguided. In the everyday, both statements are probably valid—the rules do protect pantries from too much demand, assisting in their daily survival, but by doing so they also spend much time “addressing the minority” and prevent the community from “understanding the real need” and meeting it.

Managing Resources through Tracking

Tracking is the method by which the majority of pantries in Syracuse ensure that their clients only go to one food pantry, one time per month. Pantry coordinators make exceptions to this rule when they determine on a case-by-case basis that a family or individual needs more food during a month for a given reason. But, most pantries do limit the number of times a client can come to the pantry to once per month and they accomplish this through their recordkeeping. Clients have a file where their dates of service are listed. Every time a client visits a pantry these records are updated. The church-based pantries rely on their residency requirements and their own records to ensure that clients are not going to more than one pantry per month. But EFA pantries, which are mostly agency-based pantries located at large organizations or community centers, keep paper-based records and participate in a computer-based tracking system that electronically connects the records of the seven or so pantries in the network.
The EFA network was established in the 1990s and was started as a network of agencies that did more than distribute food. In fact, in the 1990s, they had funding to give out rent and utility support to clients, a factor that necessitated more accountability via the centralized recordkeeping. Members of the EFA no longer distribute money or financial support through their activities connected to the EFA, though some members do through other non-pantry programs at their organizations. Michele, at the IFC, has a leadership role in the EFA. She said that though there was not any money left, “they still keep track of the people they serve.” She regards the EFA monthly meetings that are held at the IFC offices as an opportunity for pantries to network with each other, to learn about community services through speakers, and to give coordinators a chance to develop some “camaraderie.” Other pantry coordinators who work with the EFA agreed with Michele’s statements that the EFA is useful for its networking, educational, and relationship-building opportunities.

Workers in the local network held a variety of opinions on the tracking system itself. Current members of the EFA generally had a positive stance on it. The critique that I most frequently heard was that the system itself “was a pain in the neck,” it was slow and froze up frequently, making it rather inefficient to use. The local Salvation Army is charged with operating the system and their organization also has a leadership role in the EFA. Allison told me about their struggles in keeping the technology up to date:

The database, so the Salvation Army designed at this point, it was a very old Access database that had to be dialed into from everyone else in the community who used it. And I think it started out with maybe 12 pantries and it’s many less now, because, number one, it’s archaic, the system. But also, some of the people that were on there are no longer pantries [because they closed] because of the resources in the community… The Salvation Army donated their time and money and staff to build this a long time ago and then we built a new one in 2003 or
2004, something like that, updated it. So it was much faster and better, but you know, imagine between 2003 and now…

Allison told me that the Salvation Army formerly employed a web developer but that they no longer had the funds to do so. At this time, they are looking into an opportunity to upgrade the system, but the cost of the upgrade is an obstacle for many of the agencies who want to use the system.

Some of the coordinators cited cutting down on “duplication” or “taking advantage” as the tracking system’s primary purpose. Sometimes coordinators use language that highlights “stretching” or “conserving” resources in addition to the language of duplication. Allison said that some pantries that left the network because they were uncomfortable with the tracking system are now struggling to keep enough food on their shelves. This sort of knowledge serves as justification of the system for the remaining pantries. Allison also asserted that members of the EFA were reasonable about breaking the rules. She reflected,

And it helps us to prevent duplication… We wish that we could have every pantry serve everyone every month and unfortunately with the resources in this community, it’s just not possible. The EFA network has been around since 1994 and it was developed…because the community resources weren’t meeting the need, and we had to find a way to prevent the duplication. And obviously, we make exceptions to that. There’s people, “Oh my food stamps, something happened, I don’t have any food stamps for 45 days.” Obviously, they’re not going to go hungry. But you know, other than that, we try to keep it to your local pantry. We also don’t want someone paying $1.25 to get on the bus and come down here, when there’s a pantry right down the street from them, ’cause it’s a waste of their resources.

Some of the coordinators, like Allison, seemed to discuss the tracking system cautiously and were usually quick to mention reasons other than surveillance that justified the system, such as making sure that clients do not spend unnecessary money on bus fare.
Easy grant reporting and recordkeeping were other features that coordinators appreciated about the system.

An additional rationale behind the tracking system includes the notion that the system helps with case management because pantries have an easier time keeping and accessing case notes and client histories for a client population that can be transient at times. Allison mentioned that in addition to cutting down on duplication, she sees the system as a better way to do case management:

Obviously…there are the occasional clients who just go around, looking for every service that you can possibly get, so it, although it, some people present it as the main reason that we do that, I mean, it, it is a big part of it, not as much anymore for us, because we try to get as many resources as possible, because we don’t want to turn people away. But, it’s really helped in terms of um, I don’t know, I don’t really know how to put it, um, what we try to focus on, the way we try to present it, is that we have it there because we can also put notes in, and we can encourage, look if you’ve been here every month for the past 12 months, clearly something isn’t working, what can we do to help you. And if they say, “Oh my Food Stamps, they’re not certified anymore, I didn’t recertify.” And you know “I really need help, but I can’t read.” You know, well often times, they won’t come out and say those kind of things to us, so we can look through the history and see that, and say, “Well, have a seat, I’ll be out in a few minutes and I’ll help you fill out your application”… And that’s part of the reason… It helps us meet more needs and realize that they’re, you know someone might come in and they might not even know, and I mean, I know it’s not usually what’s going to happen, but they might not know Food Stamps exist, it might be someone who has been unemployed for you know, two months and nobody told them. And you know, it’s easier, it just opens our eyes to other things.

Allison struggled a bit in talking about the system, possibly because of the competing pressures that food pantry coordinators feel around this issue. EFA pantry coordinators, similar to other pantry coordinators, are tasked with the job of ensuring that food gets equitably distributed in the community and believe that the tracking system is the most effective way to do this, despite the critiques.
Some EFA coordinators did discuss flaws in the system. Natalie saw the benefits of the system as complicated because there were not standards across the EFA network about how much food is given out and the level of information to put into the system. In the end she still believes that it is worth it:

I think having everybody linked stops the people, first of all, who are trying to take advantage of the system. I think it is kind of a nuisance because not everybody understands that if you enter that person in you could prevent them from getting food. So, a lot of times they will enter them in even though they only gave the person hot dogs that day and then they [clients] come to me a couple of days later and I say “You were just at a pantry a few days ago.” [The client says], “All she gave me was hot dogs.” Well, there’s no note of that. I’ll still serve you, I’ll still serve you for one no matter what, you know, but I’ll, we’ll have to call the pantry and say, “Do you remember this client, you know, were you only giving out hot dogs this day?” So, there are still some quirks with it that need to be worked out. But, I think it is definitely more of benefit. It’s more of a benefit; you can also do reports off the system so if you need to see how many people you served month-to-month you can do that.

The tracking system does seem effective at preventing people from going to more than one EFA pantry in a month, but some workers in the local community do not agree with the level of surveillance that the tracking system encourages. Beth weighed in on the issue,

Actually, [the Food Bank] would prefer that our programs were not on it… I think at this point, there’s only about five or six agencies that are… It’s really, it’s basically, the whole system was based on collecting social security numbers which…our programs are not allowed to collect that information for reasons of identity theft and honestly, the whole reason that database got started was because the EFA group, used to be called Emergency Financial Assistance and they used to be giving out money to pay like rent and utilities and things like that, so that’s why they were tracking. But as the years have passed they don’t do any of those things anymore. So all they’re giving out is food, and it’s sort of our position is that, I mean if people are hungry, they’re hungry, I mean food is not cash, it’s, there’s nothing else you can do with it and what a lot of times people don’t realize is that pantries are really only giving out enough food for three meals a day for three days. They’re giving out nine meals and a lot of pantries have this arbitrary, you can only come every 30 days. So what, according to the EFA, I mean, their definition of double-dipping is someone going between the 30 day limit and to me, you’re not double-dipping unless you’ve been within those three days… And
even if you are, I mean, how desperate can you be?... There’s a philosophical difference with that whole thing I think and...we’re just not involved in it and we don’t forbid anybody from doing it, um, but we would prefer again, like the geographic boundaries is much more problem-free and less stress on anybody and then because when you get into things like that, it becomes about catching people and people are forgetting why they got into this work and it’s all about, let’s catch the people who are dishonest and I’m sorry, but it’s food, I mean, it’s not a big enough commodity to put all that extra work and stress on yourselves and I just, when I’ve seen pantries get into something like that, it changes them and it changes what they’re looking at when they’re helping people. And yes, so we’re not involved in that, at all.

Given the power of the Food Bank in the local community and their disapproval toward the system, it is not surprising that some of the EFA coordinators have a difficult time discussing the tracking system and emphasize what the system does for them other than “catching people.” As Beth puts it, there is a “philosophical difference” between the Food Bank and the EFA on this issue; despite the Food Bank’s disapproval, the EFA pantries continue to use it.

*Managing Resources through Limiting Food*

Limiting the amount of food distributed is one way that organizations cope with resource scarcity. Soup kitchens control portions easily through the serving process and whether they allow for second portions. Food pantries control the amount of food they distribute through the food they determine to include in a food package. Food pantries that are a member of the Food Bank are expected to follow certain guidelines regarding the types and amounts of food included in a package. Pantries can determine how many days worth of food to distribute, but most distribute three to five days worth. Though the Food Bank does not regulate what exactly goes into a package, they do stipulate that any amount of food counted as a “meal” for their reporting requirements must include three of the five food groups that they define: grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat and non-
meat proteins (See Appendix F). Food Bank member programs are required to report the number of meals that they distribute each month for recordkeeping, grant reporting, and grant allocating purposes.

The Food Bank guidelines on meal packages are meant to provide food pantry clients with nutritionally balanced foods they can use to create balanced meals at home. The Food Bank considers nutrition to be a primary focus of their organization and this distinguishes their policies and practices from many other food banks. Despite the nutrition policies that the Food Bank has, the food available at food pantries in Syracuse is still of limited quality and nutritional value due to cost-related issues. Much of it is high in sodium and does not accommodate the needs of clients with dietary or medical concerns such as diabetes, celiac or heart disease. Also, the Food Bank’s food package guidelines, like many standardized guidelines, do have limitations. Megan, a coordinator of an agency pantry, thinks the guidelines are inadequate:

The Central New York Food Bank has guidelines in which they give you what they believe a family of four should have. But how would that apply to a family of four with two children [ages] 4 and 6 or two children [ages] 14 and 16. It’s not the same, crazy... You can’t make a generalization in regards to that, so in saying that, I provide accordingly… Mostly, I talk to pretty much everyone that comes through my food pantry and assess what their needs are at that point in time.

According to Megan, she gives food above these guidelines whenever she deems them to be inadequate.

The Food Bank does not regulate the maximum amount of food that pantries can give out, though they do prefer pantries to adhere to the guidelines, for consistency between packages and also to keep the pantries from running out of food. Natalie tells this story about when a Food Bank employee came out to audit their practices:
Well, they said, “What would you give for a person of four, a family of four?” And I rattled off everything that we would give them. She said, “Okay, you’ve given way too much food” and they gave me a chart that they wanted me to go by, you know, who gets what. So I try to stick to that chart. For the larger families I won’t because I don’t believe it’s enough food. If you have eight people and they’re only allowed one brick of cheese, you know, I don’t really believe that. I have discussed it with my supervisor and he says just do what you’ve been doing. We can keep up with it if we are giving away too much food. It’s not breaking our bank right now, so, let’s continue to do that. It was a little bit frustrating to be told you’re giving out too much food. She even had to say to herself, I can’t tell you to give out less.

