

FOOD JUSTICE IN TURBULENT TIMES

Needs & Opportunities in San Francisco's API Communities

SEPTEMBER 2021



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FOOD JUSTICE IN TURBULENT TIMES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In San Francisco, Asian and Pacific Islanders (APIs) constitute 34% of all residents (twice the number of APIs across the state), bringing vibrancy and vitality to the region (Data USA, 2019). Disproportionately, API residents also comprise 42% of low-income residents within the City (API Council, 2018). Despite this outsized percentage, API community members utilize safety net services at a significantly lower rate compared to other groups and are often excluded from the discourse on racial equity (KidData, 2020).

Although the systemic inequities faced by API residents within San Francisco have been historically overlooked, COVID-19 and the subsequent violence against APIs has exposed and exacerbated their devastating impacts.

Specifically, food injustice has surfaced as a tremendous challenge within San Francisco's API communities due to the pandemic.

To meet the moment, the Stupski Foundation and the API Council of San Francisco joined forces in Fall 2020 to devise transformative food-systems solutions and advocacy efforts to promote the continued vitality of San Francisco's API communities, across seven neighborhoods (Bayview, Chinatown, Excelsior, Japantown, Richmond, South of Market, Sunset, Tenderloin, and Visitacion Valley). To support this partnership, Intention 2 Impact (I2I), a research and evaluation firm, conducted a landscape study assessing community assets and barriers to food justice for API community members in San Francisco to inform solutions for the future of food justice for API residents.



In this report, a mix of quantitative and qualitative landscape data (document review, neighborhood strategy sessions, key informant interviews, community survey, asset mapping) are presented to inform hyper-local and systems-wide solutions towards a future where all API community residents are able to live a life of dignity, prosperity, and safety.

These findings are presented within a sociological racial justice framework, seeking to highlight the intertwined nature of API racialization, cultural preservation, economic security, and food justice.

“Our food system actively works to silence, marginalize, and cause disadvantages for people of color.”

-Civil Eats (2019)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

This needs and opportunities landscape report illustrates an array of assets and barriers to community-led food transformation within the API Communities within San Francisco.

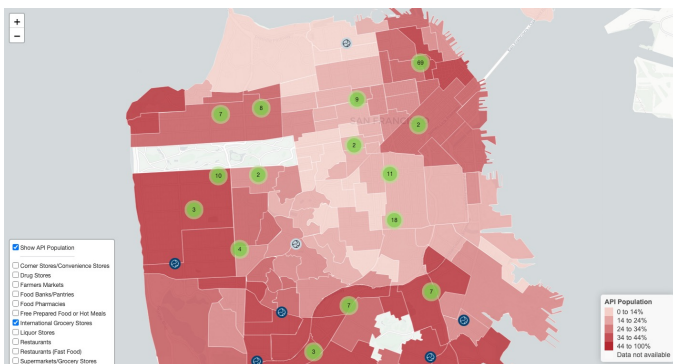
FOOD ASSETS

As part of this study, an [interactive food asset map](#) was created to identify a total of 2,915 food establishments across all of San Francisco, including corner stores/convenience stores, drug stores, farmers markets, food banks, pantries, food pharmacies, free prepared food or hot meals, international grocery stores, liquor stores, restaurants, fast food restaurants, and grocery stores.

One-third (33%, N=963) of these establishments were located in the nine API priority neighborhoods, including Bayview, Chinatown, Excelsior, Japantown, Richmond, SOMA, Sunset, Tenderloin, and Visitacion Valley.

However, these assets are not equally distributed across neighborhoods. SOMA (23%), Richmond (21%), and Sunset (19%) neighborhoods have the highest number of food assets; while some of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as Japantown (4%), Bayview (3%), Excelsior (2%), and Visitacion Valley (1%), have much fewer assets. Among all food assets in these API priority areas, only approximately 1 in 5 (19%) accept SNAP or WIC.

Preview of the interactive map:



COMMUNITY ASSETS

API Community & Culture

Data from the study emphasize the important linkage between API markets, restaurants, and merchants in promoting economic health and cultural resilience within API neighborhoods. Exemplar efforts, such as Chinatown CDC's Feed + Fuel Program, illustrate how Community Based Organizations (CBOs) forged partnerships with legacy API restaurants in Chinatown --to create self-sufficient "little economies"-- offering a mechanisms for sustaining cultural corridors, which are essential for social and cultural connection, in addition to being food access points.

Dedicated Fleet of CBOs & Community Trust

Study findings reveal the important role of CBOs in providing services and referring API community members to charitable and reduced-cost food. Data highlights that food resources are more likely to be leveraged by community members when referred by a trusted CBO. Within the API communities, the study finds that there is strong community member trust in the local CBOs. For example, 25% of the community food survey respondents have visited their local CBO to access food for more than 3 years.

Political Will

Throughout key informant interviews, there was a heightened sense of anger, confusion, and urgency to do better for API communities. Repeatedly, interview participants emphasized that the only way to bring food justice, sovereignty, and transformation to communities is via a massive overhaul of current systems. Further, recent landmark legislation and funding has put a spotlight on the needs of API communities. As such, the current political momentum is an immense asset for necessary food justice efforts.

Collaboratives & Coalitions

More and more organizations and government offices within San Francisco are focusing on food justice as a marquee issue. Thus, the opportunity is ripe for expanded collaboration across these entities as well as ensuring API community voices are at the table.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

BARRIERS

Systemic Racial Inequities

Systemic racial inequity underlies ALL the economic, social, cultural, and physical obstacles faced by API Communities. Data from this study suggest that racial inequity is the primary, “upstream” issue from which all other “downstream” barriers cascade. At the heart of these inequities is the notion that API communities are ultimately absent from the data. This study finds there is a consistent pattern of exclusion of API communities from large scale data collection and needs assessment efforts, nationally and within San Francisco. Accordingly, when API communities are absent from the data, it is no coincidence they are also absent from policy priorities and resource allocation. Further, when API communities are invisible in policy priorities and resource allocation, they are not invited to discussions to strategize solutions. Data bring visibility to marginalized communities, and serve as a gateway to change. Data are powerful. Thus, when the data systematically exclude API community members, an entire racial group is stripped of the power to speak their truth.

Lack of Access & Affordability

Study findings indicate that the current food system in San Francisco is insufficient to meet the needs of API communities. Issues related to affordability, availability, access, “Westernized” understandings of “culturally relevant” and “healthy” food, a lack of reliable and safe transportation, as well as limited access to cooking spaces were all apparent in the data.

Economic Disparities

Study findings assert that API community members, along with other people of color, are more likely to work in frontline service positions, often making less than a living wage. This is especially problematic given existing evidence that demonstrates frontline workers are more likely to live in poverty, pay too much for rent, be caring for children and/or seniors at home, lack internet access, and not have health insurance. All this demonstrates an increased and significant prevalence of income inequality among API community members in San Francisco, which serves as another formidable barrier to food justice.

Language & Technology

Data from this study provide evidence of the significant language and technology barriers faced by API community members as they attempt to access the community food services that they need. Oftentimes proper translation is not available to connect API residents to resources. Further, this study highlights that in an increasingly virtual world, with technology being used to solve a growing number of problems, those who don’t speak English, don’t have access to the internet, don’t own internet capable devices, or are elderly are often left behind.

Strained & Stigmatized Charitable Food System

CBOs are doing the work that systems have failed to do well. Changes that should be implemented at a systems level are being initiated and practiced by very small organizations, which have exceeded their capacity due to the pandemic. Especially due to COVID-19, demand on charitable food increased while funding became more scarce. When under this immense strain, data illustrate that charitable food systems cannot always provide a dignified experience to community members that honors their culture or personal preferences. This lack of cultural relevance, paired with intense fear of stigma, discourages many API community residents from leveraging life-saving food assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KEY FINDINGS

CALL TO ACTION

We need solutions that center food justice rather than food security.

This means creating solutions that are multifaceted, speaking directly to the needs of hyper-local communities while also creating food spaces and networks that are accessible, permanent, and dependable. The following are three core tenets to be considered for any proposed food-justice solutions.

Hyper-local solutions that are culturally grounded & dignified

Food justice interventions, as opposed to food security interventions, need to be culturally grounded and centered on ensuring the dignity of those they serve.

Transformational food solutions that promote the prosperity of API communities need to be borne of the community wisdom that already exists.

Moreover, dignified hyper-local solutions should also be rooted in individual choice. There is no dignity in food that is substandard and standardized. People feel seen, heard, and valued when they have choice in what they put into their bodies. Further, any proposed system of hyper-local interventions must be equipped with the resources to ensure language justice is part of the solution. Any and all promotional materials and services should be provided in every language spoken across the API diaspora within San Francisco.

Centralized leadership & capacity

Food justice solutions, while rising up from the hyper-local community, must also have a centralized arm to connect the offerings together. Across data sources, there was an appetite for solutions that offer opportunities for shared learning and an integration of efforts across the powerful fleet of CBOs, nonprofits, government entities, and private enterprise in a coordinated way. As such, a core aspect of proposed solutions should be devising ways to more fully **leverage the collective power of the existing collaborative, coalitions, and councils, especially those that represent underserved communities.**

Think Bigger Picture: Integrating Systems Change

We need investments in systemic change to avoid putting further burden on small organizations that are already under impossible pressures to address structural problems.

Focusing on increasing the capacity of the CBOs, nonprofits, and charitable food sources is not a sustainable solution. It is a short-sighted tactic that does not address the “upstream” issues such as income inequality. Rather, proposed solutions need to promote systems-level transformation via policy change to address injustices, as well as cross-sector interventions that span the many interconnected facets of food justice (e.g., workforce development, transportation, revitalization).



NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES LANDSCAPE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

On July 12, 2021, California Governor Gavin Newsom signed a spending bill that included \$156 million to combat violence against Asian Americans, who make up 16% of the state's population. This historic investment, following a devastating rise in hate and violence against Asians and Pacific Islanders (APIs) in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, marks one of the largest commitments in California history to address the needs of Asian Americans. Sadly, it took a global pandemic and unprecedented hate crimes for legislators to acknowledge the needs of the API community.

However, despite the heightened attention, the lack of research and data on the systemic inequities faced by API communities means that social problems, ranging from economic inequality to health disparities, public safety, and food security, remain ignored (Chan & Kan, 2021; Yee, 2021).

