

RESEARCH REPORT

Connecting People with Charitable Food through New Home Delivery Partnerships

Insights from DoorDash's Project DASH

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Executive Summary

Food banks and other organizations that provide charitable food are critical resources for people experiencing food insecurity. However, some individuals, such as seniors, those with chronic health conditions or mobility limitations and those lacking reliable access to transportation, face outsized barriers to accessing charitable food in person.

The COVID-19 pandemic shed new light on these barriers, as antihunger organizations scrambled to offer home delivery to those in need. To help meet this need, DoorDash—an online food delivery platform—accelerated early partnerships to provide home delivery services to antihunger organizations on an in-kind basis. By the end of 2022, the initiative, known as Project DASH, was collaborating with more than 300 nonprofits, such as food banks and United Way affiliates. Now, DoorDash has shifted to a subsidized rate approach and is working with partner organizations to find long-term funding for home delivery services.

DoorDash engaged the Urban Institute to evaluate the effectiveness of Project DASH’s home delivery partnerships. This report examines antihunger organizations experiences with Project DASH, as well as the experiences of the clients receiving home delivery of charitable food, with the goal of understanding who is reached by home delivery, how antihunger organizations have integrated DoorDash into their operations, and clients’ experiences with these services. The report concludes with lessons learned and recommendations for future initiatives.

To examine Project DASH, we conducted a survey of Project DASH clients, largely from San Francisco-Marin Food Bank, as well as a survey of Project DASH antihunger organization partners, and interviewed several staff and clients in greater depth to inform our findings. This executive summary provides a high-level overview of the key findings and lessons learned about the DoorDash home delivery partnership.

Home Delivery Removed Food Access Barriers

Project DASH home delivery clients who responded to our survey were largely adults 60 and older (71.5 percent). More than two-thirds (71.5 percent) of households had a member with a disability (71.5 percent), and nearly all (92.6 percent) received a weekly home delivery of charitable food . We learned the following about their experiences with home delivery:

- **Home delivery helped almost all clients (97.8 percent) save money.** Other client-reported benefits included fewer trips to the grocery store (91.3 percent), the ability to stretch public benefits (87.6 percent), and money saved on transit (79.4 percent).
- **Most clients (89.4 percent) cited convenience as a motivation for participating in home delivery.** Chronic health conditions or mobility limitations (78.4 percent) and barriers to transportation (68.6 percent) were the next most frequently reported motivations.
- **Time savings was a key benefit of the service.** Home delivery supported clients in their ability to take care of their health (88.8 percent), maintain work or attend school (28.8 percent), care for children or grandchildren (26.6 percent), and/or take care of someone who is sick (28.8 percent).
- **Home delivery helped fill food access gaps.** A little less than half (44.0 percent) of respondents reported receiving charitable food before home delivery was available, suggesting this service may help clients meet food needs that were previously unaddressed.
- **Using a mobile app to coordinate home delivery posed issues for some clients.** Eleven percent of respondents did not have a cell phone—the majority of whom were 60 and older, a key population of interest for antihunger organizations to serve. Of the 1 in 6 clients that experienced issues communicating with DoorDash delivery drivers, more than a third reported the presence of a language barrier.

In interviews, clients noted that an inability to stand in food pantry lines due to mobility limitations and a lack of transportation kept them from visiting food pantries. In contrast, home delivery saved them time and eliminated the need to engage in the activities—such as waiting in line—that some clients found physically burdensome and time-intensive due to chronic health conditions or mobility limitations.

Clients also identified some challenges with receiving home delivery:

- **Communication challenges.** Home delivery primarily serves older adults, who may not have a cell phone or who struggle to communicate on the app-driven platform. Language barriers with Dashers (DoorDash delivery drivers) were also a challenge: over a third of clients received communication that was not in their language. About half of surveyed antihunger organizations also heard client reports of Dashers being unresponsive or client reports of perceiving rudeness by delivery personnel (45.9 percent).

- **Inconsistent deliveries.** A relatively small number of clients (15 percent) experienced late or missing home delivery boxes.
- **Expired or damaged food.** Nearly two-thirds of clients reported receiving food that was not fresh, and 47.2 percent of clients had received a delivery with damaged items. These reflect issues that antihunger organizations may need to assess.

Partnering with Project Dash Expanded Capacity and Reach for Antihunger Organizations

Partnering with Project Dash enabled antihunger organizations to serve a greater number of clients and reach populations facing outsized barriers to accessing charitable food. Some benefits of the home delivery partnership that antihunger organizations reported include the following:

- **Increased capacity.** Home delivery helps alleviate capacity challenges faced by antihunger organizations, such as transportation costs or staff time, enabling them to meet community needs.
- **Reaching more clients.** Home delivery helps antihunger organizations reach clients facing outsized barriers to accessing charitable food, such as older adults or people who lack transportation, and allows antihunger organizations to scale their efforts to reach more community members than previously possible.
- **Reduce stigma.** The anonymity and low-contact option of home delivery helps reduce the stigma of receiving charitable food.

Antihunger organizations also identified challenges with the DoorDash home delivery partnerships:

- **Limited infrastructure.** Antihunger organizations face capacity issues, including a lack of logistical or technological infrastructure necessary to serve a greater number of clients through home delivery.
- **Difficulty meeting increased community needs.** Antihunger organizations struggled to serve the growing number of clients in need of charitable food, with many using waitlists for clients they are unable to serve.
- **Client food choice.** Given the increased demand for home delivery at a large scale, antihunger organizations struggled to offer clients choice in food contents, sometimes leaving clients without fresh produce or culturally appropriate food.

The Future of Home Delivery Hinges on Sustainable Funding Strategies

Outside of charitable food distribution, home delivery has been increasing in popularity, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic pushed antihunger organizations to find innovative solutions to connect clients with charitable food, providing the opportunity for companies like DoorDash to leverage their delivery infrastructure in partnership with these organizations.

The majority (93 percent) of partner organizations we surveyed were motivated to collaborate with DoorDash to reach populations facing outsized barriers to accessing charitable food. However, among the antihunger partners surveyed, nearly all (96.6 percent) cited lack of funding as a barrier to maintaining or expanding their home delivery services. Despite this, most partners (82.8 percent) plan to offer home delivery in the future, and more than half (59.2 percent) want to expand home delivery by serving a greater number of clients, targeting additional communities, and/or increasing the frequency of deliveries.

To reach those unable to access charitable food in person, nonprofits will need to identify longer-term, sustainable funding sources, including philanthropy, government funding streams, and subsidies from private sector delivery services. Given the disproportionately high rate of food insecurity among households with a disabled member, investing in home delivery services could help ensure all community members have access to charitable food.

Connecting People with Charitable Food through New Home Delivery Partnerships

During the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations providing charitable food scrambled to find solutions to provide home-delivered groceries to those in need who were unable to go to food distribution sites. Partnerships with businesses providing home-delivery for restaurants and grocery stores, such as DoorDash, offered an important opportunity to reach clients at their homes at a scale that had never been feasible before with volunteer labor. Even as the pandemic eased, food banks and other organizations like United Way reflected on how home delivery partnerships have enabled them to address a longstanding challenge of meeting the needs of food-insecure households facing outsized barriers to receiving in-person groceries, meals, or other basic need items .

In this report, we examine partnerships between DoorDash and local food and human service organizations to deliver charitable food and other basic needs supplies through home-delivery. This report begins with an overview of home delivery of free groceries and meals and the inception of Project DASH. Then, the report provides insights from data collection with antihunger organizations partnering with DoorDash and clients that receive home delivery. Finally, the report concludes with lessons learned on operating home delivery and how these partnerships may evolve in the future.

What Do We Know About Home Delivery of Free Groceries and Meals?

Charitable food is an essential support for families experiencing food insecurity, but some individuals face substantial barriers exist accessing these resources. Nearly 1 in 6 adults (16.0 percent) reported their household received free groceries and meals in 2022, a rate significantly higher than in 2019, prior to the onset of the pandemic (12.7 percent) (Martinchek et al. 2023). Additionally, marginalized populations like Black and Latinx adults, adults with a disability, and adults who are noncitizens, reported substantially higher levels of food insecurity and charitable food use compared with white adults, adults without a disability, and adults who are citizens, respectively (Gupta et al. 2022). While many families turn to charitable food resources to help meet their food needs¹, many face barriers in doing so, including limited distribution hours, challenges traveling to free grocery or meal sites, or

health conditions limiting a person’s mobility (Martinchek et al. 2022; Shannon et al. 2020). These barriers can result in families not getting the food they need and going without, as they struggle to coordinate friends and family to pick-up food for them, figure out transportation, and find time to attend free grocery and meal sites, which may involve lengthy wait times.

Although these challenges existed before the COVID-19 pandemic, their onset heightened the need to find innovative alternatives to traditional brick-and-mortar charitable grocery and meal programs. In the early months of the pandemic, there was a sharp increase in the number of households experiencing food insecurity amid the public health crisis and related economic shocks, which created significant instability for many families (Waxman et al. 2020). Public health guidance to socially distance required organizations offering free groceries and meals to adapt to rapidly evolving circumstances by seeking new and innovative service delivery options. These options included large-scale drive-through food distributions as well as the launch and scaling home delivery (Waxman and Martinchek 2023).

BOX 1

An Overview of the Charitable Food System

The charitable food system in the United States takes a variety of forms—from entirely independent, local antihunger organizations, such as food pantries to large, formal nonprofit networks of antihunger organizations (both local and regional) like Feeding America. Feeding America is the largest of these networks representing approximately 200 food banks that serve every county in the US. Food banks affiliated with Feeding America are regional in scope, connecting with many local antihunger partners within their geographic service area, whether city, county, or multicounty. Food banks typically serve as food distribution hubs to local food organizations, sourcing everything from excess prepared food, retail and wholesale grocery donations, federal commodity programs, and purchased items. Food banks may also provide direct service to food insecure clientele, or they may rely solely on their network partners of local food organizations.

United Way is also a key player in the charitable food system. United Way Worldwide (UWW) has a broad scope of activities but also focuses on food assistance. Local affiliates provide direct food assistance, similar to food banks and pantries, and UWW also provides food grants to food pantries and soup kitchens, and connects local farmers to food pantries.

Source: Feeding America, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/>; United Way Worldwide, <https://www.unitedway.org/our-impact/stories/fighting-hunger-to-build-stronger-communities>.

Home delivery in particular has provided an opportunity to connect with families who were experiencing low access to charitable food due to transportation, health, cost, and other barriers. While

home delivery can address barriers for populations at greater risk of food insecurity, the implementing, funding, and scaling of home delivery programs have historically presented challenges such as limited organizational capacity and a high demand for services; antihunger organizations have had varying rates of success addressing these challenges (Waxman and Martinchek 2023).

Despite the increased uptake and normalcy surrounding home-delivered groceries during the pandemic, the current state of home-delivery efforts in the US for free groceries and meals is not well understood or studied. While there is some research on home-delivered food programs targeting specific populations (such as those with chronic diseases, rural populations, and older adults), there is little research on the rise of programs that serve broader populations and leverage new technology platforms. Further, many home delivery programs are locally funded and implemented by volunteers,² limiting the scale and scope of program impact. There have been few program models that are long-term, consistently funded initiatives outside of Meals on Wheels, which serves a homebound population who cannot prepare meals. This food delivery model is in contrast to the larger segment of the population who may need assistance with free groceries to feed their households. Recent research on home delivery of food via shipping to children living in rural areas, when school meals are not available, finds that implementing and scaling such programs can be challenging and requires tailoring to unique local barriers (Gutierrez et al. 2022).

This study provides an opportunity to better understand recent innovations in home delivery of charitable food and reflect on early lessons learned that can inform the future of home delivery. The value and potential of home delivery to advance food access and security for individuals and households is promising, especially for groups facing outsized barriers to charitable food access and greater risk of food insecurity. In this study, we address a key gap in our understanding of the role home delivery plays in improving food access and security for families by examining a case study of home delivery efforts by local nonprofit organizations in partnership with DoorDash.

Project DASH: Evolving DoorDash Partnerships with Nonprofits for Home Delivery

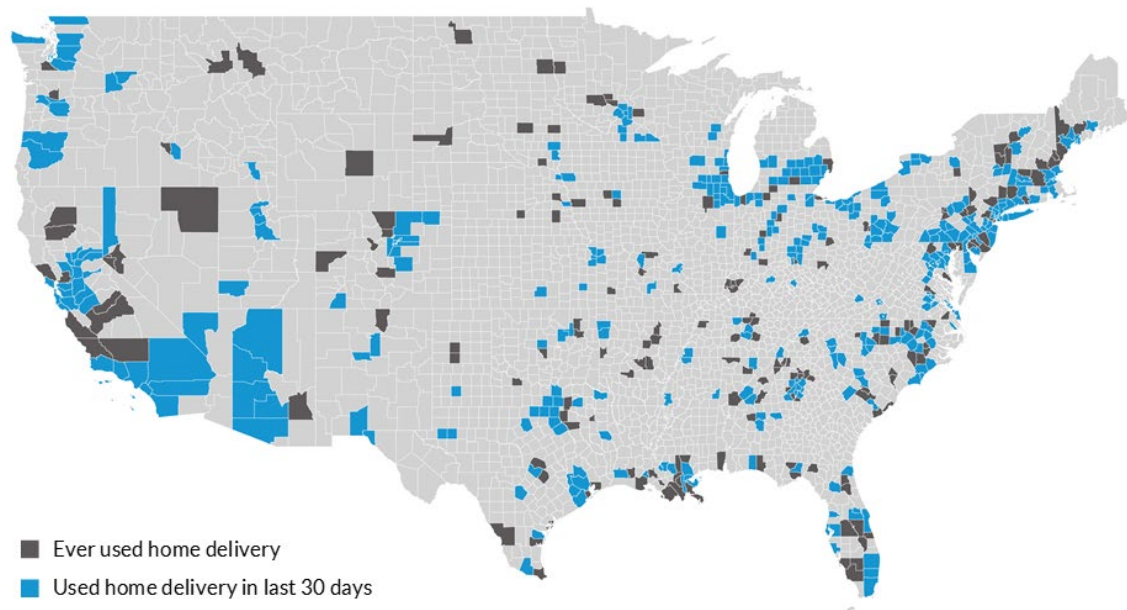
The idea to leverage the DoorDash platform to help address hunger in the community originated in 2018 at an employee hackathon.³ The original vision was to use DoorDash relationships with restaurant partners to rescue prepared food that would otherwise go to waste and have Dashers, as DoorDash delivery drivers are known, deliver these donations to local antihunger organizations that would then

distribute the food. The new initiative was coordinated through DoorDash's Social Impact Group. From the outset, Dashers were paid for their time making deliveries to nonprofits.

