



Background

The Healthy Food, Healthy Families Policy Lab (HFHF) is a project of ALL IN facilitated by In-Advance, through its Sugar Freedom Project (SFP). SFP was first inspired by the passage of the Oakland Soda Tax in 2016, specifically by election precincts in deep East Oakland (which has the highest rates of diabetes and obesity in the city) having the highest concentration of “No” votes on Measure HH (at least 60%), even though the measure passed by 61% citywide. This demonstrated the need to broaden and deepen community engagement and leadership on issues that affect the lives of people in neighborhoods that have been the most impacted by the soda and sugar industries. Sugar Freedom Project’s mission is to: (1) holistically engage East Oakland communities in empowerment and resiliency, through grassroots organizing and health and policy education, and (2) ensure Soda Tax revenues go to those disproportionately hit by illnesses related to overconsumption of sugar. In 2019 SFP the Grassroots Organizing and Leadership Development (GOLD) program was developed to better reach this mission with the following goals:

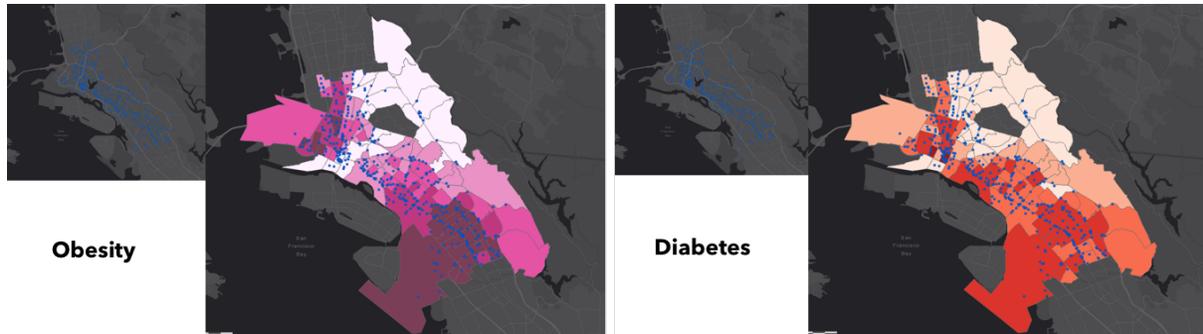
- To create an infrastructure, mechanism, and container for consolidating a base of residents most affected by corporate sugar
- To develop the capacities of neighborhood residents as leaders
- To build cross-community solidarity

With a growing, diverse community base led by community leaders, the GOLD program was implemented as complementary to another new initiative, ALL IN’s Healthy Food, Healthy Families Policy Lab, to lay the foundation to help foster and advocate for community-led policies to help transform Oakland into a healthier, more just place to live for all residents. The Soda Tax alone cannot solve the diabetes and obesity epidemics but has a strong foundational potential both by setting policy precedent and helping to fund a spectrum of new policies to create healthy food ecosystems across Oakland. The Sugar Freedom Project facilitates the Healthy Food, Healthy Families Policy Lab with the following goals:

- Engage neighborhood residents as leaders in developing policy solutions
- Produce relevant research to inform health and food policy options for the future
- Pilot new community-led policies

Neighborhood Context

While SFP engages residents across Oakland, the Fruitvale and San Antonio neighborhoods serve as the Healthy Food, Healthy Families Policy “Lab.” While the Fruitvale has many markets selling fresh produce, many of the residents cannot fully access this healthy food due to economic barriers. San Antonio lacks grocery stores and is characterized more by corner and liquor stores. Both neighborhoods are racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse. Like all of the Oakland “flats,” the life expectancy in these neighborhoods is 8 years below that of the Oakland Hills, diabetes hospitalizations are 1.01 to 1.25 times the rate for Alameda County, and diabetes mortality is 1.01 to 1.35 times the rate for Alameda County (Alameda County Public Health Department, Map Set 2018, April 2018). An organizing approach to address these health disparities centers those with lived experiences to help develop policy solutions.



Soda and sugar industries target low-income communities of color in their marketing and distribution, the consequences of which include disproportionate rates of diabetes and obesity for people living in these communities. Low-income communities of color are heterogeneous but often socially isolated from each other (and all other communities) due to language barriers, citizenship status, and other factors relating to marginalization. So while they look united in the data, on the ground they are often experiencing the impacts of corporate sugar's ubiquity in isolation. Our community organizers from Fruitvale and San Antonio have brought English, Spanish, Mam, Nepali, Dzongkha, Arabic, and Vietnamese speaking residents together. Our approach is rooted in the belief that real, sustained change can happen if these communities have the space and support for collective learning, leadership and action.

