

Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger Environmental Scan

Carolyn McAnlis Orians
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Executive Summary

This capstone project is an environmental scan for The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, which will serve as the first part of the organization's strategic planning process. Outcomes from this stakeholder audit will inform the Coalition on the current environment and shape the organization's vision going forward. This project sets the stage for internal conversations around the mission, vision, and values during the strategic planning process.

Key Research Questions

- What is the current perception, including reputation and brand recognition, of the Coalition?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization?
- What kind of work should the Coalition focus on in the future?

To investigate these questions, I developed an electronic survey and held focus groups and interviews. The electronic survey was developed in Qualtrics and distributed by the Coalition via their existing listserv to approximately 1200 people. Focus groups and interviews were conducted with 12 staff and board members.

Summary of Findings

Survey respondents agree that the Coalition has a good reputation in the Philadelphia area, but only somewhat agree that the Coalition is well-known in the area. This is an important distinction, because there are populations who may need the Coalition's services but don't know about the organization. Further, increased name recognition can attract donors. Many focus group participants also felt that the Coalition should work to distinguish itself from other antihunger organizations in the area in an effort to increase visibility.

Strengths of the organizations include the SNAP hotline, legislative advocacy, and positive culture. The SNAP hotline is a valuable resource for people who are experiencing food insecurity, and advocacy efforts were highlighted specifically as a way to focus on long-term solutions to food insecurity. Staff is clearly dedicated to the work and employees feel like they are making a difference by helping people become more food secure.

Areas for improvement include increasing name recognition, marketing and communication, and creating internal shared goals and expanded staff support. Participants feel that the organization needs more visibility and brand recognition, which has many benefits, including increased fundraising and potential expansion.

Employees want to feel like their individual work is contributing to larger objectives. By creating broad organizational goals, with connected individual goals, employees can understand how to prioritize their work. Formal goals can also be a tool to measure growth and attract funders; this might mean incorporating more data collection in order to track progress over time.

Several focus group participants mentioned that additional staff are needed, specifically on the SNAP hotline, and better succession planning could help ease transition periods.

The work most often chosen as the most important to focus on in the future was “connecting people to immediate food resources” and legislative advocacy, closely followed by helping people navigate the SNAP application process. Additionally, there were several perceived gaps in the anti-hunger space, which could be areas to focus on in the future – including underserved populations and the outer suburban counties. Some focus group participants also mentioned providing more sustainable, broad support to SNAP hotline clients.

There are two key takeaways from the Covid-19 pandemic: employees like working from home, but good technical support is necessary for this to be successful. Staff feel that they have shown they can work from home; further, some believe it could help save money by using a smaller office space. For any kind of part-virtual model to succeed, technical support is essential.

Limitations of this project are largely due to the non-experimental study design; because the survey was completed by members of the e-mail listserv; these people already know the Coalition in some capacity. Online surveys create the opportunity for selection bias, as people who are passionate (either positively or negatively) tend to answer surveys. The sample size of completed surveys is small, and therefore may not be representative of the broader population.

Future Considerations

Increase marketing and communication. Advertisements can expand brand awareness and name recognition, and attract funders to support the organization that already has a good reputation. Improved visibility can also help the Coalition distinguish itself from other Philadelphia area anti-hunger groups.

Continue to support programmatic strengths. Strengths like the SNAP hotline and legislative advocacy are clearly valued.

Examine the mission statement. Ensure the mission is clear and easy to convey; possibly create two statements – a longer, comprehensive one and a shorter ‘elevator pitch’ statement.

Consider developing organizational goals. With shared targets, individual staff members can set their own goals to align with broader objectives and prioritize their own work. Increased data collection can be used as a way to track process over time.

Increase staff support if feasible. This is particularly important if the Coalition chooses to focus on advertisements and growth – it’s crucial that staff is supported and prepared for possible expansion. If possible, prioritize the SNAP hotline.

Consider opportunities for growth into the outer suburbs or expansion to service other populations within the Philadelphia area. This could also include broader support on the SNAP hotline to include information or support for clients who may be eligible for other benefits.

Continue flexibility learned from the Covid-19 pandemic. Discuss long-term remote work or a hybrid format, and ensure staff is technologically supported.

Introduction

The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger (the Coalition) seeks an environmental scan as the first part of its strategic planning process. This environmental scan will analyze data and evaluate common themes or areas where the Coalition might focus on during the strategic planning process. The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger last developed a strategic plan in 2015. During the hiring process for the current Executive Director in 2019, the Board of Directors requested that the Executive Director spearhead the development of a new strategic plan. This project, an environmental scan, is the first step in the process and includes information gathering and data collection and analysis. The organization will use the results from this project in its next steps of defining values and establishing the organization's direction and focus moving forward in a formal strategic plan.

Overview and Problem Statement

The organization has key questions for this environmental scan, including themes of internal and external perceptions of the Coalition's reputation, strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and what the organization should prioritize going forward. These issues are critical to address because hunger is a persistent issue in Philadelphia and the Coalition is a key player in this space. Further, nonprofits like the Coalition rely heavily on fundraising efforts and grants, and fundraising is greatly dependent on brand recognition. Outcomes from this stakeholder audit will inform the Coalition on the current environment and shape the organization's vision going forward. This project's environmental scan is the first step in the process and sets the stage for internal conversations around the mission, vision, and values.

