WhyHunger Narrative Change Snapshot Results

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Introduction

Center for Story-based Strategy (CSS) and WhyHunger are jointly working on a project to support WhyHunger in assessing what a long-term narrative shift and organizing strategy can look like via CSS' model of capacity-building and training. As part of this project, in August of 2017, surveys were sent to organizations involved in the emerging Closing the Hunger Gap network and other food access organizations in order to get a snapshot of current narratives in the anti-hunger field in the U.S. This snapshot is intended to be used in shaping a story-based strategy process to further develop the current narrative and shifting narrative of WhyHunger and the emerging Closing the Hunger Gap network. This report is an overview of the survey results.

Survey Participant Snapshot

86 participants

LOCATION: 19 states + DC

SCALE:
- Community (42%)
- Regional (30%)
- State (17%)
- National (7%)

ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS:
- Community-based orgs and direct service providers
- Government agencies
- Advocacy organizations
- Faith-based orgs
- Social justice orgs
- Farmers and food producers
- Healthcare and public health organizations
- Business and food business
- Education and youth services orgs

Wide varieties of staff sizes (1–3,000 employees)

Wide varieties of budgets (<$100,000 –$5 million+)

PRIMARY ACTIVITIES:
- Food distribution
- Nutrition education
- Advocacy
- Food production/farming
- Fundraising
- Training and capacity building

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION:
Primarily food access and food justice, U.S. based organizations with missions that had an emphasis on impacts like:

- "Ending Hunger/Addressing Root Causes"
- "Building Hunger Free Communities"
- "Empowerment/Self-Sufficiency"
- "Health and Community"

ORGANIZATION GOALS:
Ending hunger, empowerment, health, etc.

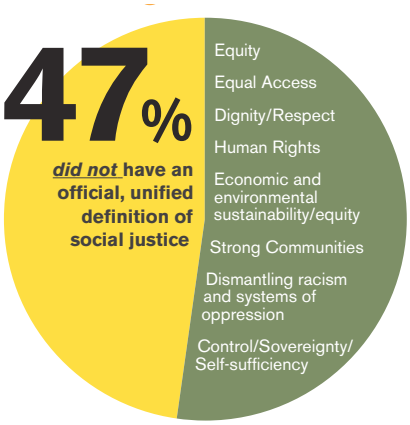
69% were familiar with Closing the Hunger Gap Network

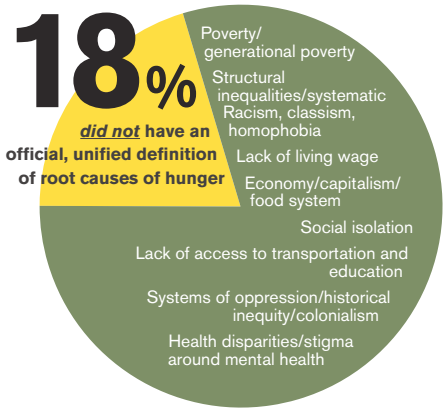
Many of the participants have had some involvement with Closing the Hunger Gap:

- **37%** Attended a CTHG Conference
- **14%** Other (Past leadership team participants, attending 2017 for first time, signed up for e-mail list, etc.)
- **11%** CTHG Conference Committee
- **13%** Leadership Team
- **9%** Community Organizing and Social Justice Community of Practice

Social Justice and Root Cause Defined

Nearly half of the organizations surveyed did not have an official definition of social justice as part of their work or messaging. For those that did have a defined social justice component, the definition varied widely.





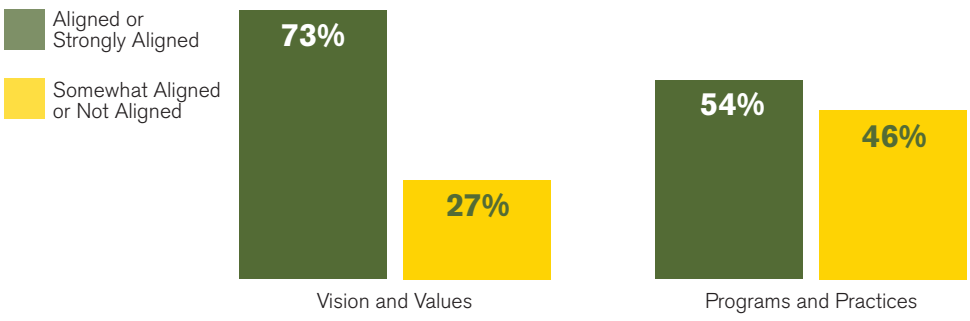
Likewise, many organizations did not have an official definition of the root causes of hunger. For those that did, the definition varied widely.