Methodology

Organizing Team

To launch the Sugar Freedom GOLD program and HFHF Policy Lab in late 2019, In-Advance partnered with organizations with aligned missions to hire, train, and support 12 Resident Organizers to engage people in hard-to-reach communities. In the Fruitvale and San Antonio neighborhoods these partners include Street Level Health Project, Mandela Partners, Trybe, Bhutanese and Nepali community associations, and Arab community associations, who all helped identify and support 8 Resident Organizers from communities most impacted by corporate sugar. This sub-cohort included 6 Spanish speakers, of whom 2 are multilingual with Mam and English and 3 with English, and 2 multilingual with Nepali, Dzongkha, and English. They have the lived experiences that allow them to adapt the project so that it is not only relevant and appropriate but activates their communities.

The Spring 2020 project cycle began in February with 4 returning Resident Organizers participating in a leadership cohort with monthly training to support them managing their own teams of Resident Organizers. As well as 14 new Resident Organizers who were recruited through partnerships with Trybe, HOPE collaborative, Alameda County Nutrition Services and SABA Grocers Initiative. However, shortly after launching COVID-19 began to spread through our communities and several new Resident Organizers opted to not join the project, so the team remained at 10.

The team is supported by the SFP project coordinator, In-Advance staff, and language interpreters in weekly team meetings that serve as a space for training as well as sharing back what they have been learning from the community members they organize. Facilitated by the SFP project coordinator, Resident Organizers share ideas from community members and as a team develop the ideas they are hearing the most into policy pathways, which they then share

back with their community members in an iterative process to ensure it is genuine to what the impacted community envisions. This iterative process informs the policy research and partnership exploration at In-Advance to further the work.

Community Organizing

Resident Organizers participated in a Door Knocking training in San Antonio in late August 2019 focused on learning from residents about their local food access challenges and assets. Their 50+ conversations laid the foundation for the HFHF Policy Lab research that was expanded and deepened through the following months of community organizing. Door Knocking was just one method of initial outreach Resident Organizers were trained on and supported to employ, other methods include street outreach and outreach at organization programming. For example, Resident Organizers often conducted initial outreach at Street Level during the ACC Food Bank's distribution. Later initial outreach focused on surveying shoppers and pedestrians outside of Mi Ranchito store on Foothill. Continued outreach, or engagement, include personal visits, house meetings, and workshops to foster conversations around barriers and assets to healthy living and popular education activities to help cultivate policy solutions from impacted community members. Community organizing methods pivoted during COVID-19 to follow CDC and municipal guides and policies; effectively shifting to focus on snowball outreach. This involves relying on people engaged to introduce our Resident Organizers to other impacted community members they know. The strength of our organizing during COVID-19 demonstrates the importance of giving leadership roles to people that are part of the communities you seek to engage, who can leverage their trust to engage even the hardest-to-reach community members. For example, our Organizers meaningfully engaged folks who are from linguistically isolated households, particularly speakers of Mam and Dzongkha.

Grassroots Policy Development

Centering the Lived Experience of Directly Impacted Communities

All community engagement was and continues to be conducted by Resident Organizers. A common approach to community organizing is to 'meet people where they are at,' and Resident Organizers had been 'meeting people where they are at' prior to COVID-19 by having conversations to recruit people riding on the bus, walking down the street, waiting in line at a store, participating in an English class, and picking up their children from school. Maria talked to Mam and Spanish speakers in line at a food distribution line in Fruitvale, Yolanda regularly visited people's houses, Angelica organized people to start attending a free Zumba class with her, and Prem and Santi incorporated these conversations into monthly gatherings with Nepali and other immigrants and refugees. They were able to leverage the social networks they had built to continue to expand their engaged resident base virtually during COVID-19.

During the policy research phase, 250+ individual San Antonio and Fruitvale residents were engaged in policy development through personal visits, workshops, and gatherings (in person pre-COVID, virtual and outside safely distanced during). During the policy prioritization phase, an additional 100+ individuals in these neighborhoods were engaged in giving feedback to help refine what would become the policy pilot. During the policy pilot in Fall 2020, 500+ families in these neighborhoods directly participated in the pilot. 50 participants participated in a small group meeting series at Cesar Chavez park (Foothill Blvd & Bridge Ave) to share about the impact of participation in the pilot and ideas to improve it, as well as other ideas for how the local government can support neighborhood-level transformations to healthy food ecosystems. 100+ participants provided feedback to Resident Organizers more informally to refine the policy.

