

IMAGINE | DELIVER



Transforming Food Security in Ramsey County

Ramsey County
July 21, 2022





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Project Overview

Ramsey County partnered with Imagine Deliver to design a community engagement initiative to create common themes of gaps that community members experience and opportunities to close those gaps by increasing food security.

Ramsey County and Imagine Deliver co-created a working definition of food security for this project:

Food Security means having reliable access to food that is culturally affirming, medically appropriate, fulfills dietary needs, and available in the appropriate quantity. Furthermore, this food must be attainable through a variety of practical and convenient access points.

The primary end goal of this engagement is to create action teams around the 4-6 identified action items.

Your Ramsey County Team

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Four Goals Guide This Effort

Engage with community members experiencing food insecurity, especially across the intersections of race and income

Create common themes of gaps experienced and opportunities to close them

Design action priorities based on community insights

Establish a cohesive framework to form action teams

Our Learning Priorities for Community Engagement

1. Navigating the Food Ecosystem and Inequities
2. Community Values and Beliefs about Food (In)security
3. Redefining Food Security
4. Reimagining a Culturally Aware Food Ecosystem
5. The County's Role in Food Security

Project Review Summary

Planning & Preparation

Convene Key Ramsey County Staff

Identify Community Targeting Profiles

Finalize Pop-Up Venues

Finalize Pop-Up Kits/Materials

Community Engagement

Carry Out Community Pop-Ups

Internal Insights Development

Action Team Workshops

Workshop 1: Themes > Priorities

Workshop 2: Priorities > Action Frameworks

Final Syntheses

Finalize Executive Summary of Pop-Ups

Develop Action Team Management Plan

Community Engagement: By the Numbers

In total, 306 Ramsey County community members were engaged during the community engagement process. Of this total, at least 293 (96%) provided some demographic information. All demographic questions were optional for community engagement participants.