Social Justice and Root Cause in Action

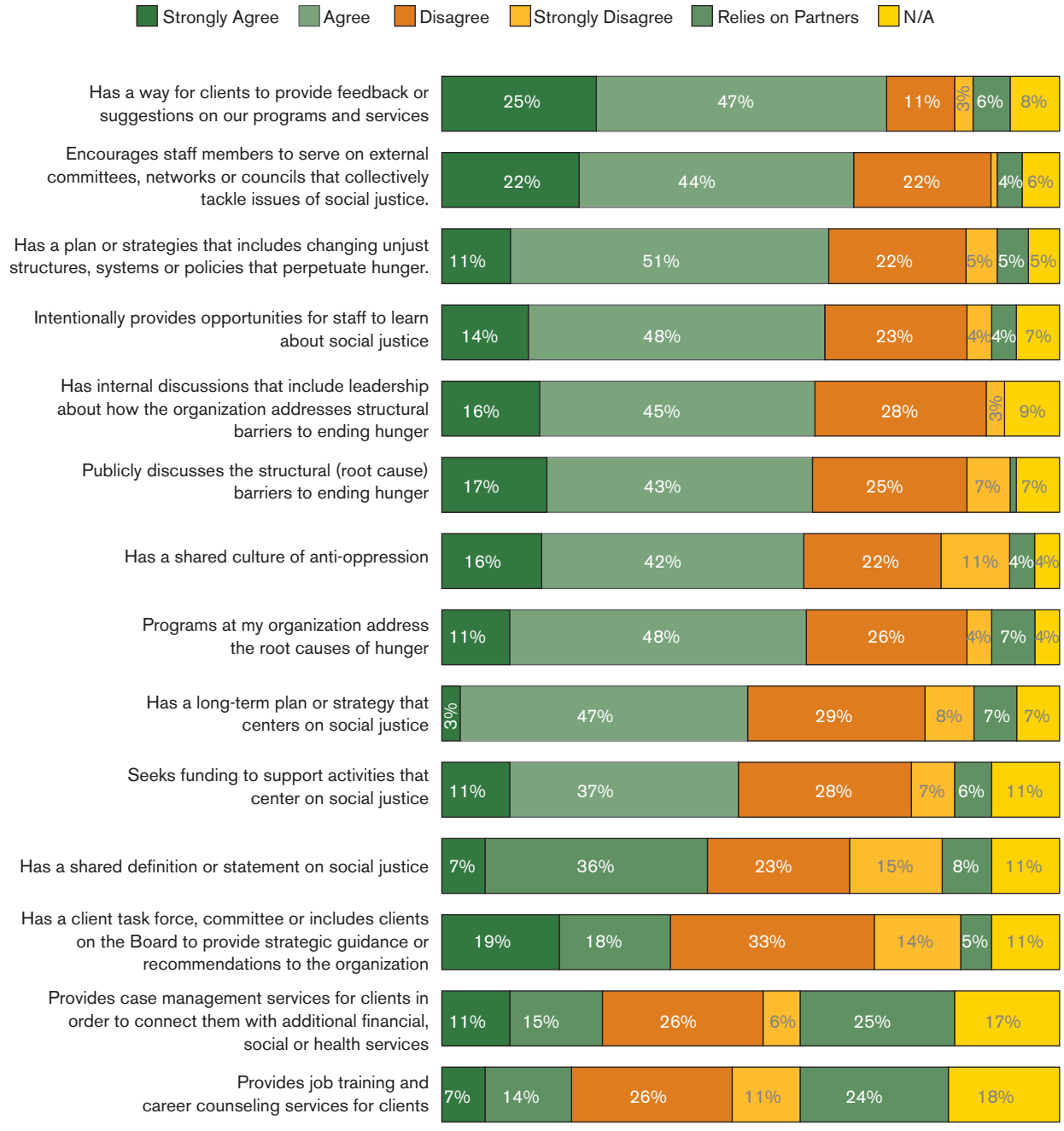
It appears that organizations tend to agree with Closing the Hunger Gap Network's vision but do not necessarily translate that vision into programs and practices. The chart below shows organizational alignment with the following statement both in their organization's vision and values and their programs and practices: "The Closing the Hunger Gap Network envisions a just food system where all community members are able to participate and receive equitable access to healthful, nutritious, culturally-relevant food; land; and resources without the exploitation of people and the environment." Seventy-three percent of respondents said their organization was aligned or strongly aligned with the statement in its vision in values, but only 54% said they were aligned with the statements in their programs and practices.

