Together at the Table

Mobilizing for Food Security in Southern Ocean County

A Report on the Convening to Create a Community Blueprint



Prepared for

The Grunin Foundation and Fulfill

The Br'Island Group

July 2026

Table of Contents

Executive Summary **5**

Chapter 1: Why This Convening Mattered **8**

From Individual Programs to a Community Food System *8*

A Different Kind of Community Conversation *9*

The Data Behind the Day *9*

Beyond Food Distribution *11*

Chapter 2: What the Community Told Us: Four Findings That Define the Path Forward **12**

Looking Beyond Individual Conversations *12*

Finding One: Coordination, Not Commitment, Is the Missing Ingredient 12

Finding Two: Transportation Is the Structural Barrier That Connects Every Other Challenge 13

Finding Three: Food Access Must Reflect the Realities of People's Lives 14

Finding Four: Community Partnerships Are Southern Ocean County's Greatest Untapped Asset 16

Technology Can Build a Smarter, Simpler, More Connected Food System *17*

Table Facilitation Feedback, Observations and Insights *17*

Collaboration Readiness as the Convening's Defining Outcome *18*

Fragmentation Rather Than Competition *19*

Untapped Social Capital and Organizational Capacity *19*

Food Insecurity as an Interconnected Systems Challenge *20*

Human Capacity, Burnout, and Community Leadership *21*

A Foundation for Sustained Collective Action *21*

Bringing the Findings Together *22*

Chapter 3: Signals of Community Readiness and Opportunity **23**

Transportation Came Up Regardless of the Topic *23*

Schools Emerged as Potential Community Hubs *24*

Community Refrigerators and Food Lockers Emerged Independently *25*

Healthcare Partnerships Were Discussed More Frequently Than Anticipated *26*

Dignity Became a Practical Design Principle *26*

Innovation Came from the Edges of the Conversation *27*

Participants Want Consistent and Structured Collaboration *28*

Participants Left More Hopeful Than Discouraged *29*

Patterns Reveal a Community at an Important Point of Readiness *30*

Chapter 4: Five Strategic Priorities and Recommended Actions for Building a Coordinated Food Security System **31**

Community Conversation to Collective Impact: A Strategic Framework *32*

Strategic Priority One and Recommended Actions: Build the Regional Coordination Infrastructure 33

Strategic Priority Two and Recommended Actions: Expand Flexible, Equitable, and Dignified Food Access 34

Strategic Priority Three and Recommended Actions: Build Partnerships That Extend Beyond Food 35

Strategic Priority Four and Recommended Actions: Build a Smarter Community Food System 36

Strategic Priority Five and Recommended Actions: Measure Progress, Learn Together, and Sustain Momentum 38

Putting Priorities Into Practice *39*

Chapter 5: Promising Opportunities for Early Action **40**

Ten Initiatives That Could Accelerate Progress *40*

Opportunity One: Launch the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition 40

Opportunity Two: Create Community Refrigerators and Neighborhood Food Lockers 41

Opportunity Three: Establish School-Based Community Food Hubs 41

Opportunity Four: Strengthen Food and Healthcare Partnerships 41

Opportunity Five: Expand Transportation Solutions 42

Opportunity Six: Build a Regional Food Resource and Referral Platform 42

Opportunity Seven: Create a Regional Volunteer Network 43

Opportunity Eight: Develop a Community Food Security Dashboard 43

Opportunity Nine: Create a Community Innovation Fund 43

Opportunity Ten: Make Together at the Table an Annual Community Forum 44

Selecting the First Demonstration Projects *44*

A Portfolio Approach to Innovation *45*

Chapter 6: From Vision to Action **46**

An Implementation Roadmap for Collective Impact *46*

Phase One: Organize - Building the Foundation 46

Phase Two: Pilot - Demonstrating What Works 47

Phase Three: Scale - Expanding Successful Models 49

Phase Four: Sustain - Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement 50

Roles and Responsibilities *51*

Funding the Work *52*

Managing Risk *53*

Looking Ahead *54*

Chapter 7: A Call to Collective Leadership 55

The Opportunity Before Southern Ocean County *55*

A Community Rich in Assets *55*

Collaboration Is the Strategy *56*

From Planning to Practice *56*

The Importance of Early Success *56*

The Role of Every Community Partner *57*

A Message to Community Leaders *57*

The Invitation *57*

Looking Forward *58*

Final Reflection *58*

Appendix 1: **Summary of the Convening Design and Facilitation 59**

Appendix 2: **Mentimeter Poll Results 75**

Appendix 3: **Implementation Dashboard Framework 93**



Executive Summary

> ***Southern Ocean County does not lack committed organizations. It lacks the coordinated infrastructure necessary to ensure that every resident has reliable, dignified, and equitable access to healthy food.***

That conclusion emerged repeatedly, and often unexpectedly, throughout the July 15, 2026 “Together at the Table” convening. Although participants represented different organizations, professions, and communities, they consistently described the same underlying challenge: Southern Ocean County possesses extraordinary commitment, creativity, and compassion, yet those assets too often operate independently rather than as a coordinated regional system.