History of Project DASH

As the pandemic emerged in early 2020, DoorDash began to hear from the nonprofit sector that it needed help providing direct delivery to clients due to businesses shutdowns, the need to quarantine, and the rising demand for charitable food made it increasingly difficult for antihunger organizations to reach all clients in need. That being so, a new model of partnership emerged during the early months of the pandemic with Dashers (picking up food from food banks and other antihunger organizations for direct home delivery to clients). These home delivery partnerships expanded rapidly and, by the end of 2022, DoorDash was collaborating with more than 300 nonprofit organizations in all 50 states (and DC), with most partnerships financially supported by DoorDash as in-kind donations; see figure 1 below for a map of counties served by Project Dash partners as of July 2023. Food banks and other charitable food organizations formed the core of these partnerships but the company also engaged in some delivery of nonfood items for nonprofit partners, such as United Way chapters. Nonfood deliveries have included disaster preparedness supplies, pet food, and household and personal care items.

FIGURE 1
Counties Served by Project DASH Nonprofit Partners



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Source: DoorDash, data as of July 14, 2023.

Notes: Each county shaded blue or dark grey has had at least one non-profit partner serving clients through a Project Dash partnership. One county in Alaska and three counties in Hawaii are not shown, none of the four counties have used home delivery in the last 30 days. Light grey counties do not have any partners serving clients.

To facilitate this new type of home delivery partnership, DoorDash implemented changes to its online platform and shifted management of the burgeoning project to its business operations. Beginning in late 2022, DoorDash began meeting one-one-one with its nonprofit partners across the US to discuss a transition plan for supporting partners in fundraising so that organizations could begin assuming part of the delivery costs going forward. Under these arrangements, DoorDash subsidizes the rate that it charges nonprofit organizations. They continue to not earn a profit on these partnerships. The company has voiced a long-term commitment to nonprofit client-level delivery and is seeking new strategies to make it financially sustainable for both nonprofit partners and DoorDash. One company team member stated that they believe nonprofit home delivery is here to stay as an expanded mode of partnership, and that the ecosystem that supports it will need to extend beyond what DoorDash can currently support independently.

As a result, 2023 has been a period of transition for the partnerships as food banks and other nonprofit organizations assess what their potential opportunities are for fundraising and at what level

to support direct home delivery for clients in the future. DoorDash has provided bridge funding that varies across organizations, ranging from three to six months of full subsidy that covers home delivery costs, depending on the size and pace of delivery. Some partners have already had significant success in tapping new funding sources, typically through foundation grants. As of summer 2023, the DoorDash team had identified more than a dozen partnerships which had already secured significant local funding. For example, one food bank secured a significant grant to continue home delivery in more rural settings. Other nonprofit partners are evaluating eligibility criteria for home delivery services, with an eye to identifying those who may be most in need of the service or time periods when demand may be the highest. While a few partners have discontinued the service because they did not see a way to sustain it without full in-kind support, most have conveyed that they see home delivery as an essential component of their services in a way that many had not previously conceptualized before the pandemic. Government sources of funding have not played a significant role to date, although a few community partners have tapped local funds made available through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). As some nonprofits expand the use of home delivery to reach vulnerable clients served by government-funded programs like the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which provides monthly food boxes to seniors), the potential role for some government contribution to the home delivery ecosystem has also become part of the discussion in the field of federal nutritional programs.⁴

Methodology of Project DASH Case Study

For our assessment of Project DASH, we conducted several stages of data collection with various stakeholders as part of a multiphase research design. The first phase of the research designed involved interviews with key stakeholders to learn about the program; these interviews were also formative to the research process to inform the development of a larger survey to home delivery clients. In this initial phase, we included these data collection activities:

- semistructured interviews with Project DASH partners (including food bank and other antihunger organization partners)
- semistructured interviews with a small sample of Project DASH home delivery clients

After gleaning insights from the qualitative interview phase, we were able to develop an informed and robust survey questionnaire for participants of home delivery and an organizational partner survey to obtain a broader understanding of program function and experiences. In this phase, these data collection activities are included:

- survey of home delivery clients

- survey of current Project DASH food bank and other antihunger organization partners
- survey of current Project DASH United Way partners

Formative Interviews with Project DASH Partners and Home Delivery Clients

We conducted telephone interviews February–April 2023 with five Project DASH partners: the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, Northern Illinois Food Bank, San Francisco-Marín Food Bank, Bread for the City (Washington, DC), and Amigos Del Valle (Texas). These food banks were chosen in collaboration with DoorDash based on the variety of clients they serve and the consistency with which they serve clients. Interviewees included organization staff members involved in the day-to-day operations of the home delivery program, as well as those engaged in larger strategic planning. The goal of these interviews was to understand the motivations behind partnering with DoorDash, the logistics and operations for Project DASH, their experiences with the partnership, and their perspectives on client experience. The interviews lasted roughly 60 minutes and were conducted virtually.

We also conducted interviews with 15 home delivery clients between March–April 2023. These clients received services from the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, Northern Illinois Food Bank, and San Francisco Marin Food Bank. Twelve interviews were conducted in English and three in Spanish. The interviews lasted roughly 30 minutes and were conducted over the phone; clients received \$25 for participating. All partner and client interviews were analyzed thematically using deductive coding.

Survey of Home Delivery Clients

We used findings from the interviews with Project DASH partners and home delivery clients to inform the development of the client survey. The purpose of the survey was to understand clients' experiences with the program, challenges they may have faced, and the impact of the program on their lives..

SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey included questions the research team developed that focused on length of time using the program, experiences with the program, perceived impact of the program, food access prior to receiving home delivery, and basic demographics. Several demographic questions were taken from validated survey questionnaires, while others were developed and tailored to this program specifically.

SAMPLE DEVELOPMENT

To develop our sample, we aimed to work directly with Project DASH partner food banks to attain client consent. Ultimately, we developed a significant survey partnership with San Francisco-Marín Food Bank, as they had already attained prior consent from clients to be contacted for research purposes due to their ongoing survey efforts. Because of this, the majority of our survey sample was sourced from this partner. To be reflective of different contexts, we also developed smaller partnerships with the Northern Illinois Food Bank and the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina. Both of these two food banks followed a two-step consent process, first by attaining consent from their clients to share their contact information with our team to take the survey in our survey protocol.

While we could not entirely represent all clients served by a variety of food banks, we felt our survey was still able to achieve our goal by soliciting key experiences of clients receiving home delivery. We offered the survey in the three primary languages based on the needs expressed by all three partners—English, Spanish, and Chinese. All three food banks were provided with consent information explaining the survey in each language (English, Spanish, Chinese). Native speakers ensured accuracy for all translations. Soliciting feedback and employing flexibility at every step of the pre-survey process was crucial to ensuring the survey was both responsive to the needs of food banks and worked around their hectic schedules. We also compensated each food bank with a stipend for their time.

SURVEY ADMINISTRATION

Based on our prior conversations with antihunger organizations, we anticipated that a large portion of the home delivery clientele may be seniors who may have difficulty taking the survey online due to limited text messaging or internet access. We also anticipated different language needs among clients and potential lower rates of literacy. To mitigate this, we used a variety of survey distribution modes. We distributed unique survey links to all participants via text messages (SMS) and email through the survey platform Qualtrics. We supplemented our initial response rate by using phone survey outreach through an external survey firm, Research Support Services. Research Support Services prioritized nonrespondents after a week of online outreach and conducted surveys in all three languages. The survey was fielded June 1–July 17, 2023, to a total of 763 respondents; 92 percent of respondents were from San Francisco-Marín Food Bank, 5 percent were from the Food Bank of Central and Eastern and North Carolina, and 3 percent from Northern Illinois Food Bank. All respondents received a \$20 digital Amazon or physical Visa gift card for completing the survey.

SURVEY ANALYSIS

We received 394 responses (52 percent response rate). Among surveyed respondents, over half (58.1 percent) were completed over the phone, indicating the importance of this survey method when surveying hard to reach populations such as seniors. The remaining respondents completed 24.9 percent of surveys via SMS invitation and 17 percent via email invitation. Because we did not have any demographic information on nonrespondents, we could not test for nonresponse bias, but we felt our respondent sample roughly matched the intended demographics based on our understanding of San Francisco-Marin's clientele. We conducted descriptive analyses on all survey questions and did not use any weights as our survey is not meant to be representative of any specific population. For two key questions (shown in Figure 5, motivations for receiving home delivery, and figure 16, benefits of receiving home delivery), we ran subgroup analyses based on presence of disability in the household, race/ethnicity, and age group. We selected these two questions above all others to assess subgroup differences as they would be the most informative of any potential differences in impact of the program on clients. We used chi-squared tests to determine differences among these key subgroups.⁵

Survey of Antihunger Organizations and United Way Partners

To understand partner experiences with the program, impact on staff operations, and the future of the partnership, we conducted two Project DASH partner surveys. One with food bank and other charitable antihunger organization staff partnering with DoorDash for home delivery and one with intermediary organizations (consisting of United Way and 211 affiliates). United Way Worldwide partners with DoorDash through the Ride United Last Mile Delivery program, in which affiliated 211, local United Way, and local partners are also able to use Dashers to provide delivery of food and other household items. The goal of these two surveys was to understand partner experiences with the program, any impact on staff operations, and the future of the partnership. The survey of food banks and antihunger organizations was fielded June 26–July 19, 2023, to 174 organizations, with 88 feeding organizations responding (a 51 percent response rate). The survey of intermediary organizations was fielded July 7–24, 2023, to 46 organizations, with 15 organizations responding (a 33 percent response rate). Both surveys were analyzed descriptively.

Client Experiences in Receiving Home Delivered Charitable Food

As described in the survey methodology, the majority of survey respondents received home delivery from San Francisco-Marin Food Bank (92.4 percent). Aligning with what we know about the demographics of the clients served by this food bank, a little less than half (43.8 percent) of all survey respondents reported their race as Asian American or Pacific Islander. About 1 in 5 (18.2 percent) reported a different race or more than two races, 14.5 percent as white, non-Hispanic, 13.3 percent as Black, non-Hispanic, and 9.5 percent as Hispanic. Roughly 7 in 10 survey respondents (69.1 percent) were female and 60 and older (71.5 percent). Employment rates were low overall, with 1 in 5 (20.8 percent) reporting any employment in the household; this may be due to the high rate of disability present in households (71.5 percent). Survey respondents reported incomes that were almost entirely (98.2 percent) below 250 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and the majority were also below 138 percent (89.6 percent), indicating that most respondents were likely income-eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other public benefits. However, only 62.7 percent of clients reported receiving SNAP in the 30 days prior to the survey. About 3 in 5 (61.4 percent) of respondents had a high school degree or less (table 1).

TABLE 1
Demographic and Social Characteristics of Surveyed Home Delivery Clients

	Percentage (%)/Mean
Food bank	
San Francisco-Marin Food Bank	92.4
Northern Illinois Food Bank	4.8
Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina	2.8
Gender	
Male	28.2
Female	69.1
Other/non-binary	1.6
Age	
18–29 years	5.9
30–44 years	12.4
45–59 years	10.2
60 years or older	71.5
Average household size	2.1
Household member employed	20.8
Annual household income	
At or below 138% FPL	89.6

	Percentage (%)/Mean
At or below 250% FPL	98.2
Benefits receipt in 30 days prior	
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)	62.7
Unemployment insurance benefits	3.3
Social Security (SSI, SSDI, or OASDI)	63.8
Women, Infants, and Children	9.8
Race/ethnicity	
Asian American or Pacific Islander	43.8
Other/Two or more races	18.7
White	14.5
Black	13.3
Hispanic/Latinx	9.5
Highest level of education attained	
Less than high school graduate	38.2
High school graduate or equivalent	23.2
Vocational training/vocational school	4.1
Some college, but no degree	15.5
A two-year or associate degree	6.8
A four-year or bachelor's degree	9.3
A postgraduate degree	3.0
Presence of disability in household	71.5

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, $n = 394$. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Participation in benefit programs may be underreported because of self-reporting. FPL = Federal Poverty Level; SSI = Supplementary Security Income; SSDI = Supplemental Security Disability Income; OASDI = Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance.

Many surveyed clients reported that they receive home delivery consistently, suggesting that they have consistent food needs. About half of surveyed clients are in their first year of receiving home delivery (49.7 percent), and the vast majority (92.6 percent) receive their food boxes weekly (figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Length of Time Receiving DoorDash Home Delivery among Home Delivery Clients

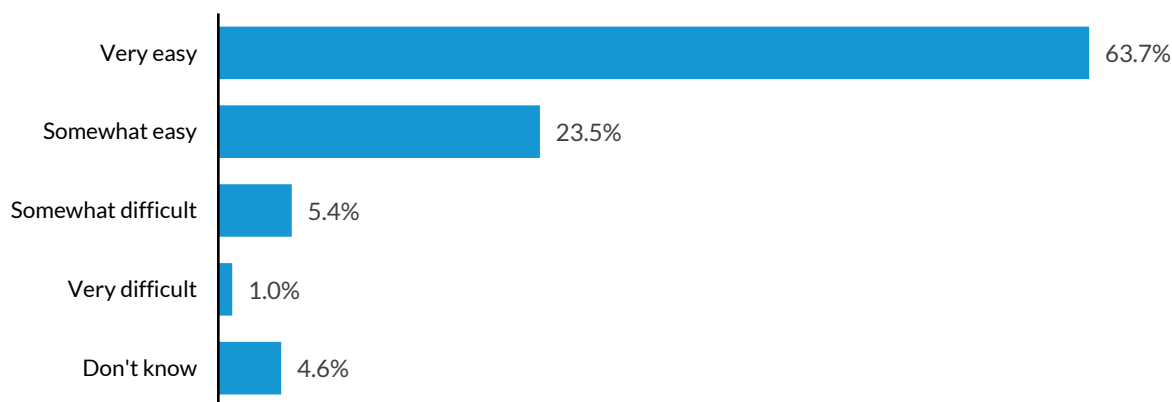


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Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, $n = 394$. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Clients also reported that getting connected to home delivery was easy, and they often got connected to services based on referrals from case workers or friend’s and family’s recommendations. The majority of clients (87.2 percent) reported enrolling into home delivery was “very” or “somewhat easy” (figure 3). About 1 in 3 (31.7 percent) reported hearing about the program from the food bank itself, while another third heard about it from other sources (figure 4). We heard from interviews other ways that clients heard about the program, and they may have been automatically enrolled into a home delivery program or were connected through a social worker, caseworker, or their child’s school. About 1 in 5 (21.7 percent) survey respondents reported hearing about it from family or friends.