306

Community members
engaged



6

Pop-up locations*

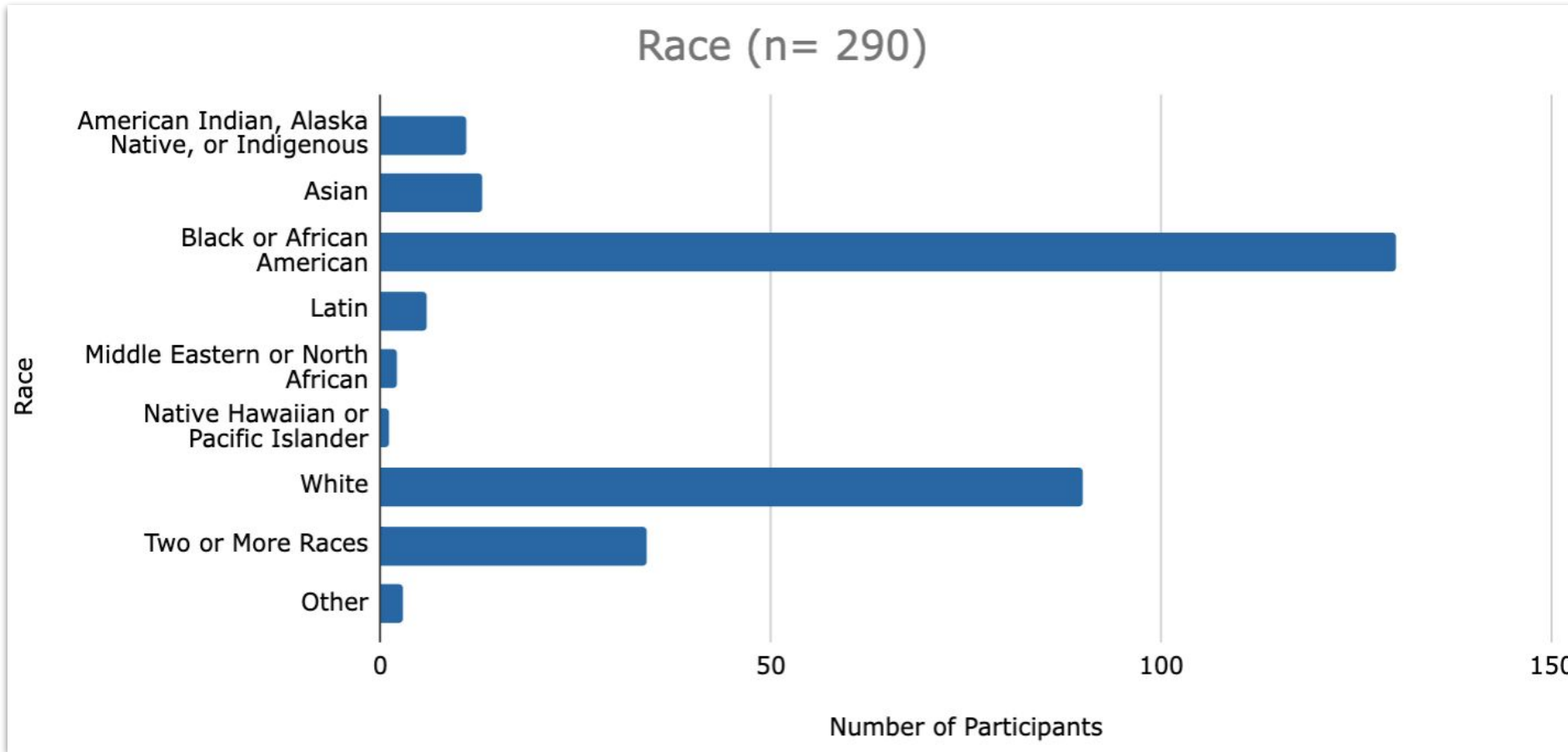


\$4,980

Incentive dollars distributed

*Our community pop-up partners: The Food Group, North St. Paul Area Food Shelf, Ralph Reeder Food Shelf, Focus House, Merrick Food Shelf, and West Seventh Library (Saint Paul Public Library)

Community Engagement: Participants by Race



68%
of participants identified
as BIPOC

Summarized Community Insights by Theme

Theme	Insight	Description	In Their Own Words
Food choice & autonomy	Gardens on every block: Localizing food production as a means of increasing access	Community members dream of having more autonomy over the food they eat and the food production process. They are seeking opportunities to grow their own food either individually or communally, source ingredients locally, and support their community farmers.	"[I dream of a] lot more natural foods, gardens, people being able to grow their own foods. Using too many chemicals. Eating from the source."
	Community knows what's good for them: Healthy foods build strong families and communities	Access to quality, healthy, and fresh food is a top priority for community members. They are conscientious of how food can affect their health and have called for less processed foods, fresh/organic fruits and vegetables, fresh meats, and more nutrient-dense options.	"More fruits and vegetables, even more healthy options, train people to get healthy food not just what is cheap and to look at ingredients lists... Education on food health."
Food affordability & supplemental assistance	Our money doesn't stretch: Compounding factors push food affordability out of reach	Affordability of food is a major issue for community engagement participants. High prices for fresh produce, increasing prices of food overall, and a need for more discounted food programs were among the issues most commented on.	"First we lower our consumption to minimize the need but then ask family for help. If more yet is still needed, I work side jobs to be able to buy more."
	Barriers to stability: Unrealistic benefit requirements create a moving target for at-risk families	Public benefits and the process of applying for them need to be more dynamic and flexible to meet the shifting needs of their users. Community members highlighted issues such as the benefits cliff and confusion around qualification requirements as key barriers to access.	"We have no little kids at home and we make too much to qualify for benefits. But not by much. There's a middle group of people that don't qualify but could use a little assistance."
Filling gaps in food availability	Keystones in the community: Formal programs and services step in where public assistance fails	Food shelves are essential resources for those who need to fill gaps in their food availability. Community members seeking ways to stretch their limited dollars heavily utilized these resources. Some community members spoke of food shelves being so reliable for their monthly food planning that they didn't even consider themselves to be food insecure.	"We've used SPPS lunches and EBT services. We also take on more work. We are also lucky to have a small garden and family nearby."
	A community potluck: Leveraging social connections to bridge the gaps	Community members utilize informal resources such as family, friends, and places of worship to access supplemental or culturally specific foods. Participants have used their networks to circumvent some of the issues they encounter with formal resources like visit limits and lack of transportation.	"[When I don't have enough food, I] go to taste of today or Gustavus Adolphus Church. Ask my mom or sisters if they have extra food."

Action Team Workshops

On July 7th and 15th, 2022, community leaders and Imagine Deliver gathered together to brainstorm and reimagine a food ecosystem that is guided by the foundational learnings shared across our community. Those involved included:

CLUES | St. Paul Promise Neighborhood | East Side Table | InterFaith Action | The Sanneh Foundation | Keystone Community Services | Fairview | Health Partners | White Bear Area Food Shelf | Mount Olivet Church | Somali Farmer Association

Our goal was to come together to form the action teams that would implement the dreams and ideas of community into an actionable and comprehensive management plan.

Click [here](#) to review the notes from the action team workshops.



Our Northstar

Action team participants co-created a northstar to guide collaborative work for the next year. This northstar represents a bold vision for what the action team will work toward together in service of a more thriving and equitable food ecosystem.

“Food is a human right where all people have autonomy and access to culturally responsive and sustainable food. This can be actualized through public-private partnerships, education, and policy change that is community-driven!”

Shared Definitions That Define Our Northstar

To ensure clarity and shared understanding of this northstar, action team members collectively defined key terms within the northstar statement.

