

Community Co-Design Case Study:

CHANNEL ONE FOOD BANK, FOOD ACCESS CO-DESIGN

Channel One supports 13 counties in SE Minnesota and La Crosse County Wisconsin. Our Mission: Channel One strengthens food access and builds healthy communities.

Our values:

- › People experiencing food insecurity are at the center of everything we do.
- › We create an inclusive culture that welcomes and respects the diversity of people we serve, employees and volunteers and honors the fundamental value and dignity of all individuals.
- › We build and foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation.
- › We work in partnership with local communities and our peers to improve nutrition and promote food security.



👉 Identifying the problem/ the purpose of creating co-design

Channel One, as a food bank and food shelf, participated in 2019 Minnesota Food Shelf Survey. In summer 2020, as result of pandemic food insecurity, Feeding America released grant funding to “increase efforts to address the priorities and needs of communities, individuals and families most disproportionately affected by the pandemic, its economic fallout, and food insecurity ... [with a focus on] the following populations: Black/African Americans, Hispanic/Latino/Spanish, American Indian... [and] rural communities.” We used the Racial Disparities Dashboard and internal metrics of the amount of food distributed in each county Channel One serves to choose the 6 counties/5 communities for our primary goal “to transform/improve the charitable food system experience for people facing hunger.” The grant funded a first iteration of our work, providing food shelves with DEI tools and “cultural conversations” with Black/African American, Somali/African/Muslim, Mexican/Hispanic/Latinx, Asian and Native American communities in and around Rochester. Through those conversations, Channel One realized that we needed to find an opportunity to hear from people highly impacted by food insecurity about what their experience is with the charitable food system, and what barriers keep them from accessing the food they need to make their families whole.

👉 Details about the setup of co-design sessions: total number of co-designers, recruitment of personas with partner agencies, number of sessions, etc.

The co-design process for the Channel One food access project had several elements that led to its success. The team had six (5-8) co-design members per region (total of 5 regions) to develop a set of guiding principles and recommendations to direct the Feeding America grant dollars within their communities/regions. The format of the each of the regions for this project was four (4) virtual design studios and three (3) research/feedback sprints that occurred between each co-design studios. In the design studios, the co-designers, Channel One stakeholders, regional food security stakeholders project and the co-design facilitator met to discuss the challenges that families were having in regularly accessing and benefiting from the existing food access resources in the region. During the exploration sprints the co-designers asked their community questions to best understand the fears and barriers to utilizing food resources as well as the assets and relationships they currently rely on to meet their own and family’s nutrition needs.

To identify and recruit co-designers, the project team, and partners developed several personas or perspectives that were of interest to the project engagement process, including individuals that currently use food shelves, used food shelves in the past and are food insecure but do not use food shelves or other food access resources. After developing the personas, community-based organizations like the United Way, the Diversity Council, and regional food shelves helped identify and recruit individuals who were collaborative and had strong connections within their communities.

Each co-designer could expect to contribute 14-18 hours of work over the course of about 2 months and were compensated \$1,000 for their expertise and defined roles.

THIS TIME AND COMPENSATION INCLUDED THREE PRIMARY PROJECT ROLES:

- 1 Design Studio Participation:** Time for the co-designers to participate in the four design studios
- 2 Research Sprints:** Time for the co-designers to interview individuals within their personal networks, collect information from the conversations and synthesize the information in preparation for the next design studio.
- 3 Co-Design Check-ins:** Time for the co-designers to discuss the interview questions and prepare for community interview with the co-design facilitator.

➤ **Results and Solutions: share common themes, new information that was collected from co-designers, benefits, successes, etc.**

Through a set of four facilitated design studios and three sprints led by the co-designers, the team developed a set of guiding principles including (Choice and autonomy, feeling welcome, access to information, navigating resources, guilt, understanding requirements, and dignity). The co-designers and stakeholders developed the guiding principles into the following set of recommendations and guidance for each region:

REGION #1

- **Creation of a “Welcome Pantry”**- a full choice food shelf that allows for increased access and a dignified experience for residents.
- **The United Way is forming food security coalition.** In their role as a funder, they are working to get funded food programs to best practices/co-design principles.