Key Research Questions

1. What is the current perception, including reputation and brand recognition, of the Coalition?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses, both internally and outward facing, of the organization?
3. What kind of work should the Coalition focus on in the future?

This paper will present background information about the organization, the need for anti-hunger associations in the Philadelphia area, and a comparison to similar groups in the area. Next, I will explain the methodology, limitations, and findings of my research. Finally, in this paper I will suggest considerations for the organization as the strategic planning process begins.

Background

About the Coalition Against Hunger

A coalition of several local anti-hunger organizations started working together in the 1970s to fight hunger in the region. Officially founded in 1996, the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against

Hunger was established to fight food insecurity. In 2002, the Coalition’s work expanded when it received one of 19 grants awarded in the country to start a SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Enrollment Campaign. Since then, the SNAP campaign assists people in need of benefits assistance and has identified and removed numerous SNAP enrollment barriers. From October 1, 2019, to September 30, 2020, the Coalition submitted over 2500 SNAP applications for residents of Philadelphia.

The Coalition works in a three-pronged approach, ensuring that anti-hunger work addresses several needs. To focus on immediate need, the Coalition works to alleviate hunger in the region by providing relief with its support of food pantries and soup kitchens. Short-term aid is achieved by helping people navigate the SNAP benefit process. In a long-term lens, the Coalition seeks systemic change through advocacy efforts at the local and state levels. By addressing anti-hunger needs beyond immediate assistance, the Coalition is working to fight hunger and its root causes into the future. The Coalition is unique in this approach, compared to other organizations in the Philadelphia area; its mission describes a three-pronged approach to fighting food insecurity: immediate relief by supporting food pantries, short-term relief through the SNAP hotline and community events, and long-term relief through legislative advocacy.

Background of Need

Food insecurity is defined as the “disruption of food intake or eating patterns” due to lack of resources¹. This can signify a reduction in quality of a person’s diet, a reduction in variability of the diet, or a reduction in food intake like skipping meals. For many people, being food insecure means not knowing where their next meal will come from. In 2016, 12.3% of all households in the United States (15.6 million) experienced food insecurity sometime during the year. Of these households, 7.4% (9.4 million households) experienced low food security, where a person reduces the variability and quality of their diet due to reduced resources; 4.9% (6.1 million households) experienced very-low food security, where a person experiences disrupted eating patterns, like skipping meals, or overall reduced food intake². According to the Healthy People 2020 report, initiated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, data collected in 2016 showed that households struggling with poverty experience food insecurity at greater rates than other households¹. There is a clear correlation between poverty and food insecurity, which is important in a large urban setting like Philadelphia. In fact, the situation in Philadelphia is worse than the United States as a whole, as the city has the 5th highest percentage of unmet need of food insecure individuals in the country³. This translates to a reported 19.3 percent of Philadelphians who are food insecure⁴. Nearly one in five people in Philadelphia do not have the resources to have enough to eat. The need for anti-hunger organizations in Philadelphia is clear. Additionally, according to a University of Pennsylvania study conducted in 2012, over half

¹ <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/food-insecurity>

² <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2017.09.027>

³ <https://endhomelessness.atavist.com/mayorsreport2016>

⁴ <https://generocity.org/philly/2017/12/13/food-security-philadelphia-pennsylvania-snapshot-one-step-away/>

of those who reported being food insecure did not receive any type of assistance⁵. This could be due to the potential difficulties in accessing aid, like navigating the application process. Determining eligibility and applying for benefits can be a barrier for vulnerable populations, particularly those who may not have access to internet or up-to-date information.

The Covid-19 pandemic has worsened the situation since its onset in 2020. An online survey of 584 participants compared food security before and after the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. “Notably, the overall percentage of food-secure families decreased... while the overall percentage of families experiencing very low food security increased by 20%⁶.” Due to the stark increase of unemployment, many families faced worsening food security. Further, many schools transitioned to online formats which left students who participate in the National School Lunch Program, and rely on the program to provide essential calories and nutrients, searching for ways to access affordable food.

Philadelphia’s Anti-Hunger Organizations

Other prominent organizations in the area include Philabundance, the Food Trust, the Share Food Program, and Benefits Data Trust. These organizations primarily work to serve as immediate relief; that is, providing food through food pantries or groceries, or working to prevent food deserts in neighborhoods in the Philadelphia area. Benefits Data Trust is another group in the region working to assist individuals with benefit applications – including, but not limited to, SNAP⁷ benefits. Benefits Data Trust also works on applications for the Women, Infants, and Children program (WIC), which provides food assistance, and the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP), which helps with utility bills.

While most other organizations focus on one or two modes of anti-hunger work, the Coalition operates along the spectrum of need to provide necessary immediate relief as well as long-term goals to move the needle on food insecurity policy and aid. The Coalition is often grouped together with other anti-hunger organizations in Philadelphia, like those listed above, despite not being involved with direct relief. It’s crucial to note why this is important: brand recognition can lead to fundraising dollars. I will investigate this further in the project.

This project’s goals include investigating internal and external perceptions of the Coalition’s reputation, strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and what the organization should prioritize going forward. This project also aims to examine potential service gaps in the anti-hunger space in the Philadelphia area. Lastly, in this paper I will investigate lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic.