Natalie’s experience with the Food Bank illustrates much about how the Food Bank impacts or tries to impact the practices of the food pantries. They do a good deal of “encouraging” and “guiding,” but in the end the Food Bank has to leave many of the decisions to the pantry coordinators. The Food Bank offers incentives, such as a free $500 shipment of food to programs that are evaluated to be “model programs.” Through those incentives, they do gain cooperation on their initiatives. As Beth mentioned, if a pantry is constantly running out of food and the Food Bank assists them, the Food Bank has a stronger power of persuasion in encouraging that pantry to change their practices if they want to continue to receive additional foods.

Despite the semi-standardization of the food packages distributed by food pantries in the network, there was a lot of speculation by food pantry coordinators that other pantries did not give out as much food as their own program. Megan reported that she has heard that some of the church-based pantries give out packages that are too small for her standards: “I had one lady told me, she came from one of the churches, where they gave her a boxed pizza and some canned foods. That’s gonna take the initial growl, but that’s not gonna give you food.” Megan differentiates their pantry’s packages from pantries that do not give enough. She spends a lot of time strategizing over the exact types of food to
put into bags to encourage “meals” rather than what she viewed as a random collection of canned goods that did not resemble a “meal.” Peter, like Megan also believes that the food packages at the pantry where he works are some of the best in the city:

Other organizations, I’m not being critical of them, other organizations will pass out a bag and say that they’ve done 4,000 bags but in their bag is a jar of peanut butter and jelly. Every bag that leaves here has got the same contents in it, and dollar value, no one comes close to us. I mean… I have not figured it out yet, I’m going to get, actually my wife, who is a home economist also, to go through that bag or two to three of them and add up in a calculator what it would cost if we were buying that, you know?

A few pantry coordinators talked about inconsistency within their own meal packages. Betty struggles to get her volunteer personal shoppers to be consistent between clients who are receiving food from their client-choice pantry:

That’s another issue with volunteers, because they are good-hearted people, you make judgments about people, and we’ve [she and the volunteers] talked about this. You make judgments about people on the basis of sometimes on the fact that they’re articulate, sometimes because, they’re filthy dirty, you know, they’re well-dressed… I mean all those things that people visually see when they meet someone, influenced, was influencing and still does to some extent I think, what choices are, the numbers of choices that are offered. So the volunteers would go around, and I would see that they’d say, “Oh, take two cereals, you can have two.” And it was not based on numbers, it was based on the fact that this was, you know, there was something in the personality, something in the interaction and the relationship that prompted the volunteer to say, “Oh, take two.” Or just the opposite. This guy is filthy dirty and there’s not a way that he’s gonna get the eight pound chicken that we have in the refrigerator. Because all he needs is hot dogs. I mean the, in a sense, stereotypes and the way you look at people. So we, every once in a while, we go, I have cards, so that everybody knows, if there’s two people this is what, you know, their choices should be. But I know that, and I’m not in there all the time, because I’m out and around, but, I always tell people, I end, when we end training or talking about it, I said, I always tell them to err on the side of love… But it does bother me sometimes because I’m thinking, oh, how am I gonna replace that two cans of (laughs)? Where are we going to get the money…

Betty’s comments illustrate the inconsistencies that happen even between food packages in one pantry. She also discusses the subjective and sometimes prejudiced decisions that
volunteers make while using the client choice model. Her assessment of this prejudice demonstrates that notions of the deserving and undeserving poor are sometimes applied during service delivery. In some ways, anonymous packing of “prepackaged bags” controls for this kind of prejudice.

Staff at the Food Bank were very invested in ensuring consistency between packages at a pantry. Annie commented,

So what I’m finding is that people are really generous with the singles and the twos. And when they get into the bigger families they’re not getting enough. ‘Cause, it increases dramatically, so you’re better off to be a single or a two… So, we’re trying to encourage them to make sure that they follow it just like this, and it does seem like a lot of food, so some that thought they were doing 15 meals, were actually doing more like 9 for the bigger families, but they were doing 15 for the smaller families.

As Annie mentioned, some inconsistency is unintended and the result of how a package of food can appear like a large amount of food but actually not include the number of meals that the pantry is trying to provide. In the past, some pantries in the network intentionally limited the amount of food that single people could receive. Beth said that she was able to use the HPNAP non-discrimination policy to stop this practice in pantries:

[There was] a guideline that was established by the EFA network, where they were going to serve people with children once a month and individuals without children, single people, every three months… And they didn’t really want to bend on that rule, but once I was able to point out that that’s really a discrimination against family status… then when funding gets involved, people are a lot more susceptible to that…

Her use of the family status category as a protected category included in the HPNAP contract helped her to ensure that local pantries were not discriminating against single people, who do also need to eat. EFA pantries stopped this practice relatively recently.

This is an example of one of the ways that the Food Bank successfully coordinated the
practices of local food pantries and made a positive impact on service delivery from the perspective of people without children.

Though pantry coordinators can no longer limit the amount of food that they give to individuals versus families, I did observe one instance where a pantry coordinator was favoring families over individuals because their food stock was low. The coordinator said that they keep much of their food out of public view, even though they use the client-choice model:

Right now, I’ve got things hidden in here, because I do have some single guys that come in. This family that’s here now, they’ve got two daughters and then I want to make sure that people with children, not that single people don’t, but right now, it’s precious until I get my delivery, like spaghetti sauce and fruits and vegetables and soups and stuff. But um, you know, [I have] a lot of stuff tucked away so that I can make sure that families have it.

Though this pantry does not turn individuals away, they have implemented a different practice that limits the type of food that they give to the “single guys.” This is a discriminatory practice based on the workers’ own notions of who deserves foods like “spaghetti sauce” and “fruits and vegetables.” Here, again, is an instance of notions of the deserving and undeserving poor actually being applied during service delivery. The fairness of such practices should absolutely be questioned, but it seems that judgment calls such as this would be prevented if the network had sufficient resources in the first place.

Food packages at food pantries are not meant to last a full month, they are meant to last for three to five days. According to many workers the packages are designed as “supplementary” and constitute an “emergency” source of food, not a regular source of food to be accessed every month. Over my years of involvement in the local community, I observed some resentment on the part of workers that food pantries are a regular source
of food for a certain percentage of their clients. A recent study by Feeding America has illustrated that for the clients of the emergency food network, SNAP benefits last on average, 2.7 weeks or the equivalent of 19 days (Mabli et al. 2010). Given the shortcomings of SNAP and the weakness of the rest of the social safety net, it is quite understandable that food pantries are a regular source of food for many low-income residents of the United States. Though food pantry clients receiving SNAP likely have other sources of income, negotiating the costs of housing, food, health care, child care, transportation and other costs on a low-income are quite difficult. When coupling the 19 days with the average amount of food that food pantries distribute, about three to five days worth in a month, it is shocking that the emergency food network is still considered an adequate response to hunger and food insecurity in the United States. People in the United States do not have a right to food, a basic human need. On the subject of resentment on the part of some workers, these workers probably have good reason to feel burnt out by a system that seems to take advantage of their volunteer labor. However, it is difficult to understand why this resentment is directed towards the clients of food pantries rather than on structural inequality and poor government policies that have created the system in the first place.

_Duplication, Double-dipping, and Catching People_

Members of the local network view the rules that I have discussed as the fairest and most equitable ways to distribute resources and to ensure that some pantries are not overburdened. Many actors also view serving clients that live near an agency as positive because it can increase the sense of community and connection felt by the organizations and the clients. Some pantry coordinators were invested in “preventing duplication” or
“double-dipping” by way of enforcing the rules—in part because of the challenges involved with equitably distributing limited resources. For some coordinators, the work of preventing duplication occupies much of their time and energy. Margaret, the coordinator of an agency-based pantry at a community center, remarked on how the EFA tracking system helps her prevent duplication:

That’s what’s great about having the computer system, I can see and make sure they haven’t been to, you know, some place. Quite a few times I have somebody come in and “I haven’t been any place, blah, blah, blah” and then you look on the computer, “You were just someplace yesterday or even today, what happened?” “Oh, I didn’t know you meant that, oh, I didn’t get very much food.” And then you call [the other pantry], “I gave them bags of food, what are they saying?” So, it’s a good way of, you know, duplication of services, although with all the pantries you’ve talked to, I’m sure families go from here to there and we can’t do anything about that.

Allison, a coordinator at another agency-based pantry wishes that more pantries were able to use the EFA computer tracking system. At the time of our interview only about seven local pantries were using the system, none of which I would classify as a church-based pantry, though some may have a religious affiliation. Allison remarked on some of the gaps in the tracking system:

So we have no way to know if they went [to a church pantry], but you know what, if they’re really hurting that bad, and they need to get food on Sunday from their church and from us, we’re ok with that… I wish we had a free, fast, simple database that everybody could be on, but the fact is most of these, most of the churches and things, it’s their mission and they just want to feed their neighbors and we don’t want to stop that. We don’t want to say, “Hey, you can’t feed them because we’re feeding them.” You know?... I mean it doesn’t bother me like it bothers some people, I’m ok that they get served by both of us, but it’s different, a lot of times when you go to a church, you might get a bag with seven or eight things, that’s not…a full meal. And…with us, we try to really make it last.

Allison’s comments reflect a tension in the local community—there are rules about how often someone can come to a pantry, but because the pantries are independent of each other, there is inconsistency in the quality and quantity of food given out, especially by
some of the smaller church-based pantries. Though Allison may not care if a client is using an agency-based pantry and a church-based pantry in a month, some workers do care and do their best to prevent this from occurring.

Not everyone connected to the local network supports the use of the tracking system in preventing duplication. Annie, an employee at the Food Bank thinks that the geographic/service areas do a better job at preventing duplication:

If they stick to their boundaries, then you’re not gonna have the problem. Because then they’re complaining about duplication and “Oh, this person went to that pantry and that pantry.” But you serve them out of your area, so really you’re the one that created that if you don’t stick to your boundaries.

But, even some pantry coordinators that do “stick to their boundaries” seem to engage in policing around the issue of geographic/service areas. One coordinator at a church-based pantry mentioned that she gets together with a nearby pantry coordinator to compare client lists. They recently “found 10 clients that were shoppin’ both pantries.” This coordinator enforces the rules quite strictly:

I say for the first time they come here you’re only allowed to go to one pantry, this is the pantry you should be comin’ to because you live in [zip code], if you’re caught going to another pantry, you’ll be disqualified from all pantries, I’ll give ’em the little spiel. You know, a lot of times, you kinda can feel when people aren’t tellin’ ya the truth. And I just said [to the client], “You know, I do check other pantries, I check with [this other pantry] too.” You know, they’ll come in and we’ll go through our lists, I have a regular list, of people that come here and you know, we’ll go through the list and see.

Her comments indicate that she considers identifying people who use more than one pantry as part of her job. The pantry where Allison works at does not have boundaries, so she relies on the EFA tracking system to prevent duplication. She said that sometimes a client will come to the pantry and claim that they went to another pantry that did not give
them enough food, at which point she will call the other pantry to check up on the client’s story:

If they came in and said, “Well, they didn’t give me much food.” That part of it, which is, it’s not a lot of people, so I don’t want to bring the negative into it, but there is probably, maybe 10 percent of people try to duplicate and then try to say, “Well, I went there and all they gave me was hot dogs.” Well, we know that’s not true, because we meet with them every month and we know what they do and they’ve been there forever and they’ve, you what I mean? So we would call if they said that. All the pantry coordinators pretty much have each other’s numbers on speed dial. So we have a few pantries, that that happens with sometimes, and we’ll call, most of the pantries are actually somewhat smaller, they remember everyone.

Allison’s comments indicate that she distinguishes between the food given out at larger agency-based pantries and the church-based pantries, as she contradicted her earlier statement about not knowing about the quality of the church-based pantry food packages and therefore not worrying about duplication.