REGION #2

- A local organization is looking for a location to open a new food shelf that will focus on the needs of the Latinx community in Mower County. While they are a Latinx led/Latinx outreach organization, they are using co-design principles to offer welcome, choice, autonomy for all cultures. Many Karen, African and other cultures are using the pop-up pantry.
- A Food Shelf is moving forward with offering produce and dairy at the food shelf (instead of their voucher program) to address choice and autonomy for their food shelf shoppers.
- An existing Backpack program will be increasing offerings of fresh produce and will pilot a delivery program this summer to reach additional families.
- Working with a local Community College Foundation to sponsor a Food Pantry as an agency



REGION #3:

- Regional food shelves are working to develop consistent food shelf offerings across all 4 locations for a predictable experience and increased access to information.
- A food shelf is increasing produce and dairy access at their food shelf and moving to “choice by category” - to address choice and autonomy. They are also considering additional Saturday hours for increased access.
- Food shelf is likely doing some increased marketing to address access to information

**REGION #4**

- A food shelf will be increasing their marketing efforts and considering opening for Saturday hours for increased access.
- A Food Shelf is moving to “choice by category” to address choice and autonomy.
- Food shelf leaders, along with county SHIP, will be developing a plan for coordinated access to information across the county.

REGION #5

- Several food shelves are moving to prepared meals, specifically targeting single mothers living in transitional housing; plus high-impact communities.
- Food shelves recruiting more BIPOC volunteers and staff so shoppers “see themselves reflected” when they shop.
- Developing a mobile market and other choice models to take Food Shelf shopping experience outside of the physical food shelf.

IN ALL COMMUNITIES

- Broadening survey structure: how do we survey people who don’t traditionally use a food shelf? We heard the “top 5 experiences” answers in our co-design cohorts: choice, welcome. How do we dig deeper with this year’s survey? Also, how can we engage co-designers as survey supporters?
- Working with numerous foodbanks to develop client bill of rights



➤ List examples of continued collaborative work with co-designers. Invitations to events, press and media, speaking about the project to decision makers, etc.

- The United Way in one region hired two co-designers to staff the pantry and are planning the operational model around co-design principles.
- A County Food Security Coalition is developing their working model and including the idea that highly impacted, low-influence community members (like those identified in the stakeholder mapping) should be an important part of work moving forward. The Coalition is looking at models to provide a stipend like the co-designer effort.
- Two of the co-designers in one region are actively participating in meal distribution through their organizations, including Pamoja/Halal meals.
- Co-design work done at Channel One has garnered state and national attention. Its results and process has been presented to parent organizations and leadership at large food distribution organizations such as Second Harvest Heartland.



➤ Conclusion

Channel One Food Bank and its partners have recognized the significant value of investing directly into the communities they serve. More importantly, we have found that the co-design approach has allowed us to connect with stakeholders that have been invisible to us through other methods. We found that insights tend to emerge from those that have a different or non-existent relationship with food shelves. For example, one of the co-designers was part of a “safe at home” effort and while their experience was not the “usual” it exposed many of the limitations to our existing system that most deal with but have not experienced them so acutely. We see numerous other opportunities for more equitable engagement and collaboration, including involvement in decision-making at the highest levels of our organization. We have been so touched by the stories that the co-designers shared with us (both painful and positive) and a bit surprised by how sophisticated those most impacted can be if just given the space, resources, and opportunity to help inform the future of food access across our region. Finally, the relationships we have built through the co-design effort is probably the most valuable aspect of this process. We have been collaborating directly with co-designers, with some taking on paid positions in some of the regions. The process really exposed that we don’t know what we don’t know, and this process allows us to better understand our stakeholders’ experiences, values, and hopes in ways that were unattainable in the past.