In San Francisco, Asian and Pacific Islanders constitute 34% of all residents (twice the number of APIs across the state), bringing vibrancy and vitality to the region (Data USA, 2019). Disproportionately, API residents also comprise 42% of low-income residents within the City (API Council, 2018). Despite this outsized percentage, API community members utilize safety net services at a significantly lower rate compared to other groups and are often excluded from the discourse on racial equity (KidData, 2020). Although the systemic inequities faced by API residents within San Francisco have been historically overlooked, COVID-19 and the subsequent violence against APIs has exposed and exacerbated their devastating impacts. Specifically, food injustice has surfaced as a tremendous challenge within San Francisco's API communities due to the pandemic.

To meet the moment, the Stupski Foundation and the API Council of San Francisco joined forces in Fall 2020 to devise transformative food-systems solutions and advocacy efforts to promote the continued vitality of San Francisco's API communities. To support this partnership, Intention 2 Impact (I2I), a research and evaluation firm, conducted this landscape study assessing community assets and barriers to food justice for Asian and Pacific Islanders in San Francisco to inform solutions for the future of food justice for API residents.

Building upon the City of San Francisco's Office of Racial Equity's (ORE) [Racial Equity and Food Sovereignty Policy Framework](#),

this landscaping study reveals that food justice — not only food security — is the key to breaking down structures of racism and economic injustice that perpetuate food inequity.

In this report, a mix of quantitative and qualitative data are presented to inform hyper-local and systems-wide solutions towards a future where all API community residents are able to live a life of dignity, prosperity, and safety. These findings are presented within a sociological racial justice framework, seeking to highlight the intertwined nature of API racialization, cultural preservation, economic security, and food justice. While this report elevates API community experiences, these data contribute to a much larger narrative that is focused on dismantling white supremacy and liberating all people of color (Bhojwani, 2021).

The Heart of the Issue: Racialization of API Communities in San Francisco and Beyond

Asian and Pacific Islanders in San Francisco comprise a country, language, and asset diverse community. They are also racialized in unique ways and suffer from racial discrimination.

Racialization in the United States tends to be reproduced through two dominant comparative frameworks: outsider/insider (Merton, 1972) and inferior/superior (Zou & Cheryan, 2017). Asian and Pacific Islanders living in the United States are often viewed as forever foreigners (or outsiders) while also being situated adjacent to whiteness. Although not seen as fully American, API community members are assumed to be able to access privileges, resources, and status that are out of reach for many members of the Black and Latinx communities (otherwise known as the “model minority myth;” Yi & Museus, 2015). These types of race-based assumptions conceal inequalities happening across the API community and minimize the unique struggles that API community members are experiencing in their day-to-day lives.

“*Asian poverty gets ignored; the stats don’t wear it out... these populations don’t spike in the data because we need different disaggregation. We would like to know more.*”

-Policy Representative Interviewed

Further, API data has been largely absent from not only academic research (Yee, 2021) but also from media coverage (Chan & Kan, 2021). When research does explore API experience, API data is historically aggregated to present a homogeneous representation. Despite this aggregation, the API community is diverse and vast. According to Policy Link and PERE (2017), the majority of API community members in San Francisco primarily hail from six countries (e.g., China, Philippines, India, Vietnam, Korea, Japan). Each of these groups has different histories, struggles, cultural norms, sets of languages spoken, and connections to the traditions of their homelands. We know, for example, that Pacific Islanders living in San Francisco, alongside African Americans and Native Americans, experience the highest concentration of poverty by race, and have the lowest median household incomes (SF Food Security Task Force, 2018).

There is also a presumption that API communities have strong family, social, and economic networks that protect these communities from economic downturns and food injustice experienced during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic or the 2008 financial crisis. However, as this landscaping study illustrates, API communities face unique food justice challenges, both pre and post COVID-19 pandemic, that are often concealed by the model minority myth (Zou & Cheryan, 2017) and data discrimination.

Food as a Human Right

As socio-economic stratification has worsened over time, food insecurity has become a dominant discourse in the United States, with increasing focus placed on food justice/sovereignty. As opposed to food security, which refers to a state when people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle (InTeGrate, 2018), food justice refers to a holistic and structural view of the food system that sees healthy food as a human right and addresses structural barriers to that right (Foodprint, 2019).

Nikki Henderson-Silvestri, the former Executive Director of the People's Grocery in Oakland, California, said it best, **“Food justice is important for everyone because food is culture. Food is your family. Food is part of how we communicate with one another; it’s a way we share our love. Being able to enjoy and prepare food that actually nourishes the body and keeps us healthy is connected to our ability to stay sane as human beings”** (Nourishlife, 2012). Thus, when members of our communities are unable to access life-sustaining food, we must view this as a violation of human rights.

Food injustice is especially pernicious because people of color are the most severely impacted by hunger, poor food access, diet-related illness and other problems with the food system (Foodprint, 2019). As such, there is a dire need for food justice efforts to ensure access to healthy food for all, but also to examine the structural roots of these disparities. This report is in service of the larger movement for food justice, and is particularly aimed at amplifying the Asian Pacific Islander experience in San Francisco.

METHODOLOGY

In early 2021, the API Council, in partnership with the Intention 2 Impact (I2I) evaluation team prioritized three guiding questions about the landscape of food assets and barriers for the API community in San Francisco. A mix of quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer these questions and inform implementation solutions to address food injustices experienced by Asians and Pacific Islanders.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are the community and food assets available to API neighborhoods in San Francisco?
2. What barriers exist to accessing and utilizing these community and food assets?
3. How does awareness of these assets and barriers tangibly inform community-led transformation within these neighborhoods?

To answer these questions, the I2I Team designed and implemented a participatory, mixed-methods needs and opportunity landscape analysis.

A landscape analysis (also known as a needs assessment) is a relevant methodology in this context to systematically identify, determine, and address "gaps" between current conditions and desired conditions, as well as map potential strategies to address these "gaps."

See Appendix B for a full description of each data collection method and analysis approach.

Data Collection

QUALITATIVE DATA SOURCES

1. Neighborhood Strategy Sessions

Virtual conversations with 4-8 API Council members representing CBOs in five neighborhoods via Zoom (Japantown, Chinatown, SOMA, Bayview, Westside). CBO representatives discussed their current food-related programming, challenges faced, community assets, key strategies for addressing food access, and ideas for food interventions and policies.

2. Literature & Document Review

I2I reviewed 25 documents to identify common food related assets and barriers as well as 16 additional documents to identify food-related interventions and case studies. These documents were sourced via a systematic process, using specific search engines, journals, and websites, as well as provided by the API Council.

3. Key Informant Interviews

In-depth interviews with 15 key informants (30-45 minutes via Zoom). Informants included: municipal government officials, local CBO representatives (non-API Council members), food systems experts, and policy experts. Interviews discussed community assets, barriers to food access, potential interventions, and food systems.

QUANTITATIVE DATA SOURCES

4. API Community Resident Survey

In collaboration with six API Council member organizations (Self-Help for the Elderly, CYC Bayview, Chinatown CDC, Richmond Neighborhood Center, Kimochi, and SF Bayanihan Equity Center), paper and online surveys were administered to 478 API residents within San Francisco. The survey was offered in English, Tagalog, Chinese, with questions covering use of charitable food services, common sources of food, affordability of food, and transportation to access food

5. San Francisco Food Asset Map

I2I worked closely with David Keyes (founder of R of the Rest of Us) to develop a [virtual asset map](#), depicting the various food resources across San Francisco, with an emphasis on neighborhoods with larger concentrations of API residents. The map expands the understanding of food access and systems within and across API communities in San Francisco.



QUESTION #1 FINDINGS

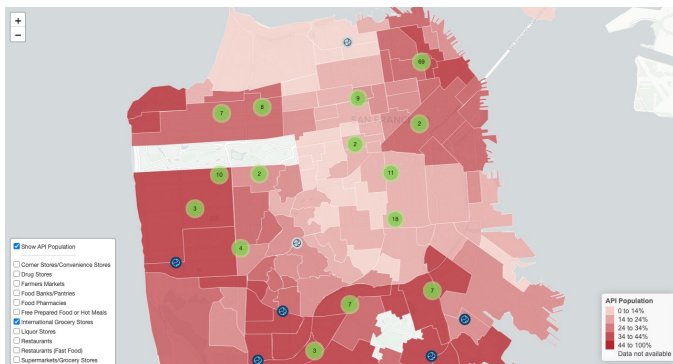
What are the community and food assets available to API neighborhoods in San Francisco?

1 | COMMUNITY & FOOD ASSETS

In partnership with David Keyes, I2I launched an interactive food asset map identifying a total of 2,915 food establishments across all of San Francisco, including corner stores/convenience stores, drug stores, farmers markets, food banks, pantries, food pharmacies, free prepared food or hot meals, international grocery stores, liquor stores, restaurants, fast food restaurants, and supermarkets/grocery stores.

One-third (33%, N=963) of these establishments were located in the nine API priority neighborhoods, including Bayview, Chinatown, Excelsior, Japantown, Richmond, SOMA, Sunset, Tenderloin, and Visitacion Valley.

Here's a sneak peek of what the interactive map looks like. [Visit the interactive map](#) to zoom in & out, select different types of food assets, and navigate different neighborhoods.



In total, the map drew on data from over 10 sources of publicly available data. We acknowledge that this asset mapping likely does not fully capture every *single food asset* with the City of San Francisco. However, this exercise is the first of its kind to offer insight on general trends and patterns related to food access points within the City. It is meant to keep building upon over time and is by no means, comprehensive in detail, but focused on food access touchpoints across the identified neighborhoods.

In addition to food assets identified in the virtual mapping, a triangulation of data sources (i.e., neighborhood strategy sessions, synthesis of existing literature, key informant interviews, and community surveys) identified the following *community assets* related to food justice:

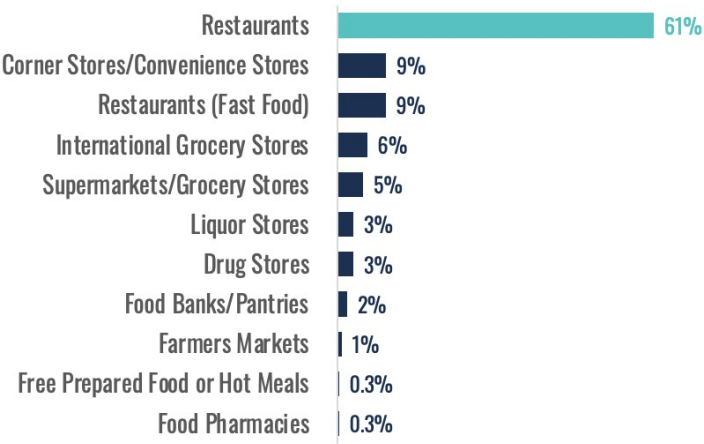
- **Strong sense of community and culture**
- **Dedicated fleet of community-based organizations (CBOs) who have community trust**
- **Existing collaborative networks and coalitions focusing on food justice across San Francisco**

The following sections unpack these food and community assets in more detail.