For some pantry coordinators, going to more than one pantry in a month is a greater offense. Janice has a policy of disqualification for anyone who goes to another IFC pantry during the month for a period of up to six months, though she has never exercised that power. A different church-based pantry coordinator was very upset that one of their staff had discovered that some of their clients were using an additional pantry. This coordinator expressed interest in being on the tracking system and mentioned that even if they could not participate, maybe they could “pretend” to, to deter clients from “double-dipping” and “scamming.”

The Food Bank does not support policing activities like the sharing of client names between pantries as they consider it a violation of the client’s confidentiality and perhaps, misguided. Annie reiterated her earlier point about sticking to the boundaries and referring clients that are not in your geographic area to the appropriate pantry or the
IFC. Overall, the staff at the Food Bank seemed unworried about the issue of clients going to more than one pantry in a month. Annie talked about the misconceptions in the community around this issue:

I wanna say that it’s probably, you know, I don’t even know the statistic anymore. It used to be three percent of people that double-dip and are abusing the system and but it seems, they [the pantry coordinators] talk about it. You know, it’s just like if you work in the grocery store you have 100 people that were great and you have two that were jerks, who do you think about?...the jerks… Same with waitressing, I know, I waitressed for years and I don’t remember the millions that were really nice to me and gave me good tips, I think of the jerks…You know, and I think it’s human nature. They dwell on the people that took advantage… rather than thinking about how many they actually helped and really were grateful.

Annie said that she often tries to remind the coordinators of this in meetings and that her message is well taken, though in a group setting, talk does revert back to the conversation of clients abusing the system.

It is quite possible that practices such as tracking would exist even if there were enough resources to go around as some of this extreme rule-mindedness does seem to be rooted in negative attitudes towards the poor. Nancy, the coordinator of a pantry in a nearby town, talked about their recent adoption of geographic areas and said that their funders wanted to make sure that pantry clients were “learning responsibility” and that they were not “taking advantage.” In the case of the pantries in this town, funding pressures brought about the implementation of residency requirements, which were understood to enforce “responsibility” and ensure that clients do not “take advantage.”

A number of coordinators were against using tracking in this way. Jennifer, a coordinator of a large church-based pantry supports the use of geographic areas but not the tracking system. When we discussed the issue, she said,
If everybody in the city could come here, they would, and we’d be closed in two days because we’d run out of food. Do you know what I mean?... It just kinda, it’s kind of a fairness kind of thing, in trying to keep everybody… We used to be on a computer, when I first started volunteering, we were on a computer, so I would know if you came in today, that you were at [another pantry] yesterday. And that, there was some good to that, but there’s also some bad to that. You know? We know people are double-dipping now. But you know what, some people need to double-dip… And maybe I don’t need to know. You know?

Jennifer seemed to have a more nuanced position on “double-dipping” as she acknowledged that some people would need more than three to five days worth of food.

Ernie, the coordinator of the pantry at a local Temple also has a different perspective on the issue. The pantry at the Temple does not enforce any residency requirements or place limits on the number of times a client can come a month. Their pantry is open three days each month; Ernie explained their policy on how often clients can use the pantry:

No, they can [come] when they need it. They come when they need it… In the past we have suggested once a month but no, if they need it. In fact, we had a sign that said, (looks around the room) where is it, yes, right there (points to sign hanging on wall). “Please come only when you really need food”… And people are for the most part trustworthy. Sometimes not and it pops up, you discover this and there was a lot of discussion about “Well, gee aren’t you concerned about double dipping, they go from here, there and so on?” But, we’re dealing with people who have limited means of transportation. And I’ve had people who’ve walked two to three miles to get here and then proposed that they leave three quarters of their stuff right there instead of taking it with them because they can’t carry it.

Ernie’s pantry seems to place a greater level of trust with their clients than many pantries. Ernie was sympathetic about the amount of work that it takes clients to come, get food, and transport it home. He even gives clients rides home sometimes. His perspective was very different from some of the other workers in the network that would probably never consider taking a client home in their car. Some workers even expressed concerns about “safety” in the pantries as if they were under siege by an unstated threat.
Jennifer, the coordinator of a pantry that left the EFA network, differed in her opinions on the subject from some of the other coordinators in the network. She said,

Other pantry directors hate it [when people go to more than one pantry in a month] because they get mad that people are taking advantage… There’s a certain portion of the population that is going to do that, rich, poor, or otherwise, that are gonna take advantage of a situation if they can. You know? Go to this pantry, that pantry, but if we’re doing what we’re supposed to do, which is checking identification and checking where you live, every month, then it shouldn’t be happening a lot. It [when people go to more than one pantry in a month], it’s happening, you know what I mean? There are people that know how to get… And I, I always tell the kids, when I used to bring the high school kids down here and even my own kids, you know, people want to think that poor people are dishonest and cheat and you know, it’s an easy thing to think, but I always tell the kids, remember when you were little and you would go trick-or-treating and there was one house that said “please take one,” and they’d leave a bowl out, there’s somebody in every group that’s gonna take more than one, or dump the whole bowl in their bag, it’s no different. If people see opportunity or if that’s their nature, then they’re gonna try to do that, whether they’re poor, whether they’re rich, whether somewhere in between. It really has, do you know what I mean? It’s, it’s just part of it. And it, it’s ok. And, not that I’m condoning it, I’m just saying it’s just part of reality, it is what it is.

Jennifer’s opinions diverge from those of some other coordinators in that she does not care to worry about the issue—partially because she believes that a disproportionate amount of attention is given to the issue of poor people “cheating.”

*Competition*

Given the large number of food pantries located in Syracuse and the limited amount of resources, it is not surprising that some competition happens between organizations. Employees at the Food Bank say that competition for funding is one reason that they do not want to open any more food pantries in the city of Syracuse. Competition for funds does not seem to deter many food pantry or soup kitchen coordinators from their work, though it does affect their work and relationships. Betty,
who tended to be more critical of the food pantry system, in general, said that pantries were “territorial.” She continued,

There’s a tremendous competition among [the pantries]…It’s terrible, it’s awful, it’s another thing that this whole system has pushed us into. People are closed mouth about where they get their money from…because they don’t want you applying… It’s not a, I don’t like you anymore kind of thing… It’s the fact that people are dedicated and very personally invested in the pantry that they run or the pantry that they’re involved with.

Her statements illustrated the tensions around funding that circulate in the community despite the overall friendliness of members of the local network. As she points out, people are not “closed mouth” because they are being spiteful, but because they prioritize the needs of their own pantry over other pantries. Sharing resources does have the potential to dilute one’s own.

On the whole, coordinators were willing to talk about their funding sources, particularly the grant sources, as these sources were very well known and utilized across the local network. I did occasionally experience coordinators to be “closed mouth” about foundations or businesses that they received support from or even private donors. One pantry worker verbally declined to share any of the names of their private donors, some of which were local businesses that donated money to their pantry. Most of the time, the silence around funding sources seemed to happen through vague answers to questions that I posed during interviews.

Competition over food donations from local businesses exists in the network. Large businesses, like Wegman’s, seem to have adopted a rather complex system of spreading the resources between different organizations. Different pantries get donations from different stores on different days of the week. According to Betty, one local business tired of the competition and decided to stop distributing to the pantries, instead
sending their leftover bread to the Food Bank for them to distribute. Betty told this story as an example of competition between pantries:

Bread. I mean we used to be able to get bread at Friehofer’s if we’d go over there and get it. And there were so many people over there to get Friehofer food, bread. And some people would come early in the morning and take rack upon rack upon rack upon rack. And when we would get there, for, and we figured we only needed like eight racks or something, the bread would be gone. So Friehofer’s, I think knowing that there was that competition going on, stopped offering it to us directly and sent it all to the Food Bank…

Betty wants to hold the pantries responsible for sharing better. She is also disappointed that because of the Food Bank’s new role as the “middle-man,” the bread is unusable to her:

And to me, it’s two days later and already… I would pick up bread and the bread would already be five days old, by the time we got it. And if it was another day or two before we had the pantry, it could be ten days old before it went out to people who either had to eat it immediately, or it was, I mean it was just (pauses). I was very upset about that.

Food pantries and soup kitchens often get donations of food that are close to expiration or in some cases, already expired. Another coordinator mentioned that she no longer had Friehofer’s products because of the length of time that it took to get to the pantry. She said,

I was there [the Food Bank] last Thursday, which was the 12th [March] and the bread was dated February 20th… So it’s that old and I don’t get it because they always gave bread at the Food Bank, and the problem is it’s a big warehouse, and in the summer it gets hot and the bread gets moldy. And it’s not worth my while to go out there and get it and bring it here. And not if it’s way outdated.

These coordinators viewed this change in practice as a loss for their clients and not worth their own effort any longer. Competition between organizations can create situations such as this, where a food source that used to be viable is no longer so. Some local resentment regarding the Food Bank’s seemingly countless relationships with local businesses also
exists. In the case of the bread, some of the pantries find the Food Bank’s “middle-man” status counterproductive. Warshawsky (2010) and his research participants also critiqued the “monopolies” that Chicago food banks have over local donations, suggesting that this is a general tension regarding food banking (772).

The effects of resource scarcity in Syracuse’s emergency food network are detrimental to food access. Though the implementation of resource management strategies is quite understandable given the limited resources available to the organizations, not enough attention is paid to the limitations of these mechanisms. Though some pantries in the local network do not enforce some of the rules that I have discussed, those pantries seem to be the exception, not the rule. These practices have been increasingly coordinated across the network by way of official Food Bank guidelines, unofficial suggestions from the IFC, or through horizontal relationships such as those based on networking and the sharing of practices.

FRAGILITY AND INSTABILITY

Despite widespread public and governmental support of the emergency food network, several factors make the system vulnerable. Poppendieck (1999) discusses how the network is donation and disposal-driven, rather than need-driven. This reliance on donations makes the network vulnerable to unreliable sources of support and is part of her argument that the emergency food network cannot meet the needs of food insecure people adequately. This issue is also present in Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens—though since the time of Poppendieck’s publication of Sweet Charity? Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement, the funding sources of the emergency food network seem to have shifted ever farther away from a reliance on corporate donations.
My research in Syracuse’s emergency food network also pointed to the importance of considering the vulnerability caused by the volunteer-driven nature of food pantries and soup kitchens. Some people are concerned locally about the aging out of local volunteers in Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens. Changes that are occurring in Syracuse’s religious community also affect the stability and vulnerability of Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens. Economic swings also affect food pantries and soup kitchens. Though many food pantries and soup kitchens seem to have weathered the recent recession, it is important to consider the reasons for this. National statistics on the number of people accessing food pantries and soup kitchens during the recession seemed higher than local statistics, suggesting that the recession had less of an impact on Syracuse’s emergency food network. Also, New York State’s HPNAP funding significantly bolsters the stability of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse. Additionally, I argue that food pantries in Syracuse are better insulated from the demands of increased numbers due to the rules that I have discussed. It is possible that these limitations shelter organizations from increases in demand and at the same time keep food insecure people from accessing the food that they need to live healthy lives.

Volunteer Driven

Many of the food pantries and soup kitchens of Syracuse are reliant on an extremely small volunteer staff. A number of the organizations rely upon a single person to do the majority of the work. What happens when a pantry coordinator is suddenly unable to run the pantry, due to illness or other demands? Tim and Isabel remarked on how the inconsistency of their volunteer help left them with the challenge of carrying out all of the work of the pantry. In my sample, two church-based organizations that were
located in churches that serve predominantly the African American community were struggling with this issue and were forced to close for a span of time during my research.

Additionally, other demands on staff and volunteers affect the stability of these organizations. For example, Natalie has a difficult time taking days off. She reflected on the possibility of their pantry expanding their hours: “Yes, it has been talked about…but it will be very difficult to do because I take a lunch break. I’m the only person in the building who can actually work the food pantry system.” A volunteer at the community center where she works can use the paper intake form when Natalie is gone, but only Natalie is trained to use the computer system where they store their records. Because of their staff limitations, the number of hours that they can be open per week is limited, despite Natalie’s wishes to extend them. The schedules and demands of paid and volunteer staff keep the accessibility of these organizations limited.