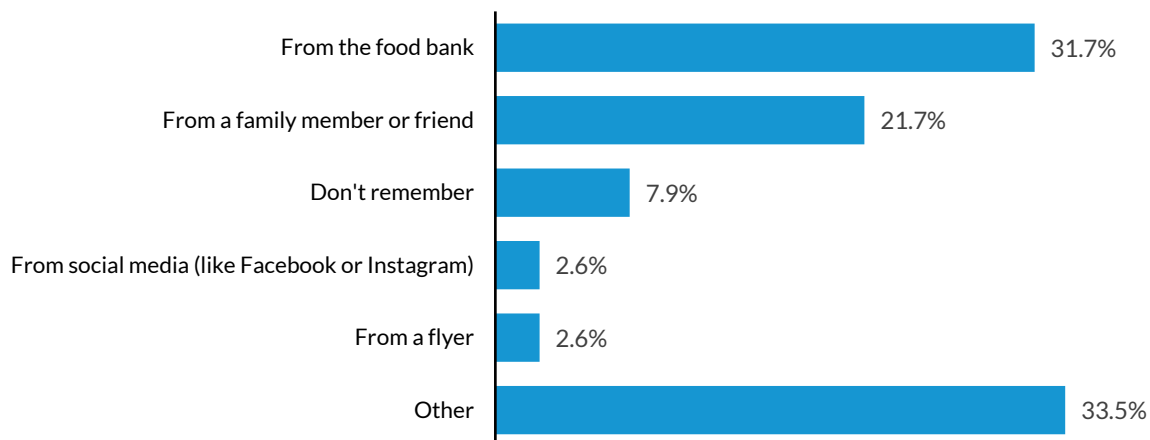
FIGURE 3
Ease of Enrolling into Home Delivery among Home Delivery Clients



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

FIGURE 4
How Home Delivery Clients Heard of the Program



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Motivations for Clients Accessing Home Delivery

Clients were motivated by convenience and constrained mobility when choosing to receive charitable food via home delivery. Most still reported buying at least some of their own groceries and, prior to the availability of home delivery through the food banks, they often relied on taking public transportation, walking and/or getting help from others to get charitable food. While findings reported through our survey are limited to the experiences of clients receiving services from the three food bank partners, they shed light on the importance of this service for senior and homebound populations.

Convenience of Home Delivery

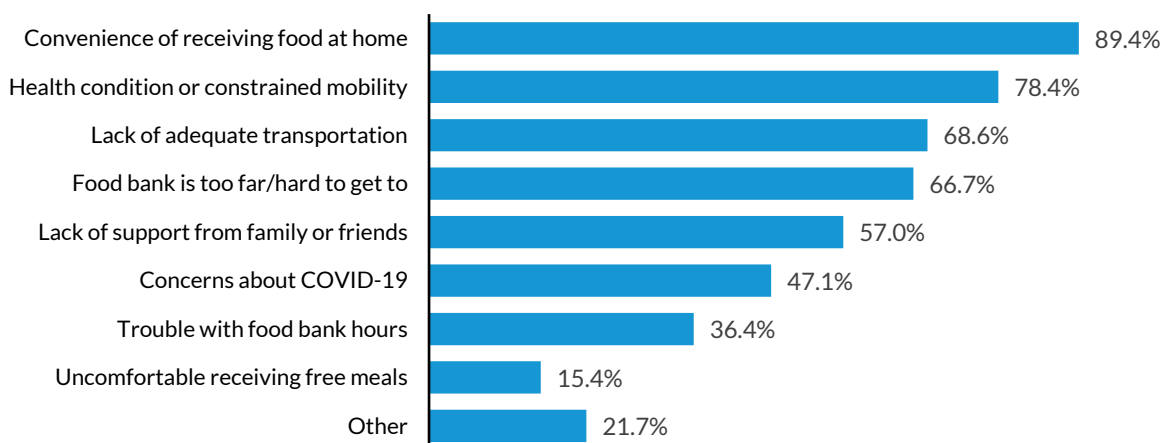
Home delivery may help clients experiencing food insecurity overcome barriers to getting resources while reducing anxiety about accessing food or asking others for assistance. We asked surveyed clients about their reasons for receiving home delivery (figure 5), and the most often selected response was the convenience of receiving food at home (89.4 percent. We did not find significant differences in respondents' likelihood to select convenience by age or disability status (and did not run these analyses by race or ethnicity due to sample size limitations); this indicates that convenience may be a more universally applicable motivation for all clients. In interviews, clients remarked that they valued the reliability of home delivery because they could count on receiving food on a regular schedule. For those who could order online, being able to “shop” ahead of time for a selection of food items was appreciated. The convenience of home delivery can also reduce stigma; 15.4 percent of respondents stated that a reason for seeking home delivery was their discomfort with receiving free meals, which can be visible to others when visiting a food distribution site.

Chronic Health Conditions and Constrained Mobility

Over 1 in 4 survey respondents cited trouble traveling to sites because of chronic health conditions or mobility limitations as a motivation for receiving home delivery (78.4 percent). We also found that respondents 60 and older and respondents with a disability were significantly more likely to cite this choice, compared to respondents younger than 60 or those without a disability, respectively. Overall, when all respondents were asked to rank which reason was most important in receiving home delivery, the highest ranked choice overall was due to chronic health conditions or mobility limitations (55.6 percent of respondents; data not shown). Another reason cited in survey responses included continuing concerns about COVID-19 exposure (47.1 percent; figure).

FIGURE 5

Reasons for Choosing Home Delivery among Clients



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select multiple response options.

Transportation Barriers

More than two-thirds of survey respondents cited a lack of adequate transportation (68.6 percent) and lack of accessibility of the food bank site (66.7 percent). We found that adults 60 and older were significantly more likely than their younger counterparts to cite lack of adequate transportation as reason for choosing home delivery (data not shown). More than half of survey respondents (57.0 percent) cited a lack of available support from family and friends, and approximately one-third cited trouble accessing food during open food bank hours (36.4 percent; figure 5). Moreover, we found that individuals with a disability were significantly more likely to cite lack of support from family or friends than those without a disability (data not shown).

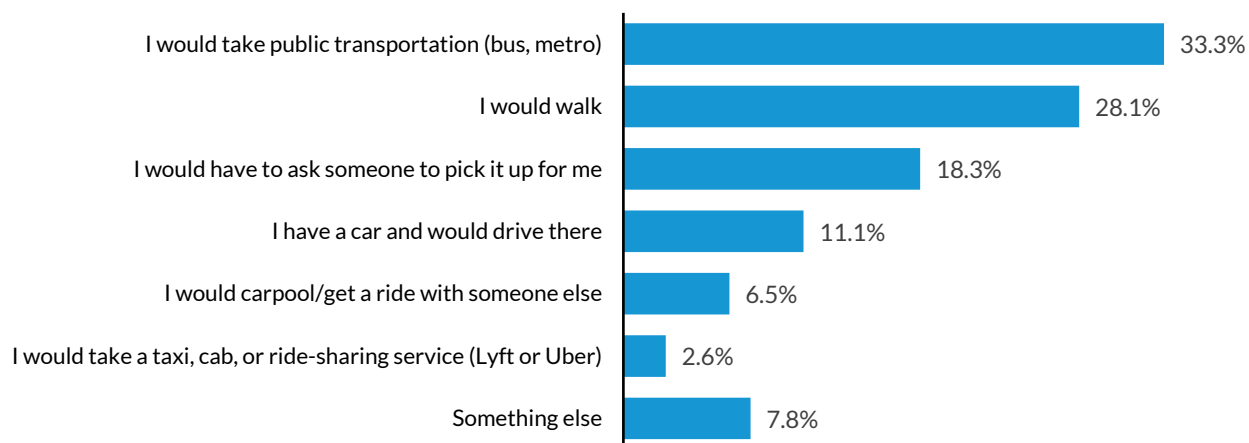
We did not find significant differences in reporting a lack of support from family or friends or inaccessibility of food bank hours between age groups or racial/ethnic groups, which again may point to the universality of this motivation among subgroups.⁶ In interviews, clients also mentioned that they appreciated not having to rely on family and friends as much for assistance and feeling a reduced sense of burden on others. One client shared, “I can’t drive anymore because of my disability, so the fact that I found out that I did not have to ask someone to go to the food bank, that I could have it delivered, that was, like, very good news for me.” Another client relayed that she had tried to coordinate food pick-ups with her brother but that had not worked out. The home delivery option had been an important resource for getting the food she needed. One client shared that home delivery had created new access

to charitable food because previously food boxes had been distributed at a local church that was not accessible for her.

As transportation barriers were a commonly cited reason for seeking home delivery, we examined the types of transportation modes that survey participants reported they had used to access charitable food before home delivery (figure 6). Nearly a third (33.3 percent) had previously taken public transportation and another quarter (28.1 percent) had walked to a food distribution site. About 1 in 6 (18.3 percent) reported that they had previously needed to ask someone to pick up food for them and another 6.5 percent had relied on carpooling or getting a ride with someone. Only about 1 in 10 (11.1 percent) reported having a car for pick-ups.

FIGURE 6

Usual Mode of Transportation to Charitable Food Site Before Delivery among Home Delivery Clients



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

In addition to statistical tests among age and disability subgroups, we conducted statistical tests among racial and ethnic subgroups where the sample size allowed us to assess whether motivations for using home delivery of charitable food among certain subgroups were stronger than for others (box 2).

BOX 2

Motivations for Home Delivery of Charitable Food among Racial Subgroups

We were largely able to run these statistical tests among the Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) subgroup given our larger sample size, which reflects the large AAPI population in the San Francisco Bay Area. We found that AAPI respondents were significantly more likely to report being motivated by chronic health conditions or constrained mobility than those who identified with other races or ethnicities. While the prevalence of disability is generally estimated to be lower among Asian populations compared to other groups in the US, this may be attributed to cultural norms and a lower rate of disability self-identification in available data.⁷ We were not able to run these tests for Black, white, or Hispanic subgroups due to insufficient cell sizes, so it's uncertain whether other groups were also affected.

We also found that AAPI respondents were significantly more likely to report concerns about COVID-19 exposure than non-AAPI respondents. Again, while we could not run these tests for other racial/ethnic groups in our sample, abundant literature shows that COVID-19 had disproportionate impacts on Black and Hispanic/Latinx subgroups (Graham 2021). Some literature also shows high impact on AAPI populations, particularly given the rise of xenophobia and racism against this group during the pandemic (Wang et al. 2020). Finally, respondents who identified as AAPI were significantly more likely than non-AAPI respondents to cite lack of adequate transportation and difficulty getting to food banks as issues, while Black respondents were significantly less likely to cite these issues compared to non-Black respondents; this could not be run for white or Hispanic subgroups.

Sources: Graham, Garth. 2021. "Addressing the Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color." *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* 8: 280–82. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40615-021-00989-7>;

Wang, Daniel, Gilbert C. Gee, Ehete Bahiru, Eric H. Yang, and Jeffrey J. Hsu. 2020. "Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders in COVID-19: Emerging Disparities Amid Discrimination." *J Gen Intern Med* 35(12):3685–88. doi: 10.1007/s11606-020-06264-5.

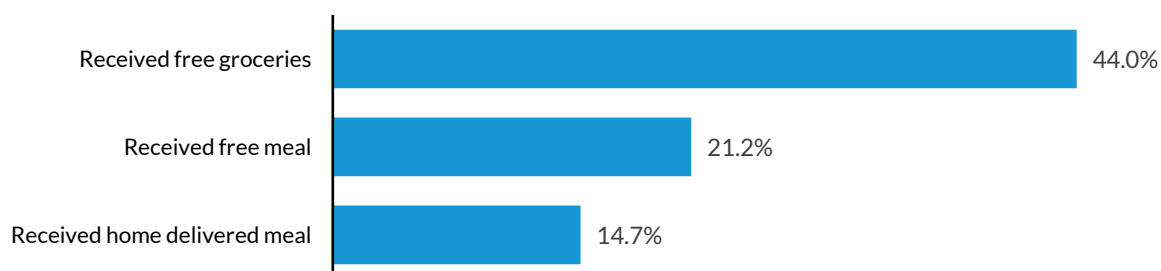
Meeting Food Needs Before Home Delivery

Survey respondents were also asked about their use of charitable food resources prior to participating in home delivery (figure 7). A little over half (55.2 percent) of clients reported receiving any type of charitable food before receiving DoorDash home delivery (data not shown). A little less than half (44.0 percent) previously reported receiving free groceries, such as that typically available from food banks and pantries. Most charitable food clients are less likely to receive prepared meals than groceries (Martinchek et al. 2023), and this was true of survey respondents as well, with only 21.2 percent reporting obtaining free meals prior to receiving home delivery. Approximately 1 in 6 (14.7 percent) reported they had previously received home-delivered meals at some point, which may reflect their prior need due to health issues. Given that many home delivery clients reported that they did not

receive charitable food prior to enrolling in their current program, this service may help clients meet food needs that were previously unaddressed. In interviews, clients mentioned multiple reasons for not accessing charitable food in the absence of a home delivery option, including an inability to stand in food pantry lines because of physical limitations, a lack of transportation to sites, and concerns about driving in the winter.