⁵ doi:10.1007/s11524-014-9887-2

⁶ <https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.22996>

⁷ <https://bdtrust.org/what-we-do/>

Methodology

To investigate the key research questions, I developed a survey to collect quantitative data and held focus groups and interviews to collect qualitative data. The electronic survey was developed in Qualtrics and distributed by the Coalition via their existing listserv. Developed in collaboration with the Executive Director, the Qualtrics electronic survey was distributed to approximately 1200 people via e-mail in December 2020 and January 2021. Eighty-five people completed the survey electronically. In order to also capture feedback from people who do not have access to email, from January 7 to January 15, clients calling in to the SNAP hotline were asked if they would be willing to provide feedback by completing a telephone survey. Ten clients consented to be called and participate, and 4 were successfully reached and completed the survey via telephone. The Coalition provided \$15 gift card to these participants from organizational funds. Between the electronic responses and telephone responses, a total of 89 people completed the survey. This is a response rate of 7.4%. See Appendix 1 for the survey questions.

In order to capture qualitative data, focus groups were conducted with staff and board members. Three focus groups, with 2-4 staff members each (assigned by the Executive Director) were conducted virtually between January and March 2021. One focus group with board members was also held in February 2021, and an interview was conducted with the Executive Director. Totaling 12 people, these recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis. See Appendix 2 for the focus group question guide.

To analyze the collected data, I ran descriptive statistics and frequencies in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Survey responses were analyzed for frequency of each response, with some correlations also examined as mentioned in the findings section.

Findings

Demographics of online survey

		Percent
Gender	Female	81.9
	Male	12.0
	Prefer Not to Answer	6.0
Race & Ethnicity	White	62.5
	Black or African American	22.2
	Prefer Not to Answer	11.1
	Hispanic	2.8
	Asian	1.4
Age Range	18-35	12.0
	36-50	27.7
	51-65	31.3
	66+	25.3
	Prefer Not to Answer	3.6

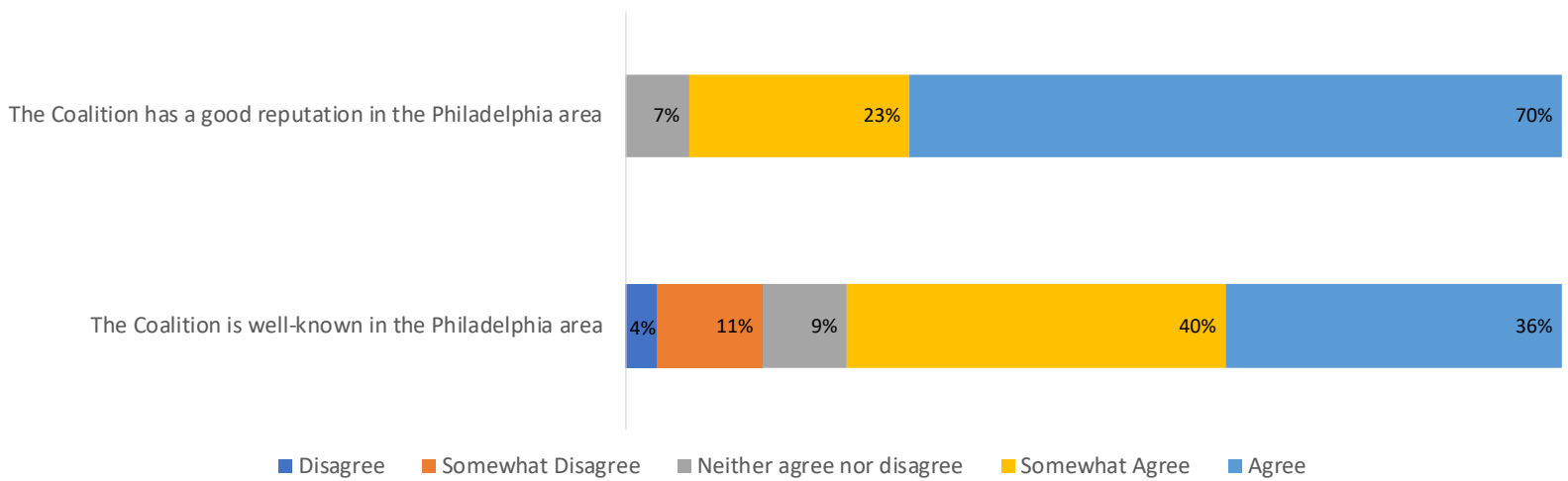
Relationship with the Coalition	Current or Former Partner	38.2
	Current or Former Board Member	15.7
	Other	15.7
	Donor	7.9
	Current or Former Staff Member	7.9
	Current or Former Volunteer	6.7
	Current or Former Client	4.5
	Current or Former Intern	3.4
Staying Updated about the Coalition	E-Mails	76.1
	Social Media	17.4
	Mailings	4.3
	Website	2.2

Research Question 1: What is the current perception of the Coalition?

Key Finding: Survey respondents agree that the Coalition has a good reputation in the Philadelphia area, but only somewhat agree that the Coalition is well-known in the area.

Survey responses about the Coalition’s reputation and visibility are illustrated here.

Reputation and Name Recognition



It’s clear to see that most respondents felt that the organization has a good reputation, but fewer participants indicated that the Coalition is well-known.

This was similarly reflected in focus groups, as eight people associated a positive reputation with the Coalition. One staff member commented, “I think we’ve made a pretty good name for ourselves...I think people respect us and trust us.” Focus group attendees also generally felt

that the organization is somewhat well-known; however, many specified that the Coalition is well-known only amongst people working in the anti-hunger space, rather than across the general population of Philadelphia. This is an important distinction, because there are populations who may need the Coalition's services but don't know about the organization. Further, increased name recognition can attract donors. There was no statistically significant correlation between respondents who identified their relationship to the Coalition (options: current or former staff, intern, volunteer, board member, partner, or donor) and their perception of the Coalition's reputation or visibility.