*The Aging Out of Volunteers?*

An issue related to the unsustainable nature of under-supported food pantries and soup kitchens is the possibility that the volunteers of Syracuse’s emergency food network are aging out of the volunteer workforce with no replacements in training. It is not clear that there is a generational trend affecting Syracuse volunteers on the whole. But what is clear is that some of the workers in the local community are concerned about the aging out of coordinators and volunteers within Syracuse’s food pantries and soup kitchens. Though my sample of organizations was not representative or exhaustive, my experience in interviewing coordinators was that the bulk of volunteer coordinators were at least at or past the age of retirement.
The issue of the aging volunteer workforce arose during a few contexts. Beth remarked that not too many of the emergency food providers were taking advantage of their online ordering system. She said, “Yeah, that’s definitely, we’re definitely looking at sort of an aging volunteer network. So that’s gonna be something that’s gonna take a while.” Tom remarked that the age of volunteers is an important motivation for their commitment to delivering food:

[When he started at the Food Bank,] the first advice I got from my peers, the Director in Albany was stop delivering door-to-door, the cost is too high. But, just as you said, you’ve got elderly volunteers, so how do you get them to access this food?… They have to get a pickup truck; they have to get someone to move it. So we were able to keep that service and I’m very proud of it.

Annie discussed the difficulties of inspiring a group of long-term volunteers to engage with change and make the transition to the client choice model:

Yeah, so it’s an education piece, working with a lot of older volunteers, you know, who have been doing things the way they’ve been doin’ it for years, and they don’t like to change. But it is better for the clients to be able to choose, gives them more dignity, they take what they want, so it’s not going to be left on the curb…

Michele from the IFC seemed increasingly concerned about the volunteer network in general, but also about the issue of volunteers aging out. When I spoke with Michele in 2009, she was paying attention to the issue, but thought pantries were doing “ok” at that time:

I think we’re doing ok, I want to say we’re doing ok, so far, I haven’t heard of any [closings], you know, I don’t have a feeling or I haven’t heard… So I think they’ll be all set. But you, it’s hard to say, because if somebody can’t do it anymore then you wonder who’s going to step up, especially in the city, maybe not so much in the suburbs, but in the city, it’s become an issue, it really is.

Though Michele thought everything was “ok” at the time, she was concerned about the sustainability of the overall network and wanted to systematically check in with the food
pantries about their challenges. She elaborated on her concerns regarding pantry sustainability:

Sustainability, well, what I want to do is look at the food pantries because of some of things we’ve talked about, like the age of the pantry people, the limited volunteers, more money that they have to pay, I just want to look at that system and just, kind of try to measure how fragile it really is and be prepared, to you know, in the long term, what will happen to it, so we want to look at the boundaries, you know, if the demographics have changed, food choice, a little bit, and the percentage of what they actually have to choose, what they have to pay for, ’cause there’s this misconception that the pantries get free food, when in fact, it’s not even the, 14 cents or 18 cents a pound that the food bank charges, it’s that they will charge for food, you know, they get the HPNAP grant, yeah, HPNAP grant, the pantries get it, but they have to use it at the Food Bank, there is a little bit of a misconception that this, that you know, the pantries are getting free food, even from the clients themselves… Now, my concern is, what if the pantry system disappears?

Later, her concerns were similar but she was also considering the gravity of a possible domino effect in the local community:

My concern is the little ones start dropping, if and when they do, that’ll put a burden on the oth-, some of the ones that are bigger, and I don’t know how they’re gonna do it. So…that was one [church pantry that closed] that was last year. [Another church] was a small one, they dealt with a small, you know, seniors. We’ve [another church pantry] that’s closing for the month of July, and they’re struggling, they’re an older group, it’s hard. It’s hard, you know most of them are volunteers, it’s very hard.

Michele thinks that dealing with volunteer-related issues will constitute some of the biggest challenges they will soon have to deal with in the emergency food network. “It’s not like there’s people lined up to take over,” she observed. Continuing, she said,

I do see, I do see changes where, you know, pantry people have been doing this for 20, 30 years, they’re in their 80s and 90s and some of their volunteers are that age, so you wonder how long they can be able to sustain themselves…and have their church sustain them, so, it is an issue.

Participants in a focus group that I conducted with Michele also discussed the difficulties of “getting older.” At one church-based pantry, the volunteers there stopped doing their
annual fundraiser because they could no longer handle all of the work. This pantry was also seeing a decrease in support from their host church, which was in turn seeing a decrease in support from their aging parishioners on “fixed incomes.”

During the time period of my research a church-based pantry in Syracuse was closed by its former volunteers. Michele surmised why they closed,

The volunteers were older and some of them didn’t feel well. The staff at the church were very hard to work with, you know, not every church should have a pantry, do you know? I mean that. Not every church should, some are better at ministering to the elderly, so you know, sometimes you have this feeling, well every church should and some churches shouldn’t…

Michele also said that the location of so many pantries inside of basements is difficult not only for some clients to access but also for the volunteers. But overall, she thinks that the local network handled the recent closing well:

I don’t think it [the closing] was not as burdensome, as we anticipated, because I don’t think there’s really a drastic increase in the number of people using the pantries in the city, I think that, it’s kind of at a level. ’Cause there’s not an influx, the only influx that’s coming in is the refugee population that is exploding here in the city and that is what’s taxing the resources, especially at the pantries. I just think there’s limited resources. I think pantries have to buy more food. Whether it’s from the Food Bank or looking for the best deals and I think that is an issue that they’re going to have to face. Budget. Because many of the ones in the city, you know, there’s a decrease in their congregation, but the food pantry keeps them connected to the church, so it’s issues that we’re gonna have to look at in the next couple of years, if the economic situation doesn’t get better.

Brother Joe also discussed the issue of the aging volunteer network:

Okay, her [Michele’s] big battle cry and it’s mine too is that the system is very fragile right now because of the age of the volunteers. I mean we still have the same people volunteering that we did 20 years ago. ’Cause there isn’t a group to replace them, most women are working now and they just don’t have the number of people at home anymore that have time to come in. And I think that eventually down the road, you might need that money more for salaries for people who would actually come in and do the work and get paid for it.
Brother Joe thinks that one solution to the challenge will be the creation of more paid positions in the local network. Alternatively, some U.S. communities have moved towards a more centralized model of food pantries, which is believed to reduce several of the inefficiencies related to the duplication of staff, space, heating bills, and so on in these organizations. The issue of fragility in the volunteer network also connects to challenges that local churches have recently had to face.

**Vulnerable Churches**

Pantries and soup kitchens located within churches are vulnerable to decreases in the level of church support that they receive. Some churches in Syracuse have experienced declines in their congregations, affecting the financial stability of the church itself, along with any programs such as food pantries that the church may support. Two pantry coordinators worked in churches that were undergoing major changes in the near future. Shirley, a paid part-time coordinator at a church-based pantry said that their church would soon be closing its doors and merging with a church a few blocks away. Everyone involved with the merger was aware that the community needed the pantry to remain open, but their fate was uncertain. The church that they were merging with already had a pantry and was a few blocks away, so Shirley did not think it made sense to consider merging the pantries:

> It wouldn’t make sense, because it’s different areas. You know, I have people way up there, and then they’re gonna go way over here, they gotta walk, a lot of these, wouldn’t work… They need a pantry, you know, right here.

Though a difference of six blocks may seem insignificant, Shirley considered it an issue of accessibility for her clients, who primarily walked to the pantry. A related issue is whether the neighboring church’s pantry could handle the increase in numbers. Betty was
also concerned about their church’s sustainability. She was fairly certain that they would be forced to close in the next few years:

What does it cost for us to keep this building open? I mean we’ve got, we maybe got two years left and then we’re gone, ’cause we just can’t. We don’t have the people to maintain…when I retire and the Pastor retires, chances are it’s gonna be, unless, I mean we’re still open to the miracles that might happen, but, it costs, our budget is $58,000 a year to keep the building, just to do the heat and the lights and the bathrooms and I mean that’s a tremendous amount of money for a congregation that worships less than 100 on a Sunday morning. And even though we get, I mean I write grants all the time, for $1200 here and $500 there for various things around the building, it doesn’t keep pace with the costs.

If their church and pantry close, other pantries will likely cover their “service area.” But what happens if the other pantries cannot handle the increased demand on their time and resources?

Vulnerable to Economic Swings

In general, food pantries and soup kitchens are vulnerable to changes in the economy. In an economic downturn, organizations receive fewer donations and have increased demand for their services. Local opinion on the demand in Syracuse was varied—some coordinators reported an increase, others did not. The Food Bank reported that they experienced a minor increase in demand on their services, but one that was much smaller than the nationwide statistics that circulated during the height of the economic downswing. Michele and other workers argue that the increases and decreases that are observed locally are based on shifting populations within the city itself, not on a surge of new clients. Organizations in Syracuse seem to have survived the demands placed upon them by the recent recession better than organizations in other places. This may be because the food pantries and soup kitchens of Syracuse have existed in a state of relative economic depression for a long time, perhaps helping them to adjust to resource
scarcity decades ago. Also, the resource management practices outlined in this chapter impact the survival of local organizations by helping them to ration their limited resources. How different is the state of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse from that of other places? What does the story of food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse tell us about the state of emergency food, overall?

CONCLUSION

Over time, it appears that the activities of food pantries in Syracuse have become more highly coordinated by local funding and institutional actors such as the Food Bank of Central New York and the Emergency Food/Financial Assistance (EFA) network. In some respects, increased coordination has contributed to improvements in the local network from the perspective of people using it. For example, the “push” for food pantries to use the client-choice model improves client access to foods that clients want, can cook, and will eat.

In other ways, the coordination that has taken place has helped organizations to ration resources—an accomplishment that has surely helped them survive in a tough climate, but one that also limits the adequacy of the emergency food network as a response to hunger and food insecurity. Resource management strategies such as the establishment of geographic areas are considered efficient from the perspective of funders. But, are these practices efficient for people experiencing hunger or food insecurity—quite possibly not.

Resources in Syracuse are limited, despite many pantry coordinators’ reports that they doing “ok.” Workers have become very skilled at managing the limited resources that they have access to, thereby structurally protecting themselves against major
increases in demand. The local network works well to prevent any pantry from having “empty shelves” through regulation of who can use which pantry, when, and how often. The effects of resource management strategies such as eligibility limits and limits on the amount of food a person can access during a month directly impact the experiences and well-being of people coming to these organizations for food.

Many pantry coordinators view the rules and policies that I have outlined as the fairest and most equitable ways to distribute limited resources. Some coordinators hold to the notion that food packages are meant to be “supplementary” and for “emergencies” despite their awareness that a segment of their clients does rely on this food source on a monthly basis and that SNAP benefits are inadequate. At the same time, it is clear that some pantry coordinators are very invested in “preventing duplication” or “double-dipping” by way of enforcing the rules—in part because of the challenges involved with equitably distributing limited resources, but also because there are still deep-seated prejudices regarding who is deserving of assistance and who is “abusing the system.” Notions of the deserving and undeserving poor can be found in the “talk” of emergency food workers and also sometimes in practice. Curtis (1997) argues that policies such as the ones I have outlined, “although rooted in practical considerations, are indicators of authority and control” (109).

While acknowledging and respecting the incredible amount of love and labor that goes into operating food pantries and soup kitchens, I would like to posit that these organizations are not actually doing “ok,” even though they are not running out of food every month. On the surface, it appears that food pantries that do not run out of food are meeting the community’s needs—that they really are “ok.” After all, they manage to stay
open and do provide food to many people. But scholars like Poppendieck (1999) rather convincingly argue that the emergency food network is understood by the public as a “solution” to hunger. She and others argue that this is a misunderstanding at best—that the network is inadequate, unstable, inappropriate, inefficient, and full of indignity for the people forced to rely upon it through economic necessity.