1.1 | FOOD ASSETS

Among the [963 food assets](#) located in the nine API priority neighborhoods, the majority (61%) are restaurants, 9% are corner/convenience stores, 9% are fast food restaurants, 6% are international grocery stores, and 5% are supermarkets/grocery stores.

Most food assets in the API neighborhoods were **restaurants**, followed by corner stores and fast food establishments.

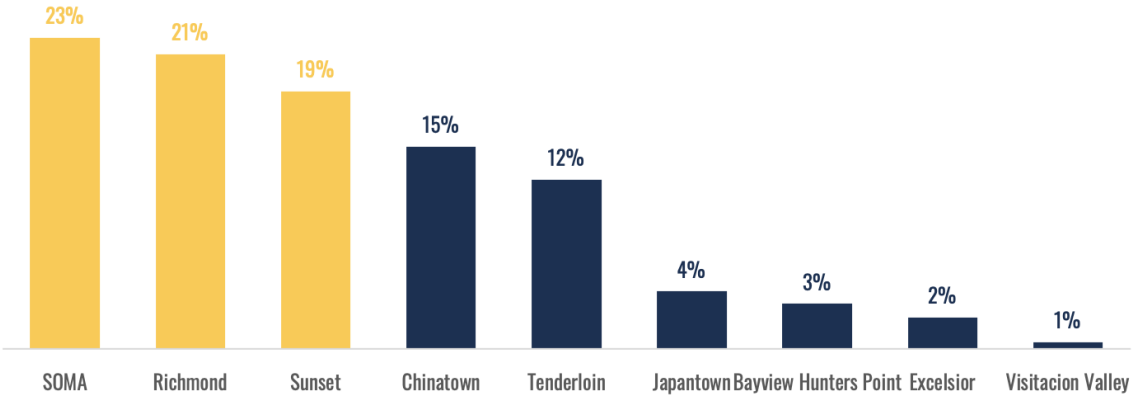


However, these assets are not equally distributed across neighborhoods. SOMA (23%), Richmond (21%), and Sunset (19%) neighborhoods have the highest number of food assets; while some of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as Japantown (4%), Bayview (3%), Excelsior (2%), and Visitacion Valley (1%), have much fewer assets.

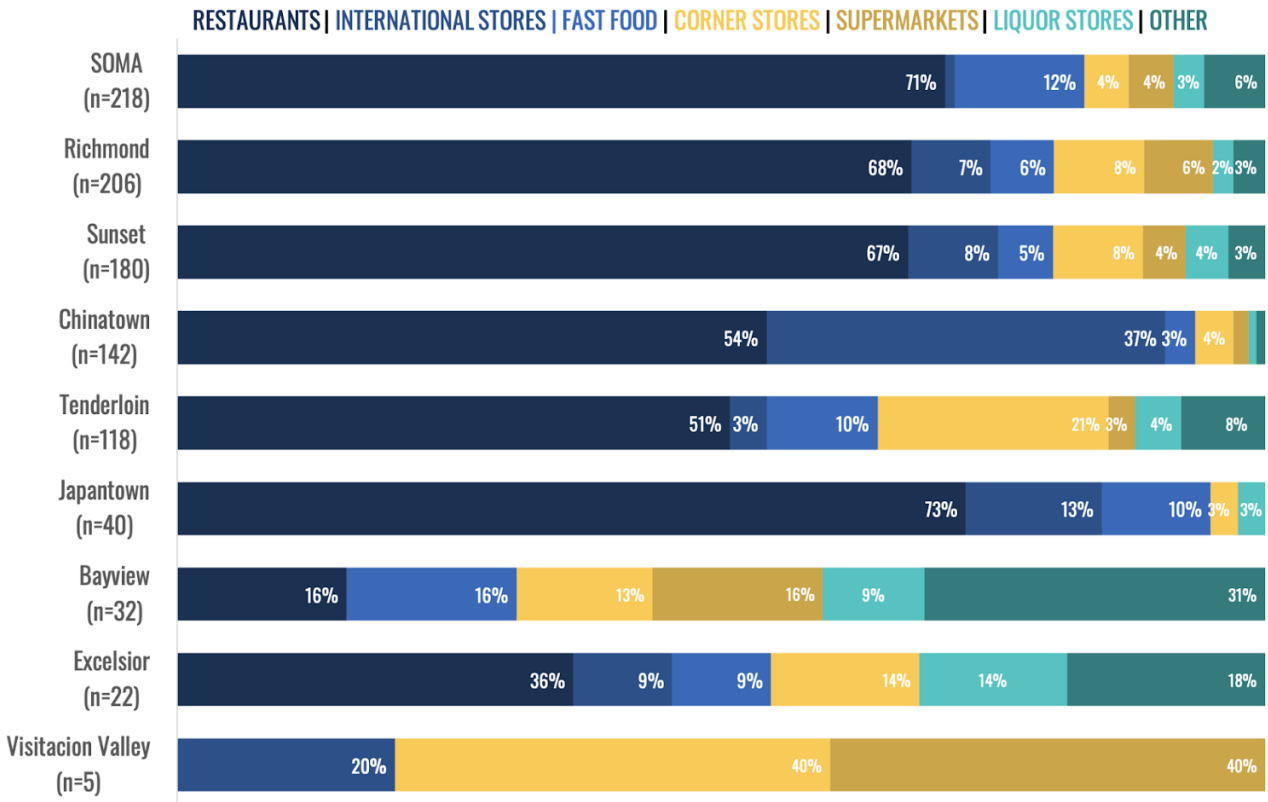


SOMA & Richmond restaurants found via TripAdvisor

The majority of food assets are concentrated in the **SOMA**, **Richmond**, and **Sunset** neighborhoods.



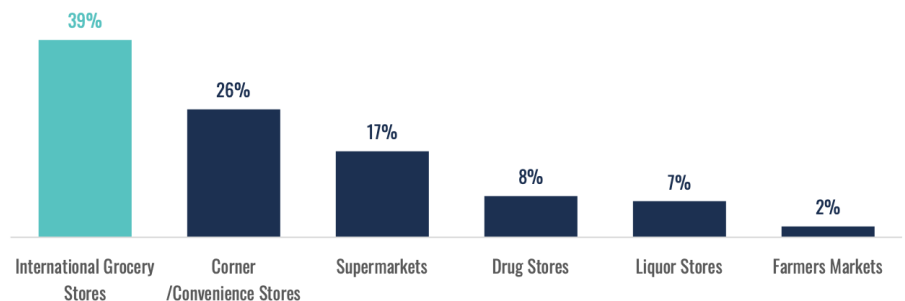
Restaurants are most common across neighborhood with higher frequencies of assets.
Chinatown has the highest concentration of international grocery stores.



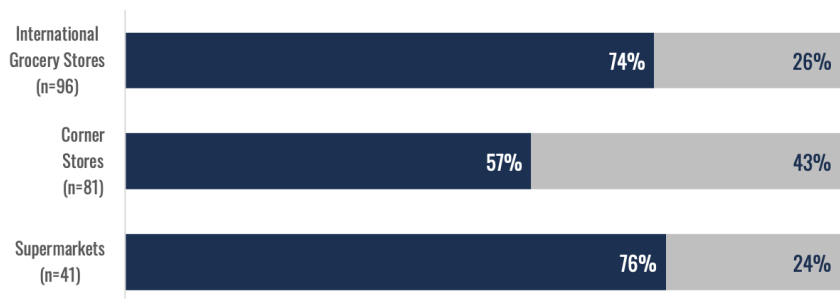
Among all food assets in these API priority areas, only approximately 1 in 5 (19%) accept SNAP or WIC. These public assistance programs are most likely to be accepted at international grocery stores (39%), corner/convenience stores (26%), and supermarkets/grocery stores (17%).

Despite the overall low rates of accepting SNAP & WIC, the majority of international grocery stores, corner or convenience stores, and supermarkets across neighborhoods are accepting these social benefits. Of all 180 establishments that accept SNAP and WIC programs, they are most likely to be located in Chinatown (25%), Richmond (16%), or Tenderloin (15%).

Among all places that do accept SNAP or WIC (N=180), more than one third are international grocery stores and about one-fourth are corner stores.



3 in 4 international grocery stores or regular supermarkets accept SNAP or WIC across the API priority neighborhoods.



1.2 | STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY + CULTURE

Previous research emphasizes that a **“sense of community” allows individuals, especially those living within neighborhoods with cultural corridors (e.g., Chinatown, Japantown), to feel more connected to their culture, preserve tradition, and nourish a sense of “home”** (Csignaladmin et. al., 2018; Wang, 2014). Further, an array of studies illustrates that the ability to access cultural food in one’s own community is a leverage point, thwarting food injustice (Williams-Forson, nd).

Primary data collected via this landscaping study affirmed the linkage between community connection, culture, and food. For example, during the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions, CBO representatives emphasized the role of local API markets, restaurants, and merchants in promoting economic health and cultural resilience. CBO representatives in Chinatown, spoke about their partnerships with legacy API restaurants -- which are viewed as community anchor institutions -- during COVID, as a successful mechanism to promote self-sufficient, “little economies.” As a part of Chinatown Community Development Center’s Feed and Fuel Program, partnerships were strengthened by using grant dollars to fund local restaurants to serve hot meals to community members. Through this type of partnership, community members received free, culturally relevant meals and businesses were able to stay afloat and continue paying their staff (many of which are also community members who reside in nearby affordable housing spaces).

The findings from the Community Food Survey and key informant interviews also emphasized the importance of social connection for food access. As one community member shared: ***“I’ve been coming here for six years and I cannot cook. I’ve met many friends here.”***

Similarly, several interviewees spoke about the community building that occurs at food access points. Key informants shared that for the API community residents they serve, congregate meals are about more than attaining a nourishing meal, they are a time to connect with the community.