Autonomy

The right and ability for an individual to make choices that direct their lives.

Culturally Responsive

Reflective of one's own cultural experience, religion, heritage, preferences for flavors, methods of preparation, and other facets specific to a person's preferences as defined by that person.

Sustainable

An ongoing, constant, and consistent source of food that is grown in a way that supports the Earth, prevents climate change, and nourishes the body/health. Maintained on a long-term basis into the foreseeable future, based on affordable costs, methods of production, and other factors that help to build local food resiliency/food system.

Community-Driven

A shared decision-making model where those who are impacted by the work participate in determining the policies, resources, and outcomes of a particular program or initiative.

Action Team 1

Localizing Food Production

This action team is dedicated to planning and implementing initiatives to localize food production. Community members dreamed of more autonomy over their role in food production and are interested in additional opportunities to support local gardens and farmers.

Action team members have committed to:

- Foster local farm to retail opportunities
- Develop equitable access to local foods on a neighborhood level
- Mobilize a communication plan around existing resources and values of a local food system



Action Team 2

Ensuring Quality

This action team is dedicated to planning and implementing initiatives related to food quality. Community engagement participants are aware of how food can affect their health and have called for less processed foods, more fresh and organic fruits and vegetables when possible, and a variety of fresh meats. Action team members believe it's important that communities have access to the same quality of food regardless of where the food is acquired.

Action team members have committed to:

- Support facilities and programs that allow safe preservation of food, such as refrigeration
- Ensure food quality throughout the food life cycle, from production to composting
- Partner with organizations that have developed standards for quality control



Action Team 3

Increasing Food Affordability

This action team is dedicated to planning and implementing initiatives to increase food affordability for our community. Community members described the challenges they experienced when it came to affording the food they needed for themselves and their families. The COVID-19 pandemic and inflation have exacerbated the problem of food affordability for these community members and their families. This action team has the opportunity to improve access to affordable foods that everyone can benefit from.

Action team members have committed to:

- Create a targeted educational campaign to increase knowledge and understanding of initiatives such as Market Bucks
- Conduct community focus groups with those using SNAP and WIC to better understand their experiences and gaps in the current system
- Pilot a food fund for community members



Action Team 4

Revamping Food Benefit Requirements

This action team is dedicated to planning and implementing initiatives to revamp food benefit requirements. Community members told us the painstaking and confusing process of trying to get the support they need. This action team is dedicated to creating a new and improved process that is equitable and ensures Ramsey County residents are always able to get the food they need.

Action team members have committed to:

- Advocate for policy changes to improve access and support, including: increasing income limits for benefits, expanding where benefits can be used to make it more accessible
- Push for a combined application for all Ramsey County programs to streamline documentation including the following benefits: WIC, MA, SNAP, MFIP, childcare, Section 8, work skills
- Increase funding for benefit workers so they can have more flexible and extended hours to meet community needs and make it a one-stop shop in the community
- Expand education around benefits and how to be successful when moving off benefits for all – seniors, undocumented, youth, etc. – in various languages and through trusted organizations and messengers



Action Team 5

Sustaining Formal Food Services

This action team is dedicated to planning and implementing initiatives to sustaining formal food services. When asked about their experience with food insecurity, many community members actually stated that they weren't food insecure. They considered resources such as food shelves a mechanism in preventing food insecurity. This action team will see to it that this vital piece of the food ecosystem is rightfully sourced to mobilize and support community needs.

Action team members have committed to:

- Connect stakeholder organizations throughout the food system working collaboratively to support each other's work and expand their impact
- Design educational programs that give community members the agency and resources to transition off of public benefits, with a focus on transforming the food system rather than simply moving people around within it
- Partner with large funders and institutions (county, healthcare systems, retailers, etc.) supporting local farmers through wholesale purchase and transportation assistance
- Streamline county food-related grant processes to allow organizations to apply and report collaboratively and encourage long-term, sustainable funding opportunities



Action Team 6

Leveraging Social Connections

This action team is dedicated to planning and implementing initiatives to leverage social connections to foster a thriving food ecosystem. Community members attested to their strong network of family, friends, and community in ensuring that there was always food at the table. This action team will leverage these bonds to provide a fortified outlet for community to access food in this larger food ecosystem.

Action team members have committed to:

- Develop an action network that includes local businesses, community members, co-ops, and local grocery stores to collaborate in developing initiatives
- Establish intergenerational support teams, community gardens, ride-share programs, and other similar initiatives
- Create a food swap model to exchange bulk items, garden produce (community pop-up events, regular planned events, etc.)
- Leverage social media (by neighborhood) to promote tools and resources



How the Action Team Will Function

Meeting Cadence

Action teams will commit to:

- Monthly meetings throughout the duration of their service
- Attending bi-monthly member events such as networking and professional development training
- Participating in an annual review and celebration event

Governance

Each action team will have a team lead. Team leads will commit to:

- Monthly working group meetings
- Monthly team progress reports
- Semi-annual direction checks
- Serving in this position for agreed-upon term length

An established, rolling succession plan must also be decided.