In Syracuse, it appears that the institutionalization of the food bank and the network more broadly has led to more coordinated and respectful practices. But these improvements may not come without a cost. The food bank celebrates the fact that their pantries never close for lack of food and it appears that the emergency food network in this community is functioning better than ever. It certainly appears to be functioning better in Syracuse than in the localities that appear on the national headlines with empty shelves. But, it seems important to ask, has the local network become so efficient at managing resources through its rules and policies that it cannot possibly meet all of the needs of the community? How do the resource management strategies, as one worker pondered, “keep us away from understanding real need, because we refuse to serve…we only know what we’re able to see walk in the door?”

Despite the improvements in the local network, the services available for people needing food through emergency channels in Syracuse are quite limited. The network seems to have been institutionalized, but in a rather messy and disorderly form. If success is defined as organizational survival and operation, how do the successes of emergency food further serve to entrench and institutionalize the network as a solution to hunger in the United States? This is a particularly important question to ask, when considering that food pantries in Syracuse are actually well funded overall, relative to pantries in other
regions that do not have a well-established food bank and state-based funding such as HPNAP. Even with its relatively stable funding, the network in Syracuse still has many sources of fragility including competition, the volunteer network, the role of churches, and so on. Policymakers must acknowledge that neither the emergency food network nor SNAP comprise adequate solutions to the problem of hunger and poverty in the United States.
Chapter Six
Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have provided an in-depth exploration of how the emergency food network operates in Syracuse, New York. Workers in the local network invest much labor in completing the numerous tasks that make it possible for them to provide food at food pantries and soup kitchens. The work happening within these organizations is coordinated and monitored by the regional food bank and various sources of government funding. Despite the relatively high level of funding that food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse experience, they must manage their resources strategically in order to stay operational. Many of the resource management strategies that are employed limit the ability of the network to function as an effective response to hunger and food insecurity in the United States. In this conclusion, I return to my research questions and extend the arguments that I have made in preceding chapters. Additionally, I discuss the limitations of this study and future directions for this research. I end with a brief discussion of what this dissertation contributes to existing research on the emergency food network and also on struggles for food justice.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY OF PROVIDING FOOD?

In this section, I return to the problematic that motivated this project. *What gets in the way of providing food? Why couldn’t we just give the man a sandwich?* When I experienced the denial of a sandwich to a self-identified hungry man, I wondered what was happening inside of these organizations that would create such a discomforting situation. I felt a disjuncture in witnessing the rejection of the man and thinking that I understood the missions and goals of the organization. I was unaware of how the
everyday activities of serving and *not* serving people food were connected by social relations that mediated the experience of both providing and accessing food. Simply put, I thought that the purpose of these organizations was to provide food to all people in need of food, whenever and however. Like most activities in the social world, however, the process of providing food turns out to be a bit more complicated. Though the goals and missions of food pantries and soup kitchens are to provide food to people, they are unable to or sometimes unwilling to provide food comprehensively. They cannot and are not designed to provide food to all people, at any time.

The services provided by the emergency food network are still severely limited. Thirteen years after Janet Poppendieck’s book-length critique on the emergency food network, the seven deadly “ins” that she catalogued are still problems—insufficiency, inappropriateness, nutritional inadequacy, instability, inaccessibility, inefficiency, and indignity (1999:210). The research conducted for this project suggests that though there have been efforts to address some of these issues, such as the Food Bank of Central New York’s efforts to better regulate the nutritional quality of food distributed and to increase food choice in food pantries, these problems still exist.

This exploration of the emergency food network has paid particular attention to the strategies that organizations employ to “stretch resources.” Because of the limitations of the network’s resources, a set of rules and policies has developed to assist organizational staff in stretching their resources. These rules and policies help staff to ensure that food lasts throughout the month, that the organizations stay operational, and that few resources are distributed to more people, rather than giving more resources to fewer people. At the same time, these rules and policies, which have become increasingly
widespread and supported by institutional-level and grassroots coordinative actors such as the Food Bank and the IFC, also have a negative side and get in the way of providing food. They hinder the provision of food through decreasing accessibility to and adequacy of the network.

The assertions that local organizations are able to keep their doors open and are doing “ok” are celebrated. This is a great accomplishment for many people who are trying to work within these organizations or access food within the current construction of food assistance. I would like to suggest that this celebration contributes to a false impression of the success of the network. In other words, does the success of staying open with food on the shelves give the workers, the public, and policymakers a false sense of the adequacy of the emergency food network’s contributions to ending hunger? Does this false sense further institutionalize the network’s inadequacies through making it look more successful than perhaps it really is? If pantries have food on the shelves, does that fuel a belief that surely people cannot still be hungry or food insecure?

Are the management strategies of the network further sustaining the emergency food network’s function as a moral safety valve, as Poppendieck suggests? Food pantries give out three to seven days worth of food to supplement low wages and inadequate government assistance, so as to keep people afloat, but government assistance and emergency food assistance is not designed to provide enough food support to suggest that people have an entitlement, a right, to food, a necessary component of human life. The problem of hunger appears to be “solved,” but in reality no social change has occurred. The causes of hunger have not been addressed. Following Poppendieck’s logic, I might suggest that the entire emergency food network actually gets in the way of providing
food, if one considers the adequate provision of food to be a human right. As Poppendieck (1999) argues, the network obstructs actual social change through its function as a moral safety valve. Assistance to survive is a “gift,” or “charity,” not a right. Even the language of “guest” implies that people accessing emergency food are “invited” in, not there because they have a right to be there. The emergency food network has grown during a time of government devolution. The support for charitable responses to issues such as hunger, as opposed to structural responses, is connected to broader histories and ideologies of inequality and power in the United States.

Discourses and actions based on ideologies of the deserving and undeserving poor continue to affect anti-hunger struggles more broadly as well as the emergency food network. These discourses also get in the way of just and equitable provision of food. Certain embodied persons and groups in the United States have historically or more contemporarily been deemed undeserving. Some organizations in Syracuse have a history of providing differential services to single people and families, for example. It seems that single, able-bodied men have had a particularly difficult time asserting their right to food, locally. The case of single men needing food clearly does not have the salience of hungry children, but the harsh realities of the capitalist economy spew them out, just the same. What of undocumented workers, transient populations, and single mothers? As long as access to food is considered a privilege of economic gain, not a basic right, people will continue to be adversely affected by the injustices of the capitalist economy.

COORDINATION AND GOVERNANCE

Food banking has evolved in the years since it was developed primarily as a method of rescuing corporate mistakes in the food system. Currently, not much corporate
food is available, forcing food banks to look elsewhere to support their member programs. Levels of state and federal aid are currently relatively high, as recent increases in funding for the HPNAP and TEFAP programs indicate. This increase in government support has helped food banks, especially those receiving funding such as HPNAP, shift to wholesale purchasing as an avenue to increase access to food. The food that food banks purchase is need-driven rather than donation-driven and this shift gives organizations the ability to plan and better control for quality and nutrition. The fact that food banking has undergone significant shifts since it was founded raises questions about its future—at what point should stakeholders and policymakers step back and reassess where this project is headed? If this part of the emergency food network was designed to reduce waste and redistribute food that would have otherwise been wasted and that food is no longer available, does it make sense for the nonprofit sector to continue this work? The boundaries between food banks and grocery stores appear to be blurring. How is this shift changing food banking practices? What does the government have invested in maintaining the status quo other than a clear interest in having a place to redirect excess commodities?

Despite their apparent decreasing reliance on the corporate world, food banks have been highly influenced by the business sector and appear to be affected by business practices related to efficiency, accountability, management, and governance. In recent years, the public and nonprofit sectors at large have become more and more influenced by these practices. On the face, this development may seem useful. What could be wrong with making government and nonprofit activities more “efficient” and more “accountable?” But for whom are these services more efficient? In the emergency food
network, does efficiency come to signify “more bang for the buck” through feeding more people, more food or greater accountability to funders? Many actors in the network would probably answer that both are desirable. In terms of broader efficiency, Poppendieck (1999) has well documented the inadequacies of the entire emergency food network. It certainly is not more efficient for people needing food for survival to need to access both public and private assistance, which are both inadequate. What would efficiency look like from the perspective of people who need to eat to live?

In the emergency food network, talk and implementation of “best practices” are indicative of an investment in improving services; at the same time, they also demonstrate linkages to notions of accountability, efficiency, and management. A Google search of “best practices in food banking” leads to thousands of links to websites of food banks and other organizations throughout the United States. A cursory review of the content of these sites suggests that identifying and implementing best practices is common and filters into everyday life at food pantries and soup kitchens. Some best practices relate to designating service areas, others to storage practices, still others to the availability of client choice. Some seek to make services more efficient through encouraging “complementary” services rather than redundancy.

Due to the challenges and particularities of acquiring resources and funding, food banks may be increasing their own efforts to coordinate the work of food pantries and soup kitchens. These efforts seek to improve people’s experiences accessing food, but also to improve the “efficiency” of the overall network. Monitoring, audits, and grant applications reward programs that comply with food bank policies and demonstrate accountability, contributing to more coordinated operations in an environment that has
historically consisted of loosely connected organizations. These broader trends of accountability and governance were also documented in Warshawsky’s (2010) discussion of food banking in Chicago.

These trends are not unique to the emergency food network, however, as many scholars have examined the impacts of the convergence of business sector practices and devolution on the nonprofit and public sectors. For a local example, on January 3, 2011, Mulder of the Syracuse Post-Standard outlined the United Way of Central New York’s announcement that it would cut $200,000 in funding to the community-based Dunbar Association due to concerns about its “governance and management” (Mulder 2011a). The Dunbar Center has a long history of serving Syracuse’s black community. On February 10, 2011, Mulder reported that, “the United Way was unhappy with attendance at Dunbar’s board meetings, the work of the board’s fundraising and finance committees and strategic planning…revenues have been declining and it has been operating in the red.” From examples such as this, it is clear that governance and accountability are central to the concerns of funders. The ways in which this loss of funding will impact Dunbar’s role in the community remains to be seen.

Much of the literature in institutional ethnographic work that addresses governance examines the impacts of such shifts on services in community-based agencies. Many of these studies suggest that the implementation of new public management practices on these organizations is detrimental to services on the ground (see Ng 1996 or Grahame 1998 for examples). Food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse are not funded based on strict performance goals in terms of the output of food that is distributed. They are, however, funded based on the number of people they serve and
how well they incorporate what the Food Bank and government agencies deem as best practices. Organizations who serve more people have access to more food and funding through these sources. This component seems to be a relatively straightforward calculation and one that does not seem to affect services on the ground in huge ways, excluding of course, the vital work of keeping accurate records. Organizations who can demonstrate diverse sources of funding and compliance with other Food Bank guidelines and practices are rewarded. This area is more subjectively evaluated based on Food Bank and funder priorities. Some of the practices encouraged by the Food Bank and other funders seek to increase the community’s access to services; other practices address critiques of indignity in services, such as the move to client choice. Still others seek to increase “responsibility” in the local community, by ensuring that residents are not able to “take advantage” of the network by going to more than one pantry a month.

The issue of coordination of food pantry practices is complex. Some of the practices that I outlined in this dissertation are mandated by the Food Bank and funding sources that are routed through the Food Bank, such as the requirement that programs cannot discriminate based on family status. Other practices are encouraged by the Food Bank by the dissemination of information or inducements like free shelving or extra food for pantries that switch to the client-choice model. These are welcome changes, indeed. If the relationship between the Food Bank and its member programs continues to become more vertical, through more mandates and additional funding requirements, will local workers on the ground lose the potential to respond to individual circumstances and needs in ways that are positive for their clients? For example, stricter enforcement of the food package guidelines might prohibit coordinators like Natalie from giving out extra
food when she has it. As the local network does appear to be becoming more coordinated, these sorts of issues should be considered.