“During COVID, it became obvious that gathering and socializing is a main priority for Seniors who attend our meals. In COVID, there was a dramatic decrease in the number of people who come and pick up food, when there was no social aspect.”

-CBO Representative Interviewed

Further, key informants also highlighted that there are an array of other benefits that are cultivated from this strong sense of community. Specifically, key informants shared that the sense of community commonly found within cultural corridors:

- Create space for folks to help and be helped by “their own”
- Cultivate trusted spaces for people to socialize, organize, and engage in commerce, serving as an intersection between food and economic health
- Have their own communication channels to spread awareness about resources
- Are incubators for local programs, such as community gardens for folks to grow their own food

Additionally, the strong API communities that currently exist within San Francisco are a foundational asset for the community organizing that is necessary to manifest change. Indeed previous literature states that CBOs promote residents working together for a common cause that can improve their community and drive change (Equitable Food Oriented Development, 2019).

“Community is the biggest asset. We need to continue tapping into what they want to do... and promote it. We have learned to respect the API community and just get out of the way; they get done what they want to get done.”

-CBO Representative Interviewed

1.3 | DEDICATED FLEET OF CBOs, FUELED BY COMMUNITY TRUST

The strong API communities within San Francisco are also home to a dedicated fleet of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) that have earned the trust of local community members. As previous research affirms, CBOs serve a critical role in datasparse areas by informing public health efforts and by bringing resources to multicultural communities (SFHip, 2019). Primary data collection from this study confirms that this is indeed the case within many of the API communities within San Francisco. **Most obvious, the API Council is a network of 54 member organizations, comprising a robust fleet of institutions who know their communities, have earned community trust, and are experts in service.**

“We pride ourselves on relationship building. We are not coming in as outsiders. People have been building this trust for decades. We are a part of the neighborhood, part of the community. People know who to go to and people can come to them.”

-CBO Representative Interviewed

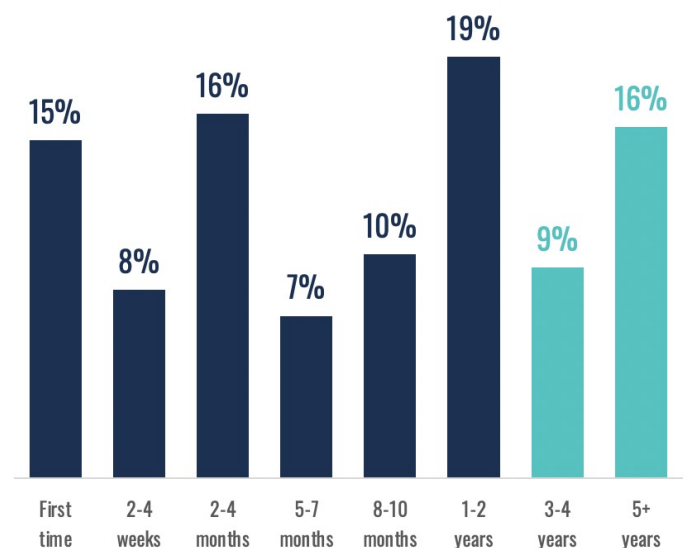
CBO representatives who attended the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions emphasized the important role that their organizations play in providing services or referring community members to charitable and reduced-cost food. According to CBO representatives, these types of resources are more likely to be leveraged by community members when referred by a trusted CBO. Furthermore, key informants echoed these sentiments, citing that the existence of CBOs that have cultivated trusting relationships with community residents are an immense asset in the quest for food security.

“Organizations that specialize in serving these special groups... they do lots of translation and have equipped staff who are familiar with the community. These CBO's are an asset because they are more than food distribution; they are the connection to folks on the ground.”

-CBO Representative Interviewed

The Community Food Survey illustrates that many API community members have forged strong, and trusting bonds with CBOs in their neighborhood. When asked how long they have been visiting their local CBO to access food, 16% reported that they have been using the CBO's food services for over five years and 9% reported they have been frequenting their local CBO for 3-4 years. This finding indicates a sense of trust experienced between community residents and their CBOs.

One fourth of respondents have been visiting their local CBO to access food for 3 years or longer.



Moreover, previous literature reinforces the importance of community trust and voice in designing community food justice solutions. Cheong and colleagues (2019) assert that one way for CBOs to become aware of cultural nuances and design programs with culturally appropriate food choices is to have community members provide suggestions for interventions. Additionally, the work of Louie and colleagues (2020) in Southern California demonstrates that engaging and collaborating with API communities to tailor interventions is a critical strategy to achieve a greater likelihood of increasing CalFresh utilization (Louie et al, 2020).



Self-Help for the Elderly

安老自助處

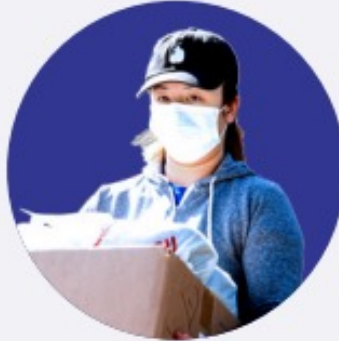


Photo from Self-Help's [2020 Annual Report](#)

Community Trust Exemplar Spotlight: Self-Help for the Elderly

Since 1966, [Self-Help for the Elderly](#) has provided assistance and support to seniors in the San Francisco area. They provide trustworthy and devoted care for seniors to promote their independence, dignity, and self-worth. Their influence is particularly strong in the Richmond, Sunset, and Chinatown neighborhoods and many seniors depend on their [CHAMPSS program](#). Especially during COVID, senior members of the Asian Pacific Islanders community relied on Self-Help to provide the nourishment they needed to survive the pandemic.

Self-Help is known for not only their services but also their companionship, helping to guide seniors to wellness and happiness. Their commitment to ensuring seniors live longer, healthier, more purposeful lives makes them an exemplar of what community trust looks like at it's best.

100 community members, who utilize Self-Help's services, replied to the Community Food Survey. On average, respondents had been visiting Self-Help for food assistance for 6.5 years.

This is a clear illustration of the trust shared between community members and Self-Help. Self-Help is a pillar of the elderly API community, across neighborhoods.

1.4 | EXISTING COLLABORATIVE FOOD SECURITY NETWORKS AND COALITIONS

Within San Francisco, food injustice has been gaining City-wide attention for the past decade or more. During the document review and key informant interviews, a multitude of collaboratives and coalitions surfaced that are actively championing change within the food systems in San Francisco. These existing collaboratives and networks are vital assets, offering infrastructure and political cache that can be leveraged.

Example collaboratives include:

- [California Food Is Medicine Coalition \(FIMC\)](#): Well-established group pushing policy to have medically tailored food as a private and public insurance health benefit
- [SF Food Security Task Force](#): Currently has no representation from primarily API serving organizations
- [CalAIM](#): Focused on expanding medically-supportive food and nutrition services to improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs; many co-signers on this initiative
- [UCSF Anchor Institution Initiative](#): Managed by the Community Engagement Center at UCSF, bridging university and community assets; primarily focused on health-equity

While engaging in vital work, many of the above cited **efforts have failed to recognize and validate the API struggle**. Throughout the key informant interviews, several coalitions expressed a need and potentially a willingness to partner with the API Council. However, none of these organizations have reached out to the API Council to forge partnerships. The API Council is a vast asset, that not only serves as a network of nonprofit service providers, civil rights organizations, and arts groups, but also produces seminal community-based research and public policy analysis to support API communities.

Furthermore, the API Council has worked closely with the [API Health Parity Coalition](#), and their membership bases share many similarities. Together these two organizations are eager and willing to engage in partnerships and dialogues that advance the prosperity of people of color across San Francisco.

1.5 | POLITICAL WILL & EMERGENT POLICY AGENDAS

The final community asset highlighted is a fervent political will and emergent policy agenda that both have been reignited by the stark injustices that have gained national attention during the COVID-19 crisis.

Throughout the key informant interviews, there was a heightened sense of anger, confusion, and urgency to do better for API Communities. Repeatedly, interview respondents emphasized that the only way to bring food justice, sovereignty, and transformation to communities is via a massive overhaul of the current systems.

“*I feel disillusioned, to be honest...*

We need to burn it down.

I don't see how policy can fix the racism. There are a lot of power grabs. It is a rarity to find politicians who are actively looking to benefit their communities. Policy needs to be sustainable and it does play a major role, but it needs to reflect what the community wants.”

-CBO Representative Interviewed

Building upon this political will, the City of San Francisco's [Office of Racial Equity](#) (ORE) has recently released a [Racial Equity and Food Sovereignty Policy Framework](#). Within this policy framework, food sovereignty (ensuring communities have the right to nourish themselves through the equitable and ecologically sound production, distribution, and consumption of food) is boldly, and rightly, framed as the policy goal.

Further, the framework posits that COVID-19, structural racism, economic injustice, redlining, the lack of government support, and trauma and violence perpetuate food inequity within the San Francisco community.

To meet this goal of creating an equitable food system, the racial equity centered framework advocates for a holistic approach that is community-led and controlled. It touts the need to rethink access and prioritize agency as well as leverage new and existing food infrastructures. The framework articulates a need to strengthen the food industry with fair and equitable workforce practices, and also advocates for culturally and religiously appropriate solutions that are local and sustainable.

Accompanying this framework, the ORE has also released two legislative ordinances: (1) the establishment a special fund for grants to nonprofit agencies to establish and operate food empowerment markets and (2) a requirement for the Department of Public Health to report biennially on food justice and equity, with input from other departments. Taken together, the ORE framework and the two ordinances are illustrations of the renewed momentum surrounding food system policy and advocacy work. This momentum and the ORE framework are both strong leverage points for lasting community food reform efforts.

EXCERPTS FROM THE ORE FRAMEWORK

Food insecurity deepened due to the collapse of our food systems:

- 56% of food service and hospitality workers in SF lost their jobs
- 39% increase in mortality for agriculture and food workers in CA
- Even before the pandemic, 1 in 4 residents in SF did not have reliable access to healthy food

What's Fueling Food Inequity in our Community?

COVID-19

Structural
Racism

Economic
Injustice

Redlining

Lack of Govt
Support

Trauma &
Violence

SF HRC ORE ©2020

The policy goal for our city is food sovereignty, rather than food security

Food security: Reducing outcomes of malnutrition and hunger through temporary, often paternalistic solutions

Food sovereignty: Ensuring communities have the right to nourish themselves through the equitable and ecologically sound production, distribution, and consumption of food.