Many participants felt that the Coalition should work to distinguish itself from other anti-hunger organizations in the area in an effort to increase visibility. One online survey respondent wrote in to say, "I do think work needs to be done to differentiate the Coalition from other providers such as Share and Philabundance. People outside of the anti-hunger community do not seem to have a good grasp on what the Coalition does beyond the [SNAP] hotline." Nine focus group attendees also mentioned creating a separation between the Coalition and other groups. One staff member said, "people have heard our name but they're not exactly sure what we do and they're not sure how we relate in terms of the other hunger relief agencies...I think our name gives the impression that we do the same thing [as other organizations like Share or Philabundance]." Philabundance is often mentioned as a group that is well-known and receives praise for immediate food assistance; the Coalition is often grouped together with organizations like this, despite not being involved with direct relief.

It's crucial to note why this is important: brand recognition can lead to fundraising dollars. One participant commented, "every other hunger group I can think of in this city has flashier branding." Flashier branding, or increased marketing and advertising, can increase the aid that is provided but can also increase donations. ScribeWise, a marketing and public relations firm located in Philadelphia, recently conducted a brand assessment and found that the Coalition lacks "strong and recognizable branding that differentiates it from other anti-hunger organizations. In order for the Coalition to increase its funding and increase impact, it must be able to expand their reach and awareness within the community."

Research Question 2: What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization?

Key Finding: The Coalition's programmatic strengths include the SNAP hotline and advocacy efforts.

Twenty-four survey respondents (out of 89) and five focus group attendees specifically mentioned the SNAP hotline as a strength of the Coalition. As one staff member said, "the [SNAP] application is very confusing...I think that is one of the things people get excited about when they find out that there is somebody they can call that can walk them through it." Another said that people who call the hotline "get somebody who's going to give them a lot more one-on-one attention and really walk them through the process and make them feel heard."

Key Finding: One of the Coalition’s weaknesses is lack of visibility and name recognition.

The most often mentioned weakness of the organization in the online survey is the lack of marketing and name recognition of the organization, with twenty-three people writing in to mention it. One respondent wrote, “people need to know more about it. If people don't know about it, what's the point?” Furthering the point, interviewees explained that the organization needs more visibility and brand recognition particularly among the average Philadelphian (compared to those working in the anti-hunger circle). Even colleagues or partners might know one aspect of what the organization does, but not the full scope of the work.

Nine people (75%) in staff and board member focus groups also mentioned marketing as an area for improvement for the Coalition. Interviewees commented that improved name recognition could bring many benefits, including increased fundraising and potential expansion. One participant explained, “the more that we engage people and let them know what we’re doing, I think the more interested they are in supporting us financially and by spreading the word about what we’re doing.” If the Coalition decides to expand in the future, marketing is particularly important, as one focus group member described: “you can’t really broaden your reputation or really expand if...no one knows about it or you allow other people to take the credit for it...**people won’t ever know what we do if we don’t tell them that it’s us that’s doing it.**” Another attendee echoed this sentiment, saying, “we do so many things, but people don’t know because we’re not really making ourselves the forefront of it.” Some interviewees specifically discussed increasing advertisements for the Coalition, reasoning, “I feel like we should advertise ourselves a little more...that would bring more information to the community and people would know exactly what we’re doing.” Ideas that were mentioned: SEPTA ads, TV ads for the SNAP hotline, flyers at local libraries or schools, or increasing referrals from other organizations (like county assistance offices).

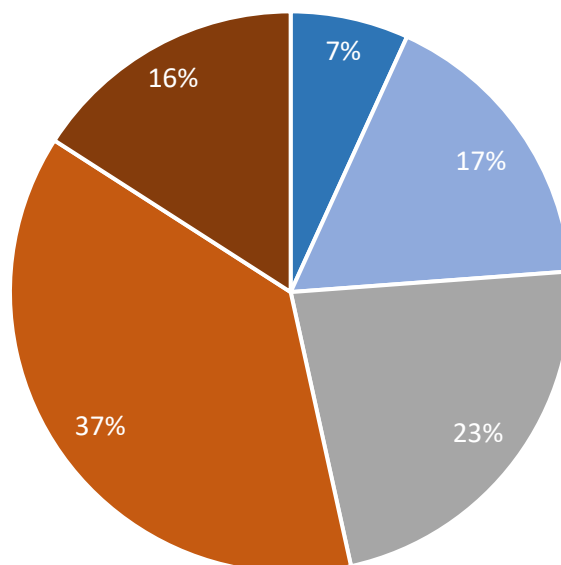
A few people even questioned the name. As one person stated, “‘Coalition’ suggests a group” and another clarified, “I think we also need to consider changing the name of the organization. I don't think we are really a ‘coalition’.”

Key Finding: There were mixed perspectives about the length and clarity of the mission statement.

Current mission statement: *Founded in 1996, the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger strives to build a community where all people have the food they need to lead healthy lives. The Coalition connects people with food assistance programs and nutrition education; provides resources to a network of food pantries; and educates the public and policymakers about responsible solutions that prevent people from going hungry.*⁸

⁸ <http://www.hungercoalition.org/about-us>

Do You Think the Coalition Needs a New Mission?