Organizations within Syracuse’s emergency food network do not seem to be affected in the same ways as the community-based organizations studied by Ng (1996) and Grahame (1998). The primary goal of distributing food does not appear to have shifted significantly since the advent of the network. The activities by which they accomplish this goal, however, have become more coordinated to a distinct set of institutionalized practices.

Most food pantries and soup kitchens are not engaged in the kind of discriminatory “creaming” practices that Grahame (1998) documented in community job training programs, such as for example, refusing to serve people based on their likelihood to return to the pantry next month. So, as the system is currently constructed, food pantries are not accountable for producing “results” in the same ways as the workers in Grahame’s study, rather they are accountable for service provision. However, this does not mean that these organizations are not being affected by new public management strategies and discourses. More recent literature has begun to draw attention to additional ways that new public management affects organizations. For example, DeVault, Venkatesh, and Ridzi (forthcoming) discuss how accountability circuits are developed not only in terms of vertical circuits of accountability between organizations, but also through horizontal circuits that develop among local organizations. Through an examination of the relationship between a Medicaid office and long-term care facilities in one region, they argue that the county office and facilities worked together, horizontally, to ensure “efficiency” and “accountability.” These organizations had complementary
goals. The relationship between the Food Bank and its member programs is complex and elements of their relationship seem to be both vertical and horizontal.

Many organizations within the emergency food network are small, volunteer driven, and religiously based. In many ways, these grassroots, religious organizations seem to contrast with what the new public management signifies. A website named “Charity Food Programs that Can End Hunger in America” argues for fewer rules and more dignity in food pantries (Arnold 2004). “Why only once per month?...There is no “once a month” rule in the Bible, the Tanakh, the Koran, or any other significant religious text.” It instructs, “Please review what your faith’s Scripture says about helping the needy and revise your pantry’s policies and procedures as needed. When you are doing God’s work you really need to do it God’s way!” Interestingly, this same website provides an evaluation tool for food pantries that considers cost-effectiveness as a highly desirable goal.

Does the religiousness and small size of many food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse’s emergency food network serve to buffer or protect them from some of the impacts of the new public management? Are funders able to make the same demands on these organizations as they do on other organizations that have higher capacities and are more professionalized? As one local stakeholder mentioned, many coordinators work in emergency food because of their religious commitments, not because they want to be arms of the state. As Beth and Annie from the Food Bank mentioned, the Food Bank is aware of the limitations of their coordinative efforts. From the perspective of workers in soup kitchens and food pantries, perhaps the benefits of increased access to food outweigh the increased coordination that they experience through their relationship with
the Food Bank and other funders. Or perhaps, as in examples of food pantries happily switching to the client-choice model, coordination is happening in a horizontal manner that reflects their mutual goals—more food and dignity, less waste, and greater bang for your buck.

Another factor that may buffer food pantries and soup kitchens in Syracuse from some of the negative impacts of new public management is the influence of New York State’s HPNAP policy. Though HPNAP funding does come with strings attached, it is possible that it makes New York a unique environment where food pantries and soup kitchens are shielded from some of the demands of acquiring funding. Through this program, the state of New York has more or less subsidized the purchase of wholesale foods and shared maintenance fees on certain nutritionally adequate, donated foods. Warshawsky (2010) observed that some food pantries in Chicago were disgruntled about the enforcement of shared maintenance fees and other forms of “neocorporatist” governance (772). In Syracuse, I did not hear many such complaints. Could policies such as HPNAP ameliorate the effects of such practices on the food pantries and soup kitchens of Syracuse, since this grant primarily serves to enable the programs to purchase the wholesale-priced foods available for sale at the food bank? Do their HPNAP grants buffer them from the harsh realities of having to pay for food to give out for free? I am hesitant to argue in support of more government programs that bolster the emergency food network rather than address the root causes of food insecurity. However, it may be that programs such as HPNAP have the potential to ameliorate some of the challenges of acquiring and utilizing funding within the current construction of emergency food where
workers in food pantries and soup kitchens are increasingly required to purchase food to distribute.

MISSIONS SUSTAINED?

Workers in food pantries and soup kitchens spend a significant amount of time trying to fulfill their missions of providing food. Are their formal and informal goals met? Have these organizations experienced mission drift as other organizations under funding pressures sometimes do? I did not find examples of food pantries and soup kitchens that seemed at odds from their original goals and missions of providing food. The goals and missions of the smaller organizations, in particular, seem to have stayed constant over the years. As Minkoff and Powell (2006) suggested, it appears that these small, volunteer-driven organizations may be so focused on their day-to-day survival that they are not experiencing mission drift in significant ways. The attention paid to emergency food services within a broader, agency-based context may be more variable, however, as support for each of their many programs shifts with the funding priorities of local foundations, for instance. The Dunbar Center, for example, operates a food pantry in addition to many of their other programs. The cuts in their overall funding could certainly affect staff and food support for the pantry there.

Though the missions of food pantries and soup kitchens are still focused on food, other tasks have been incorporated into their activities. For example, most food pantries in Syracuse now inquire within their intake process about whether a person is receiving SNAP benefits, HEAP, WIC, and other assistance programs. The goal is to encourage as many people as possible to access these benefits, so as to reduce the demand on the
emergency food network. This practice is encouraged by the Food Bank and other funders and also seems supported by the pantry workers themselves.

The mostly volunteer workforce in the emergency food network is overwhelmingly motivated by religious commitments. As Poppendieck (1999) argues, the religious commitment to the provision of emergency food has contributed to its institutionalization and entrenchment as a response to domestic hunger. If the goal of these workers is to give food to people who need it, then they are certainly accomplishing the task. At the same time, many organizations utilize words such as “ending,” “stopping,” and “alleviating” hunger so that they can motivate people to donate or get involved. This language suggests broader goals than simply redistributing food. Poppendieck (1999) discusses the detrimental effects of such language on public perceptions of hunger in the United States. She argues that if there are thousands of organizations “ending hunger,” then the public incorrectly assumes that the problem of hunger has actually been solved. Though thousands of organizations are distributing food to people who need it, the causes of hunger have not been addressed.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As in much social research, this study has both strengths and limitations. One of its strengths is that by designing an in-depth exploration of one emergency food network, I was able to examine its intricacies and social context in great detail. I was able to meet and interview many of the local actors within one network. That the study focused on one city is also one of its limitations. It is likely that emergency food networks in other cities, particularly mid-sized, rust-belt cities located in New York, look and feel similar. But as I learned, the effects of the regional food bank and state policies on the network in
Syracuse are strong, suggesting that other networks may be affected differently. Since in many ways the network in Syracuse is well supported by the Food Bank and HPNAP funding, it may serve as a best-case example of a functioning emergency food network. The ability to compare my observations on Syracuse’s emergency food network to networks in other locales would probably strengthen and nuance the arguments made in this dissertation. If I were to expand this study beyond the state of New York, I would expect to find organizations that struggle even harder to stay open. What are the effects of such struggles on services in food pantries and soup kitchens in other places?

When I designed this project, I decided to enter the emergency food network from the perspectives and experiences of workers in food pantries and soup kitchens. None of the people that I interviewed, that I know of, were currently accessing food from food pantries or soup kitchens—though one coordinator mentioned utilizing the pantry where she works, years ago. I made the choice to interview workers so that I could shift my examination of the emergency food network from the grounded perspectives of those who use food assistance and into the social relations that organize those everyday activities. I accomplished this through following the funding streams from food pantries and soup kitchens who gather resources into the organizations that supported them. Though the inadequacies of the network have been catalogued with the perspective of people accessing these organizations in mind, not much of this research gives voice to the actual people receiving food. Research providing voice to people accessing food in the emergency food network could provide much insight and is one dimension that this study does not contribute to.
Though this research was designed to analyze the emergency food network at the level of the organization, that I did not collect more demographic information on the staff, clients, and constituents of the organizations in my sample is also a limitation of this study. While this study was not designed to examine generalizable differences between, for example, food pantry coordinators at churches that are predominantly populated by black congregants versus those predominantly populated by white congregants, having this information could have provided insights into the potentially unique challenges of operating food pantries and soup kitchens in the racially segregated neighborhoods of Syracuse. Also, future research should systematically analyze the impact of race on the emergency food network. Are food pantry and soup kitchen coordinators in the city, serving racially diverse populations, disproportionately white? What impact might this have on service delivery and attitudes towards clients? Notions of the deserving and undeserving poor are certainly impacted by racist ideologies, how does the current construction of food assistance in the form of charity uphold these ideologies?

My research pointed to a potential volunteer-related challenge for the emergency food network in the next several years. If the volunteers and volunteer coordinators are aging out of the network without replacement, the entire network could undergo serious shifts in the near future. Future research ought to systematically study this issue in Syracuse and in other locations to determine if this is, indeed, happening. Though I do not have an investment in upholding the emergency food network in the long-term, a short-term crisis such as the one that this issue poses could have a detrimental impact on the thousands of people accessing Syracuse’s emergency food network.
In other future research, I want to cultivate a greater understanding of the role of food banking in the United States. This project has demonstrated that regional food banks have a strong coordinating effect on the everyday activities of food pantries and soup kitchens. Organizational members of food banks have greater access to resources through their membership; however, food banks are becoming more akin to grocery stores due to the decrease in corporate donations. Membership requires compliance with food bank policies, which is increasingly standardizing activities in what has historically been, in most localities, a network of loosely connected, grassroots organizations. Though many food bank requirements seek to increase efficiency and fairness in service delivery, the implementation of corporate practices of management and accountability in nonprofit and grassroots organizations is a relatively new site for scholarly analysis. Since the widespread emergence of food banks in the 1980s, these organizations have been at the intersection of grassroots anti-hunger organizing and the corporate food industry, making them a rich site for an analysis of the impacts of corporate practice and politics on nonprofit organizations. Warshawsky (2010) accurately noted that though scholars have examined the rise of food banks, few have “adequately examined how food banks operate as para-state institutions in emergency food systems in the context of neoliberal urban governance regimes” (763). I hope to address these gaps in future research.

HUNGER AND FOOD JUSTICE

Why is it that the emergency food network is necessary in the first place? The answer to this question has several layers and should begin with a discussion on how hunger and food insecurity happen in the United States. Several arguments attempt to explain why so many people are hungry and food insecure in the United States; some of
these arguments are poorly supported, while others seem only partially to address the issue. In this final section, I briefly outline these arguments and attempt to redirect the answer to the question of why there are so many hungry and food insecure people to a consideration of the complex relationship between hunger, food insecurity, and economic inequality. I suggest that the food justice framework may be one way to continue to push the linkages between inequality and hunger. I conclude with a brief discussion of this dissertation’s contributions to these discussions.

One common explanation of hunger is that there is not enough food on the planet to feed everyone. Over time, arguments espousing this perspective have used Neo-Malthusian assertions that overpopulation and acts of nature such as floods and droughts explain poor harvests and scarce food (Wisner, Weiner, and O’Keefe 1982; Lappé, Collins, and Rosset 1998; Gardner and Halweil 2000). Certainly, poor harvests affect local food systems. But scholars and activists have argued that hunger as a result of a scarcity of food is a myth (Wisner, Weiner, and O’Keefe 1982; Lappé, Collins, and Rosset 1998).