QUESTION #2 FINDINGS

What barriers exist to accessing and utilizing community and food assets?

Photo credit: Cars wait in a line to receive boxes of food at a drive-thru food distribution site from the Los Angeles Regional Food Bank and Los Angeles County Federation of Labor outside the Teamsters Local 572 office in Carson, California, April 18. REUTERS/Patrick T. Fallon

2 | BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD ASSETS

This landscaping study identified the following barriers preventing API communities from fully accessing and utilizing the food and community assets identified in the previous section:

- **Lack of food availability & affordability**
- **Economic disparities**
- **Language and technology barriers**
- **Strained, stigmatized charitable food systems**
- **Systemic racial inequities**

We view racial inequity as the primary, “upstream” issue from which all other “downstream” barriers cascade from. As highlighted in the introduction, the racialization of API communities, especially the “model minority myth”, perpetuates race-based assumptions that obscure the inequalities experienced by API communities. Several specific examples of this concealment emerged throughout this project.

For one, there is a **consistent pattern of exclusion of API communities from large scale data collection and needs assessment efforts** nationally (Chan & Kan, 2021), as well as within the City of San Francisco. In fact, API communities are not considered an underrepresented minority group by NIH and NSF, thus research centering APIs is not prioritized (clinical research focused on APIs and funded by the NIH comprised just 0.17 percent of its total budget between 1992-2018) and API investigators Asian investigators are not eligible for supplements aimed at increasing diversity in research (Yee, 2021). Further a recent study of 380 news articles from 2019 found that API communities were the focus of media stories on racial and economic inequality less than 4% of the time (Chan & Kan, 2021).

These facts are startling when realizing that the API community, as a whole, has been the fastest growing racial/ethnic group in San Francisco since 2000 (PolicyLink & Peer, 2017), now comprising approximately 34% of the total City’s population (Data USA, 2019). Given API community members constitute a disproportionately high percentage (42%) of residents living below the federal poverty line (API Council, 2018), it is harmful when reports produced by the City, such as the Food Security Task Force’s Food Support Gaps Analysis (2020), fail to adequately include proper representation from API communities in their data collection.

When API communities are absent from the data, it is no coincidence they are also absent from policy priorities and resource allocation.

The SF Food Security Task Force’s [Food Support Gaps Analysis](#) (2020) again illustrates this phenomena. Despite the under sampling of API communities within the report, large numbers of API respondents indicated a need for food support (46% Pacific Islander, 36% Other Asian, and 35% Chinese). However, the report’s six recommendations did not speak to this data. Rather, the bulk of the recommendations specifically advocated for African American/Black and Latinx communities (Pacific Islanders were mentioned once). While we support the plight of all people of color, this exclusion of low-income API folks in the policy recommendations renders an entire subset of the most vulnerable population invisible.

When API communities are invisible in policy priorities and resource allocation, they are not invited to discussions to strategize solutions. For example, within four of the primary food justice collaboratives and coalitions in San Francisco (FIMC, SF Food Security Task Force, CalAIM, and UCSF Anchor Institution Initiative; see Section 1.4), there has been no outreach or invitation extended to the API Council. In this way, there is a systemic lack of representation of API communities within the “food justice ” spaces.

Exclusion from data is an act of racism and discrimination, whether intentional or not. Without proper representation in the data, there is little evidence of the struggles faced by low-income API residents. If there is no evidence, there are neither policies nor proper resources allocated for these communities. Data bring visibility to marginalized communities, and serve as a gateway to change. Data are powerful. Thus, when the data systematically exclude API community members, an entire racial group is stripped of the power to speak their truth.

Omission of API data silences reality.

2.1 | LACK OF FOOD AVAILABILITY + AFFORDABILITY

Overall, the data show that the current food system is insufficient to meet the food justice needs of API communities. Issues related to availability and access span numerous domains, many of which are highlighted below. **However, each of these domains reinforce and perpetuate one another, creating a vicious system of food injustice for API communities.**

NEED FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT + HEALTHY OPTIONS

Prior literature indicates that for many community members of color, “trying to find these [culturally relevant] foods can be hard and frustrating, often making many immigrants take things into their own hands to try and get what they need” (Williams-Forson, nd). Indeed, data gathered as a part of this exploration aligns with this notion. For example, the [San Francisco Asset Map](#) illustrates that many of the predominantly API communities in San Francisco have low access to food stores as well as low access to culturally relevant food items (as evidenced by a dearth of International Grocery Stores). As depicted on the Asset Map, while cultural hubs such as Chinatown and Japantown do offer a plethora of culturally relevant grocery stores and restaurants, those living in the Tenderloin or SOMA are too far away to commute to these venues on a weekly basis.

“*Food that is not culturally relevant is not ‘acceptable’ or ‘accessible’ — there is no dignity in it.*”

-Kapelari et al. (2019)

CBO representatives during the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions uniformly shared concerns regarding the accessibility of culturally relevant foods, both at supermarkets and via charitable food sources. One CBO representative pointed out that in District 6 (Tenderloin and SOMA), there are more liquor stores than grocery stores; and these liquor stores accept EBT, but often the produce markets do not. Further, CBO representatives from SOMA noted that members of their Filipino community are particularly hesitant to accept food from sources like Meals on Wheels because they are unfamiliar with the Westernized food selections.

Moreover, key informants frequently cited the lack of culturally relevant foods as a major barrier to food security among API community members. In fact, key informants framed the cultural appropriateness of food as one dimension of healthy food.

“*Not just any food should be connected to the community. We need to focus on the health of the communities. Cultural relevance and quality are extremely important. Food that is culturally relevant is one way to show respect.*”

-Government Representative
Interviewed

However, several key informants also highlighted the fact that not all culturally relevant foods are nutritious.

This insight exacerbates the underlying tension that many “healthy foods” are based on Western conceptualizations and are in fact, not culturally relevant (Williams-Forson, 2012). As such, it is vital that food solutions and interventions avoid “acculturation” in their efforts to provide technical assistance related to nutrition, food, and health.

2.1 | LACK OF FOOD AVAILABILITY + AFFORDABILITY (CONTINUED)

LACK OF RELIABLE & SAFE TRANSPORTATION

Relatedly, since vendors of culturally relevant foods are not abundant across the numerous neighborhoods of San Francisco, many API community members are dependent on walking or on unreliable public transportation to access the food they prefer. Data from the Community Food Survey highlights that across the seven predominantly API neighborhoods, walking is the most common mode of transportation for many API community residents, closely followed by personal cars and then public transportation. Both of the sources of mobility to access food are limited and restrict the distance that can feasible be traveled.

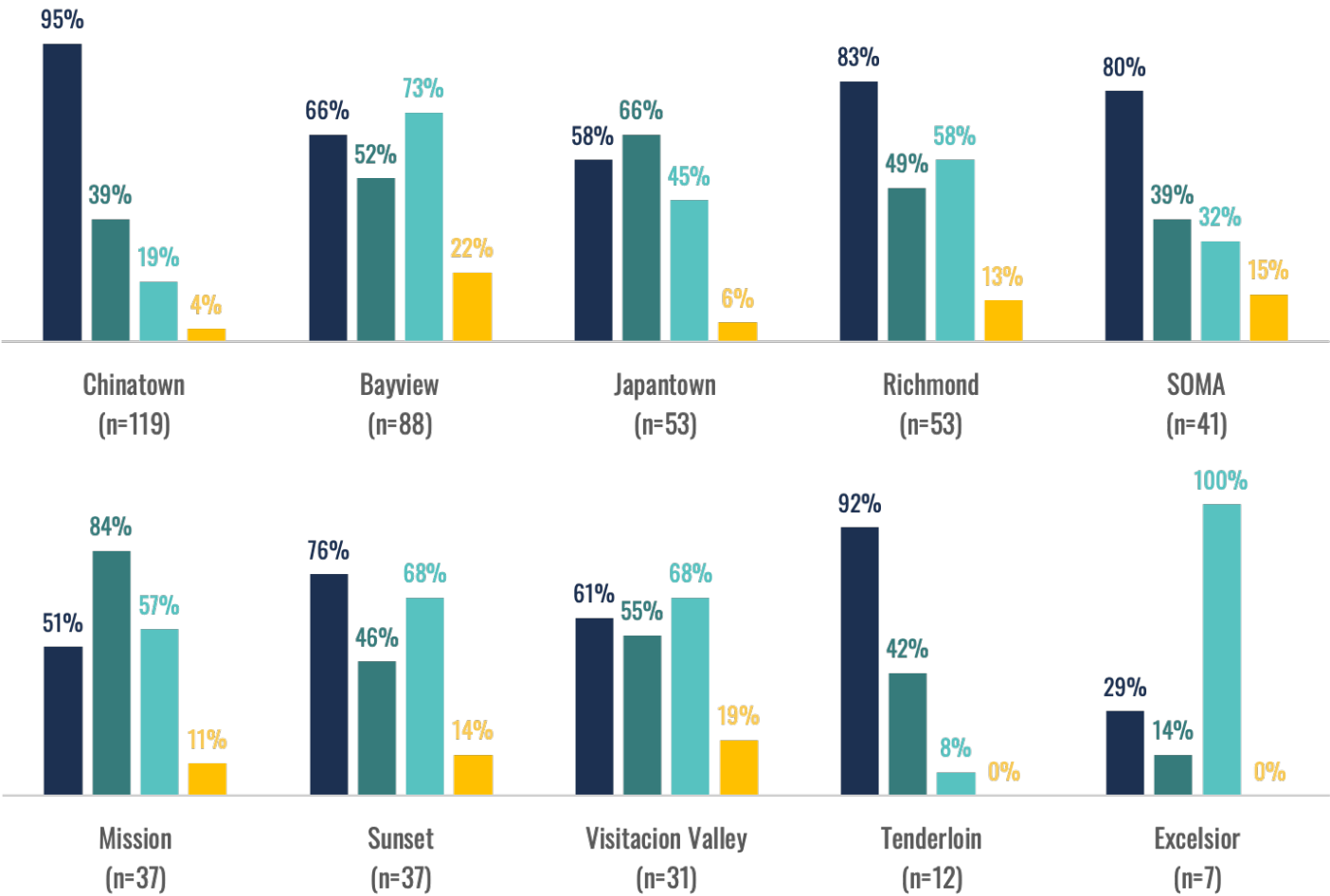
The Neighborhood Strategy Sessions and key informant interviews affirm and expand on this notion.