■ Definitely Yes ■ Probably Yes ■ Might or might not ■ Probably not ■ Definitely not

Conversations about the mission statement were somewhat mixed. The slight majority of online survey respondents indicated either 'probably' or 'definitely not' that the organization needs a new mission (53%), but several focus group members felt that the mission needs to be revised in terms of clarity.

There was no statistically significant correlation between relationship to the Coalition and whether or not the Coalition needs a new mission statement. However, a negative correlation (p -value <0.05 , r value -0.26) was found between respondents who felt that the Coalition is well-known in the Philadelphia area and those who responded that the Coalition needs a new mission. The negative correlation indicates that, as one answer increases, the other decreases; this means that, if a respondent considers the Coalition to be well-known in the Philadelphia, s/he is less likely to feel that the Coalition needs a new mission (and vice versa). The correlation has a small to moderate effect, but it is statistically significant, meaning that it is unlikely due chance or error.

Of those people who responded that the mission should be changed, common explanations included that it needs to be shortened or made clearer (10). But others felt it would be difficult to do so. One interviewee explained, the "three-pronged approach [is] very comprehensive, it feels effective – [but] it's not easy or quick to explain to people." Another agreed, saying, "trying to put [the three-pronged approach] in a readable, digestible message...can be difficult sometimes."

Others felt that, “I don’t think the mission necessarily needs to change unless the work is going to substantially change.” One person suggested adding a condensed version that could be quick to convey and understand: “I don’t know that the mission statement needs to be revamped as much as the elevator speech [does].” This person put forward creating a shorter ‘elevator pitch’ statement in addition to a more comprehensive mission statement.

Complicating the issue is that the scope of the work is inherently large; one interviewee explained, “[the mission] is intentionally meant to be many things” because of all of the work that the Coalition does. The downside, however, is that people can’t immediately identify the Coalition as a ‘food education group,’ or an ‘advocacy group,’ or a SNAP hotline, which may affect name and brand recognition. This creates a tension between a succinct, clear mission statement and one that comprehensively depicts the mission of the organization. Describing the history of the current three-pronged approach, one attendee said, “it feels like the Coalition is left holding, potentially as a legacy, a lot of things that nobody else has quite taken on. Which doesn’t lend itself to cohesion but is certainly important.”

Several participants felt that some factors are missing from the mission statement. In the survey, eight people specifically mentioned that they thought the mission needs to address the root causes of hunger. One participant wrote, “it’s important to talk about the root causes of hunger in your mission [like] racism and poverty.” Another person said, person said, “the Coalition is concerned with hunger impacting all families and provides services/advocacy to address emergency and structural food insecurity. And there is data that shows these issues impact POC more; stating this heads on brings the mission into alignment with the way many currently understand inequality.”

Key Finding: The organization could improve through the development of defined organizational goals to track performance and prioritize employee work.

This topic was discussed often in focus groups. Seven attendees mentioned a desire for organizational or personal goals, with one person saying, “it’s not effective to say, ‘go out and reach everybody’ because we can’t...by trying to reach everybody, I know we’re not reaching people in the most effective way.” By creating broad organizational goals, with connected individual or departmental goals, employees know how to prioritize their work. “I want someone to tell me...Delco [for example] is our priority. So that I can rise to that challenge.” Employees want to feel like their individual and departmental work is contributing to larger goals.

“if we’re all individually [working] without it leading towards a bigger goal, then we’re all individually going to feel like ‘what’s the point of this?’”

Understanding the priorities for the organization helps individual employees work along the same priorities and stay on the same page. “If [there is] one clear focus point that we can all look at, then we can all move in the same direction no matter what we’re doing in our individual departments...because we’re all focusing on the same goal. That’s what’s needed

right now.” These goals can also measure growth year over year, and can help attract funders. One focus group attendee said, “Year after year we have the same numbers...A grant funder looks at that.” This might mean incorporating more data collection in order to create measurable goals and track progress over time. As one interviewee said, “if we had more data...I think it might help, more than seeking new grants, I think it could help the organization see what’s bearing the most fruit.”

It’s important to define what the data collection plan is, and to think purposefully about what data to record and track. There are some elements that may be difficult to measure, like advocacy or serving as a connector and building relationship. The organization will want to strike a balance between collecting data and ensuring that gathering and reporting the data is not a burden to employees and doesn’t take away from the services provided. In this way, the numbers won’t overshadow the work, but, as one interviewee put it, “without those data points, we’ve lost half of the conversation.” Part of the conversation is, how does the organization measure success? It could mean meeting set yearly, measurable goals.

“We have to figure out how to quantify some of the good work that we do that isn’t captured right now.”

Key Finding: Internal areas for improvement are staff support, particularly on the SNAP hotline, and improved succession planning.

Several focus group participants mentioned that additional staff are needed. One attendee said, “one of our biggest problems is that we don’t have enough people. We don’t have the staff. You can only do so much.” Eight people specifically mentioned needing more staff on the SNAP hotline. One person pointed out, “if the SNAP hotline is so important, why are there only two [employees]?” Positively, staff are clearly dedicated to this work, and several people were concerned about ensuring that clients are assisted. One said, “we need to find the money to hire someone that will be able to help us complete more [SNAP] applications...we can serve more people.” There’s also a concern that the current staff is unable to meet the demand of the SNAP hotline, saying, “having people waiting for us to call them for two days, three days...shows that we don’t have enough personnel to do the work.”