The formal and informal feedback was taken together to help launch the campaign. 20 residents participated in the campaign leadership, primarily through attending the Equity Academy for Leadership in Oakland Governance and then through planning for and participating in City Council advocacy with Councilmember Noel Gallo and Council President Nikki Fortunato Bas. The majority of the engaged community members do not list English as their primary language: From most common to least, they speak Spanish, Nepali, Mam, English, Arabic, Vietnamese, and Cantonese. Reflecting that, Latinx and Nepali are the most common ethnic groups. The majority are women, but their ages range from teens to great-grandparents.

Policy Development

Community-identified solutions-as-policies were brainstormed through two methods: Resident Organizers' one-on-one conversations with people and group workshops about their neighborhoods' barriers, assets, and needs. The following themes rose from these brainstorms:

- Genuine access to affordable fresh, healthy food
- Intervening on corporate food ubiquity
- Community power

Using the above themes to frame the research, the following policies were identified and researched further as possible policy pathways (in no particular order):

- **Buying Co-op/Clubs** to leverage low-income folks' money and prioritize sourcing.
- **Cooperative Purchasing Agreements** among multiple small/corner store owners to place larger orders to bring down prices, to allow small store owners to provide affordable fresh produce in their stores with minimized risk.
- **Healthy Retail** investments to break down barriers and support produce sold in corner stores and potentially experiment with the current models to include CSA style distribution.
- Expose **corporate food race-based strategy** and its health impacts within low-income communities of color. It may result in a class action suit and include use of California's Unfair Practices Act which prohibits price discrimination between communities.
- **Staple Food Ordinance**, like that currently in place in Minneapolis, to require all food retailers to stock a minimum quantity of fruits and vegetables.
- **Incentivize Healthy Businesses** by utilizing Oakland's Conditional Use Permit land use tool to prevent new fast, corporate food and assert community power moving forwards.
- Provide **food subsidies** for grocery stores, farmers markets, CSA boxes which support both consumers, the economy, and local growers. Seattle used their Soda Tax revenue for supermarket and farmers market vouchers, which provided the infrastructure for expansion in the current COVID-19 crisis.
- **Safety warnings** on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and junk food. San Francisco attempted to get labels on shelves warning of health impacts of SSBs, similar to tobacco, but got blocked by the courts.
- **Universal Basic Income (UBI)** to provide people with unconditional direct payments; studies show that people spend more money on healthy food products when they receive UBI.
- **Healthy check out** to require food items sold at checkout shelves to meet 'healthy' standards (this passed in neighboring Berkeley during the HFHF Lab period).

COVID-19 Redesign

As mentioned throughout the report, COVID-19 shifted our approach early on in the HFHF Policy Lab contract. First, we paused all of our in-person organizing and encouraged our

Resident Organizers to take time to experiment with virtual organizing methods, namely phone and computer-based meetings. Second, we paused our approach to listen to what they were hearing from their communities and decided to redesign our approach to better meet the urgency: in many ways COVID-19 accelerated our policy development work due to the urgency of need but also the opportunity of funding ideas that had been politically unpopular prior to the pandemic (eg Universal Basic Income through Stimulus Checks).

What we learned from Resident Organizers in March 2020 was that the same communities they had been organizing were facing heightened vulnerability to COVID-19 and related job and wage loss and increased food insecurity. As our Resident Organizers and their communities reported product shortages, price gouging, and unsafe practices at large chain stores and shared turning increasingly to their corner stores instead, we decided to prioritize the healthy retail policy pathways we had identified based on earlier community ideas and to partner with Saba Grocers Initiative (Saba) and their store owners to collaboratively respond to urgent COVID-19 needs as well as address root causes of food insecurity. The pilot policies project that emerged allowed us to explore more deeply a few of the policy pathways we had identified pre-COVID in the now COVID-19 specific context of a disrupted food economy:

- Healthy Retail
- Food subsidies
- Cooperative Purchasing Agreements
- Buying Co-op/Club
- Race-Based Strategy of Corporate Food

Policy Experimentation

Mini-Pilot: Corner Stores to Community Stores

Phase 1: Design

Corner store owners in East Oakland are in a unique position to build spaces for community safety, culture, healing, and economic sustainability for communities of color through place-based organizing. Our group of African American, Latinx (including Mam), and Nepali organizers teamed up with Arab corner store owners to redesign the project to use community organizing to help stores transform into cornerstones of a local food system that prioritizes health and justice for customers: from food to parks, schools, and safety. A shared vision emerged for corner stores to be key distribution points for healthier food alternatives and function as a focal point for community empowerment.