For example, CBO representatives cited a widespread lack of transportation, especially during COVID, for community residents. CBO representatives also noted that transportation issues perpetuate and are adjacent to issues related to community safety. Due to the rise in hate crimes against the API community, walking and public transit now present safety concerns. Similarly, key informants noted that community residents find it **“physically hard to get help”** and access food due to lack of safe, reliable transportation needed to travel the far distances to get connected to services.

Due to this lack of reliable and safe transportation, many community members must rely on the small grocers, corner stores, and liquor stores close by that rarely sell fresh, let alone culturally appropriate food. Again, this perpetuates a system of pervasive food injustice.

Modes of transformation differ across neighborhoods. Most respondents prefer walking.

WALKING | PUBLIC TRANSIT | CAR (PERSONAL OR SOMEONE ELSE'S) | OTHER



2.1 | LACK OF FOOD AVAILABILITY + AFFORDABILITY (CONTINUED)

LACK OF AFFORDABLE FOOD

Even if API community members are able to access culturally appropriate and healthy foods, affording it is yet another barrier. According to data from the Community Food Survey, 64% of respondents shared that they are “sometimes” able to afford to purchase the food they prefer. While only 34% are either “always” or “often” able to afford the foods they prefer.

Most respondents reported they are **sometimes** able to purchase food they prefer.

ALWAYS | OFTEN | **SOMETIMES** | NEVER



Further, key informant interviews validated that the price of healthy food is a barrier to food justice.

“We break it down into ‘find’, ‘afford’, and ‘choose.’ From our research ‘afford’ is the most influential barrier to getting healthy food. People will drive or walk long distances to a grocery store. While that is not ideal, they will do it if they can afford to.”

-Policy Expert Interviewed

Commentary from the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions indicate that API community residents in San Francisco are forced to choose between healthy food, paying rent, and affording other living expenses. CBO representatives in Japantown especially raised concerns about the increasing cost of rent faced by their community members. Relatedly, a 2013 food justice report focused on the Tenderloin neighborhood posited that it is not uncommon for individuals to spend in excess of 50% of their income on rent, leaving very little for other necessities (Harder + CO, 2013).

As such, many API community members rely on free food services from local CBOs to access food. When survey respondents were asked, “If the [local CBO] no longer offered food, how would you get your food-related needs met?”, **19% said they would be forced to seek out other charitable food sources**, 8% said they would need to buy cheaper food, 7% would need to rely on support from family/friends, 7% would rely on CalFresh, **6% of respondents said “I would eat less”**, and 5% said they would not know what to do or where to turn.

LIMITED ACCESS TO COOKING SPACE + EQUIPMENT

Lastly, mixed-methods data highlighted challenges faced by community members living in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) dwellings or are currently unhoused. According to the 2019 San Francisco Community Health Needs Assessment, over 21,000 occupied housing units in San Francisco do not have complete kitchen facilities (SFHIP, 2019). **Data illustrate that Chinatown residents have five times the rate of housing overcrowding than the San Francisco average**; over 600 Chinatown families live in Single Room Occupancy hotels, as do many Southeast Asian families in the Tenderloin or Filipino families in the South of Market. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders also experience significant housing overcrowding in the Bayview and other neighborhoods in the Southeast sector of San Francisco, living in multi-generational households as do many Black families.

Community members living in these crowded conditions face challenges with storing perishable groceries and cooking meals due to their lack of refrigerators and kitchens. CBO representatives from Westside neighborhoods shared stories of 6-7 seniors living in cramped, converted garages and parceled out mother-in-law suites. These representatives conveyed a strong desire for intergenerational community kitchens that would provide space for community members to cook and access food.

“Lots of folks in the Tenderloin live in SRO’s...most don’t even have a stovetop. They just have a microwave and mini fridge. Most folks in SROs only have 1 meal a day. In COVID, it was a huge challenge because they cannot eat out. So actual cooking equipment is a limiting factor.”

-CBO Representative Interviewed

2.2 | ECONOMIC DISPARITIES

API community members constitute 42% of all San Francisco residents who live below the federal poverty line (API Council, 2018) and thus contend with high and rising levels of economic inequality that underlie concerns related to food availability and access. Over one third of all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in San Francisco (approximately 38,495) live below the Poverty Line. **Since 2007, API's have experienced the largest growth in poverty of any ethnic group in San Francisco (API Council, 2014).**

As such, API poverty has grown beyond the historic central neighborhoods such as Chinatown, the Tenderloin, and South of Market, which together account for 37 % of API poverty (API Council, 2014). Today, San Francisco's Westside neighborhoods (i.e., Richmond, Sunset) represent over 27 % of total API poverty in the City. Further, API poverty in the Southeast sector (i.e., Bayview, Visitation Valley, Excelsior Districts) has grown to represent over 17 % of total API poverty in the City.

INCOME INEQUALITY

Previous literature indicates that plays a massive role in the origin and perpetuation of food injustice (Brown & Brewster, 2014). Indeed, a community needs assessment conducted by the San Francisco Health Improvement Partnership (SFHip, 2019) reported that racial health inequalities and poverty are the two most common causes of disparities among San Francisco residents (SFHip, 2019).

Key informants echo this finding, identifying poverty as one of the most pernicious “upstream” issues that result in “downstream” ramifications, such as food injustice. Informants cited low income levels as a major factor in food injustice, especially for API communities. They assert that these folks simply cannot afford the high rent prices as well as the cost of transportation and food.

API community members, along with other people of color, are more likely to work in frontline service positions, often making less than a living wage. Although not overrepresented among frontline industries as a whole, API workers, who account for 27% of workers overall, are overrepresented in frontline industries including health care (36%); manufacturing (36%); and trucking, warehouse, and postal service industries (32%; Henderson, McCullough, Treuhaft, 2020).

This is especially problematic given studies that demonstrate frontline workers are more likely to live in poverty, pay too much for rent, be caring for children and/or seniors at home, lack internet access, and not have health insurance (Henderson, McCullough, Trehaft, 2020), particularly in San Francisco. Moreover, 17% of all frontline workers live below 200 percent of the poverty level (about \$48,000 for a family of four; Henderson, McCullough, Trehaft, 2020).

Furthermore, a study by PolicyLink and PERE (2020) reveals that wide pay disparities by race and gender persist even for those with a college degree. They found that workers of color and women across all racial/ethnic groups earn lower wages than their White counterparts, even when they have similar levels of education. Looking solely at college graduates, API women earn \$12 less per hour than White and API men.

All this demonstrates an increased and significant prevalence of income inequality among API community members in San Francisco, which serves as another formidable barrier to food justice.

“**Money is the biggest barrier. It always starts with money.**”

-Government Rep. Interviewed

2.2 | ECONOMIC DISPARITIES (CONTINUED)

RISK FOR GENTRIFICATION

San Francisco has many districts that have over 35% API community residents residing in them. Many have clusters, cultural districts, or corridors where API small business owners own restaurants, grocery stores, and other types of small businesses that make a commercial corridor attractive to local and outside visitors. **The COVID-19 pandemic caused a large number of legacy API restaurants and small food storefronts to go out of business or on hiatus.** High commercial rents with little flexibility from landlords, coupled with reductions in the number of customers has meant that once vibrant cultural corridors have closed and feel largely abandoned. Moreover, there was fear among the CBO representatives during the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions that these historically API restaurants and shops will be turned over to businesses that don't serve local residents once the economy opens back up, given the extreme gentrification trends in San Francisco.

These API food-oriented businesses are more than transactional sources. Neighborhood Strategy Session participants assert that they are respite spaces for folks who live in overcrowded SROs, anchors in the neighborhood economies, they provide culturally relevant hot meals at an affordable price, and are pillars of API cultural resilience. **They make up the energy and community gathering spaces of belonging. Thus, there are drastic implications for API food justice when these food-centered gathering places and legacy businesses close.** As CBO representatives in Chinatown, Japantown, and SOMA highlighted during the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions, there has been a ripple-effect from the COVID-induced closure of API businesses that has created further job injustice, exacerbated the rent burden, and perpetuated the cycle of individual debt and poverty, all contributing to more rampant food injustice.

These API legacy businesses are vast, unique, and critical parts of the API foodways of San Francisco. Therefore, the pandemic and their resulting closure has worsened economic injustice and thus amplified food injustice across the API community, while also leading to the loss of valued community and cultural food resources.

2.3 | LANGUAGE + TECH BARRIERS

There are significant language and technology barriers for API community members as they attempt to access the community services that they need. Previous literature reveals 35% of San Francisco's population is foreign born, with the majority (65%) hailing from Asian countries (SFHip, 2019). Additionally, data also show that 16% of the total API population in San Francisco are first generation immigrants from their home country (PolicyLink & PERE, 2017). These community members speak English with varied proficiency. **A study of Asian American food injustice in California reveals that both being foreign born and speaking a non-English language at home were both significantly associated with a higher prevalence of food injustice** (Becerra et al, 2018). This is compounded by the fact that 25% of low-income residents in San Francisco do not have access to reliable Wifi (Connect California, 2018).

Neighborhood Strategy Session participants told stories of how community members had trouble accessing CalFresh due to an inability to access or navigate the clunky website. These individuals resorted to calling the Department of Social Services in order to apply and qualify for CalFresh — a potentially daunting and unapproachable task for non-English speakers.

Further, CBO representatives and key informants alike share that language barriers also exist for API community members as they seek services from local nonprofits and CBOs. Neighborhood Strategy Sessions and interviews reveal that due to a lack of linguistically appropriate materials and outreach, many community members were unaware of the availability of food resources.

The language barriers also mean that in an increasingly virtual world, with technology being used to solve a growing number of problems, those who don't speak English, don't have access to the internet, don't own internet capable devices, or are elderly are often left behind. Thus, accessing food from phone applications, such as GrubHub or Instacart, as a remedy to unsafe and unreliable transportation, isn't accessible to everyone, even if they have the economic means to utilize these services.

2.4 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

It has largely been the charity and CBO system that is expected to rise up to meet the food justice needs of our diverse communities. They are the ones making sure that their constituents don't fall through the cracks. **CBOs are doing the work that systems have failed to do well. Changes that should be implemented at a systems level are being initiated and practiced by very small organizations, which have exceeded their capacity due to the pandemic.**

According to the Community Food Survey, there was an increase in usage of charitable food sources in the last 10 months during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, 56% of respondents only began using their preferred charitable food source within the past 10 months. Data from the San Francisco Marin County Food Bank confirm this finding, noting that during COVID-19 they went from serving 32,000 to 60,000 households weekly, which is a jump from 855,000 meals to 1.3 million meals a week (SF Marin Food Bank, 2020).