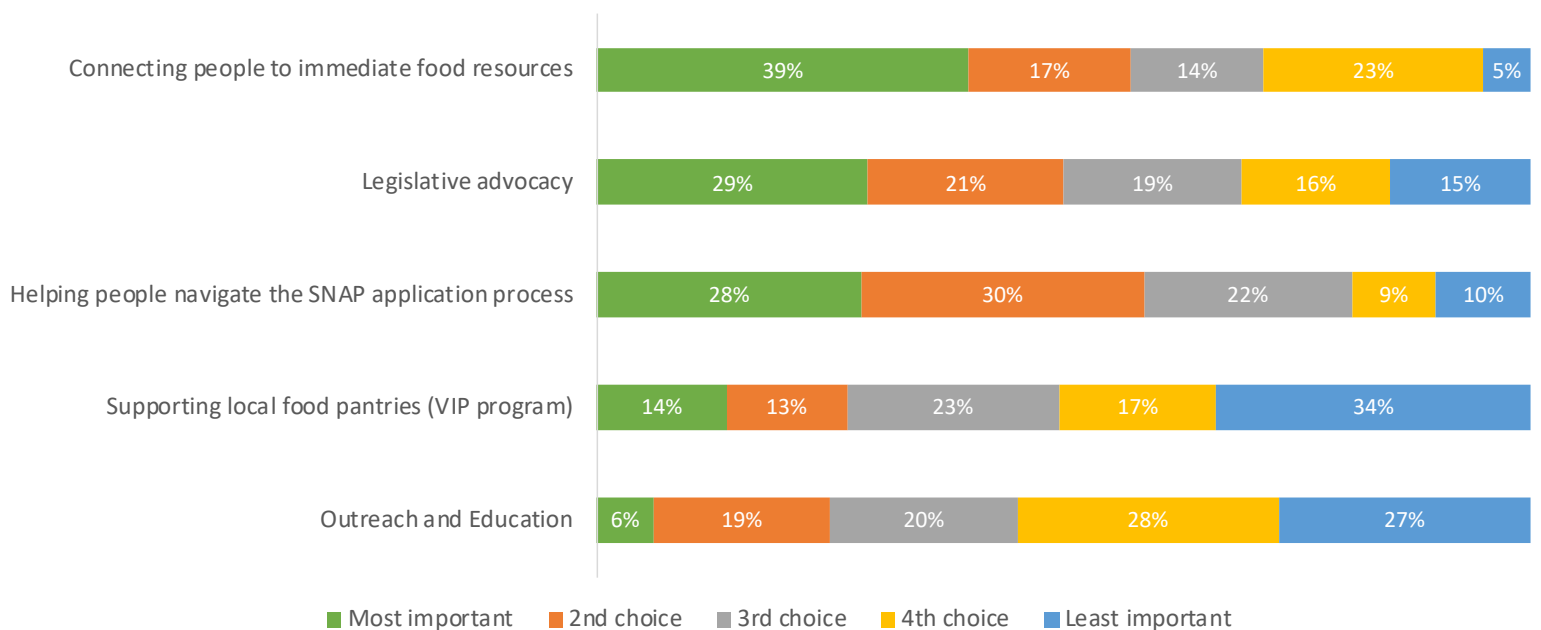
Similarly, several focus group participants mentioned that an area for improvement at the Coalition is succession and onboarding planning. With a small staff, many departments are made up of just one person. Cross-training could help ensure smooth transitions during turnover or leave times. “All the turnover with no real transition plan is another area that keeps us from looking ahead.” Staff transitions do happen, and it’s crucial to ensure that the work continues as smoothly as possible. Adding more staff may not be feasible, but should be considered if the Coalition is interested in expanding or decides to increase its marketing. It’s crucial to prepare for it by having enough staff to handle the potential expansion. “You want to expand, broadening awareness of the hotline, but then we don’t have the wherewithal to be able to manage the calls coming in.”

Research Question 3: What kind of work should the Coalition focus on in the future?

Key Finding: Respondents reported that the Coalition should prioritize connecting people to immediate food resources.

According to survey respondents, as seen in the chart below, the work most often chosen as the most important to focus on is “connecting people to immediate food resources” and “legislative advocacy,” closely followed by “helping people navigate the SNAP application process.” The option chosen least often as most important to focus on is “outreach and education.” Under “other,” common responses were the root causes of hunger like poverty and racial equity (3) and marketing (3).

What Should the Coalition Prioritize in the Future?



In contrast, one person wrote in on the survey, “there are so many emergency food providers and suppliers in the city. Not sure how much of the org’s work currently goes to that, but it may be something to scale back on in order to prioritize other core strengths.” The second and third priorities most often chosen were advocacy and the SNAP hotline. A participant of the online survey said, “the advocacy and hotline pieces are unique and deserve more resources [and] attention”

Key Finding: The Coalition can distinguish itself from other anti-hunger organizations by highlighting what makes the Coalition unique.

A respondent in the online survey wrote, “leave direct support to food pantries to Philabundance and focus on what makes [the Coalition] different.” A focus group attendee

agreed, saying, “there are so many food agencies out there that might take up all the air in the room...they do important [work] but I think there’s a real challenge to...distinguish yourself from those other entities.” “We have our three-pronged approach and I think that is so unique because it sets us apart from all the other organizations that only focus on hunger, like Philabundance or Share.”