5 of our Resident Organizers and 2 Saba store owners designed this pilot program over 7 design and planning sessions over April and May. In mid-June we launched an 8 week pilot of “Corner Stores to Community Stores” with 10 Resident Organizers and 3 corner stores in East Oakland: including Mi Ranchito in the Fruitvale. Unlike the other stores and neighborhoods, Mi Ranchito sells fresh produce and groceries and is not located in a “food desert,” however, much of the surrounding population cannot afford to fully shop there and so the focus at this store was understanding the barriers for consumers and store owners to realize full access. The focus of the pilot was to explore methods for deep, sustained community engagement in a store to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the neighborhood, from prices to products to programming.

Phase 2: Implementation

The pilot program model:

- 2-3 nearby residents are trained as community organizers and paired with a store
- They develop a survey with the store owner to engage customers and neighbors in envisioning the types of changes that would transform the store into a community store
- Conduct the survey with 100+ customers and neighbors using a variety of socially-distanced methods
- Provide vouchers for produce for participating customers
- Requested produce and other changes are introduced in store
- Follow up with respondents to explore their ideas further and learn about ideas for the neighborhood
- Bring participating residents together with the store owner to collectively plan
- Continue cultivating collective planning and engaging the City of Oakland in scaling up and replication

Mi Ranchito

Mi Ranchito is located on Foothill Blvd near Fruitvale Ave. It serves a wide variety of affordable vegetables, fruits, and staple items. While the area may not be considered a food desert, with high populations of people recently out of work due to COVID-19, its level of neighborhood trust (re: store loyalty) makes it a great store to explore community organizing for a spectrum of policies. Our team of Mam and Latinx organizers, speaking English, Spanish, and Mam between them surveyed over 100 people over a month in summer 2020, and \$500 was redeemed in vouchers as reported by store owners.

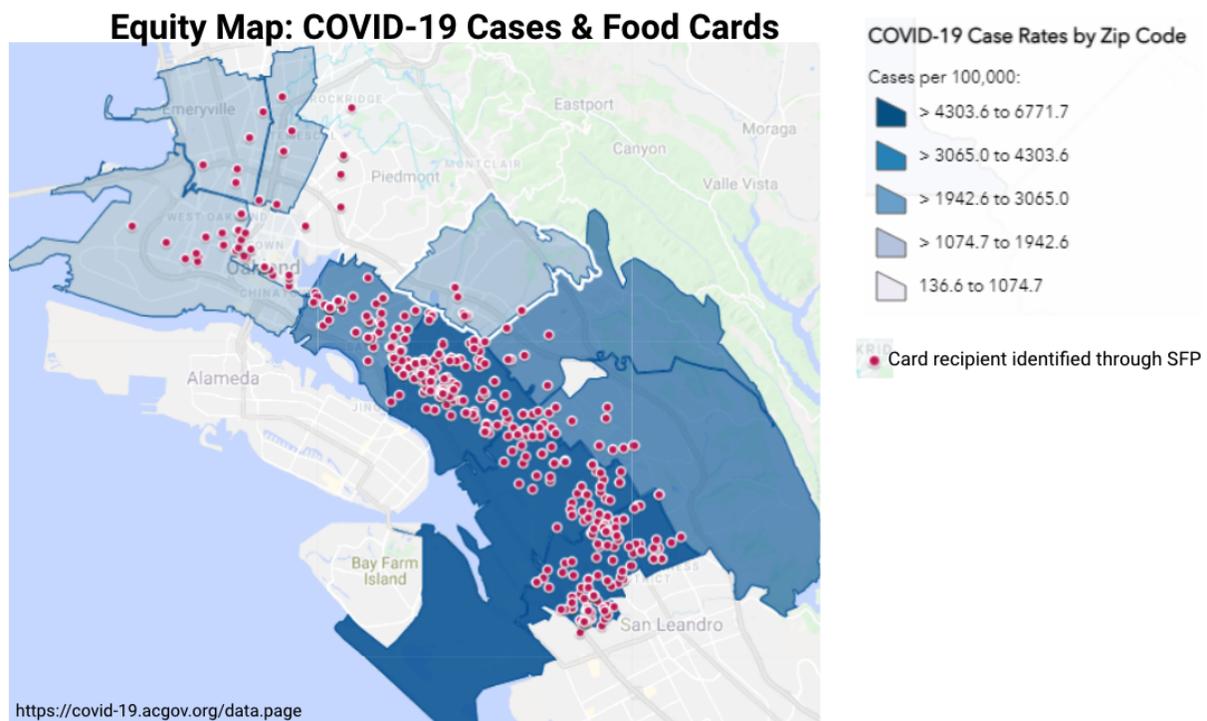
Phase 3: Policy Prioritization on Subsidies