The chart below shows how respondents rate their organization on specific actions to address root causes of hunger and social justice. Towards the top are actions that appear to be occurring more frequently within organizations and towards the bottom are actions that appear to be occurring less frequently. For example, 72% of respondents agree or strongly agree that their organization "has a way for clients to provide feedback or suggestions on our programs and services," whereas only 21% say that their org "provides job training and career counseling services for clients."

Organization's Alignment with Statement: *The Closing the Hunger Gap Network envisions a just food system where all community members are able to participate and receive equitable access to healthful, nutritious, culturally-relevant food; land; and resources.*



How would you rate your organization on the actions it is taking to address the root causes of hunger and social justice?



Organizational Needs

Participants were asked what organizations need in order to build capacity to focus on building social justice and addressing the root causes of hunger. Answers varied quite a bit, but generally fell into the major categories listed below. The number in the parenthesis is the number of respondents who mentioned the theme and the percentage is the percent of respondents who mentioned the theme. For example, 31% of respondents (or 17 people) said that they need more awareness among folks at their organization to create buy-in.

- Awareness building/training/discussion for staff/board/leadership about social justice and root causes of hunger in order to create buy-in (17, 31%)
  - Develop a shared language and culture around the issues
  - Educational materials for staff and partners on the root causes. (How do you talk to folks who are deeply invested in the pull-yourself-up-by-your-bootstraps, poverty is a personal problem narrative?)
  - Building our capacity around talking about social justice issues with our conservative colleagues could be helpful.
- Funding (13, 24%)
- Expand advocacy/policy work (6, 11%)
- More staff (6, 11%)
  - Staff skilled in systemic change work/facilitation, deep listening/empathy, community organizing, collective impact
- More time (5, 9%)
- Examples of best practices from those partners currently integrating social justice/root causes in mission and programs (4, 7%)
- New leadership including more diversity in positions of power/people that are aligned with mission (4, 7%)
- Create spaces for sharing frontline perspectives (3, 5%)
- Culture shift (3, 5%)
- Office space (3, 5%)
- New strategic planning/alter mission/program shift (3, 5%)
- Deeper collaborations with other nonprofits working on root causes/social justice (3, 5%)
- Decentralized decision making (2, 4%)

Five percent, or three individuals, said they were not trying to increase capacity to address social justice and root causes of hunger. There were also a few responses (5 or 9%) that may indicate that folks did not understanding or were not aligned with the definition of social justice/root causes that the authors of the survey had in mind when asking the question. Their answers were related to how to bolster the current charity model. For example:

- Refrigerated trucks
- Deliver food to homebound clients
- Bigger, better food pantry
- Improve nutrient quality in pantries
- Provide nutrition education/cooking classes
- Provide health screening
- Continue to support folks doing the work

Shaping Our Story

How organizations are ending hunger

Participants were asked: If someone you consider to be a part of your primary audience(s) emailed you asking "how is your organization working to end hunger?" How would you respond in 2-3 sentences? Answers varied widely depending on the organization. One observation is that many of the sentences focused on the specifics of what the organization does, rather than telling a cohesive story. Below are some examples. The full text of all answers can be viewed in the data set.

We volunteer to distribute food once a month.

Our efforts to end hunger are focused on education and employment. We have a number of programs that are helping people to increase their earning power through educational avenues

We provide information on local services which can provide immediate assistance and relief to families in need. These services include emergency feeding sites, transitional housing and classes which support financial stability and food security.

We are working to end hunger by raising awareness of the health consequences (and high healthcare costs) associated with hunger. We are engaged in rigorous research to prove the "ROI" of nutrition for health outcomes and healthcare costs, and we are actively engaged in publicizing this research and data.

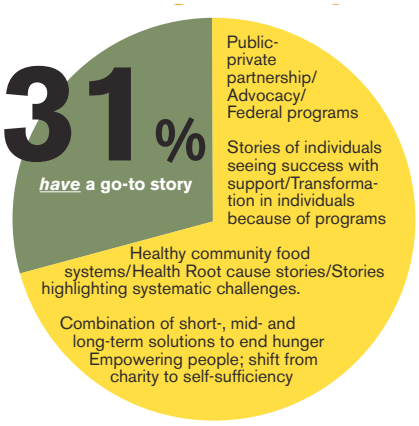
I don't think we would say we are "ending" hunger. We are addressing hunger by redirecting resources (fresh produce) to communities who don't have access to it. We are addressing the inequality in our food system and also providing nutritious foods to those who may not be able to afford them.

