



Key Insights from Early Adopters of the Food Security Solutions (FSS) Prioritization Process

HUNGER FREE NORTHBROOK



Step 1: Identify Unmet Needs

The Village of Northbrook, located 25 miles north of Chicago, Illinois, is a small suburb with a median income above the state average and an unemployment rate below the national average. However, data show **that food insecurity does exist in Northbrook**; approximately 4,000 residents of Northbrook may not have regular access to enough affordable, nutritious food. The Hunger Resource Network (HRN), a local, all-volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping alleviate hunger in the greater Chicago area, in partnership with the Alliance to End Hunger and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation, convened a community-wide coalition of stakeholders. This group, now called Hunger Free Northbrook, used the Food Security Solutions (FSS) Prioritization Process to thoughtfully expand their approaches to addressing hunger, with the goal of improving the food and nutrition security of those in need in Northbrook.

“The outcome of the data was powerful. It provided us with facts, not assumptions, that hunger is truly present in a community like ours.”

- Hunger Free Northbrook

The eight-month process began with a kick-off session of over 50 stakeholders representing Northbrook schools, houses of worship, businesses, health care, government and civic groups. By leveraging the experience of this group, consulting with a registered dietitian nutritionist, and referring to the data sources suggested in the **Community Assessment Worksheet**, objective information was used to describe the local situation and provide a baseline from which to measure progress over time.

Hunger Free Northbrook is part of the **Hunger Resource Network**, a local, all-volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to helping alleviate hunger in the greater Chicago area. Learn more at www.hungerfreenorthbrook.org.

Data from the **Community Assessment Worksheet** and **Program Inventory Worksheet** Indicate Gaps and Potential Solutions

- The Northfield Township Food Pantry is currently serving 200 Northbrook families, significantly fewer than those estimated to be in need.
- Approximately 1,000 children live in households at risk of food insecurity in Northbrook township. School meals are only available when school is in session - there were no existing programs focused on providing food to students in need on the weekends, school holidays or during summer vacation.
- An estimated 400 Northbrook seniors have incomes near the poverty level and are likely food insecure; the senior population is growing in Northbrook.



To complete the **Program Inventory Worksheet**, a survey was developed and distributed to stakeholders using the free, online survey tool SurveyMonkey. By comparing the data from the community assessment to the list of existing programs, a **Gap Analysis** identified key areas of need.

Overall, the assessment process identified multiple issues including a lack of programs for children and seniors; and the need to increase awareness about the local food security situation; improve the availability of food and transportation to food security resources; rescue food to feed those in need; and have better coordination of and increased fundraising for local food security programs.

Case in point: When the Northfield Township Food Pantry received an overwhelming supply of donated goods from local food drives, they had to rent space for the overflow. But once the food had been distributed, many of the shelves were once again empty. In the first step of the FSS Prioritization Process, Hunger Free Northbrook determined that a driver of this “feast or famine” cycle was that all the area high schools held food drives on the very same weekend during the holiday season. A suggested solution was to create a community calendar to coordinate efforts, thus providing the food bank with a steady supply of donated goods and freeing up the funds used to rent storage space for other needs. In the final step, this suggested solution ranked at the top of the prioritization process for its ease of implementation, minimal cost and strong potential for positive impact.

Although multiple needs were identified, addressing them all simultaneously was not necessarily feasible or realistic for Hunger Free Northbrook, especially as an all-volunteer organization. From here, the organization was poised to take the next step – to reach agreement on which challenges to focus on and to brainstorm potential solutions for each one. Future steps honed in on the most feasible suggested solutions and systematically prioritized them, but the entire process was rooted in this first data-driven step.

Key Insights on Step 1 from Hunger Free Northbrook

The completion of the Community Assessment Worksheet provided a baseline of data from which to measure progress. It provided fact-based statements versus ad hoc assumptions about hunger in the community. Obtaining an inventory of existing programs helped identify the gap between need and services and opportunities to coordinate efforts.

In Preparation – Assembling an Advisory Panel

The prioritization process is managed by an advisory panel, organized around the shared goal of identifying food security solutions. The prioritization process is a participatory process; broad engagement is key. Including diverse stakeholders on the panel empowers the community and can catalyze a long-term commitment to success. There is no better resource for the prioritization process than the collective knowledge and experience of this panel.

Find guidance on how to identify key stakeholders and extend an invitation, an example timeline and clarification on roles and responsibilities in “In Preparation – Assemble an Advisory Panel,” posted on the webpage, under “Additional Resources.”

Find the **Food Security Solutions Prioritization Toolkit** at www.eatrightFoundation.org/FSSToolkit or email FSS@eatright.org