As such, these sources of charitable food are strained, often providing services that seemingly lack dignity. These services are thus subject to extreme cultural stigma and perpetuate feelings of scarcity.

STRAIN ON CBOs

The Neighborhood Strategy Sessions demonstrated that the API member organizations (CBOs) are on the ground serving and delivering tens of thousands of meals a week to their food insecure API community members. During COVID, more than ever, they are strained for resources at every level. Several CBO representatives mentioned they had to reduce or discontinue their food services due to a decrease in available volunteers during the pandemic as well as a decline in funding. These decreases are despite the exponentially rising community demand for charitable food.

Even prior to COVID, funding for these organizations is inconsistent at best, according to CBO representatives.

Much of the financial strain is linked with larger systems, such as problematic government mandates and colonial philanthropic funding models.

Key informant interviews spoke about how CBOs and nonprofits feel the squeeze from government funding mandates, which grant funds to whichever organization can feed the most people at the cheapest rate. Similarly, key informant interviewees spoke about how philanthropic donors often inadvertently pit CBOs against one another, having them compete for limited grant dollars, rather than empowering them to collaborate.

“*Whoever had the cheapest bid got the contract [for the federally-funded COVID relief food boxes]. The current boxes are despicable. If anyone thinks otherwise, they haven't seen the box. There are 2 quarts of cottage cheese, which Asian folks dumped out immediately, 2 bags of celery, and pre-cooked mystery meat. There was milk and cheese, a bag of apples, and a bag of potatoes. It was not what a family or senior can live on. It is not okay.*

The legacy of white supremacy in the food became clear.”

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

Through these observations, key informant interviews reinforced that these well-intentioned organizations simply cannot afford to feed the need in their communities amidst the immense financial strain and unrealistic expectations that they are subject to.

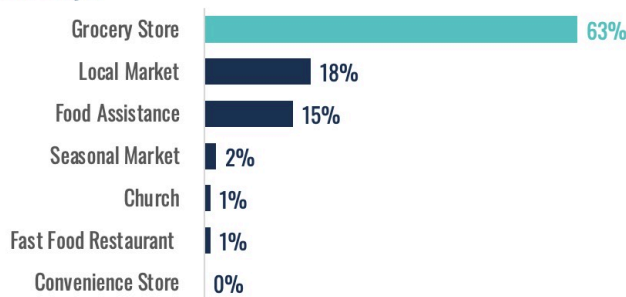
“*We need to change mindsets. People think that food should be cheap... food is not cheap. But we think charitable food should be cheap.*”

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

2.4 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS (CONTINUED)

Key informants asserted the unrealistic expectations placed on charitable food organizations extend beyond financial expectations. For example, charitable food sources are intended to be an emergency resource. Yet, as inequality grows, more community members rely on charitable food sources as a pillar of their weekly food access. The Community Food Survey Data show that 16% of respondents relied on charitable food sources (i.e., food assistance, church) for their weekly groceries.

Respondents got most of their food from **Grocery Stores** in the past 30 days.



“People should give some grace to food banks because of the model that they are. Food banks are there for emergency purposes. But because our society doesn’t address hunger the way it needs to, food banks became grocery stores.”

-Government Rep. Interviewed

DIGNITY

As stated, for those members of the API community that don’t make enough money to buy their food from the grocery store or local market, they must rely on charity food sources that are strained and were not designed to be long-term sources of food for community members. Thus, charitable food sources often do not serve culturally appropriate foods, require standing in long food lines at odd times of day, disseminate less-desirable, surplus food, and do not cater to the language needs of API San Franciscans. Ample literature, the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions, and key informant interviews all converge to highlight these inherent flaws in the charitable food system. What results is an experience that lacks choice and dignity for community members.

“So many nonprofits and food organizations are driven by what is cheap and free. They don’t have an eye towards the quality piece...[Community members] often get food that looks like garbage; they are essentially standing in line at a food bank to get garbage.”

-Policy Rep. Interviewed

“They [charitable food sources] have to be able to address the cultural responsiveness of the folks they are serving. The current model of food banks is acquiring surplus food and providing it to folks, so it’s not always able to be culturally responsive. Buying to scale doesn’t allow cultural responsiveness. Overall, food banks are at a disadvantage in getting to food appropriateness.”

-Government Rep. Interviewed

“We focus on sourcing produce for food distribution versus relying on donation. When you do that, you provide quality and choice. People feel seen, heard, and valued. That goes a long way when in a crisis when everyone feels threatened and unsafe.”

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

As the quotes above illustrate, policy, governmental, and nonprofit personnel alike recognize that many charitable food sources are providing an undignified experience that lacks cultural responsiveness. However, as these quotes also insinuate, actions to address these deficiencies are thwarted by inflexible organizational ideologies, rooted in the status quo models of charitable food systems. While in many ways, these charitable food organizations are "doing the best they can," it is imperative to call-out the immense power many of the charity food organizations, particularly those who operate on a national scale, wield. Ultimately, they are fully aware that their models of operation (i.e., "push models" of getting donated food out the door) do nothing to combat systemic racial inequity. These ideologies are both supported by and perpetuate woefully inadequate understandings of dignity and cultural responsiveness.

2.4 | STRAINED + STIGMATIZED CHARITABLE FOOD SYSTEMS (CONTINUED)

The interviewee excerpt below highlights this dismal grasp of cultural responsiveness through the quoted representatives' assumption that simply providing rice to Chinatown food pantries is an appropriate demonstration of cultural responsiveness.

“We try to think of the demographics when we are sending the food... but we have not focused on culturally specific and appropriate food. I wish we would, but I understand the restrictions; that costs more money. How do we support and feed people how they prefer to be fed? Within Chinatown, we are not using culturally appropriate food enough...”

but we get rice out to Chinatown more than other places.”

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

STIGMA

There are also deeply rooted, culturally embedded stigmas that prevent members of the San Francisco API communities from accessing food resources, even when these resources would be fairly easy to acquire. Studies show that culturally-based stigma related to “handouts” inhibit Asian-American populations from seeking food-related assistance at higher rates than other minority communities (Becerra et al, 2018; Louie et al, 2020). In fact, CalFresh data from Marin County demonstrate that only 5% of API households leverage CalFresh, despite comprising 42% of low-income residents within the City.

During the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions, CBO representatives from all five neighborhoods cited their community members feeling “embarrassment” about receiving “handouts.” Thus, this stigma acts as a deterrent for folks who would benefit from these food resources. For example, one CBO representative shared their experience working with API youth in the community. The CBO was given a grant to disseminate food gift certificates to their youth. However, a fear of stigma resulted in the CBO having many gift cards that they were unable to give away. These youth would rather struggle alone than admit that they needed help.

Additionally, key informants cited that the stigma of accessing charitable food is compounded by fear and mistrust in the entities providing the services.

SCARCITY

The strain on charitable food organizations, the lack of dignity that results, and the stigma associated with receiving “hand-outs” all perpetuate an environment of scarcity. Several CBOs representatives from the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions and key informants spoke about altercations that broke out in food lines among individuals.

“There is a scarcity mentality. There are cultural norms that come to light in food lines.”

-CBO Rep. Interviewed

At a time when hate crimes against API community members are dramatically on the rise, these in-line tensions further prevent API community members from feeling safe and accessing the resources they need to thrive.

While this violence - both verbal and physical - is problematic, one key informant astutely pointed out **the larger, remaining issue — “Why do our API community members need to stand in line for charitable food at all?”**

Overall, this perceived scarcity of charitable food is associated with violence and hostility, thus presenting yet another food security barrier experienced by API communities.

“There is a fear of accessing programs: goes back to prior federal administrations - public charge and attacks on the immigrant community.”

-Government Rep. Interviewed



QUESTION #3 FINDINGS

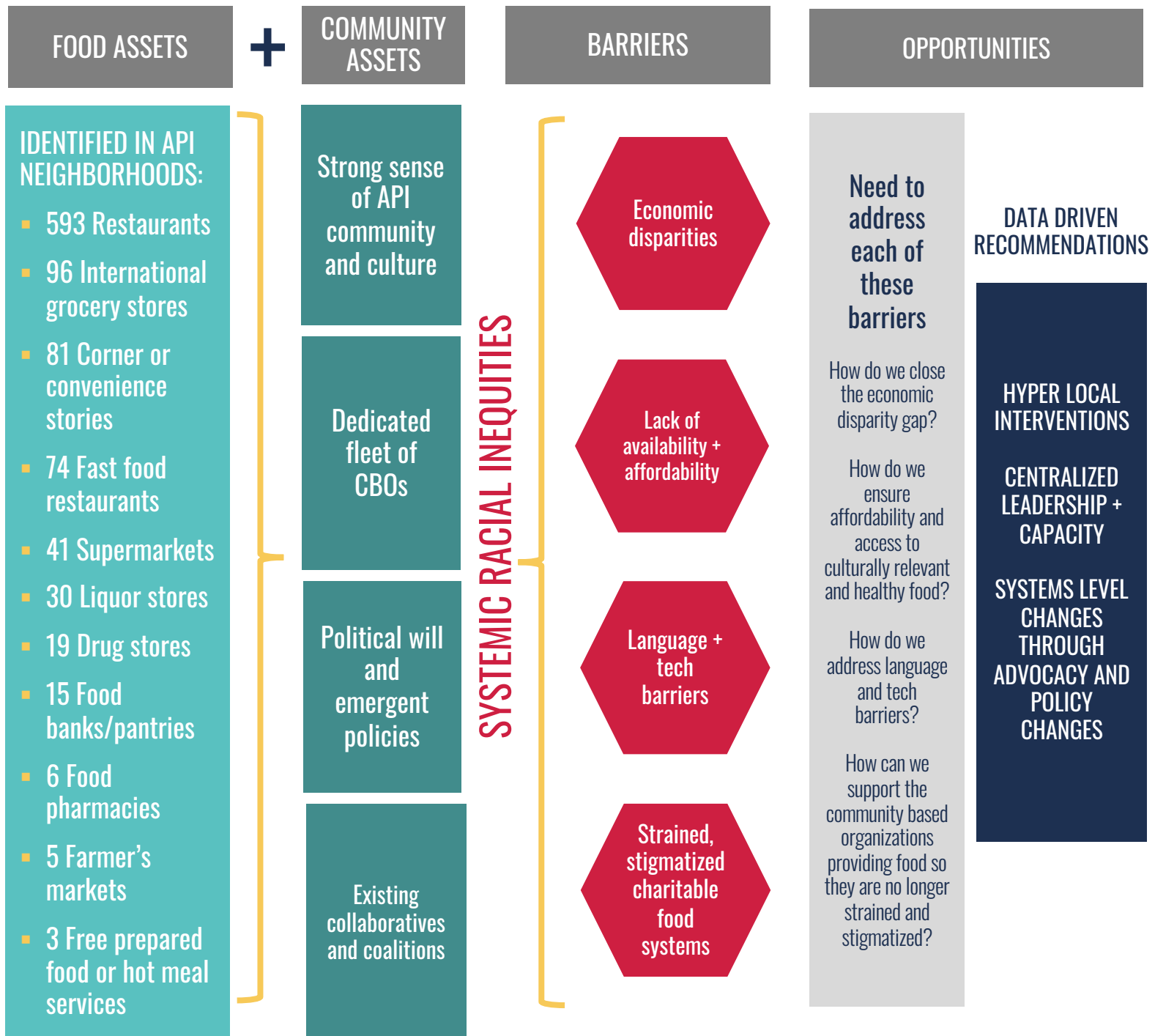
How does awareness of these assets and barriers tangibly inform community-led transformation within these neighborhoods?