FIGURE 7

Receipt of Charitable Food Before Program, among Home Delivery Clients



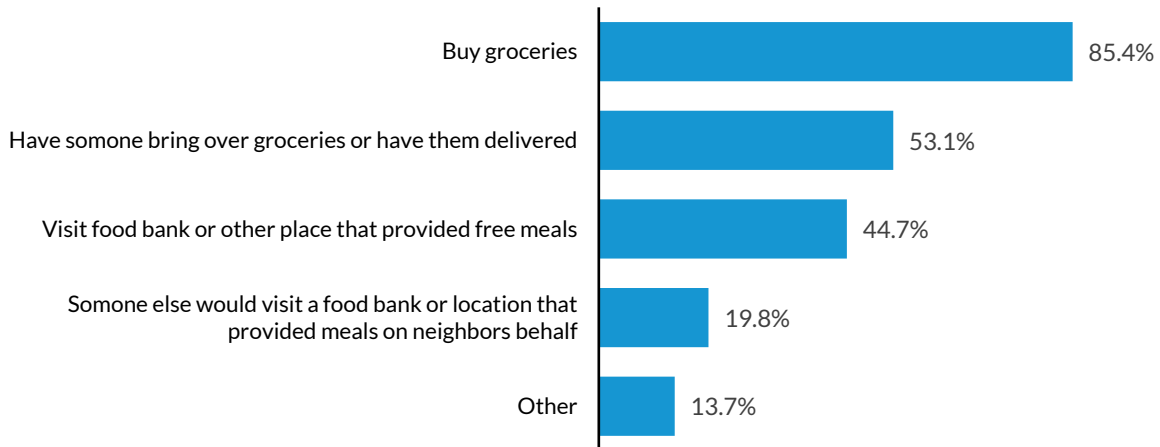
URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Prior to home delivery, clients used a variety of strategies to meet their food needs. As shown in figure 8, the vast majority of clients (85.4 percent) were purchasing at least some of their groceries on their own. More than half (53.1 percent) had someone bring purchased groceries over to them or used a delivery service for purchased groceries. A little more than 4 in 10 (44.7 percent) had visited a charitable food site directly, and about 1 in 5 (19.8 percent) had received charitable food because someone else had visited a site on behalf of the respondent.

FIGURE 8

How Food Needs were Met Before Charitable Home Delivery, among Home Delivery Clients



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Note: Respondents could select more than one response option.

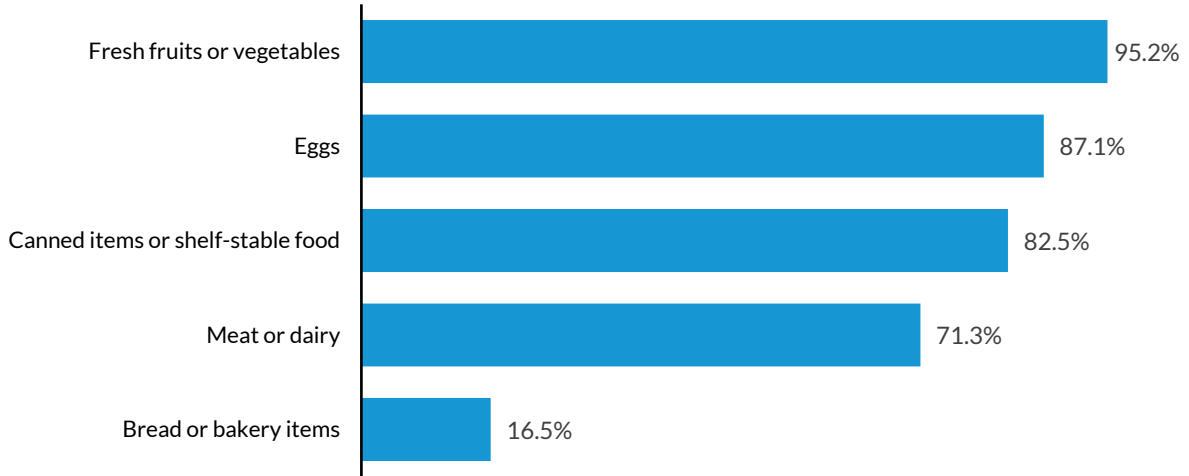
Clients’ Perceptions on Food Box Content

Home delivery clients often receive the types and quality of food they want via home delivery but value having greater choice and autonomy in what they receive. The majority of clients reported they typically receive fresh fruits or vegetables (92.5 percent), eggs (87.1 percent), or canned or shelf stable items (82.5 percent) in their home delivery boxes. Meat or dairy products are also relatively common while bread and bakery items are rarer (figure 9). About half of clients (54.8 percent) mention that choice is very important to them (data not shown), and interviewed clients agreed that choice is highly valuable.

In general, client opinions on the food received in home delivery boxes are positive with roughly 60 percent of clients agreeing that they always or often receive the variety of food that they need or want. A firm majority of clients also report that the food they receive is healthy and nutritious but were less satisfied with how that food fit their dietary needs or represented their culture (figure 10).

FIGURE 9

Types of Foods Typically Received in Home Delivery Boxes, among Home Delivery Clients



URBAN INSTITUTE

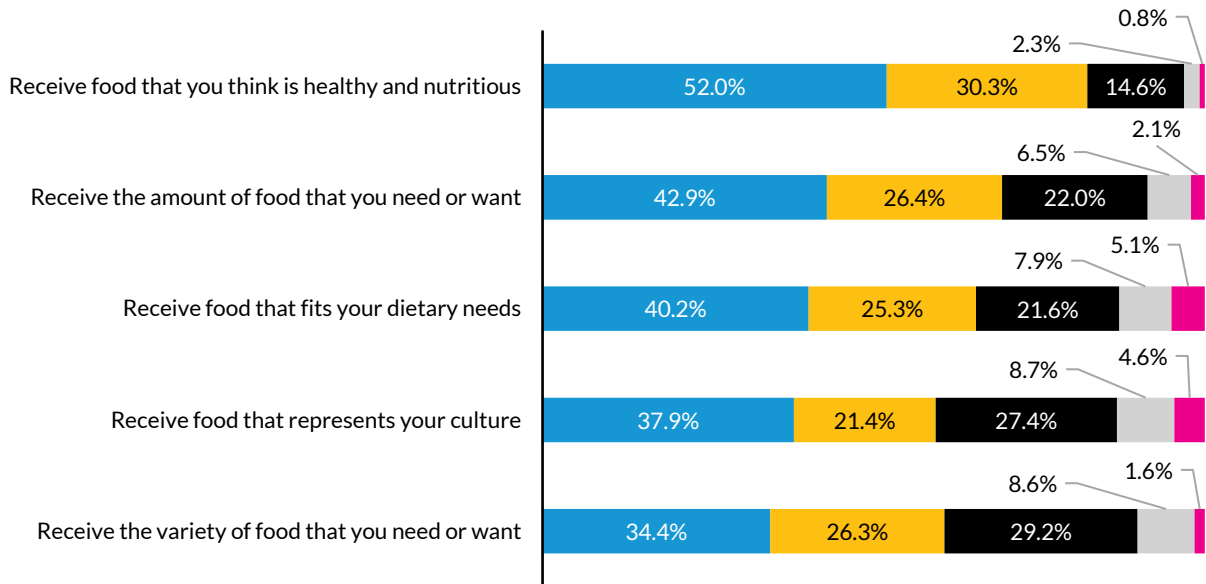
Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

FIGURE 10

Client Opinions on Food Received in Home Delivery Boxes

Always Often Sometimes Rarely Never



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Client Challenges with Home Delivery

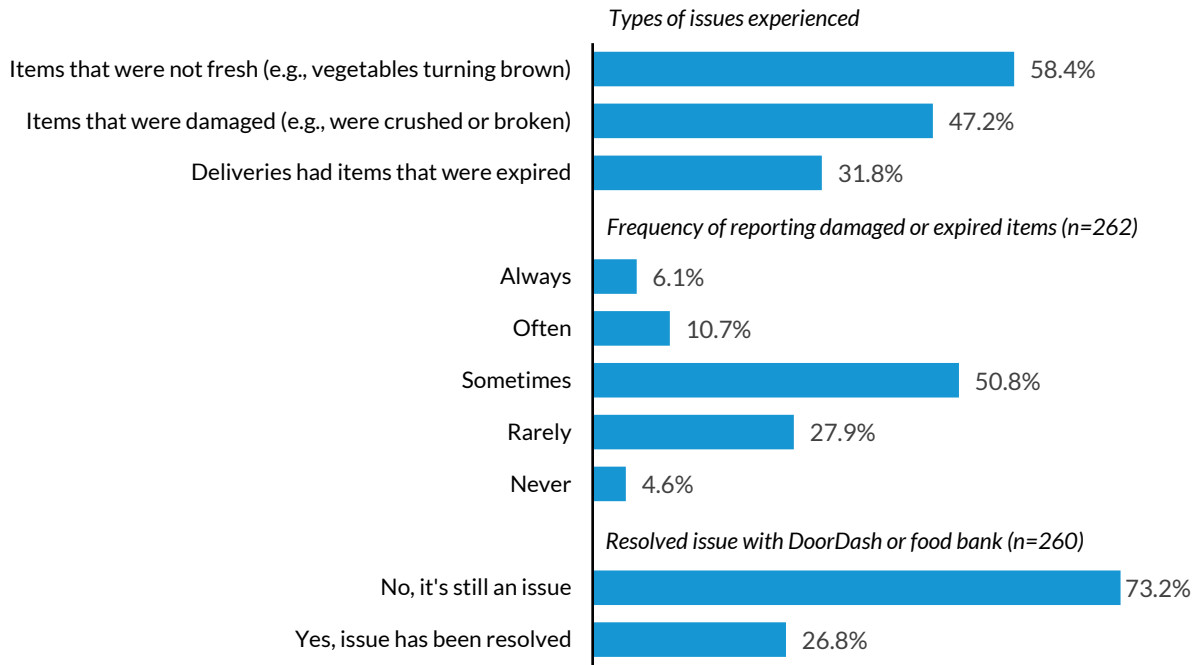
Despite the notable benefits and impact home delivery has had on clients' lives, no operation is without its challenges. Clients report experiencing issues with their home delivered boxes, either related to when the boxes arrive or related to the contents of the boxes being expired or not fresh. Some have also reported negative experiences with drivers who use the DoorDash platform.

Experiences with Content and Condition of Boxes Delivered

Receiving items that were not fresh, such as produce, appeared to be the most common experience; nearly 3 in 5 clients (58.4 percent) reported this issue. Feeding organizations in California do tend to provide more robust produce options than those in other states, which may contribute to this finding. This issue is also not necessarily unique to home delivery, as clients may experience damaged items when picking up food items directly from food banks. Additionally, 47.2 percent of clients reported receiving a delivery with damaged items and 31.8 percent reported expired items. Of those who reported issues with their delivered boxes, the issues were not frequent; 50.8 percent say they experienced issues “sometimes”: while only 16.8 percent reported “always” or “often” having damaged or expired contents in their boxes. However, these issues may not be resolved among most clients who report experiencing them; among those reporting issues with damaged or expired box contents, about 3 in 4 (73.5 percent) said that it was still an issue and that they have not been able to resolve it with DoorDash or the food bank providing the food (figure 11).

FIGURE 11

Experiences with Damaged or Expired Box Contents, among Home Delivery Clients



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

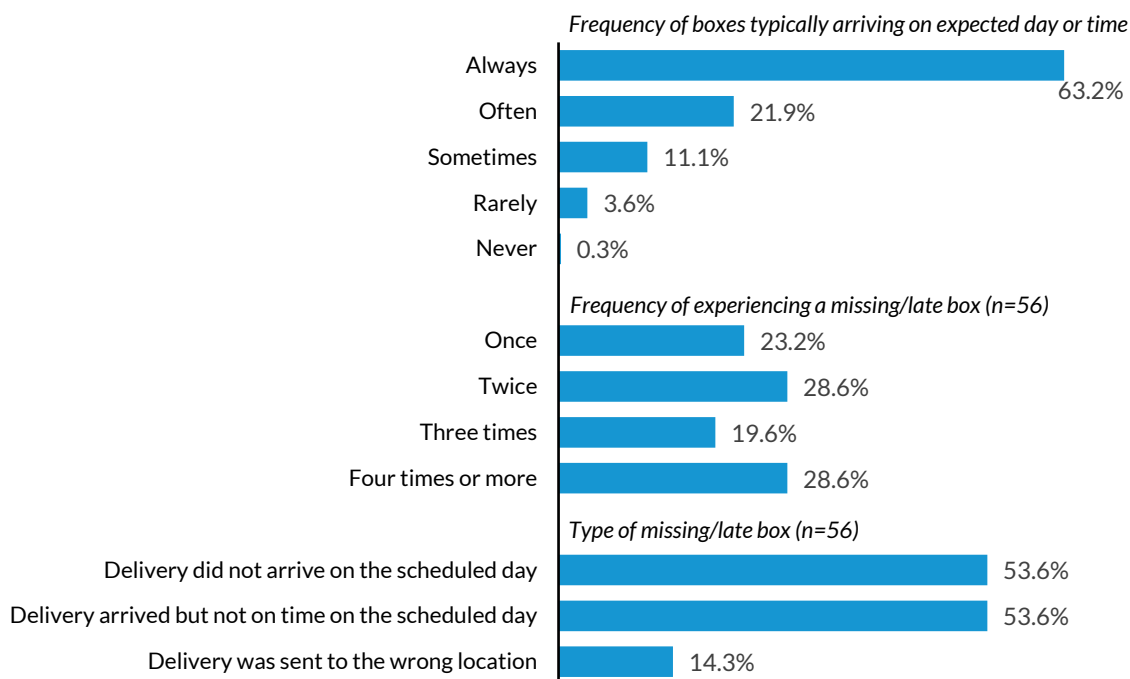
Notes: Frequency of receiving damaged or expired items and resolving the issue with DoorDash were both asked of those that reported experiencing any issue.

Boxes were likely to arrive on time for the majority of clients; 85.1 percent of survey respondents said that their boxes always or often arrived when expected. Of the 15 percent who had issues with late or missing boxes, 28.6 percent had experienced problems four times or more, indicating that there is a small percentage of clients who regularly experience trouble with their deliveries. When issues are experienced, it is most commonly related to the timing of when boxes are delivered. About half of clients experiencing issues (53.6 percent) reported boxes not being delivered on the expected day or at the expected time. In a few cases, boxes are delivered to the wrong location (14.3 percent) (figure 12).