Another common argument used to explain hunger defines the problem as one not of food shortage but of food distribution. Food in the United States is distributed unequally. For example, geographers and others designate certain areas of the United States as food deserts, or places where it is much more difficult to access inexpensive, quality, nutritious food (Morton et al. 2005; Blanchard and Lyson 2006). Others have discussed the exodus of major supermarkets from urban centers and how this has affected the urban poor who have difficulty accessing transportation to the relocated stores (Curtis
and McClellan 1995). Unequal distribution of food can also be seen globally; for example, in areas of high conflict, food is frequently used as a weapon (Scanlan 2003).

Currently, hunger in the United States is more complicated than solely a distribution problem because healthy food is materially available to everyone that has the resources or money available to physically access it and purchase it. This highlights the importance of not only food distribution but also food access and the economic structures that impact food access. Problems of food access are persistent in a system that connects food with purchasing power. Many scholars and activists argue that government food assistance programs alleviate difficulties in purchasing food and bridge problems of distribution with problems of access. Food assistance programs enable many people to increase their own access to food and play an invaluable role in our social welfare system. However, others argue that food assistance programs serve merely as a band-aid in an unequal system (Riches 1997; Poppendieck 1998). Additionally, many scholars argue that food assistance programs are implemented inadequately (Poppendieck 1997, 1998; Eisinger 1998).

Scholars have tried to explain why hunger has been historically framed as one of the primary social problems in the United States. For example, Eisinger (1998) argues that many people in the United States are perplexed by the presence of hunger in juxtaposition with abundance; they find it embarrassing and unacceptable. Poppendieck (1999) argues that the issue of hunger has emotional salience and draws higher levels of sympathy than other social ills, which mobilizes more action. The ways in which stakeholders have socially constructed hunger as a social problem may also play a role in bringing this question to the forefront of everyone’s mind. Poppendieck (1997) argues
that anti-poverty activists in the twentieth century strategically mobilized around the issue of food assistance because it would have less potential for backlash than other social welfare programs. This strengthened the anti-hunger lobby which continues to define hunger as foremost, a problem to be solved. The anti-hunger lobby and anti-hunger advocates were successful in heightening the visibility of hunger as a social problem; campaigns to end hunger are present everywhere—the Post Office, the boy scout troop, the church down the street, and the Syracuse University library are just a few example of local organizations in Syracuse that conduct food drives. Poppendieck (1997) goes so far as to argue that “fighting hunger has become a national pastime” (139).

With a basic understanding of why so many people are interested in the issue of hunger, it is important to work beyond the singular focus on hunger that is often articulated in popular discourse and account for the systemic inequalities that generate hunger. In other words, the question of why so many people are hungry must be asked as a part of an inquiry that reflects an understanding of the complex relationship between accessing food and the histories and structures of our economic, political, and social systems. Experiences of hunger are structurally created in the United States. Hunger does not exist in a social vacuum, but in a world that privileges certain social groups over others. If it did exist in a social vacuum, differential rates of food insecurity between historically privileged and oppressed groups would not be evident.

Food security and the ability to purchase and consume a healthy, appropriate diet are experiences that are structured by race, class, gender, age, region, and family composition, amongst other structures (Nord, Andrews, and Carlson 2006). Food access is not the only societal need that is structured by these systems of difference. Access to
other opportunities is socially structured as well; these opportunities often exist in relation to access to food as they work simultaneously to affect a person’s financial and social viability in the U.S. capitalist economy. For example, social group membership structures access to job opportunities and a living wage (Wilson 1997). Wilson (1997) argues that economic changes have fostered an employment growth in technology and service sectors and a decrease in manufacturing sectors have affected job opportunities for urban populations, especially men of color. Wilson (1997:28) also points to the decrease in unionization rates that came along with the decrease in manufacturing jobs as a contributor to “shrinking wages and nonwage compensation.” Social location structures access to quality educational opportunities as well (Kozol 1992; Oliver and Shapiro 1997). The U.S. education system has a history of racial segregation; racial and class equity in schooling has yet to be achieved in most of the country (Kozol 1992; Anyon 1997). Access to fair and affordable housing is also an issue that affects people differentially. Several scholars have discussed the implications of racist housing policies and housing segregation in the United States (Wilson 1997; Massey and Denton 1998). Poppendieck (1997) also argues that the escalation in housing costs in the 1980s has negatively contributed to a person’s ability to be self-sufficient in the capitalist economy. These are only some of the current conditions that differentially affect the lives of people who live in the United States; others include access to health care, child care, and safe working and living environments, to name a few.

It is vital to understand the relationship hunger and food insecurity have with other systems of inequality. The interconnectedness of these issues seems impossible to ignore and yet it is frequently ignored. The capitalist economy produces inequality. The
social welfare system in the United States was partially created, albeit inadequately, to address the challenges of surviving in the capitalist economy. The emergency food network and other nonprofits were created to address the gaps in the social welfare system, also inadequately. Curtis (1997:1) argues that the emergency food network is in fact a “shadow government”; it fills in gaps created by the government and becomes more like the state, while at the same time it obscures the failures of the state. She argues that increasingly stringent eligibility requirements within the emergency food network will deter people from the programs (Curtis 1997:6). Though measuring the number of people deterred from emergency food would be quite difficult, my research does suggest that eligibility requirements are highly relied upon as a way to manage demand on Syracuse’s emergency food network. Through practices such as these, perhaps the emergency food network is beginning to shadow additional flaws of the state. Another critical view of the charitable emergency food network is that its presence enables the state to pull back its own responsibility, making charity a form of containment (Heynen 2010).

Perhaps it is time to re-situate anti-hunger work within a broader movement for social justice. The food justice framework offers much promise to scholars and activists who wish to address not only hunger and its responses, but also inequality and broader injustices connected to food. It highlights connections between broader social justice movements, policy, and people’s basic right to eat healthy, appropriate foods. By grounding anti-hunger work in the word justice, the structural inequalities that produce hunger and other social inequalities remain in view, while politicizing the movement for change. Deb, an organizer for the Hunger Action Network of New York State
(HANNYS) said that one of the challenges of working with the public is that poverty and inequality seem to be a part of the natural landscape:

The biggest challenge to me to a degree, is that portion of the public who does believe that the poor will always be amongst us and that charity in and of itself is all that we need to do and don’t have a problem with us having that as part of our landscape forever. That think that it’s good and that the government doesn’t need to have a role and that we don’t need to change the system. That it’s fine to have a little tiny percent of the population with the large chunk of the wealth and then others who are struggling to keep a roof over their head, body and soul together.

Though HANNYS does support food pantries and soup kitchens through their services, they try to address hunger through addressing poverty. They do this by lobbying for a living wage, welfare reform, workers rights, and so on. This is an example of one organization that could fit into the goals of the movement for food justice.

Increasing numbers of scholars and activists are turning to food justice as an inroad to addressing the intersections between inequality and food. For example, Berg (2008), an anti-hunger activist, argues for anti-hunger organizing within an anti-poverty movement. Winne (2008) argues for similar approaches, pointing to policy change as one avenue to truly address poverty. Much work encompassed by the food justice framework focuses on addressing the many injustices in the system through which food is grown, accessed, distributed, and consumed. Gottleib and Joshi (2010) provide an example of a broader discussion of the ways that food justice impacts everyday life. They state,

The groups that embrace food justice vary in agenda, constituencies, and focus, but all share a commitment to the definition we originally provided: to achieve equity and fairness in relation to food system impacts and a different, more just, and sustainable way for food to be grown, produced, made accessible, and eaten (223).

They provide discussions of a range of modes of organizing that ought to be considered in the context of discussions on food justice, such as the recent organizing to end poor
working conditions for tomato pickers in Immokalee, Florida. From a different perspective, Johnston and Baumann (2010) consider how food, in particular the gourmet food landscape, produces class inequalities. Heynen (2010) provides another example of work within this framework and discusses how Food Not Bombs groups attempt to expose hunger through the public sharing of food, while creating mutuality in communities.

What does this dissertation project contribute to this growing scholarly and activist framework? With regard to the emergency food network, my findings have supported existing literature that critiques the shortfalls of the network and a need to find different and more comprehensive methods of addressing poverty in the United States. My attention to the methods by which limited resources are managed in food pantries and soup kitchens is particularly informative to a discussion of the inadequacy of the current food assistance system. The findings here also provide additional context to the ways that neoliberal governance and new public management are continuing to affect nonprofit organizations. The effects of new public management are seen even within food pantries and soup kitchens that seem to be partially shielded from it due to their highly grassroots nature. The discussion on the interconnectedness between the government and the charitable sector suggests that the government plays a large role in upholding and bolstering the institutionalization of the network. Additional research should further examine the motivations behind this entrenchment, but my findings suggest that the consequences of the network’s status as a shadow state have the effect of maintaining the status quo. Finally, this work supports arguments for both a stronger welfare state system
and/or widespread economic change, because without these changes, hunger will most certainly continue to exist.
APPENDIX A
Interview Guides

Phase I
My goals are to understand how funding processes unravel in everyday life at non-profit food assistance organizations. I hope to explore these processes collaboratively with staff in a variety of local organizations so that I can get a better picture of how organizations function in this environment locally.

1. Get background on organization if needed. Introduce my study.

2. What is your role in funding processes in this organization?
   - Do you work alone or with others? If with others, who?

3. How is your organization funded?
   - Over the past 5 years, what different types of funding has your org. sought and/or received?

4. How does your organization strategize about funding?
   - How do you assess what is needed?
   - How do you make plans?
   - Who is involved in making the plans?
   - How do you agree on goals?

5. (If relevant) Can you take me through your role in a grant or annual appeal funding process?
   - Walk me step by step through the process, what you did to begin, what you did to move forward, what were the results, how did the granting or non-granting of this funding affect daily life at ______.
In this process, what other organizations did you come into contact with?

6. Has any of the funding you have received come with restrictions? (ask for example)
   - How does your organization negotiate these restrictions?
   - Has your organization changed in any way or made compromises to meet these funding requirements?

7. If you had access to a grant of a large sum of money, what would you do with it?

   **Phase II**

   *(course of interview is dependent on earlier interviews with direct service providers)*

1. How do you advertise your funding to organizations?

2. How do you determine the levels of funding that you will grant to organizations?

3. How do you decide who will receive funding and who will not?
   - Can you give me an example where you made a positive decision and discuss how you came to that decision?
   - A negative decision?

4. Who is involved in the decision? How is the decision made?

5. What kinds of reporting do you require from organizations that you fund?
   - What determines the content and depth of the report?
   - Have these reporting requirements changed over time? If yes, why and how?

6. How do you decide if you will fund an organization again?
7. If you decide not to fund an organization again, how did you make that decision?

8. What kinds of restrictions does your agency place on funds, if any? What is the rationale?

9. How does your granting agency address diversity issues when allocating funding to an organization? (gender, race, age, illness, working status, etc.)
APPENDIX B
List of Organizational Documents

Food Bank of Central New York:
2010. “Hunger and Hope Fall 2010 Newsletter.” (print)
“Guest Bill of Rights.” (print)
“Intake Form.” (print)
“Package Guidelines.” (print)
“Program Bill of Rights.” (print)
“Model Programs Education Series.” (print)
“Brochure.” (print)

HPNAP:
“Brochure.” (print)
“Healthy Food for Hungry People.” (print)

Syracuse Hunger Project:

The Samaritan Center:
Research Title: “Hungry for Funding: Funding Activities in Non-profit Food Assistance Organizations”

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Stephanie Crist and I am a Ph.D. student in the Department of Sociology at Syracuse University. I am conducting research for my dissertation titled “Hungry for Funding: Funding Activities in Non-profit Food Assistance Organizations.” I am inviting you to participate in this research study to discuss your experiences working in food assistance organizations. Involvement in this study is entirely voluntary, so you may choose to participate or not. This sheet will explain the study and a signed copy will be yours to keep for your records. I will also maintain a signed copy for my records. As you read through this sheet, you are welcome to ask any questions. Also, please feel free to ask questions at any time during this research.