3 | DATA-DRIVEN, COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS

We need solutions that center food justice rather than food security.

This means creating solutions that are multifaceted, speaking directly to the needs of hyper-local communities while also creating food spaces and networks that are accessible, permanent, and dependable.

To recap, data from this study demonstrated a host of community and food assets, as well as barriers to community-led food transformation (see image below). These findings demonstrate the enmeshed nature of API racialization, cultural preservation, economic security, and food justice.



3.1 | HYPER-LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Food justice interventions, as opposed to food security interventions, need to be culturally grounded and centered on ensuring the dignity of those they serve. As this study demonstrated, the close-knit API communities, especially those found in the cultural corridors, as well as the fleet of CBOs that are trusted by the community, are the most prominent assets and levers available.

Transformational food solutions that promote the prosperity of API communities need to be borne of the community wisdom that already exists, which is often held by CBO representatives (many of whom are API Council member organizations).

These folks are in tune with the community members they serve, are a part of the cultural fabric of the neighborhoods, and have the ability to authentically ground any proposed suite of food systems interventions. Justice means food solutions are developed with the people they are intended to serve, as opposed to enacted on the people they are intended to serve.

Moreover, dignified hyper-local solutions should also be rooted in individual choice.

As key informants suggested, transformative food solutions uplift communities by offering high quality food that individuals can choose for themselves. There is no dignity in food that is substandard and standardized. People feel seen, heard, and valued when they have choice in what they put into their bodies.

Lastly, any proposed system of hyper-local interventions must be equipped with the resources to ensure language justice is part of the solution. Any and all promotional materials and services should be provided in every language spoken across the API diaspora within San Francisco.

HYPER-LOCAL INTERVENTION SPOTLIGHT



Chinatown Community
Development Center

華協中心

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and shelter-in-place order, Chinatown CDC shifted their priorities in March 2020 to immediately address disease transmission reduction in Chinatown SROs and public housing. As a part of this urgent effort, the [Feed + Fuel Chinatown](#) program was launched, in partnership with Self-Help for the Elderly and SF New Deal, providing meals to Chinatown's most vulnerable population (seniors and families living in SROs and public housing). To do this, Chinatown CDC directly funded Chinatown legacy restaurants to feed the residents.

In three months alone, they accomplished much to protect Chinatown and the legacy restaurants, while keeping all staff, volunteers, and residents safe. This included providing over 122,000 meals provided to seniors and residents living in SROs and public housing as well as engaging 34 Chinatown restaurants. Due to the success of this program and the increased community need, Chinatown CDC re-launched Feed + Fuel in May 2021. In partnership with SF New Deal, they provided 300,000 meals to Chinatown SRO residents over a 15-week period, using up to 70 Chinatown based restaurants.

Feed + Fuel is an exemplar of how hyper-localized community connection (between anchor restaurants, SRO residents, and CBOs) is a source of essential support that celebrates cultural identity and leverages community networks.

Food justice solutions, while rising up from the hyper-local community, must also have a centralized arm to connect the offerings together.

Across the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions and key informant interviews, there was an appetite for solutions that offer opportunities for shared learning and an integration of efforts across the powerful fleet of CBOs, nonprofits, government entities, and private enterprise in a coordinated way. As such, a core aspect of the proposed solutions should be devising ways to more fully leverage the collective power of the existing collaborative, coalitions, and councils, especially those that represent underserved communities.

The centralized infrastructure must:

- 1. Include Marginalized Community Voices.**
As discussed within this report, representation from API communities on City-wide food justice initiatives has been dismal to date. Systematic, consistent, and intentional inclusion of communities of color in this work must be a cornerstone of food systems solutions.
- 2. Create Opportunities for Systematic Knowledge Sharing.**
Representatives from the CBOs, nonprofits, and government entities who engaged in the interviews were eager to connect with one another on the topic of food justice. There was a cited lack of understanding about what is occurring across the City and what approaches are successful. Implementing quarterly convenings among food justice actors within San Francisco would be one way to gain clarity on the larger challenges, share best practices, and design/implement coordinated action.
- 3. Include Frameworks for Shared Measurement.**
It is important to promote a set of common, shared metrics to inspire action, track progress, and inform food systems change, across the organizations. Within the API Council context alone, CBOs in Chinatown, Japantown, and SOMA all mentioned a need for improved data infrastructure. They highlighted the importance of tracking food distribution across sites in their neighborhoods and better documenting the contents of the food boxes. This is merely one, simple example of how shared measurement may behoove service providers.

3.3 | THINKING BIGGER PICTURE: SYSTEMS-LEVEL CHANGE AS THE NORTH STAR

As this study demonstrated, CBOs, nonprofits, and other charitable food sources are strained beyond belief as they do the work that systems have failed to sufficiently do.

We need investments in systemic change to avoid putting further burden on small organizations that are already under impossible pressures to address structural problems. Focusing on increasing the capacity of the CBOs, nonprofits, and charitable food sources is not a sustainable solution. It is a short-sighted tactic that does not address the “upstream” issues such as income inequality.

Rather, we need systems-level transformation via policy change to address injustices, as well as cross-sector interventions that span the many interconnected facets of food justice (e.g., workforce development, transportation, revitalization).

Experts indicate that without systemic policy change, including but not limited to raising the minimum wage, healthcare reform, and educational opportunities, the struggles related to food injustice will continue (Paynter, Berner, & Anderson, 2011).

There are several key policy issues that are gaining traction within San Francisco:

1. **ORE’s Racial Equity Proposed Ordinances.** as highlighted previously in this report, the ORE has released two legislative ordinances: (1) the establishment a special fund for grants to nonprofit agencies to establish and operate food empowerment markets and (2) a requirement for the Department of Public Health to report biennially on food justice and equity, with input from other departments.

2. **Direct Cash Assistance.** Empirical studies have demonstrated the linkage between food injustice rates and the receipt of social assistance via direct cash. These studies find that food injustice is responsive to expanded social security programs. For example, Loopstra (2018) found that increasing a family's combined income and food entitlements by \$1,000 reduced food injustice by 1:1 percentage points. Legislation to give direct cash assistance to those in need is effective because it increases individual purchasing power, giving them the dignity and choice to use the funds as they see fit to make culturally appropriate choices for themselves and their families.

3. **Worker Rights.** CBOs across the neighborhoods that took part in the Neighborhood Strategy Sessions indicated that, with help, they could work in concert to advocate for and implement workplace protections for food-workers within their neighborhoods. Additionally, key informants cited the importance of advocating for increases in the minimum wage as another worker protection.

4. **Food As Medicine Legislation.** Within San Francisco there is currently a large effort underway to have nutritious food categorized as medicine, essentially making food a cost covered by health insurance.

5. **Accurate Data on API Communities.** Currently the demographic data being collected at a city-wide level about API communities conceals the experiences of low-income API community members. Often data is improperly aggregated and does not account for the nuance inherent within the various cultures. In this way, the current data silences the truth and blinds us to the realities faced by API communities. The APIn Council could band together with API Health Disparity Coalition to raise this issue for City governance. Until we properly account for and document the barriers faced by API communities, their needs will continue to be ignored.

CONCLUSION

Although Asians and Pacific Islanders make up one-third of San Francisco's population, they comprise 42% of the City's low-income residents. **Despite the systemic barriers that hold API residents back, the lack of data on these communities continue to exclude them from racial equity solutions.**

In 2020, the California-based coalition [Stop AAPI Hate](#) set forth to rewrite the narrative by collecting data of hate incidents involving AAPIs nationwide. As state Senator Richard Pain, Chair of the California Legislature's Asian Pacific Islander Caucus put it, "Collecting the data and reporting on the data and getting in front of the media and other folks was really important... Without that collaboration, without that effort, I'm sure we would have individual stories, but they would not have highlighted this challenge that we're seeing."

The Coalition's tracking of nearly 7,000 hate incidents provided visibility and momentum for the California legislature to finally take API disparities seriously, resulting in the \$156 million commitment to combat violence against Asian Americans across the state.

CLEARLY, DATA = POWER.

To that end, this needs and opportunities landscape report provides actionable data – drawing from asset mapping, community surveys, key informant interviews with CBO leaders and government officials, and neighborhood strategy focus groups – to highlight the unique food and community assets and barriers to food justice experienced by API communities in San Francisco.

The solutions offered within this report are driven by a belief that it is not enough to ensure food security, our communities are entitled to food justice. While much of the information in this report is unique to the many API communities, it all contributes to a larger narrative, related to dismantling white supremacy, that binds all people of color together (Bhojwani, 2021). Moving forward, funders, policy makers, CBOs, nonprofits, and private enterprises must embrace this mentality by approaching the design and implementation of food systems solutions with an intersectional perspective, building coalitions that raise the collective voice of all who are oppressed.



“Food is the necessary sustenance of life but it is also history, community memory, family, homeland, and love.”

—Kara Young, PhD, Food Security Advisor,
Stupski Foundation & API Council

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[Click here for references and appendices.](#)