"It comes on different days. And sometimes I don't know delivery had come by until someone in the area says, 'Did you get your delivery?' For the last month, I didn't know it was coming, and I was gone." –Client receiving home delivery in North Carolina

FIGURE 12

Experiences with Box Delivery Timing, Among Home Delivery Clients



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Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Frequency and type of missing/late box was asked of respondents that indicated boxes sometimes, rarely, or never arrive on time. *Respondents could select more than one response option.

Interactions with Home Delivery Drivers

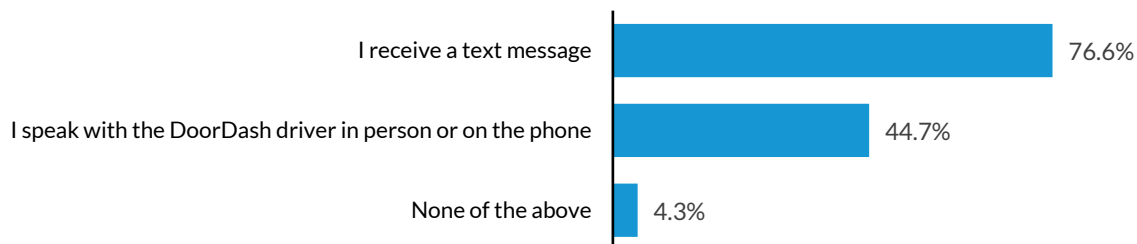
Clients identified ways that Dashers had been helpful when delivering food boxes. A third of clients in the survey reported that Dashers had brought food boxes inside for them, which they found very helpful. For example, one interviewed client noted that she lives on the third floor of an apartment building and the Dashers had carried the boxes upstairs which was helpful because of her back issues.

There are also a number of challenges that can arise for clients when communicating and interacting with Dashers. Some home delivery clients do not have access to a cell phone and may struggle to communicate with app-driven delivery services. Eleven percent of surveyed clients did not have a cell phone. We also found that the majority of those who did not have a phone were 60 or older, and those 60 or older were significantly less likely to have a cell phone and significantly more likely to have a land line (data not shown).

Given the design of the delivery system, when receiving their home deliveries, about 3 in 4 (76.6 percent) clients interacted with Dashers through text messages. However, about half (44.7 percent) of clients talked with Dashers in person or over the phone, indicating that communicating solely through the app or text may not be ideal for many home delivery recipients (figure 13).

FIGURE 13

How Clients Typically Interact with Dashers



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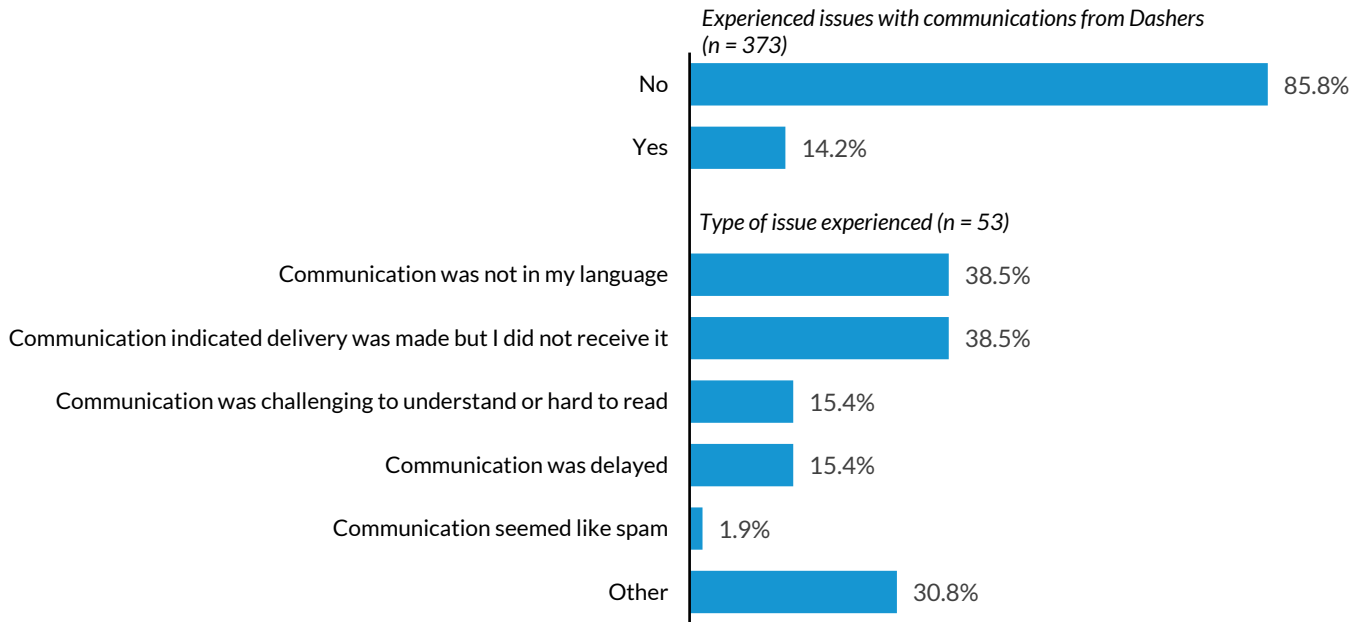
Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, $n = 394$. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

Overall communications with Dashers was not a major issue with clients, as only 14.2 percent of survey respondents reported challenges with the communications they receive. Among those who do report issues, one of the most common issues was the presence of a language barrier. Whether through a text, in-app notifications, or speaking with Dashers, of the clients who reported communication issues, 38.5 percent said it was due to issues with language. Language accessibility is crucial for clients, especially in communities with high rates of immigrant populations. In a client interview, a daughter responded to questions as her mother did not speak English and expressed that the ability to be a secondary contact for her mother’s deliveries is critical. The daughter receives text messages alerting her when the boxes have arrived, and she passes this information to her mother. Faulty communications were also cited as an issue, with 38.5 percent of clients reporting receiving messages saying a delivery was made when it had not (figure 14).

FIGURE 14

Issues Experienced while Communicating with Dashers, among Home Delivery Clients



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Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 374. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Issues experienced with communications was asked only to survey respondents who reported they interact with Dashers. Type of issues experienced was asked to respondents who indicated “yes” to experiencing an issue with communications. For type of issue experienced, respondents could select more than one response option.

Other less common issues also exist like clients finding communications difficult to understand or difficulty with using cell phones. As one client noted:

"The smartphone is too little, it's not easy for us—me—maybe American people it's okay, but my age people are not good with smartphones." –Client receiving home delivery in Illinois

Impact of Home Delivery on Clients

Clients reported how impactful the receipt of home delivery has been on their well-being, and they most predominantly cited money and time savings, and the ability to care for their health. Antihunger organizations shared their perspectives on client impacts and strongly agreed that improving food access overall has been a major positive benefit of home delivery.

Household Budget Relief

Clients felt that home delivery helped them save money and stretch public benefits further, providing crucial economic support. An overwhelming majority of clients surveyed (97.8 percent) reported that receiving home delivery has helped their finances and household budget. Among the clients that reported this, most (97.8 percent) reported that home delivery helped reduce grocery and transportation costs (79.4 percent) associated with meeting their food needs (figure 15). In interviews, clients described how home delivery may have been especially helpful as costs associated with groceries have been on the rise over the past year and a half and noted that receiving healthy foods (like protein and produce) can be especially useful as these are more costly (Martinchek et al. 2023).

“It makes a difference by my budget. It makes a big difference. Because stuff is so high now in the stores.”—Client receiving home delivery in North Carolina

FIGURE 15
Client Perspective on How Home Delivery Impacted their Household Budget



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, sample among those that said home delivery has helped with household budget, n = 370. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

For many clients receiving home delivery, charitable food is one resource out of many that they draw on to meet their food needs. Several of the clients we interviewed acknowledged that home delivery is supplemental to other services, including accessing other charitable food services and relying on public benefits. A majority of clients (87.6 percent) surveyed reported that home delivery helped them stretch their public benefits (figure 16). One interviewee highlighted how home delivery became a key resource as SNAP benefits changed over the course of the pandemic:

"Beautiful service, especially since they went back to the non-pandemic food stamp allowance."—Client receiving home delivery in Illinois

Time Savings and Ability to Engage in Important Activities

Clients receiving home delivery identified time savings as a key advantage of the service. In interviews with clients receiving home delivery, they reported that delivery saved time that may have otherwise been spent waiting in line at food pantries and meal programs and traveling to get there. These burdens are especially important to alleviate because, as described above, many clients experience health challenges that make standing in line and traveling to charitable food locations physically burdensome and time-intensive.

Survey respondents identified multiple ways that home delivery had supported them in taking care of themselves or their families (figure 17).). The vast majority cited its value in taking care of their own health (88.8 percent), while 28.8 percent said it helped them as they were caring for someone else who was sick. A similar proportion (26.6 percent) said home delivery assisted them while they spent time caring for their children or grandchildren. Adults older than 60 and those with disabilities were significantly less likely to report spending time caring for children or grandchildren. About two-thirds identified home delivery as supporting their ability to do activities they enjoyed (65.3 percent) and in spending time with their family (61.8 percent), which encompass two important aspects of well-being. Nearly a third (28.8 percent) reported that a benefit of home delivery was support in doing their job or schoolwork (figure 16). Both younger adults (younger than 60) and respondents without disabilities were significantly more likely to report support in doing their job or schoolwork as a benefit.

BOX 3

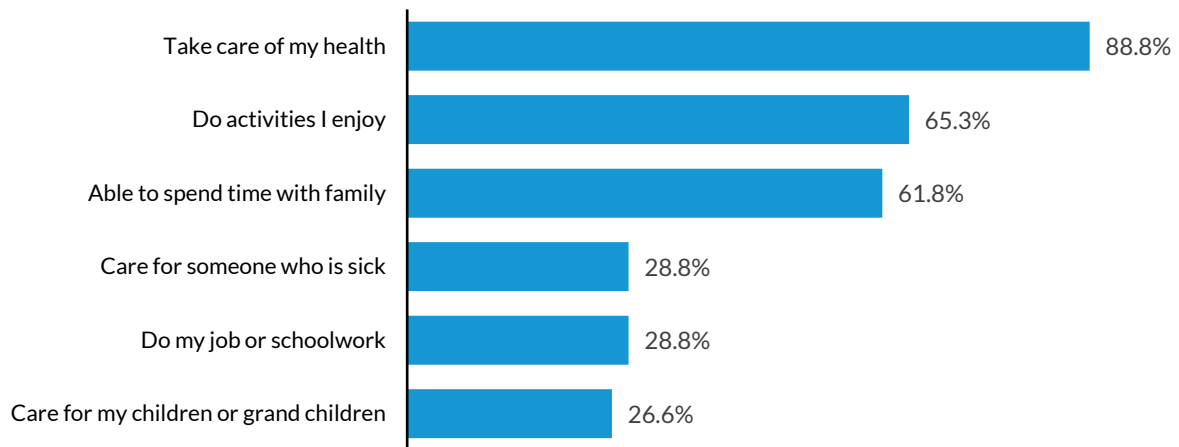
Benefits of Home Delivery among Racial and Ethnic Subgroups

Similar to our assessment of differences in motivations by racial and ethnic subgroups (see box 2), we also conducted statistical tests among racial and ethnic subgroups where the sample size allowed to assess whether benefits for certain subgroups were stronger than for others. Again, we were only able to run these tests among the Asian American or Pacific Islander (AAPI) subgroup given our larger sample size, which reflects the large AAPI population in the San Francisco Bay Area. These tests were not run for Black, white, or Hispanic subgroups. We did not find a significant difference in the percent of respondents reporting caring for someone else who was sick or having support in doing their job or schoolwork as a benefit between AAPI and non-AAPI respondents, suggesting the universality of these benefits. However, AAPI respondents were significantly less likely to report spending time caring for children or grandchildren than non-AAPI respondents. Research shows that Asian American households generally place strong values on parenthood, which may suggest that this was already a priority for these households prior to receiving home delivery and not a perceived benefit (Pew Research Center 2012).

Source: "THE RISE OF ASIAN AMERICANS. Chapter 5: Family and Personal Values," Pew Research Center, June 19, 2012, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2012/06/19/chapter-5-family-and-personal-values/>.

FIGURE 16

Benefits Experienced by Clients as a Result of Home Delivery



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting home delivery clients, n = 394. Survey conducted June 1–July 17, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

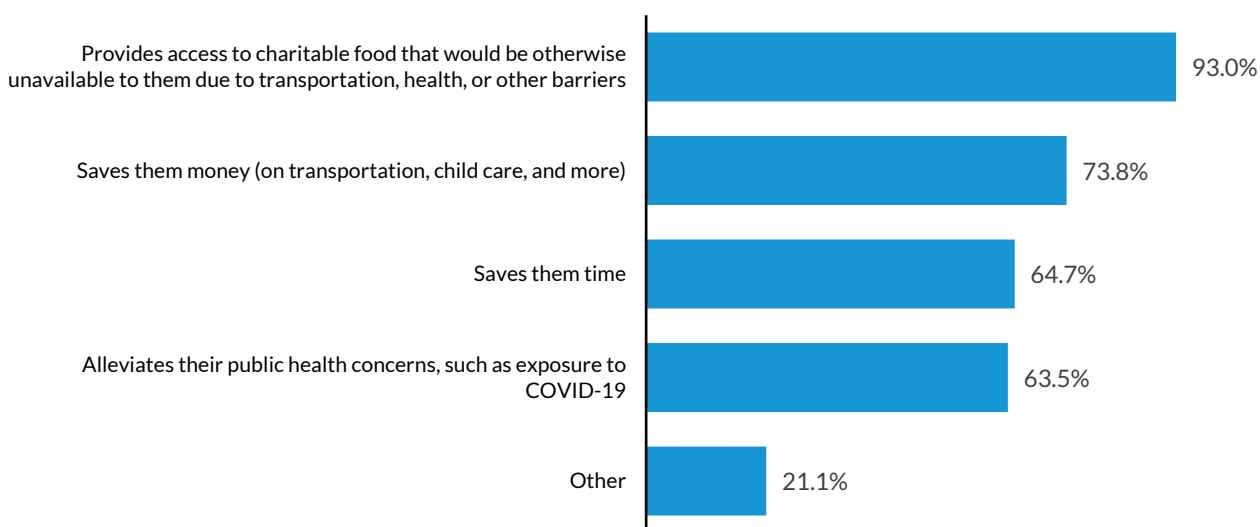
Antihunger Organizations' Perspectives on Client Impact

We also surveyed Project DASH antihunger organizations to ask their perceptions of how home delivery may benefit the clients they serve (figure 17). The vast majority cited the ability to obtain charitable food that clients might otherwise not be able to access because of transportation, health, or other barriers.

