



Policy Blog: Referrals and Agency Connections in Franklin County

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On June 18, CPFBImpact and Policy Research will release their sixth Community Hunger Mapping report; this report is the capstone on a year-long project assessing the charitable food network and the needs of food insecure neighbors in Franklin County.

This policy blog previews a key finding from the report: pantries in Franklin County provide some of the lowest-barrier social services in the area, but there are disconnects between parts of the charitable food network as well as between food pantries and other social service providers. Franklin County's food pantries already reduce hunger by more than 50% for those who visit more than once a month; increased collaboration within and across sectors presents a significant opportunity for the agencies in the county to provide even more robust services and referrals and ultimately, better serve neighbors.

As part of the Community Hunger Mapping process, CPFBImpact researchers held listening sessions and interviews with partners from across Franklin County. Participants expressed the need for consistent, accurate sources of referrals to other resources and a desire for more connection and collaboration with other food pantries in the county.

Regarding referrals, stakeholders with a variety of areas of human services expertise felt that many services are not well known to county residents and that service providers are disconnected from one another, limiting their ability to offer the full wealth of resources to neighbors who need them. One contributor stated that "knowing the right person or place to ask" seemed to be the main way information was shared. Relying on key informants and community navigators provides a human touch to referrals, but its reach is inherently limited, and there is a serious risk of loss of institutional knowledge when these individuals seek other roles or retire.

Existing local and statewide referral organizations serve Franklin County, but they may not always be up to date, as the process of updating information is generally up to each individual organization. Outdated information about hours of operation, services offered, and eligibility thresholds can limit the utility of these tools for those seeking assistance or hoping to find resources on behalf of others. Even services that are generally considered easily accessible, like the charitable food network, can see their reach limited by erroneous information. Incorrect or out of date information may prevent people from accessing the support they need to navigate a household crisis, and providers cannot serve people they cannot reach.

The food pantries and their associated organizations in Franklin County have a unique opportunity to increase the comprehensiveness of social services across the county by collaborating more with one another as well as other anti-poverty organizations. Pantry coordinators spoke highly of the opportunities to connect with one another provided by the Community Hunger Mapping process and wished for more in the future. Pantries that connect with one another can learn from each other, share resources, and solve problems together, while those who have forged strong connections with non-food organizations can help build a broader coalition and more accurate, cohesive knowledgebase for referrals and opportunities to collaborate with other social service providers. This work has already begun; one agency mentioned during an interview that, following the listening session, they had coordinated with three other pantries to receive and distribute larger donations than any one of them would have been able to on their own. By emphasizing community connections moving forward, Franklin County's charitable food network has the potential to truly be better together as it works to build a south central Pennsylvania without hunger.

The full report and launch event feature much more analysis and many more recommendations that can help food pantries, food banks, and other anti-hunger and anti-poverty organizations ensure that their work is making the biggest difference for the largest number of neighbors at risk of food insecurity. **To learn more, please join us at our launch event, which will be held on [Wednesday, June 19 at 1:30 PM at the Coyle Free Library in Chambersburg](#). For those who cannot attend in person, the event will be accessible [virtually via Zoom](#).**