I am interested in the ways that non-profit food assistance organizations are funded and negotiate funding processes. I am also interested in the ways that receiving funds or not receiving them affects service delivery. By asking you about your experiences in the local food assistance system, I hope to better understand the system broadly and also the everyday details of funding work.

I will ask you a series of questions that I hope will allow you to share your experiences regarding funding and food assistance organizations. Questions will be presented to you in an informal, open-ended format. This interview will take approximately one to two hours of your time today. Please feel free to answer as thoroughly or succinctly as you see fit. You are welcome to decline to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer and you may stop the interview at any time.

In order to closely examine this interview and your perspective, I am also seeking your permission to audio record your responses. After our interview, I will transcribe our conversation to ensure that I accurately understand our conversation. If you wish to see the transcript of our conversation, please contact me and I will send it to you after it is transcribed.

In the future, material from this interview may be used in publications and presentations. Because I will share my findings back with the local food assistance community and beyond, you may want me to disguise your identity by using a pseudonym and by
changing the details of our conversation that may identify you directly. If you do not tell me that you wish to use your legal name, I will assume that you prefer your confidentiality to be maintained through the use of a pseudonym. If you would prefer that some information stay confidential and some not, please indicate to me after the interview and I will send you a transcript of the interview for you to review and mark lines, words, or sections as confidential or not confidential.

The benefit of this research is that you will help me to better understand the local food assistance system. I will also share my findings with the individuals and organizations that express an interest in the project. Though you will not receive any monetary benefit for participating in this research, I hope that my research will contribute back to the local community by demystifying some of the ways that funding happens. This research will also contribute to my requirements in fulfilling a Ph.D. degree from Syracuse University.

The risks of your participation in this study are minimal and include feelings of discomfort while reflecting on your experiences. There are also minor social and political risks of expressing your opinions about your experiences. Recognizing that you will make all decisions about which questions to answer and in what detail you are comfortable with them will help to minimize these risks. The time you allot to participate in this study may also be an inconvenience to you. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, please feel free to contact me at any time. You may also contact my faculty advisor, Professor Marjorie L. DeVault via email at mdevault@maxwell.syr.edu or by phone at (315) 443-4030. You are also welcome to contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board office (the office that protects and maintains the rights and privileges of human subjects involved in research such as this) if you have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator. They can be reached at (315) 443-3013.

Confidentiality (may be amended at any point during or after the interview)

_____ I would like my identity to remain completely confidential.

_____ I would like my identity to remain confidential in certain parts of the interview and not at others (I may change my mind at any time by notifying the researcher in writing or verbally)

_____ I would not like my identity to remain confidential. Do not use a pseudonym for me. (I may change my mind at any time by notifying the researcher in writing or verbally)
All of my questions have been answered. I am at least 18 years of age and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.

________________________
Signature of participant
________________________
Signature of investigator

Date
Date

Printed name of participant
Printed name of investigator

Contact information:

**Investigator:**
Stephanie Crist
skcrist@maxwell.syr.edu
Syracuse University
302 Maxwell Hall
Syracuse, NY 13244
(315) 488-6821

**Advisor:**
Prof. Marjorie L. DeVault
mdevault@maxwell.syr.edu
Syracuse University
302 Maxwell Hall
Syracuse, NY 13244
(315) 443-4030

**IRB:**
121 Bowne Hall
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13244
(315) 443-3013
Syracuse University Community Geographer
# APPENDIX E

Intake Form (Food Bank of Central New York)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Names of Adults</th>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<table>
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</tr>
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<td>6.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Address:

Phone: __________________________ School District: __________________________

Do you have access to the following?  ____ Stove  ____ Refrigerator  ____ Microwave

Check all that you are receiving:

- ____ Food Stamps  ____ WIC  ____ HEAP  ____ Unemployment
- ____ Disability  ____ SSI  ____ Public Assistance  ____ Reduced Free Lunch

Referrals Made to:

- ____ Food Stamps  ____ WIC  ____ HEAP  ____ Health Insurance

Comments:

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Food Bank of Central New York
6970 Schuyler Road
East Syracuse NY 13057
(315) 437-1899 1800-444-1562
TEFAP: The Emergency Food Assistance Program

Income Eligibility Guidelines: July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2010

Note: Eligibility is set at 185% of the U.S. poverty Guidelines

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<th>Monthly</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
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<td>2,823</td>
<td>652</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>40,793</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>785</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47,712</td>
<td>3,976</td>
<td>918</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>54,631</td>
<td>4,553</td>
<td>1,051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>61,550</td>
<td>5,130</td>
<td>1,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>68,469</td>
<td>5,706</td>
<td>1,317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Each additional person add</td>
<td>+6,919</td>
<td>+577</td>
<td>+134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By signing below, I declare that my income, from all sources, does not exceed 185% of the federal poverty level as listed above for my household size. I understand that these records will be held in confidence at this distribution site, but may be released to the New York State Office of General Services or the United States Department of Agriculture for review upon their request.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Number of Adults</th>
<th>Number of Elderly (65+)</th>
<th>Total Individuals</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX F

Suggested Food Package Guidelines (Food Bank of Central New York)

#### Food Guide for a 3 Day Pantry Package

Examples of foods in each group and how to count them as points are given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>What equals a point?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>Rice, 16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pasta, 16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oatmeal, 19 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold Cereal, 12-16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macaroni &amp; cheese = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Spaghetti Sauce, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canned Vegetables, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frozen Vegetables, 16 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instant Potatoes, 15 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>Dried Fruit, 15 oz = 2 points</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canned Fruit, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit Juice, 46-48 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>Fluid Milk, 32 oz = 1 point</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 envelope Dry milk = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cottage Cheese, 16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 yogurts, 6 oz each = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cheese, 8 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat &amp; Non-Meat Proteins</td>
<td>Tuna, 12 oz = 1 point</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canned Meat &amp; Beans, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eggs, Dozen = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peanut Butter, 18 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frozen Meat, 16 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Food Guide for a 5 Day Pantry Package

Examples of foods in each group and how to count them as points are given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Group</th>
<th>What equals a point?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grains</td>
<td>Rice, 16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pasta, 16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oatmeal, 18 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cold Cereal, 12-16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Macaroni &amp; cheese = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>Spaghetti Sauce, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canned Vegetables, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frozen Vegetables, 16 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instant Potatoes, 15 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>Dried Fruit, 15 oz = 2 points</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canned Fruit, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit Juice, 46-48 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dairy</td>
<td>Fluid Milk, 32 oz = 1 point</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 envelope Dry Milk = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cottage Cheese, 16 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 yogurts, 6 oz each = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cheese, 8 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat &amp; Non-Meat Proteins</td>
<td>Tuna, 12 oz = 1 point</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canned Meat &amp; Beans, 15 oz = 1 point</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eggs, Dozen = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peanut Butter, 18 oz = 2 points</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frozen Meat, 16 oz = 1 point</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
GUEST BILL OF RIGHTS

As a consumer of food from an Emergency Food Program, you:

- Are entitled to receive food free of charge;
- Are not required to give donations, pay, work or participate in religious services in order to receive food;
- Are to be treated with dignity and respect at all times;
- Are to receive food without discrimination against the basis of age, race, family status, gender, disability, religious belief, or sexual preference;
- Are to be provided with clear policies and procedures for receiving food;
- Are free to refuse any food items that do not meet your dietary or religious standards;
- Are to receive food that meets the local, state, and federal standards for food safety;
- Are not to be turned away on your first visit because of lack of identification, referral or documentation of need. Documentation may be required to verify other members of your household; and
- Are not required to provide any part of your Social Security Number to receive food.
PROGRAM BILL OF RIGHTS

As an Emergency Food Program that distributes food, you:

- Are able to have a set geographic area that only serves people that live in that area, as long as you provide a referral to a guest's local emergency food program after you serve them the first time;

- Are able to require documentation to prove the number of people in a household as long as these requirements have been explained to the guest on a previous visit;

- Are able to require documentation to prove a household's address as long as these requirements have been explained to the guest on a previous visit;

- Are able to limit how often you serve each guest in order to ensure all guests receive enough food;

- Are able to refuse service to anyone that is hostile, aggressive or threatening to staff, volunteers, or other guests;

- Are able to serve income eligible volunteers as long as they register as guests and they do not receive preferential treatment or more food than other guests;

- Are able to terminate services of a volunteer if that volunteer does not follow program rules, is disruptive, or disrespectful to staff, other volunteers or guests.
**APPENDIX H**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local</th>
<th>National</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>St. Mary's Food Bank in Phoenix, AZ established as first food bank 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Federal tax law permits businesses to deduct for food donations 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>Second Harvest gets 501(c)3 status, has 13 member programs 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Samaritan Center established 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Famous government cheese distribution 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Interreligious Food Consortium established 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Second Harvest has 44 member programs 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>TEFAP established 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>FBCNY established; distributes 330,000 lbs of food 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>TEFAP mandatory funding at $250 million 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>SNAP Homeless and Destitute established (HPNAP) funded with $1 million 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>NYS study finds 1,557 food pantries and 327 soup kitchens in NY 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1988 Hunger Prevention Act - USDA now purchases commodities for EFOs 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Samaritan Center served 41,000 meals 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>TANF funding supplements SNAP H/D brings to $17.7 million 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>TANF supplement increased brings to $24.7 million 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>FYCNY has revenue of $14,694,692 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>FYCNY distributes 11,232,123 lbs of food 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Congress appropriated $299.5 million for TEFAP for FY 2009 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Samaritan Center served over 100,000 meals 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources:
1 Poppendieck 1999
2 HPNAP 2008
3 FBCNY 2011
4 FRAC 2010d
5 TEFAP 2010b
6 Feeding America 2011
7 Samaritan Center Annual Appeal 2005
8 Interview
9 FYCNY Hunger and Hope Newsletter Fall 2010
10 Samaritan Center Annual Appeal 2010-2011
11 Syracuse Hunger Project Report 2004
12 FYCNY Annual Report 2009
APPENDIX I
List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARRA</td>
<td>American Recovery and Reinvestment Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACFP</td>
<td>Child and Adult Care Food Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>Current Population Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSFP</td>
<td>Commodity Supplemental Food Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EBT</td>
<td>Electronic Benefits Transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Emergency Food/Financial Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFSP</td>
<td>Emergency Food and Shelter Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFSPNBP</td>
<td>Emergency Food and Shelter Program National Board Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERS</td>
<td>Economic Research Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FBCNY</td>
<td>Food Bank of Central New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMA</td>
<td>Federal Emergency Management Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRAC</td>
<td>Food Research and Action Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSP</td>
<td>Food Stamp Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIS</td>
<td>Geographic Information Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HANNYS</td>
<td>Hunger Action Network of New York State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEAP</td>
<td>Home Energy Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HPNAP</td>
<td>Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFC</td>
<td>Interreligious Food Consortium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOEP</td>
<td>Nutrition Outreach and Education Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPIC</td>
<td>Nonprofit Industrial Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPM</td>
<td>New Public Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSLP</td>
<td>National School Lunch Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRWORA</td>
<td>Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act</td>
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<td>SBP</td>
<td>School Breakfast Program</td>
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<td>SNAP</td>
<td>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program</td>
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<td>SPAH</td>
<td>Syracuse Partners Against Hunger</td>
</tr>
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<td>TANF</td>
<td>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families</td>
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<td>TEFAP</td>
<td>The Emergency Food Assistance Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>TFP</td>
<td>Thrifty Food Plan</td>
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<td>USDA</td>
<td>United States Department of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
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<td>UW</td>
<td>United Way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHY</td>
<td>World Hunger Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC</td>
<td>Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bibliography


VITA

NAME OF AUTHOR: Stephanie Crist

PLACE OF BIRTH: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

DATE OF BIRTH: August 17, 1979

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:
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Teaching Associate, The Maxwell School, 2007-2008