One organization commented that home delivery allowed them to easily reach a population who struggles significantly with food insecurity. They added that, in their community, there was a lack of transportation in a town that also had no supermarket. Approximately three-quarters (73.8 percent) of organizational respondents indicated that home delivery saved clients' money— for example, on transportation or child care costs, they might incur to visit an in-person site. Saving time and alleviating public health concerns were also identified as benefits to clients (64.7 percent and 63.5 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 17

Antihunger Organization Perspective on Client Benefits from Participating in Home Delivery



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of Project DASH antihunger organization partners, $n = 88$. Survey conducted June 26 – July 19, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

Project DASH Partner Experiences with Home Delivery Partnerships

The responding antihunger organizations partnering with Project DASH answered basic questions about their home delivery partnership with DoorDash. Many organizations' Project DASH home delivery programs serve communities in urban (61.4 percent) and suburban (58 percent) areas, while fewer serve communities in rural areas (19.3 percent). About half of surveyed organizations (54.6 percent) serve fewer than 100 clients at least once a month through Project DASH, and almost all organizations prioritize serving seniors (92 percent), people with a disability (85.2 percent), and people who lack transportation (83 percent). About 3 in 5 organizations (62.3 percent) directly coordinate the home delivery process, while 1 in 4 (24.1 percent) do both direct coordination and partnership with local agencies to coordinate.

Organizations engage in coordination activities such as scheduling deliveries to clients, packing bags/boxes for delivery, managing enrollment, handling client inquiries, and purchasing and storing food. While agencies affiliated with the antihunger organization were the most common program type using home delivered boxes (meaning boxes built by the affiliate agencies) (39.8 percent), partners also use home delivery for programs supported through federal nutrition funding, including the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) (21.6 percent) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) for seniors (21.6 percent). In addition to shelf-stable items, most food boxes provided through the Project DASH home delivery program contain fresh produce at least monthly (79.5 percent; see table 2).

Additionally, 15 intermediary United Way organizations responded to the second organizational survey (a 33 percent response rate). Six (40 percent) serve less than 50 clients through home delivery and five (33 percent) serve between 50 and 500 clients. The populations served by these organizations match largely with populations served by antihunger organizations, and include seniors, families with children, and people who lack transportation (table 2). One of the differentiating characteristics about United Way partners is that many (60 percent) also include non-food items in their boxes such as pet food, hygiene products, diapers, baby supplies, pet food, and additional necessities (data not shown).

TABLE 2

Characteristics of Surveyed Project DASH Antihunger Partners

	Percentage (%)
Type of organization	
Food bank or other antihunger organization	79.3
Other	26.1
Method of providing home delivery through Project DASH	
Coordinated directly by lead partner organization	63.2
Coordinated with other agency partners	12.6
Both	24.1
Activities performed by organization related to home delivery*	
Schedule deliveries to clients	93.2
Pack grocery bags/boxes for delivery	90.9
Manage participant enrollment in home delivery	87.5
Handle inquiries from home delivery clients	87.5
Purchase and store food used in the home delivery program	78.4
Number of clients receiving Project DASH deliveries at least once/month	
Less than 100	54.5
100-500	34.1
500-1,000	4.5
1,000-5,000	4.5
More than 5,000	2.3
Populations served by home delivery/Project DASH*	
Seniors (adults 65 and older)	92.0
People with disabilities	85.2
People who lack transportation	83.0
People with chronic illnesses	73.9
Families with children	76.1
Veterans	67.0
Immunocompromised people	54.5
Pregnant or post-partum people	52.3
Other	10.2
Geographic areas served*	
Urban/metropolitan area	61.4
Suburban, mix of urban and rural areas	58.0
Rural area	19.3
Programs used with Project DASH*	
Partner agency-led home delivery	39.8
The Emergency Food Assistance Program	38.6
Commodity Supplemental Food Program (USDA senior boxes)	21.6
Produce prescriptions, or food boxes for specific health needs	19.3
Other prepared meals	19.3
Child-specific programs	12.5
Tailored meals (prepared meals for specific dietary needs)	11.4
Contents of home delivery boxes beyond shelf-stable food (at least monthly)*	
Fresh produce	79.5

	Percentage (%)
Other perishable items	75.0
Nonfood items	36.4

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, *n* = 88. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: * Respondents could select more than one response option.

Home Delivery Partnerships at the Start of the Pandemic

The pandemic accelerated innovation and desire for implementing home delivery options for antihunger organizations. The majority of Project DASH antihunger organization partners started engaging in home delivery at the start of the pandemic; only 8 percent of surveyed antihunger organizations had been providing home delivery for over five years. A little over one in 4 (28.4 percent) were in their first year of providing home delivery, and about half (47.7 percent) had been providing the service for one to two years (table 3). Nine (60 percent) of the United Way intermediary organizations also started partnering with DoorDash after the pandemic, so in the past one to two years (data not shown). Some interviewed organizations didn’t have home delivery on their radar prior to the pandemic, such as the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina, while others expanded their existing services to additional clients in need, such as San Francisco-Marin Food Bank.

Commonly in antihunger organization operations, and especially at the start of the pandemic, volunteers made up much of the workforce. Among the 3 in 5 (56.8 percent) organizations that offered home delivery prior to partnering with DoorDash, the majority (94.0 percent) relied on volunteers and paid staff members (table 3). Amigos Del Valle Food Bank reported having roughly six people delivering between 30–60 meals. Additionally, San Francisco-Marin Food Bank piloted recruiting and managing their own volunteers for home delivery; however, as pandemic restrictions eased, volunteer numbers dropped, making this model less reliable. As the pandemic progressed, so too did the breadth of partnerships that antihunger organizations began to use to provide home delivery. Bread for the City reported that they received several offers for delivery partnerships early in the pandemic, with their motivation stemming from public health guidelines limiting in-person contact. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina implemented a pilot program with another service and a community partner, though this was logistically difficult and did not go smoothly. Bread for the City reported using Uber Eats and Amazon services to provide home delivery.

Many antihunger organizations have come to rely on their partnership with DoorDash to provide home delivery. Roughly half (45.4 percent) of surveyed partners do not currently provide home delivery

outside of their DoorDash partnership; those that use other methods report relying on volunteers most heavily (58.3 percent) followed by DoorDash (20.8 percent; table 3). Northern Illinois Food Bank reported they were able to explore home delivery further as a result of their partnership, stating, “We had just finalized our strategic priorities for the next year, and decided that home delivery wasn’t in the cards, because it was too big of a monster to tackle. And then DoorDash came along, and we were thinking, you know, DoorDash, their main job is home delivery, and if they’re offering home delivery to us for free, we have to pivot and explore that option.”

TABLE 3
Experiences with Home Delivery, With and Without DoorDash, among Antihunger Organizations

	Percentage (%)
Length of time serving clients through home delivery through any program	
Less than 1 year	28.4
1–2 years	47.7
2–5 years	15.9
More than 5 years	8.0
Offered home delivery prior to DoorDash partnership	56.8
Delivery model used prior to DoorDash partnership* (n = 50)	
Volunteers or paid agency staff	94.0
Other corporate partners (Amazon, Lyft, etc.)	8.0
Other	6.0
Other methods of home delivery currently used outside of DoorDash	54.6
Current most relied on method for home delivery** (n = 48)	
Volunteers	58.3
DoorDash	20.8
Paid staff	10.4
Another corporate partner (Amazon, Lyft, etc.)	6.3
Other	4.2

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, n = 88. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: *Among those organizations that report offering home delivery prior to DoorDash partnership. Respondents could select more than one delivery model. **Among those that report using methods of home delivery outside of DoorDash.

Benefits of Home Delivery Partnerships for Antihunger Organizations

Given the increased demand for services during the pandemic, private-sector partnerships can be highly beneficial to antihunger organizations with limited capacity. Food banks and other antihunger organizations reported several benefits to partnering with DoorDash to provide home delivery, such as

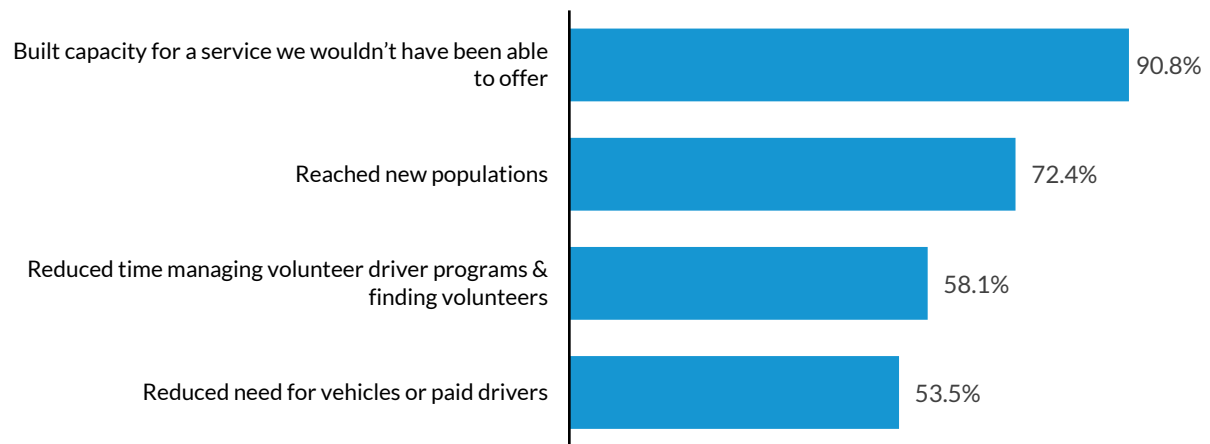
alleviating capacity challenges, reducing stigma for clients, providing services to hard-to-reach populations, and overall increasing the number of clients served.

Alleviating Capacity Challenges

Partnering with private partners with expertise in delivery can alleviate capacity challenges faced by hunger organizations in executing what are often referred to as last-mile delivery options⁸ because they serve as a bridge from a hub to individual households. Many of the Project DASH partner antihunger organizations that we interviewed reported that partnering with DoorDash helps increase organizational capacity and their ability to meet community needs. Specifically, interviewees described how partnering with DoorDash saved them transportation costs and staff time in delivering meals. One interviewee reported: “Without DoorDash’s involvement they [our partner agencies] were able to handle maybe 10 clients [for home delivery], and now all four of those agencies have said that they’re feeling really good with serving 40 clients that they each have.” Many Project DASH partners shared this experience, with 90.8 percent of surveyed antihunger organizations reporting that partnering with DoorDash allowed them to build capacity for services they otherwise would not be able to offer, about three-quarters (72.4 percent) reporting that they could reach new populations, and over half naming reduced staff time (58.1 percent) and reduced transportation costs (53.5 percent) as key capacity-expanding benefits of the partnership (figure 18).

FIGURE 18

Organizational Benefits from Participating in Project DASH, among Antihunger Organizations



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, $n = 88$. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Bringing Services to Hard-to-Reach Populations

Many organizations prioritize populations who face outsized transportation barriers to accessing in-person services who can benefit greatly from home delivery programs. For the majority of Project DASH partners (93 percent of antihunger organizations, see figure 19, and all of surveyed United Way partners, data not shown), the ability to address transportation or time barriers for clients was the motivating factor for the partnership. Older adults, for example, may face mobility constraints and are a primary target population for most antihunger organizations (92 percent serve seniors, 85.2 percent serve people with disabilities, and 83 percent serve people who lack transportation; see table 2). For example, Amigos Del Valle focuses home delivery on those that are homebound and age 62 or above. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina provides home delivery via CSFP and noted that seniors were the first population they focused on to receive home delivery with DoorDash.

Other antihunger organizations have broader eligibility for residents with income constraints or populations who may want greater anonymity in receiving charitable food. For example, Bread for the City does not have strict eligibility requirements but instead use general guidelines of populations living below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Northern Illinois Food Bank used a geo-spatial approach by overlaying a map of their My Pantry Express deliveries with a 'Proximity of Resources and Needs map' to identify high-priority areas to serve. Through this program, they also target college students, veterans, rural communities, and Latinx communities to reduce stigma in receiving charitable food among these populations. Northern Illinois's other program, the Winnebago Community Market, has clients self-attest their income among other information such as household size and SNAP receipt to determine eligibility.

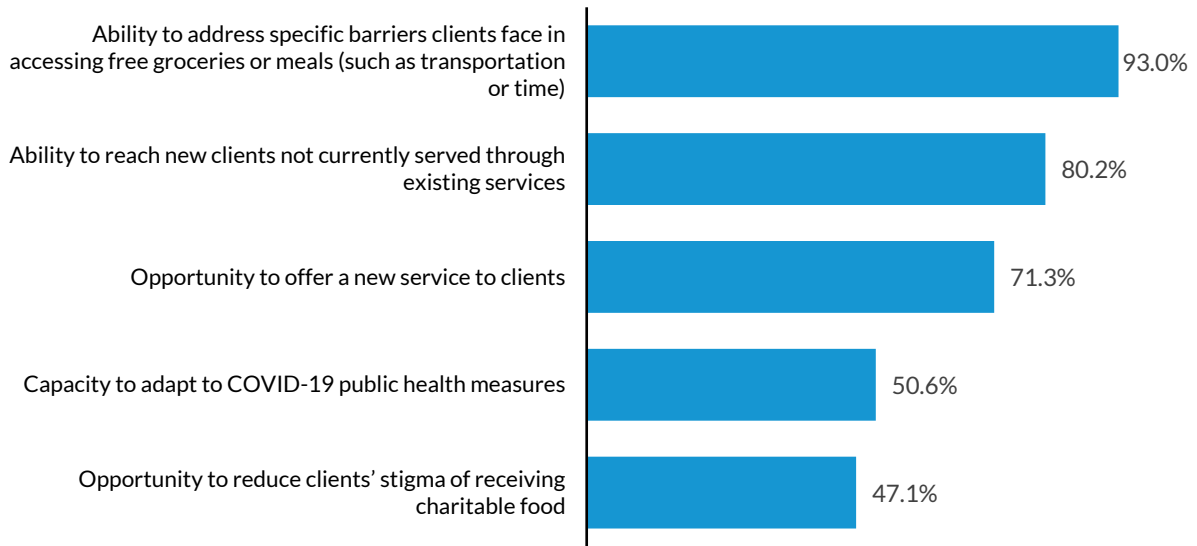
Increasing the Number of People Served

Home delivery partnerships have not only built the capacity to reach those who experience barriers to accessing charitable food, they also have allowed nonprofit partners to scale their efforts to reach many more community members than previously possible. In many cases, Project DASH antihunger organization partners cited being able to reach new clients not previously served; 80 percent of antihunger organizations responding to the survey reported that a motivating factor in seeking a DoorDash partnership was the ability to reach new people in need (figure 19). Northern Illinois Food Bank was able to more than double the capacity for their program through its DoorDash partnership—growing from serving about 800 households per week to 1800 households. Moreover, NIFB staff commented that it allowed them to support this level of service much more efficiently than would otherwise be possible without a partnership. Although its home delivery program was smaller in overall

size, the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina reported that it nearly tripled its capacity for delivery through external partnerships with DoorDash and other organizations, going from approximately 100 households to 279 households served. A team member remarked: “We’ve really been able to, kind of, push our boundaries, being able to rely on DoorDash.” Bread for the City also commented that previous efforts to provide delivery through volunteer-run efforts had served a much smaller population than was now possible through the partnership model.