The vouchers were employed both to incentivize increasing participation and more importantly to support consumer and consumption change over time. This is crucial for the stores as they transition into selling or expanding produce inventory. It helps both customers and store owners take the risk of changing their shopping habits and store model respectively. This was our first experimentation with direct consumer subsidies, in the form of paper vouchers to redeem. We received feedback from consumer participants that the vouchers are helpful in that they provide money for food, but that paper vouchers are easy to lose and the amount (ranging from \$10-20 depending on the amount of engagement activities) was not meaningful to impact a family's health and wellness. Feedback from store owners shared the challenges of a paper voucher, including the burden on employees, but that a subsidy tied to their store helps them take on more risk (i.e. selling requested culturally-specific produce). This feedback led to the development of the "Saba Food Card," the main policy pilot of the HFHF lab.

Policy Pilot: 'Saba Food Cards'

The fourth quarter of 2020 saw the full implementation of the pilot of our dual policy: investing in store transformations and customer purchasing power, both to accelerate overcoming the most persistent barriers in shifting the conditions of food apartheid and facilitate systematic change. Saba Grocers received CARES funding to scale up, including funding for 1000 \$250 cards restricted to 26 participating stores across Oakland's low-income neighborhoods, as well as funding for subsidizing produce fridges, produce orders, and healthy grocery items for those participating stores launching a produce section for the first time. SFP Resident Organizers drew on their peer-to-peer network to identify 400+ individuals to receive a card. Another ~300 cards were distributed through Homies Empowerment, Trybe, Street Level Health Project, and

East Oakland Collective, which helped us better understand how direct assistance through cards has a distinct impact from free food distribution and to gather qualitative impact data from both those organizations and their communities. The card recipients were a diverse group of long-time African American residents and Latinx and Southeast Asian immigrants, refugees, and undocumented residents, with a focus on those most impacted by COVID-19: low-income families with young children, community elders, day-laborers, people experiencing homelessness, and other low-income folks not eligible or receiving direct assistance.



This approach allowed us to connect with folks through their trusted networks and begin to build a grassroots infrastructure for understanding what an equitable COVID recovery looks like for those most impacted, by asking them directly through the activity of giving them a card and following up. As well as for mobilizing this infrastructure to develop, advocate for, and secure policy and funding wins for their own solutions. While the fall pilot was funded as a COVID response, it also piloted what a dedicated investment in shifting the conditions from food apartheid to healthy food ecosystem by investing directly in purchasing power and local business transformation could look like. Over 95% of the \$250,000 in cards were redeemed - which went directly to local, independently-owned stores supporting local jobs. Additionally, all of the corner stores that launched produce inventory have maintained or expanded their produce inventory since the launch.

Resident Organizers engaged willing participants in individual relationship building, focus groups, and popular education to surface refinements on our emerging policy ideas. Using a popular education curriculum that introduces residents to the multiplier effect of dollars spent on locally owned businesses, and understanding their purchasing power built a foundation for community engagement in refining the policy approach moving forward. Using a community organizing approach allowed us to respond to urgent COVID-19 needs as well as address root

- Barriers for stores and customers boil down to costs, economic burden/ inaccessibility of healthy lifestyles

Saba's CARES funding has created conditions where some policy pathways that have emerged from store owners and community members can be piloted and explored, ideally through investments from the City's Human Services Department and the County's Public Health Department to help institutionalize them. The following policies have emerged as the most impactful per residents, store owners, and CBOs in our coalition to transform food apartheid to healthy food ecosystems:

- **Healthy Retail:** Support culturally-appropriate and desired produce and healthy products sold in corner stores
 - Saba funding provided produce fridges, coordination of a collective purchasing agreement and delivery, technical assistance, and subsidized produce orders for corner stores launching produce inventory. SFP Resident Organizers continue to engage customers on inventory.
- **Food Subsidies:** Expand direct assistance food cards from Saba fall 2020 pilot
 - Saba's CARES funding covered 1000 visa cards loaded with \$250 with restricted access to 26 participating stores across Oakland.
 - Selected families would ideally receive monthly allotments to support sustained shift in health outcomes and local economy outcomes
 - Participating stores could be expanded to restaurants and farmers markets
 - The fall cards had over a 95% redemption rate, and while there is not much data on redemption rates of voucher programs or household food waste associated with free food distributions we feel this redemption rate is a clear sign of success for giving people the freedom to shop for what is best for them and their families' health and wellness

Campaign

Development

The process detailed above led to a campaign focused on securing a sustainable expansion and continuation of the card program, with the Soda Tax revenue (which is allotted through the Human Services Department) identified as the most appropriate funds to target, and the Oakland City Council Biennial Budget process as the focus of the campaign. The campaign was first developed in January, after Resident Organizers felt they had sufficient, significant feedback from participants on the card program, and an amount of \$3.5 million was selected (the tax generates ~\$8.5 million annually), brought to the SSB Community Advisory Board in March for their official support, which they secured as the CAB put forth the request as their official budget recommendations to the Mayor's office and City Council.

The campaign had a two track approach: impacted communities and community-based organizations (CBOs). Often CBOs are proxies for impacted communities, but genuine grassroots policy development uplifts and centers impacted community members in leadership positions. Therefore, the coalition of organizations did not develop the campaign demands, but rather used their institutional knowledge and connections to support the Resident Organizers. Resident Organizers and card recipients planned for and led meetings with several Councilmembers including Noel Gallo and Loren Taylor to secure their support, and then met to debrief and refine strategy. Ultimately, \$500,000 was secured and a precedent set to ask for larger, sustained investments. The implementation is currently stalled as the City determines how to move forward.

Conclusion

A genuine grassroots policy development process is built on continual conversations with impacted community members, while methodology may differ it is critical that these conversations are initiated and facilitated by fellow impacted community members. The most feasible way for this to be replicated and scaled up is to start with reaching out to the focus neighborhoods' CBOs, if they are service-based and can identify community members to approach as potential Organizers. It is best to approach multiple CBOs and of varying sizes. If conversations within impacted communities is an on-going cycle throughout the grassroots policy process, the following are iterative and also cyclical: research, policy experimentation, policy section, campaign to secure policy. Centering impacted communities requires much preparation and time and providing a spectrum of activities to engage people. It also requires pushing against the status quo; attention needs to be given to understand the current system, power-holders, and external factors to what impacted communities envision. Importantly, it requires building power in both quality - leadership development and opportunities to lead through decision making - and in quantity - if an issue impacts thousands of community members, thousands of community members need to be organized in the process.

Key Take-Aways:

- Empowerment
 - It is imperative to economic, racial, and food justice to trust low-income communities of color with the freedom and resources to shop for and choose what is best for them and their families' health and wellness. Purchasing power as a concept has no real impact if people do not have the genuine economic resources to use that power. We see direct assistance food cards as under the umbrella of Universal Basic Income; the cards are a way to provide some measure of this while targeting specific food apartheid conditions. Ideally, the cards are given long enough investment that they can broaden to UBI as healthy food ecosystems emerge and flourish.
- Resonance with needs
 - While we hear feedback directly from residents that they are grateful for free food distributions, in those same conversations we hear about the limitations of their impact for a family's health and wellness since they are not choosing the food. The most common comments are the lack of fresh produce, too much processed and canned foods, lack of cultural appropriateness, and the resulting food waste. Direct assistance allows participants to choose what is right for their family's health and wellness, which will lead to more impactful health outcomes.
- Reinforcing efforts
 - Both store owners and customers within food apartheid have to contend with barriers created and perpetuated by the corporate food system and public disinvestment. Simultaneously investing in breaking down the barriers for both communities allows stores to provide and customers to support. And with community organizing to build and sustain the intentional relationships between the two in this context, customer purchasing power can shape individual stores to the neighborhood needs and wants.
- Sustainability
 - While the City and County and CBOs have done an impressive feat with free food distributions, they are costly, time-intensive, and ultimately do not shift food

desert conditions. If their funding runs out, the food desert remains. Strategic investment over a dedicated period of time in the existing infrastructure of food businesses and customer purchasing power can shift those conditions such that when the investment closes, a healthy food ecosystem thrives with benefits ranging from government focusing their budget on other needs to healthcare costs lowering to minimizing health disparities.