Communications

Action team members will commit to:

- Utilizing the approved communication method (i.e. Slack, Teams, etc.)
- Respond to all necessary communications in a timely manner.

Roles and Responsibilities

Action team members will commit to:

- Set, create, and implement action plans to address team goals
- Create a metric system for progress
- Uphold their responsibilities as defined by their action team

Workload will vary depending on the nature of the action team goals and set plan.

Key Infrastructure Considerations

Creating a supporting structure for the action teams will enable their success

Financial Support: Adequate financial backing is necessary to successfully implement these action teams. This financial support may present itself in several ways including stipends for action team members, funding support staff, and offering unique benefits to solidify action team commitment.

Staff Support: Along with financial support, consistent action team operations and administrative staffing will help Carissa manage the overall project. This could be actualized through an associate program manager.

Additional Member Incentives: Professional development training and opportunities to network were commonly referenced benefits for action team members. They are seeking ways to establish their employer buy-in, connect with others that align with their professional goals, and develop their professional skills.

What will it take for you to join this action team?

What People Said

“

“A stipend without a doubt. While this is a necessary discussion, this also needs you to participate outside or during work hours. Would love a better platform to independently communicate/network with other participants. Very open to PD not only in food security.”

“Training/development in beginning to orient the group and ensure shared understanding to build from. Community members should receive stipends for their time and commitment. Will need a current picture of the problem and previous initiatives (successful or failed and why) to build upon.”

“I'm most interested in these action teams if they actually lead to a bigger, sustainable project that the county leadership is a part of and supports. We will get further if there's leadership support. Interested in building relationships with others, and any professional development and learning about what others are doing nationally to meet goals of community, and bring to Ramsey Co.”

“Action-oriented attendees with set goals. ”

“A stipend, networking opportunities.”

“Professional development opportunities, stipend for participation.”

”



An Inclusive Food Ecosystem Reimagined by the Ramsey County Community

Over the course of the learning engagement period, Imagine Deliver heard from community members across Ramsey County on what the future of our food ecosystem could look like. Engagement participants shared some of their best ideas and their vulnerable pain points while seeking to feed themselves and their families.

Engagement participants have voiced some of their dreams for accessing food in their communities, though it can be a challenge to think outside of the box when the near future can seem so unstable. Most candidly, community members identified the ways in which some county and state resources have been failing to meet their most basic needs. Some of the insights gathered from the community serve as a renewed call for the services that currently exist to be executed at scale, with the highest degree of care, cultural responsiveness, abundance, and excellence. Community members want the county to make sourcing local food convenient, create ease of access to fresh and nutritious foods, strive to make all food more affordable, streamline public assistance administration efforts, fully equip essential formal programs, and redirect resources to informal asset- and community-based programming.

As members of the action teams and Ramsey County Food Security Working Group, you all have a pulse on how systems and institutions can affect the community members who access them regularly. With these community insights, you'll be able to create actionable next steps that are deeply informed by Ramsey County residents' lived experiences.

Ramsey County can lead the charge across the state of Minnesota in eradicating food insecurity for its community members by eliminating administrative barriers to support, funding community-led food security efforts, and establishing clear access points to nutritious foods.



Special Thanks

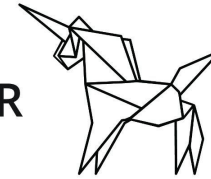
Special thanks to leaders in the food security ecosystem, which includes nonprofit and community leaders; healthcare team members; all who supported this work; and all who shared their time and attention by participating in focus groups, key informant interviews, and online surveys.

This work was made possible by stewardship and support from:

Sarah Auten | Carissa Dillon | Cassie Fitzgerald | Altreisha Foster-Ben | Angie Guenther | William Moore | The Food Group | North St. Paul Area Food Shelf | Ralph Reeder Food Shelf | Focus House | Merrick Food Shelf | West Seventh Library (Saint Paul Public Library) | St. Paul Promise Neighborhood | East Side Table | InterFaith Action | The Sanneh Foundation | Keystone Services | Fairview | Health Partners | White Bear Area Food Shelf | CLUES

About Imagine Deliver

IMAGINE | DELIVER



A consulting firm for the “new majority,” Imagine Deliver helps clients activate insights and strategies that benefit everyone. Imagine Deliver knows the best systems, services, and products are designed by the people who use them. Focused on equity-centered service design — and rooted in community-based research and creative engagement methodologies — Imagine Deliver connects the most relevant community insights to our clients’ strategic goals.

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