“There are a lot of hunger-based organizations in Philadelphia, the work that we do is maybe the least glamorous but also the most necessary.”

Key Finding: Survey respondents and focus group participants perceived several gaps in the anti-hunger space, which could be additional areas to focus on in the future.

There were several conversations within staff and board member focus groups around whether or not the Coalition should be involved in the surrounding counties outside of Philadelphia. On one hand, some focus group attendees expressed that there is a need for the Coalition’s services outside of Philadelphia; eight people mentioned serving the outer counties. “You have a lot of people that were Philadelphia residents that, because of gentrification, were pushed out to especially Delaware county...they’re still struggling.” While it’s clear there is a need beyond Philadelphia, there are anti-hunger agencies and organizations in some of these counties; therefore, a political balance exists, as the Coalition wouldn’t want to encroach on other counties’ services.

This is a key question for the organization to address during the strategic planning, as one staff member put it: “do we really want to be *Greater* Philadelphia or do we want to be the Philadelphia coalition against hunger?” Further, it seems likely to require more staff and funding. “to adequately fully cover all of the counties, I think [the Coalition] would need to grow.” One interviewee pointed out, “if that feels like it’s so important [to expand], prepare to raise the funds to staff up.” If the organization decides to expand, it would be pragmatic to define the scope of the Coalition in areas beyond Philadelphia – for example, only concentrating on advocacy and less about direct assistance.

Several other populations were mentioned in focus groups (ranked in order of number of mentions, from highest number to lowest number):

- **Immigrants.** There are pockets of immigrant communities within Philadelphia, including undocumented immigrants who may struggle to access benefits. Furthermore, many immigrants own small businesses like restaurants that have suffered during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- **Seniors.** Many seniors deal with limited finances, increased healthcare expenses, and functional limitations which can lead to food insecurity.
- **Non-English speakers.** Language barriers can make it difficult to access resources and benefits. The Coalition could provide support through information printed/published in other languages, particularly Spanish.
- **Homebound disabled.** This population may find it difficult to access resources like food pantries.

- **LGBTQI** (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex). This population faces discrimination when accessing jobs, housing, and healthcare, which can lead to reduced access to food.
- **Homeless.** Dealing with unstable housing and poverty, the homeless population often struggles with food insecurity.

Some of these populations are difficult to reach but are the most vulnerable. It may be that these populations are not considered the Coalition’s expertise, but perhaps the organization could partner with others that understand these populations. Two focus group participants also mentioned better coordination at the city level, in terms of involvement with food distribution or a more involved relationship with the health department.

Key Finding: The Coalition could do more to provide sustainable support to SNAP hotline clients.

Three focus group attendees discussed gaps in current services. For example, “what are we doing to help keep [clients] on SNAP? If we’re going someone’s SNAP application every 6 months, it’s not good for the client first of all, and it also clogs up our hotline...I think we can do a better job of helping clients stay connected to SNAP.” A few also mentioned increasing the utilization of the existing Sales Force software, like by setting up electronic reminders when a client’s SNAP benefits are about to expire. Further, it doesn’t help attract funders or grants, “helping someone get back on SNAP every 6 months is really meaningful [to them], but somebody who’s giving us money isn’t going to get it.”

Food insecurity is rarely a singular problem in a home. Four people mentioned working to assist people with other benefits. For example, as one interviewee said:

“there’s some advocating that could be done...through WIC.” Further, “all of our population is eligible for LIHEAP, but we really don’t give them much information about it, we kind of stay in our own bubble...we could be more of an information source...maybe setting up more linkage partnerships with other organizations...so that we don’t just leave a person who needs food but we know that they probably don’t have the money to pay for their utilities and they might need rental assistance...there are so many other social issues that our clients deal with.”

As the Benefits Data Trust organization does, the Coalition could expand to provide information about other benefits or services available.

Key Finding: There are two key takeaways from the Covid-19 pandemic: employees like working from home, but good technical support is necessary for this to be successful.

Two people mentioned the flexible work situation as a positive lesson learned from the pandemic. Staff feel that they have shown they can work from home; further, some believe it could help save money by using a smaller office space. One person suggested that a part-time virtual setup, with a smaller office space, could allow workers to split their time – this could

even help save money to hire more staff. In addition, two staff members mentioned wanting to remember the lesson that the organization can move quickly if necessary, as what happened at the beginning of the pandemic in 2020. As one interviewee said, “it’s possible for us to move really quickly if we have enough urgency.”

For any kind of part-virtual model to succeed, technical support is essential. For example, ensuring good working computers and phones. Some employees explained that provided phones can’t keep always keep up with the amount of use occurring out of the office. If the SNAP hotline is a priority, then “the phone system is a priority” as one employee said.

Limitations

Limitations of this project are largely due to the non-experimental study design; online surveys create the opportunity for selection bias, as people who are passionate (either positively or negatively) tend to answer surveys and therefore the sample may not be representative of the larger population.

Because the survey was completed by clients or members of the e-mail listserv, these people already knew the Coalition in some capacity and the sampling was not random. Notably, the sample size was small.

In an attempt to understand issues on a more in-depth level, and increase the validity of the study, the focus groups add a qualitative data component. Focus group data, however, can be limited by environmental conditions; for example, a staff member may have more negative things to say at the end of a hard day. In addition, there may be elements of participants who are concerned about being viewed undesirably and are therefore less likely to give negative feedback in person.