We are increasing awareness of the root causes of hunger by encouraging the story sharing of folks with lived experience in poverty and food insecurity. We are connecting folks with lived experience with community leaders and others who may not have personal experience or full understanding of the causes of poverty & food insecurity. With increased awareness of why hunger and poverty exist, our community leaders and elected officials can make informed decisions that can help shape a community in which no one has to face poverty or food insecurity.

How to end hunger in the U.S.

Approximately one third (31%) of respondents said that their organization has a "go-to" story about how to end hunger in the U.S. Most organizations, about two-thirds did not have a go-to story.

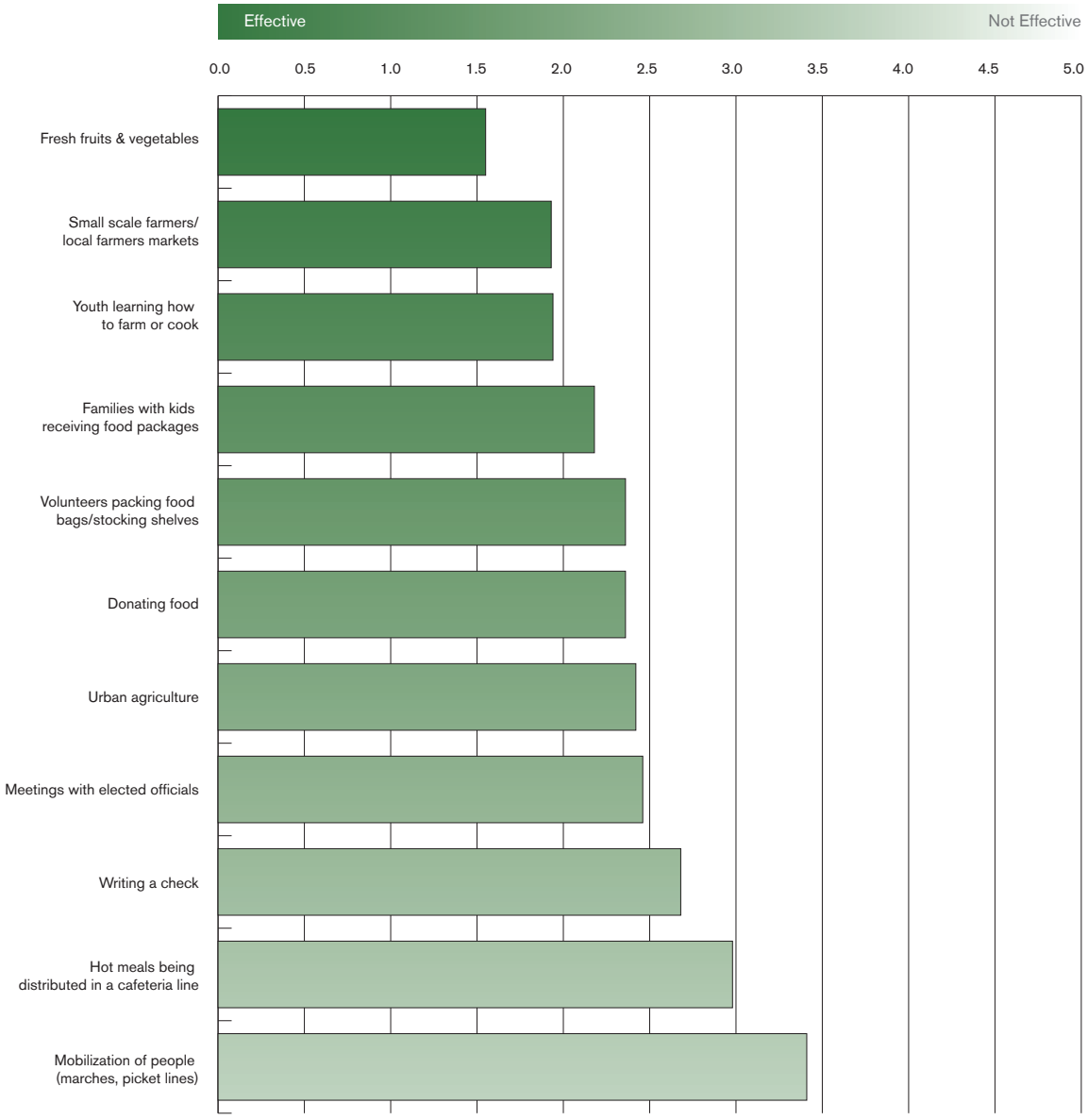
Those who have go-to stories pointed to the following concepts in their stories:



- Public-private partnership/Advocacy/Federal programs
- Stories of individuals seeing success with support/Transformation in individuals because of programs
- Healthy community food systems/Health
- Root cause stories/Stories highlighting systematic challenges.
- Combination of short-, mid- and long-term solutions to end hunger
- Empowering people; shift from charity to self-sufficiency

Images and Concepts

Survey participants were asked to rate images and concepts on their ability to effectively illustrate the story of anti-hunger that their organization is trying to tell. They rated concepts and images on a scale of 1-5, 1 being most effective and 5 not being effective. The chart below shows the results. Images of fresh fruits and vegetables was rated as most effective, whereas mobilization of people was rated as least effective.



Audience beliefs

The chart below shows the extent to which organizations' primary audiences believe certain statements about the current charitable model of addressing hunger in the U.S. to be true or commonly agreed upon. The chart contrasts the audiences of donors and supports (DS) with community served (CS). For example, 33% of respondents said that the communities they serve agree that "building alternatives is valuable but not a priority" where as 39% said that their donors and supporters agree with that statement. In general there was much commonality what the two audiences (DS and CS) believe; however there were differences as well as seen in the chart below. (It is important to note that a limitation in this information is that it is difficult to make assumptions about community and supporters beliefs. See Limitations Section for more information.)

The top 2 statements for which there was the highest level of agreement for both donors and supporters and community served were:

- "Hunger can be solved by a more efficient food distribution system" (DS=65%, CS=56%)
- "Building political power through campaigns and direct lobbying is required to make change." (DS=58% CS=63%)

The top 2 statements for which there was the least amount of agreement for donors and supporters were:

- "There is no alternative to the existing model." 40%
- "Building alternatives is valuable but not a priority." 39%

The top 2 statements for which there was the least amount of agreement for the community served were:

- "There is no alternative to the existing model." 20%
- "Making structural changes to the emergency food system is nice in theory, but not politically possible." 31%

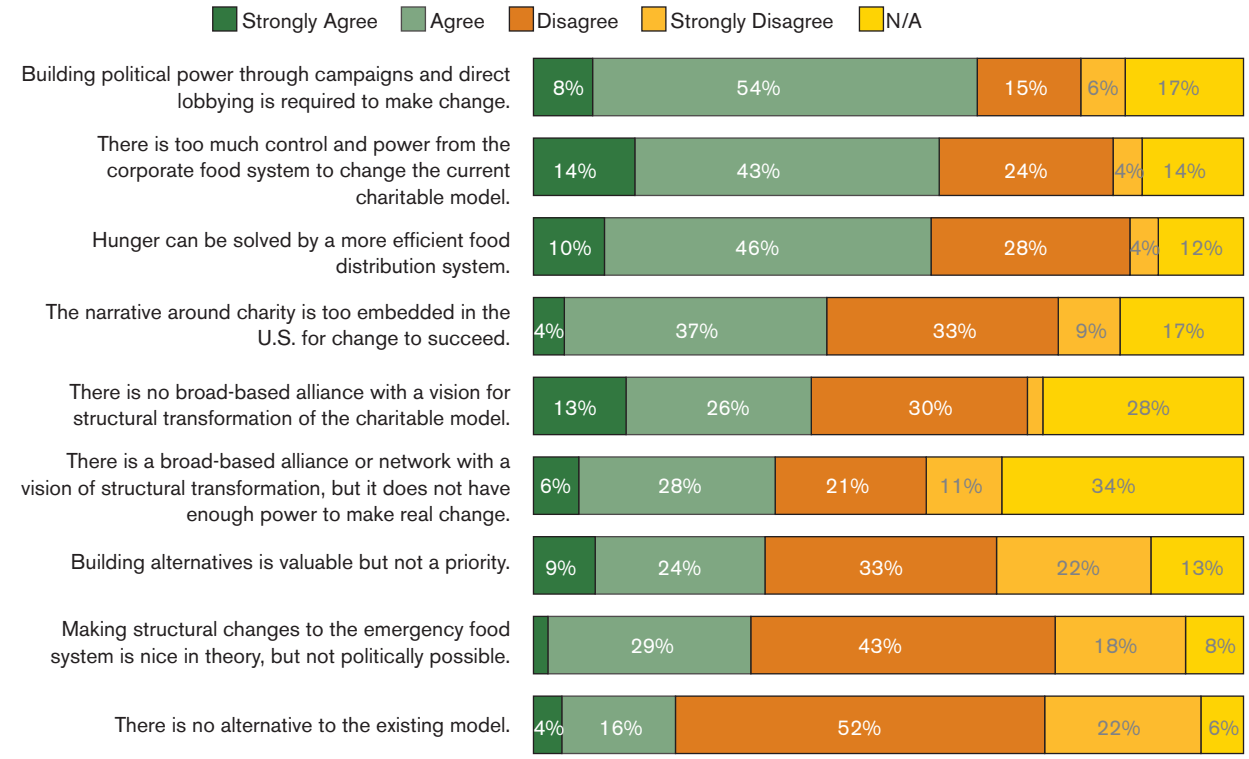
It is interesting to observe the trend that respondents tended to say that the statements were less applicable for the community served than for the donors and supporters. For every statement, there was a higher percentage of people who said that it was not applicable for community served than for donors and supporters. This trend is particularly noticeable for the following statements:

"There is a broad based alliance or network with a vision of structural transformation, but it does not have enough power to make real change." Thirty-four percent of respondents said that this was not applicable for the community served whereas 17% said it was not applicable for donors and supporters.

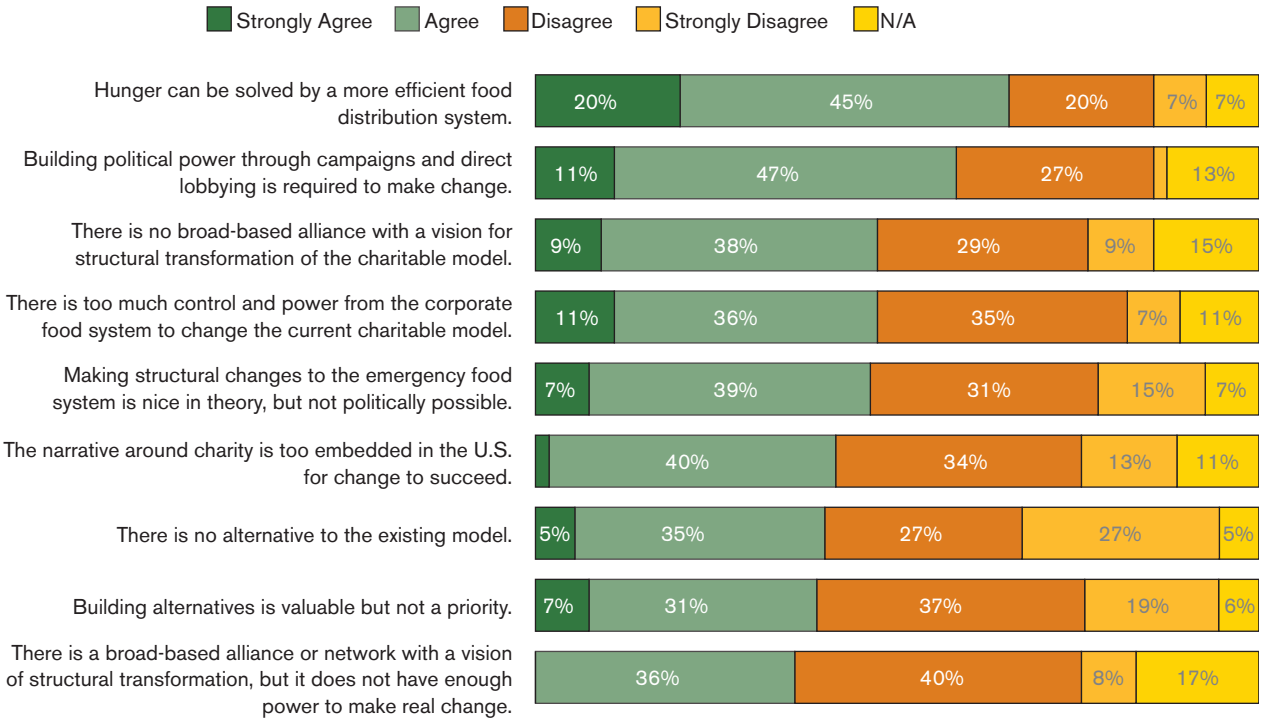
"There is no broad based alliance with a vision for structural transformation of the charitable model." Twenty-eight percent of respondents said that this was not applicable for the community served, whereas 15% said it was not applicable for donors and supporters.