FIGURE 19

Motivating Factors for Antihunger Organizations Partnering with DoorDash



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, *n* = 88. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Reducing Stigma by Offering Low-Contact Charitable Food Options

Project DASH antihunger organizations reported that home delivery may alleviate clients’ concerns for greater anonymity when accessing charitable food and support feelings of self-sufficiency. Several organizations described in interviews how they focused on offering home delivery to populations who could benefit from anonymity and reduced stigma that home delivery provides. Some of the populations of concern identified in interviews included college students, veterans, immigrant families, and rural communities as potential beneficiaries because of clients’ concerns of being seen and stigmatized for accessing charitable food options. This was mirrored across our surveyed antihunger organizations, with about half (47.1 percent) reporting that they started the home delivery program with DoorDash with reducing clients’ stigma in mind. Northern Illinois Food Bank described home delivery as more

“palatable” post-pandemic, especially as the normalization of delivering groceries increased. Northern Illinois continues to prioritize reducing stigma by delivering in unmarked boxes without their food bank’s logo, mimicking grocery delivery services. Interviewed clients appreciated the confidentiality of home delivery options and described how they appreciated that they could access the food they needed without having to rely on family and friends to get them to charitable food locations, feeling judged for attending food pantries, or having to fill out a lot of paperwork with personal details to receive support.

Challenges to Operating Home Delivery Partnerships for Antihunger Organizations

Although the program is highly valued by anti-hunger organizations, Project DASH partners faced some challenges in logistics and meeting increased demand.

Managing Client Concerns with Delivery Personnel Interactions

Three-quarters of Project DASH antihunger organizations (75.9 percent) reported they had needed to address some client complaints about interactions with Dashers, such as delivering food to wrong locations, being unresponsive, or being perceived as rude (figure 20). In interviews, antihunger organizations reported that Project DASH team members were responsive when these and other challenges were brought to their attention.

Adjusting Internal Processes

While partnerships with firms like DoorDash have greatly expanded service capacity for antihunger organizations and other nonprofits without requiring large investments in new infrastructure, organizations have learned that these partnerships can present new operational challenges, and that they must develop or adjust their own internal processes to match their delivery partner’s processes and to scale up operations. As shown in figure 20, nearly 4 in 10 (37.2 percent) antihunger organization survey respondents reported that they experienced a variety of technological issues in launching and managing their home delivery partnerships, such as managing online sign-ups or reaching home delivery clients through technology such as text.

A similar rate of United Way partnerships (40 percent, data not shown) identified technological challenges in managing home delivery partnerships. Nearly a third (31.8 percent) of antihunger organizations and nearly half (46.6 percent, data not shown) of United Way partners reported that they struggled with their own staff capacity to manage the home delivery program. Over time, organizations

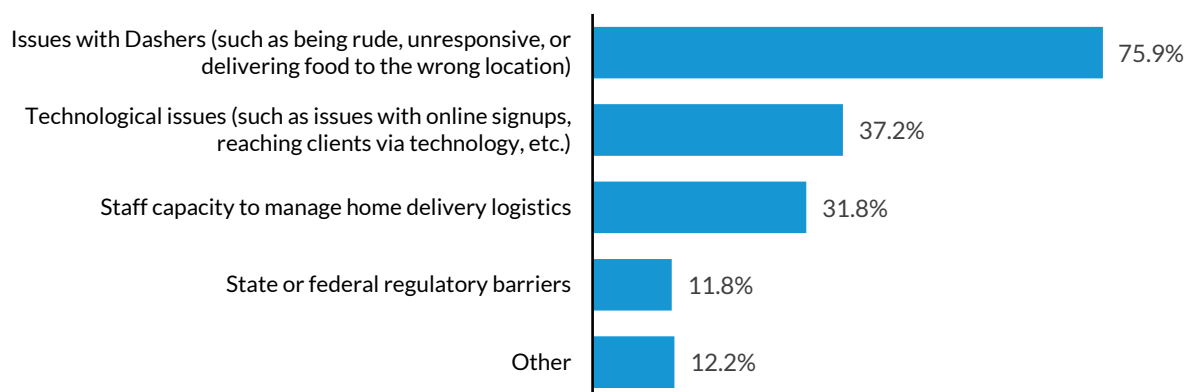
such as Northern Illinois Food Bank developed strategies for improving the pick-up of food from a large number of DoorDash drivers, such as creating checklists for volunteers managing the loading of deliveries. They also began exploring ways to automate their administrative processes for issues like cancelled orders so that these would require less administrative time.

Meeting Increased Demand for Home Delivery

There is significant demand for home delivery services at antihunger organizations, and many organizations reported having community needs that outpaced organizational capacity to provide meals. Roughly 1 in 3 (31.8 percent) of surveyed antihunger organizations cited limited staff capacity to handle logistics as a challenge to home delivery (figure 20). Some interviewed food banks, like Northern Illinois Food Bank, cited capping enrollment and using a prioritized waitlist to alleviate some of the demand. Due to the overwhelming number of referrals, their home delivery grew quickly from roughly 30 to 650 clients weekly. Amigos Del Valle uses DoorDash for their Meals on Wheels program that provides lunch to seniors three times a week, but also uses a waitlist among the clients served given high demand. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina receives between 3–39 referrals each week and has difficulty sustaining capacity for the increased client load. Clients are also affected by the increased demand. One interviewed client explained that she has to sign up for a delivery each week and noted that spots often fill up immediately. Because of this, she can typically only sign up twice per month and said during an interview, “Yesterday I went to sign up, and there were no more spots by 9 a.m.”

FIGURE 20

Perceived Organizational Challenges Encountered in Participating in Project DASH



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, $n = 88$. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select multiple response options.

Being Responsive to Client Needs and Preferences

Antihunger organizations aim to be responsive to client's needs in developing and implementing home delivery programs, but prioritizing choice of food items can be difficult when juggling increased demand. Clients prefer receiving fresh produce and culturally appropriate items, but these can be challenging to source (Martinchek et al. 2022). Food banks and other nonprofits contended with inflation's effects on food prices in 2022 and lower rates of donations from grocery stores. As a result, they haven't been able to source as much food and have needed to stretch their inventory to meet the need.⁹ One United Way partner commented, "Our biggest challenge now is the cost of delivery going up against the cost of food now." Clients expressed that receiving fresh food and produce in their home deliveries is important and also value having choice in what they receive (see Client Experiences for more information).

Culturally appropriate food is also key to client satisfaction. One interviewee explained that while the Dashers were kind and food was delivered on time, she decided to stop home delivery because she was unable to make Korean food with what she received. "I go to Korean grocery, but they are so expensive; so I'm trying to change my, you know, taste." This issue is not unique to home delivery, as food banks have been contending with prioritizing offering client choice versus prioritizing the anonymity and efficiency provided by prepacked boxes for pick-up or delivery.

To be responsive to feedback, the majority of antihunger organizations (82.8 percent) and United Way partners (14 out of 15) solicit feedback from clients participating in home delivery and use this information to inform program offerings. The most common method of receiving feedback is in real-time (70.5 percent of antihunger organizations) when clients share thoughts in-person or directly to food bank staff or volunteers. Almost a third (3 out of 10) of organizations (30.7 percent) also use surveys for feedback, though surveys often require additional staff capacity and resources. While the goal of soliciting feedback is to enhance program offerings, it's not always feasible to implement changes given constraints to the types of foods they can acquire, funding constraints on delivery frequency, and so on. Over half (56.8 percent) of antihunger organizations reported being able to make changes, with the most common being changing the sign-up process for delivery (22.7 percent), contents of food boxes (18.2 percent), and delivery frequency (17 percent). Some organizations (among the 18.2 percent citing "Other") reported returning to using volunteers to make more deliveries due to challenges with missed deliveries and miscommunications with Dashers (table 4).

TABLE 4

Antihunger Organization Processes to Solicit Client Feedback on DoorDash Home Delivery

	Percentage (%)
Receives feedback from clients	82.8
Method of receiving feedback* (n = 72)	
Real-time feedback	70.5
Client survey	30.7
Formal program evaluation	11.4
Other	8.0
Client board of directors or other advisory group	4.6
Used feedback to make changes (n = 72)	56.8
Changes made* (n = 50)	
Changed sign-up process for home delivery	22.7
Changed contents of food in boxes	18.2
Other	18.2
Changed frequency of home delivery	17.0

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, *n* = 88.

Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: * Respondent could select more than one response option. Method of receiving feedback and use of feedback to make changes were asked to those that responded “yes” to receiving feedback from clients. Making changes from feedback was asked to those that responded “yes” to using feedback to make changes.

Lessons Learned on Operations and Client Service

Throughout our evaluation, we found that partners and clients alike prioritize responsive and timely mechanisms to resolve challenges with the delivery partner. A clear communication system for partners to express issues can lead to more efficient operations and allow them to focus on key activities. Moreover, a clear reporting mechanism for issues for clients can ensure issues are identified and resolved more rapidly, and overall enhance the client experience.

Improving Communications to Enhance Client Experience

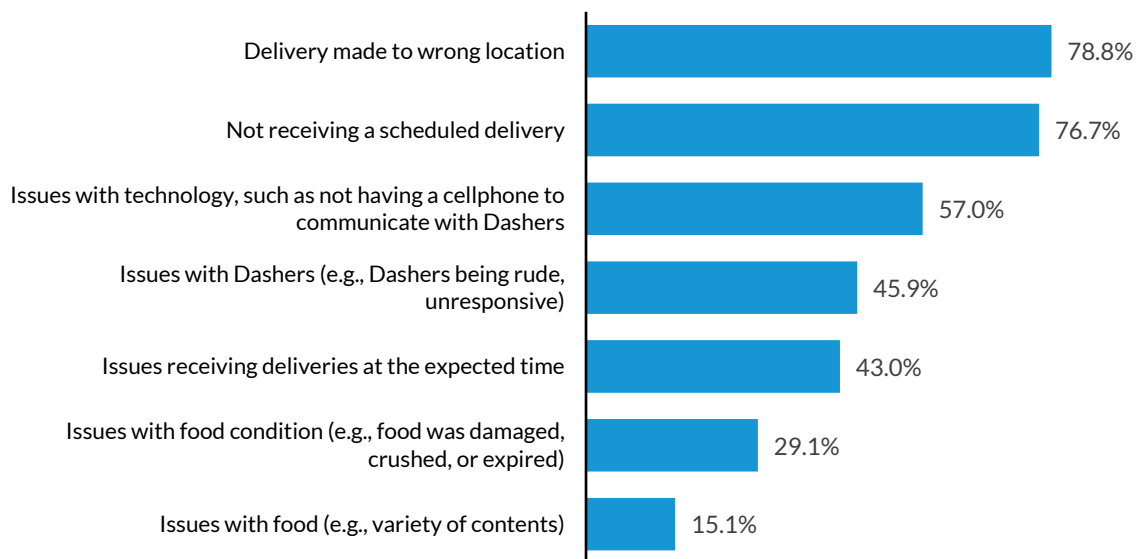
Interviewed antihunger organizations reported that the need to resolve problems with box deliveries and track drivers sometimes made it challenging to administer aspects of the program and troubleshoot when clients didn't receive food. Several organization interviewees highlighted how reaching out via regular DoorDash customer service channels made it challenging to receive the support they needed at times, since charitable food deliveries were substantially different from typical DoorDash deliveries. However, partners were also able to reach out to the DoorDash Government & Nonprofit team directly to address issues.

Figure 21 highlights antihunger organizations' perspectives on what issues clients had reported to them related to Project DASH home delivery, at least occasionally, and areas that require effective coordination with the home delivery partner. The most commonly reported issues that antihunger partners heard from clients were the need to resolve deliveries that had been delivered to the wrong location (78.8 percent of partners) or that had not arrived as scheduled (76.7 percent of partners). Project DASH antihunger partners also flagged the complexities of clients reporting communication issues, including those who lacked a cell phone or had challenges navigating technology (57.0 percent). Organizations also heard client reports of Dashers being unresponsive or client reports of perceived rudeness by delivery personnel (45.9 percent). Finally, a little less than a third of organizations (29.1 percent) heard client reports of issues with food box contents, such as damages, expired items, and so on. In contrast, about half of surveyed clients had reported experiencing these issues, suggesting that partner organizations may benefit from seeking regular feedback from clients on the food they receive.

Clients echoed some of these opportunities for improvement and reported a desire for responsive and accessible communication with DoorDash. Several interviewed clients expressed that they wanted more ready communication with DoorDash to address challenges when deliveries were made to the wrong address, when Dashers experienced challenges finding addresses, when the incorrect order was delivered, and how to deliver groceries due to mobility constraints (e.g., outside the door, inside the home). Interviewed clients described how they couldn't directly call DoorDash to resolve challenges or when they did, customer service did not always understand charitable food deliveries. Interviewed clients described how it was challenging to navigate the app to report delivery issues. Some interviewed partners suggested that directing clients to the antihunger organizations' customer service instead of DoorDash could help reach a faster resolution and ensure clients remain connected to the services they need. However, partner organizations are not always open when deliveries are made, suggesting that tailored solutions between home delivery providers and sponsoring organizations are needed to troubleshoot the unique concerns that may arise in charitable food home delivery.

