

Evaluating Northern Illinois Food Bank and its Agency Partners through the Lens of Food Pantry Users: The Neighbor Satisfaction Survey

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Northern Illinois Food Bank provides food and resources to 900 agency partners (pantries, mobile markets, and My Pantry Express) across 13 counties in Northern Illinois. To improve services offered and for establishing benchmarks for evaluating user satisfaction, the food bank partnered with Northern Illinois University to conduct the Neighbor Satisfaction Survey. Users of food bank agency partners' services were surveyed about accessibility of food distribution sites, satisfaction with food selection, and overall satisfaction at these food distribution sites.

Methods: This survey was conducted in Fall 2022, utilizing in-person administration and online mailings, with simultaneous administration of two versions of the survey. Questions evaluated food access, food choice, overall satisfaction, and user likeliness to recommend services. Data from both surveys was merged and exported into SPSS for data analysis. Qualitative analysis identified themes in open-ended questions. Quantitative data utilized descriptive stats, means, and ANOVA to compare food distribution's impact.

Results: A total of 2,473 neighbor responses were collected across three food distribution sites - pantries (25.1%), mobile markets (30.2%), and My Pantry Express (37.9%). Approximately half of users reported difficulty procuring free food, and only 47.7% reported getting the variety and types of food they need or want. Personal items, meat, and produce were the most requested items. Users reported an average score of 8.7/10 on likelihood to recommend the food distribution to a friend or family member.

Conclusion: Overall, Northern Illinois Food Bank is committed to enhancing accessibility to free food for neighbors and prioritizing the allocation of resources towards fresh produce and protein-rich foods. The survey results provide insights into areas for improvement and a baseline for future evaluations on access, food selection, and overall satisfaction.

BACKGROUND

- The Northern Illinois Food Bank works to ensure that neighbors have access to nutritious foods and resources through pantries, mobile markets, and My Pantry Express.
- In the 13 counties which Northern Illinois Food Bank serves, approximately 400,000 neighbors experience food insecurity, 100,000 of these neighbors are children.¹
- In the 2022 fiscal year, the Northern Illinois Food Bank distributed 78 million meals.¹
- United States data shows that 10.2% of (13.5 million) U.S. Households were food insecure at some point during 2021.²
- Food Insecurity and lack of access to nutritious foods is associated with an increased risk for developing certain chronic health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and mental health disorders.³

Table 1:

Food Distribution Site Type	Participants
Pantry	620
Mobile Market	748
My Pantry Express	937
Other	128
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	2,473



METHODS

- A cross-sectional survey was utilized for the purpose of this study. Responses from two separate surveys were merged. Surveys were verbally administered by student researchers at fourteen (14) food distribution sites. Additionally, seven (7) pantries distributed the link to complete the survey via email to their listserv as well as all mobile market users (25,331) received a link to participate via email.
- A total of 2,473 neighbors completed the survey. Survey questions gathered insight for the following outcomes: 1) accessibility to free food, 2) food choice and selection, 3) overall satisfaction and experience with the site and food provided, and 4) how likely neighbors are to promote services.
- SPSS Statistic 28.0 was utilized to generate descriptive statistics and means. Additionally, a one-way ANOVA was performed to compare the effect of the three different food distribution types on outcome measures.

Table 2:

Outcome	Core Questions
1. Accessibility to free food	Q3. How difficult is it to find a place for free food when you need it?
2. Food choice and selection	Q5. Do you find this site offers the kind of food you would choose at the store? Q6. How often can you get the variety and types of food you need or want?
3. Overall satisfaction and experience with the site and food provided	Q7. How satisfied are you with the food provided at this site? Q9. How was your overall experience at this site? Q10. Would you say this site meets your family's needs?
4. How likely neighbors are to promote services.	Q8. How likely are you to recommend this food distribution to a friend or family member?

RESULTS

Food Access

- 53% stated it was difficult to find a place for free food that was open when they needed it.

Food Choice

- 50% stated that the site offers the kind of food they would choose at the store.
- 47.7% reported getting the variety and types of food they need or want.
- The most requested items were **meat, produce, and personal care items.**

Satisfaction

- 80% said they had a good experience.
- 62.7% indicated they were completely satisfied with services.

Willingness to recommend

- 67% ranked the site a 9 out of 10 or higher and indicated that they would recommend the site to a friend or family member.

CONCLUSION

Results suggest that users were overall satisfied with their experiences at Northern Illinois Food Bank food distribution sites, with over half stating they are completely satisfied with the services offered. However, there are barriers in accessing services, with 53% of users stating they did experience difficulty finding a place for free food. Furthermore, results suggest that the Northern Illinois Food Bank should spend more resources on purchasing fresh produce and protein-rich foods to meet users' food preferences. The Neighbor Satisfaction survey administered annually with users will allow for further improvements to food and resources offered by the Northern Illinois Food Bank.

REFERENCES

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