To what degree does your organization's primary audience(s) believe the following statements about the current charitable model of addressing hunger in the U.S. to be true or commonly agreed upon?

Community Served:



Donors and Supporters:



What will it take to end hunger in the U.S.?

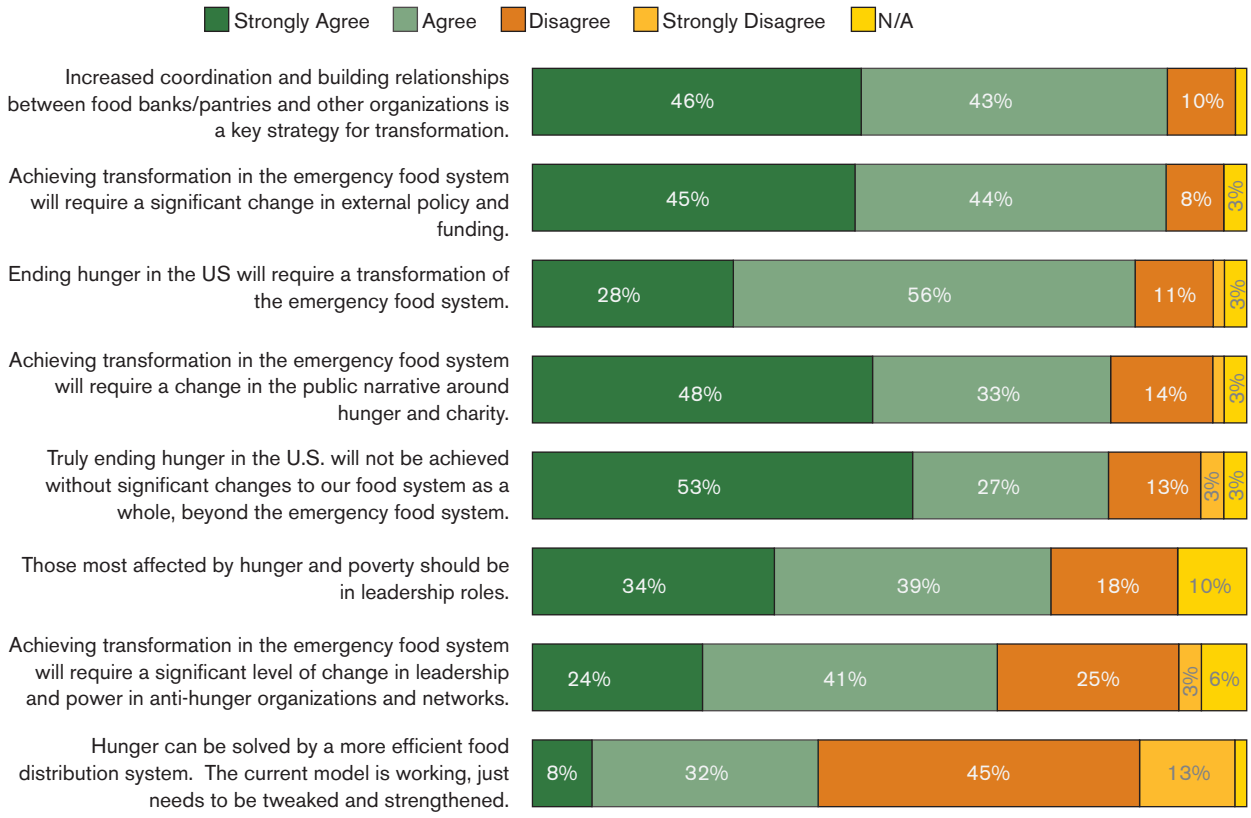
Participants were asked about what it will take to end hunger in the United States. The top three most agreed upon statements were:

- "Significant change in external policy and funding"
- "Increased coordination and building relationships between food banks/pantries and other organizations"
- "Transformation of the emergency food system"

The statement where there was the most disagreement was:

- "More efficient food distribution system. The current model is working, just needs to be tweaked and strengthened."

Evaluate the following statements about what your organization thinks it will take to end hunger in the U.S.



Additional comments about what it will take to end hunger in the U.S. (the number in parentheses is the number of respondents who gave this answer):

- Ending poverty/economic disparities addressed/fair wage (5)
- Frontline involvement in creating an action plan (4)
- Working together with a diverse team (3)
- Listening to community members input (3)
- Government subsidies that promote healthy food rather than processed foods (2)
- Reduce stigma and stereotypes associated with all forms of food assistance/hunger (2)
- Food sovereignty
- End racism
- Trying many interventions and failing at some
- More sustainable farm and garden practices
- More connection between people, land, and food.
- Greater tax incentives for companies to donate food rather than throw it away
- Sharing information and informing communities
- How do we improve the foodscape for poor people while resisting gentrification and displacement?