FIGURE 21

Food Bank Perception of Client Challenges from Participating in Project DASH



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, *n* = 88. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

Collaboration between the nonprofit and DoorDash to proactively tackle scheduling concerns can also be beneficial. For example, clients have sometimes expressed a desire for more predictability

regarding the day and the time slot for delivery and factors relating to operations at both the antihunger partner and DoorDash may influence the ability to increase predictability.

Building Relationships Between Dashers and Clients

We found that building relationships between Dashers, who deliver meals, and clients may help clients receive the supports they need and improve connectedness. Overall, surveyed clients reported positive interactions with Dashers. Among clients that reported interacting with Dashers via text or phone ($n = 374$), the majority (88.1 percent) of clients reported they agreed (selected strongly agree or agree) that Dashers were kind and courteous, and about 3 in 4 (73.5 percent) reported that Dashers communicated with them in their language (data not shown).

Many interviewed clients expressed that Dashers were very helpful, with many highlighting that Dashers would help bring in food if folks experience mobility challenges. They expressed their appreciation for positive interactions and relationship-building with Dashers, which was echoed in interviews with feeding partners who described how regular Dashers often look out for clients and check in on them. To further support such relationships, some interviewed partner organizations suggested that DoorDash note special clients' needs and delivery instructions to help Dashers be aware of how to approach these unique deliveries. Communication from antihunger organizations to Dashers on how important the service is to clients and how appreciative clients are of these supports helps Dashers be more aware of the contributions they are making when accepting these assignments.

Improving Operational Efficiencies

Delivery services like DoorDash may need to flag issues for proactive troubleshooting with partner nonprofits, such as challenges with addresses and other logistics that may impede delivery. For example, some addresses may be difficult to locate on GPS and deliveries to large apartment buildings may be challenging, particularly if the client does not have a cell phone, lacks good quality reception, or speaks a different language than the driver. Interviewed partners such as Amigos Del Valle reported that the DoorDash team had been very responsive when it requested help in documenting deliveries, including enabling a feature that required Dashers to wait for a client to sign and verify receipt, or to take a photo of the delivery if the client wasn't home. For larger scale partnerships, integrating interfaces between the antihunger organization and DoorDash systems may be useful, as Northern Illinois Food Bank is currently exploring.

Additionally, some partners found it important for DoorDash to communicate with Dashers in advance about the process and size of deliveries for charitable food organizations compared with typical DoorDash deliveries. Interviewed antihunger organizations reported that it was challenging for some Dashers to accept the size of the order needed to operate the program in their vehicles as grocery boxes were much larger than the prepared meals that Dashers were often used to picking up from restaurants. They suggested that setting expectations with Dashers on the size of deliveries could help antihunger organizations ensure that deliveries can be sent out to all clients.

The Future of Home Delivery

Although the trend toward home delivery of purchased groceries and restaurant meals had been growing for several years, the disruption associated with the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the pace of change. The need for a robust pandemic response also brought the role of home delivery into the charitable food sector on a significant scale for the first time, and partnerships such as Project DASH provided critical infrastructure and resources that had previously eluded the charitable sector. Many antihunger organizations and other nonprofits had long struggled with reaching community members who encountered challenges accessing onsite services because of barriers created by health, transportation, time, and conflicting responsibilities. The successes achieved during pandemic response, including reaching many clients not previously connected to services, have highlighted the ongoing need for delivery capacity once the immediate challenges receded. As one partner team member commented:

“This charitable partnership is a brilliant idea that made a huge impact.”

Insights from client and nonprofit interviews and surveys emphasize the high value that home delivery has brought to food-insecure community members. Private sector capacity, such as that provided by DoorDash, has provided both the technology and logistical support that likely would have been prohibitively expensive for the charitable sector. Looking to the future, both DoorDash and antihunger organizations have identified the need to plan for long-term sustainability as a top priority.

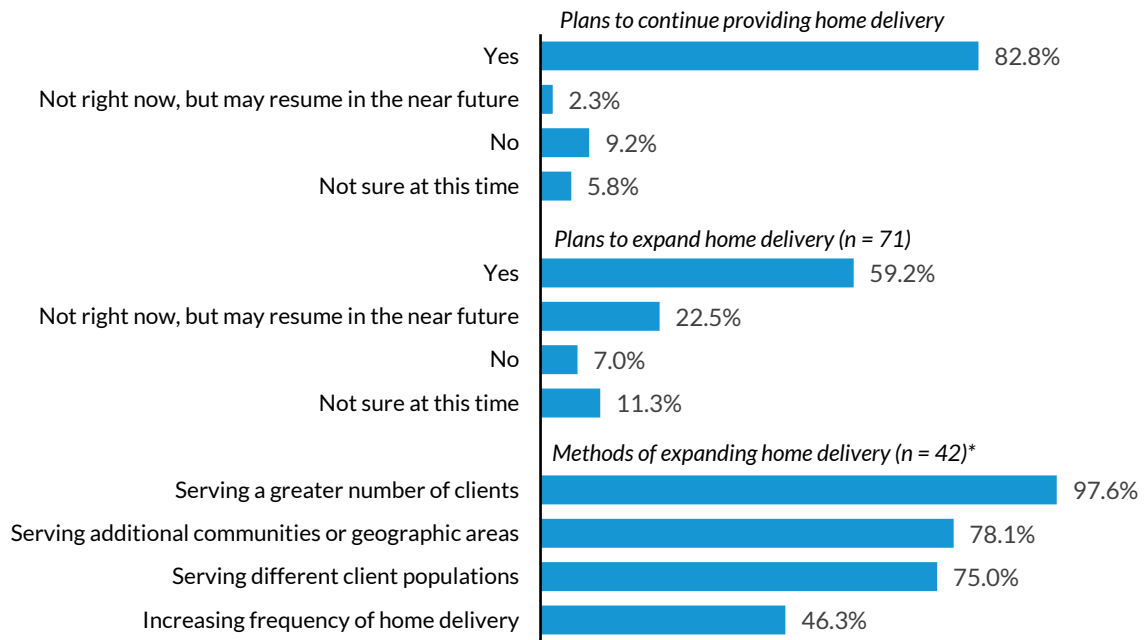
Partner Organizations’ Future Plans for Home Delivery

The vast majority (82.8 percent) of antihunger organizations reported via survey that they plan to continue offering home delivery to clients in the future, as do 13 out of 15 United Way partners responding to a survey. Many of the antihunger organizations (59.2 percent) and United Way partners (8 out of 13) who planned to continue providing home delivery also reported plans to expand the service. Specifically, antihunger organizations planned to expand the number of clients served, add additional geographic areas, serve new populations who currently do not access home delivery, and increase the frequency of deliveries (figure 22).

Nevertheless, as DoorDash transitions from full subsidy for home delivery to offering a subsidized rate that would be paid by nonprofits, the need to identify sustainable funding sources will shape the future of home delivery among community partners. Sustained funding would enable antihunger organizations to strategically determine how home delivery fits into their broader services and mission to reduce food insecurity. Among antihunger partner survey respondents, the overwhelming majority (96.6 percent, figure 23) cited potential lack of funding as a barrier to maintaining or expanding home delivery services, along with 14 out of 15 United Way organizations responding to a survey.

Even if delivery services are funded, antihunger partners reported that funding for the volume of food needed may be a barrier to continuing the service. For some partners, the food costs present a direct trade-off with home delivery funding. One partner team member commented: “As soon as it was announced that (future DoorDash) funds would be restricted to a limited grant, we began scaling back our delivery operations...used paid staff as drivers, knowing that when the grant runs out we won’t be able to afford to continue DoorDash. As long as it was free, we could rely on it, but we can’t possibly justify spending additional money on deliveries ...demands and costs for food are so incredibly high.”

FIGURE 22
Antihunger Organization Perceptions on the Future of Home Delivery



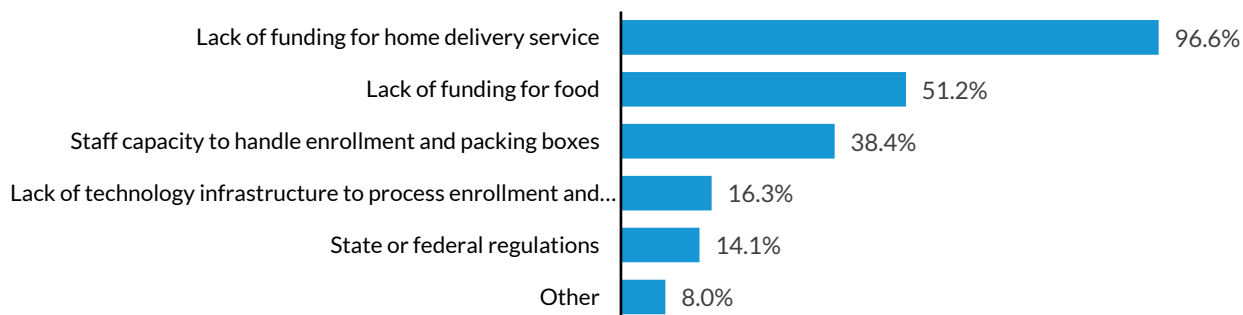
URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, n = 88. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: The question regarding a plan to expand home delivery was asked of those who said ‘yes’ to planning to continue providing home delivery, and the question regarding methods of expanding home delivery was asked of those who said ‘yes’ to planning to expand. *Respondents could select more than one response option.

FIGURE 23

Perceived Barriers to Maintaining or Expanding Home Delivery through DoorDash



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban Institute survey of consenting Project DASH antihunger organization partners, $n = 88$. Survey conducted June 26–July 19, 2023.

Notes: Respondents could select more than one response option.

Strategies for Enhancing Home Delivery

To continue reaching clients who are unable to access charitable food in person, nonprofits will need to identify longer-term, sustainable funding sources, including philanthropy, government funding streams, and subsidies from private sector delivery services. Below we detail some strategies that partner organizations are considering to keep home delivery services sustainable.

Pair Complementary Services with Home Delivery

Depending on sustainable funding, some partner organizations have expressed an interest in exploring ways to keep home delivery clients connected to a range of other necessary services that are often accessed only in-person. Interviewed organizations described how complementary services to charitable food such as medical, legal, and social services that may be offered at food distribution sites may be challenging for home delivery clients to access. Consequently, home delivery may leave some populations less connected to other services designed to meet diverse needs and future innovation could explore strategies to pair other services with home delivery to meet clients' needs.

Allow Clients to Choose Food Provided

Allowing client choice for food within home delivery is a new frontier some antihunger organizations are experimenting with and would help charitable food meet the needs of families experiencing food insecurity. For example, Northern Illinois Food Bank has paired its online ordering platform, MyPantry

Express, with home delivery for some clients as part of its vision for creating charitable food services that closely mirror how consumers acquire purchased food. The overarching goal is to reduce the stigma of seeking charitable food assistance and enhance the dignity of community members experiencing food insecurity.

Several of the antihunger organizations interviewed and surveyed offered some type of client choice models, which allow clients to select the foods delivered to them. Another interviewed partner organization indicated that they hope to expand client choice to better match services with client needs. Prior research indicates that client choice and increasing diversity of charitable food offerings is desired by clients experiencing food insecurity, as a way to connect clients with food that is culturally appropriate, healthy, and meets their dietary and health needs (Martinchek et al. 2022). A few interviewed clients highlighted challenges in offered food that does not meet their cultural needs, and the challenges in figuring out how to cook and prepare such foods, which underscores the value in tailored offerings

Looking Ahead

Ultimately, we found that the partnership model offered through Project DASH between DoorDash and antihunger organizations was able to remove food access barriers from populations most in need of home-delivered food services, particularly seniors, those with chronic health conditions or mobility limitations, and those lacking reliable access to transportation. The program helped save clients' money and time, and filled key food access gaps. Partners also appreciated the opportunity the partnership afforded them in increasing their capacity and scope in the number of clients they could serve. As with any new model, challenges arose related to the app interface and communications between clients and Dashers. Looking ahead, innovative solutions such as Project DASH can provide a key example of how the private sector can partner with nonprofits to fill a key need in the field of charitable food access. Sustainability of funding will be a key question antihunger organizations face moving forward, but investing in these solutions can have a significant impact on increasing access and reducing food insecurity in the long run.

Notes

- ¹ Forty-nine million people accessed Feeding America services (alone— not including other charitable food initiatives) in 2022; see <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america>.
- ² Fifty-one percent of Feeding America’s 200 member food banks rely entirely on volunteers; see “Hunger in America 2014,” Feeding America, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/hunger-in-america/hia-2014-executive-summary.pdf>.
- ³ A hackathon is an event set up by a company or an organization that wants to get a high-quality solution through collaboration between experts. A hackathon format is often competitive. <https://tips.hackathon.com/article/what-is-a-hackathon>.
- ⁴ USDA Food and Nutrition Service, “Commodity Supplemental Food Program,” accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/csfp/commodity-supplemental-food-program>.
- ⁵ We maintained a minimum cell size of 20 to ensure accuracy of results. Results were only considered significant for p values below 0.05. For racial and ethnic subgroups, we constrained the sample to respondents from San Francisco-Marin Food Bank to avoid sample bias from community level differences between food banks in differing geographic contexts. Because of this, we did not conduct chi-squared tests for the white or Hispanic subgroups due to low cell sizes.
- ⁶ We were unable to conduct statistical tests for white or Hispanic subgroups due to insufficient cell sizes.
- ⁷ “Disability Data Snapshot: Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders,” US Department of Labor Blog, July 12, 2022, <https://blog.dol.gov/2022/07/12/disability-data-snapshot-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders>.
- ⁸ Last-mile delivery is known as the final step of the delivery process in which a product is transported from a warehouse center to the client’s home address. This is especially challenging in rural areas when population density is low and addresses are far in distance or not exact.
- ⁹ Jennifer Ludden, “Demand at food banks is way up again. But inflation makes it harder to meet the need,” NPR, June 2, 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/02/1101473558/demand-food-banks-inflation-supply-chain>.

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