Future Considerations

This section outlines considerations and questions to examine during the strategic planning process. These are possible issues to explore, based on the results from this study.

- **Increase marketing and communication**
 - Advertisements can expand brand awareness and name recognition, and attract funders to support the organization that already has a good reputation
 - Improved visibility can also help the Coalition distinguish itself from other Philadelphia area anti-hunger groups
- **Continue to support programmatic strengths**
 - Strengths like the SNAP hotline and legislative advocacy are clearly valued
- **Examine the mission statement**
 - Ensure the mission is clear and easy to convey

- Possibly create two statements – a longer, comprehensive one and a shorter ‘elevator pitch’ statement
- **Consider developing organizational goals**
 - With shared targets, individual staff members can set their own goals to align with broader objectives and prioritize their own work
 - Increased data collection can be used as a way to track process over time
- **Increase staff support if feasible**
 - This is particularly important if the Coalition chooses to focus on advertisements and growth – it’s crucial that staff is supported and prepared for possible expansion
 - If possible, prioritize the SNAP hotline
- **Consider opportunities for growth**
 - Growth into the outer suburbs or expansion to service other populations within the Philadelphia area
 - This could also include broader support on the SNAP hotline to include information or support for clients who may be eligible for other benefits
- **Continue flexibility learned from the Covid-19 pandemic**
 - Discuss long-term remote work or a hybrid format
 - Ensure staff is technologically supported

While I was able to speak with most of the staff, and several populations are represented in the online survey responses, only 4 SNAP hotline clients were able to give feedback. This is a population that should be targeted for more information in the strategic planning process.

Conclusion

The survey and focus group data collected in this project have provided interesting perspectives and information about the current environment of the Coalition and its work. In this environmental scan, I examined themes of internal and external perceptions of the Coalition’s reputation, strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and what the organization could prioritize going forward. The future considerations that evolved from this project are important to evaluate as the Coalition undertakes its strategic planning process this year.

Appendix 1: Qualtrics Survey

Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger Survey

Thank you for your willingness to give feedback regarding the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger! Your opinions will help shape the Coalition's work and focus moving forward. Your responses are confidential, and we value your feedback. Thank you for your participation!

Please indicate your relationship with the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger (the Coalition):

- I am a current or former client
- I am a current or former staff member
- I am a current or former volunteer
- I am a current or former intern
- I am a current or former partner
- I am a current or former board member
- I am a donor
- Other

How do you typically stay updated about the work of the Coalition Against Hunger? (Please check all that apply)

- E-Mails
- Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- Mailings
- LinkedIn
- Texts
- Phone Calls
- Website

Reputation and Mission

The Coalition is well-known in the Philadelphia area

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

The Coalition has a good reputation in the Philadelphia area

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

What is one word or phrase that comes to mind when you think about the Coalition and its work?

Our Mission: Founded in 1996, the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger strives to build a community where all people have the food they need to lead healthy lives. The Coalition connects people with food assistance programs and nutrition education; provides resources to a network of food pantries; and educates the public and policymakers about responsible solutions that prevent people from going hungry.

Do you think the Coalition needs a new mission?

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Might or might not
- Probably not
- Definitely not

If yes, why and how would you recommend changing it?

Services Provided

The amount of services the Coalition provides is just right for the organization

- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree

Who should the Coalition find more ways to reach to connect with food resources?

What do you think the Coalition does well?

What do you think is most unique about the Coalition?

In what areas do you think the Coalition needs improvement?

What do you see as the work that the Coalition should prioritize in the future? Please rank the following from (1) most important to focus on to (5) least important to focus on

- Connecting people to immediate food resources
- Helping people navigate the SNAP application process
- Legislative advocacy
- Outreach and education
- Supporting local food pantries (VIP Program)
- Other (please indicate below)

If other, please indicate:

Please provide any additional feedback or anything else you would like us to know here:

The following demographic questions are optional

Please indicate your age range:

- 18-35
- 36-50
- 51-65
- 66+
- Prefer Not To Answer

Please indicate your race and ethnicity (select all that apply):

- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native American or Alaskan Native
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- White
- Hispanic
- Non-Hispanic
- Prefer Not To Answer

Please indicate your gender identity:

- Male
- Female
- Nonbinary
- Transgender
- Another Gender Identity
- Prefer Not To Answer

Please provide your Zip Code:

Are you willing to provide more feedback? If yes, please indicate your preferred method:

- Telephone interview
- Focus group with other attendees (virtual)

If you would like to be included in interviews or focus groups, please provide the following information so we can contact you (this will not be linked to your prior responses)

Name:

Telephone number:

E-Mail address:

Appendix 2: Focus Group Question Guide

Topic: Reputation and Mission

- How do you perceive the reputation of the Coalition in the Philadelphia area?
- Why do you think clients come to the Coalition?
- What feedback do you get from clients?
- What, if any, are the unmet needs in the Philadelphia area in terms of organizations working against hunger?
- How would you measure the success of the Coalition?

Topic: Strengths & Areas for Improvement

- What do you think the Coalition does well? (could be internal or external)
- In what areas do you think the Coalition needs improvement?

Topic: Future Goals & Needs

- What do you see as the work that the Coalition should prioritize in the future? (Where should our focus be? What should our priorities be for the Strategic Plan?)
- Are there any takeaways/changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What do you see as the critical issues that the Coalition will face in the next 5 years?