Future of Our Story

Participants were asked to imagine the future of hunger alleviation. They were asked "In your most optimistic moments, what do you think the anti-hunger movement could look like in 5 years?" There was a wide range of answers, but some common themes emerged. Below are the top themes. The number in the parenthesis is the number of participants who mentioned the theme, followed by the percentage of responses that it represents. For example, 14 participants (25% of those who responded) said that they imagine more collaboration occurring in hunger alleviation – whether it be collaboration between organizations, community, and/or government entities.

- Collaboration (14, 25%)
- Recognition of systemic causes of hunger/social justice (13, 23%)
- Community (front lines) leadership (12, 21%)
- Listening to community (front lines) (11, 20%)
- Reducing/eliminating need for emergency food response (10, 18%)
- New food systems (10, 18%)
- Lawmaker attention to hunger (9, 16%)
- Raising wages/employment (9, 16%)
- Decreasing stigma for those who need help with food (9, 16%)
- More advocacy/community organizing around food (6, 11%)
- Nutritious food rather than empty calories (6, 11%)
- Food as a human right (6, 11%)
- Food pantries are community hubs (5, 9%)
- More efficient food benefits systems (4, 7%)

Additional Contacts

Participants were asked who else should be contacted in developing a story about hunger alleviation in the United States. Folks listed both specific organizations and general types of organizations.

Specific:

- Black Lives Matter
- Community Food Centres Canada
- Cooperative Extension Networks
- Dine Policy Institute
- Feeding America - DC policy staff
- Food and Health Network in NY
- FoodShare Toronto
- Hoosier Hills Food Bank
- Josephine County Food Bank
- Just Harvest (Pittsburgh)
- Labor-Religion Coalition of NYS
- New Poor People's Campaign Building Movement Project
- Oregon Community Food Systems Network
- Oregon Food Bank
- Tamarack Institute
- Tolani Lake Enterprises

Types of orgs:

- Faith-based communities
- Farmworker coalitions
- Hospitals and insurance companies (potentially you are saving them money if folks are healthier)
- Immigrant rights, health care, gender justice, racial justice, labor, etc. Advocates and activists from other sectors e.g. anyone working in an aligned space that can help us get CTHG and solving hunger more on the map
- Larger back bone organizations nationally (e.g. United Ways)
- Reentry communities and support networks.
- Researchers
- Supermarket and restaurant chains
- Sustainable agriculture organizations

Limitations

When looking at this report, it is important to keep in mind the limitations of the data and the subsequent conclusions we reach. Below are some of the major limitations of this study:

- Like all survey data, this data is self-reported. Therefore it represents participant's thoughts and beliefs rather than actual observed behavior. There are always some differences in the way folks self-report vs. actual behavior.
- Some participants stated that it is difficult to make assumptions about community and supporters beliefs. There were a few questions that asked participants about the community they serve or about their supporters and what they think. Participants were not always in a position to know what their constituencies believe; therefore, data in those areas should be seen as a third hand account, sometimes making assumptions about another person's beliefs.
- The survey asked participants to speak on behalf of their organizations. It should be kept in mind that there many be a variety of viewpoints within each organization and the responses contained in the report are a sample of the variety.
- One participant felt that the questions in the survey were leading, and were trying to elicit certain responses. Participants may not have been given the opportunity answer questions fully and without bias coming from the survey instrument.

Conclusions/Recommendations for Story-based Strategy

After gathering and analyzing the data, we recommend the following for WhyHunger and the CTHG Network:

- Build consensus on the need for a social justice narrative for hunger alleviation.
- Start working towards defining the root causes of hunger and social justice as they relate to hunger alleviation. Make the definition broad enough so that diverse actors in the hunger alleviation field can see themselves in the definition, but narrow enough so that it is still actionable.
- Brainstorm on how organizations can build capacity to do the work of creating a social justice lens for their organization
- Focus on instilling the need for story when communicating rather than naming the facts
- Use the ratings of images and concepts as a jumping off point for conversations around what the current narratives around hunger are and in future discussions of creating a new story
- Use the data gathered about audience and beliefs as groundwork for discussing assumptions to challenge
- The sections of this report "What will it take to end hunger" and "the future of our story" can provide a basis and another input for fairytales at a future convening or training.