More than one hundred leaders representing nonprofit organizations, food providers, healthcare institutions, schools, municipal government, philanthropy, businesses, faith communities, and civic organizations came together to examine how Southern Ocean County can strengthen its response to food insecurity. The convening was designed not merely to identify service gaps, but to explore how the community might build a more connected, equitable, and resilient food security system.

The conversations quickly moved beyond the mechanics of food distribution. Participants began asking broader questions about transportation, access, healthcare, technology, schools, volunteerism, communications, and community partnerships. By the end of the day, the discussion had evolved from improving individual programs to envisioning a coordinated regional system capable of ensuring that every resident has reliable access to healthy food with dignity.

One message surfaced with remarkable consistency:

> ***Food insecurity in Southern Ocean County is not primarily the result of insufficient commitment, insufficient compassion, or even insufficient food. Rather, it reflects the absence of an integrated system that connects organizations, aligns resources, reduces barriers, and helps residents navigate available services with confidence.***

Transportation emerged as the single most pervasive structural barrier. Regardless of whether participants were discussing geography, operating hours, cultural responsiveness, volunteer recruitment, healthcare partnerships, or neighborhood outreach, they consistently returned to transportation as the factor limiting access to every other solution.

Participants also emphasized that dignity, flexibility, and choice are fundamental components of an effective food security system. Residents increasingly require services that reflect the realities of their lives, including evening and weekend access, neighborhood-based distribution sites, culturally appropriate foods, online ordering, and opportunities to choose foods that meet their dietary preferences and family circumstances.

Equally important, participants demonstrated a strong commitment to continued collaboration. Throughout the convening, conversations repeatedly shifted away from organizational priorities and toward collective responsibility. Rather than asking how individual organizations could simply expand their own programs, participants explored how schools, healthcare providers, faith communities, municipal governments, businesses, volunteers, and food providers could function as partners within a coordinated regional network.

The Mentimeter polling conducted throughout the day reinforced these themes. Participants most frequently defined “food security” using words such as **comfort, dignity, safety, access, health, equity, and peace of mind**, confirming that food security is understood as a condition of overall well-being rather than merely the absence of hunger. When asked to prioritize future action, respondents identified **evening and**

weekend access, **transportation assistance**, and the creation of a **Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition** as among the community's highest priorities. Just as importantly, participants left the convening expressing confidence that meaningful progress is achievable and committing themselves to continued collaboration and partnership.

Findings point toward five strategic priorities for Southern Ocean County:

- **Build regional coordination infrastructure** that enables organizations to work together more intentionally to address structural barriers and social determinants.
- **Expand flexible and equitable food access** through transportation solutions, neighborhood distribution, and resident-centered service models.
- **Strengthen cross-sector partnerships** involving schools, healthcare providers, municipalities, faith communities, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.
- **Modernize information, referral, and volunteer systems** to improve navigation and coordination.
- **Measure progress, learn together, and sustain momentum** through shared accountability and continuous improvement.

The Together at the Table convening demonstrated that Southern Ocean County already possesses many of the ingredients necessary to build a stronger food security system: committed organizations, innovative leaders, dedicated volunteers, engaged funders, and a willingness to collaborate across sectors.

The challenge now is not to create a new system that strengthens collaboration, fosters equitable access, aligns resources and empowers residents. It is to intentionally connect, strengthen, and coordinate the remarkable community assets that already exist.

This report is therefore more than a summary of a successful convening. It is a strategic framework for transforming today's network of organizations into a coordinated community food security system capable of ensuring that every resident of Southern Ocean County has reliable access to healthy food with dignity.

A Vision for Food Security in Southern Ocean County Emerges

A Southern Ocean County where every resident has reliable, equitable, and dignified access to healthy food through a coordinated community system built on partnership, innovation, and shared responsibility.

Chapter 1

Why This Convening Mattered

From Individual Programs to a Community Food System

Southern Ocean County is served by a strong network of organizations committed to ensuring that residents have access to healthy food. Food pantries, community kitchens, meals on wheels, schools, healthcare providers, faith communities, social service agencies, volunteers, municipal governments, businesses, and philanthropic organizations all contribute important pieces towards a community safety net that has evolved through decades of service and civic commitment.

Yet despite these efforts, food insecurity continues to affect thousands of individuals and families throughout the region. Rising housing costs, inflation, transportation barriers, seasonal employment, changing demographics, and increasing demand for assistance have placed growing pressure on organizations already working at or near capacity. Many residents continue to face difficult choices between purchasing food, paying rent, obtaining healthcare, or meeting other essential household expenses.

Importantly, these challenges do not reflect a lack of compassion or community commitment. Rather, they reveal the limitations of a system that has developed as a patchwork quilt through the dedication of many independent organizations responding to local needs as they emerged. Each organization has cultivated trusted relationships, developed valuable expertise, and built effective programs. At the same time, the absence of consistent coordination across organizations makes it more difficult for residents to navigate available resources and for providers to maximize their collective impact.

Recognizing both the strengths and limitations of the current system, Fulfill and the Grunin Foundation convened Together at the Table to ask a fundamentally different question:

What would it take to build a coordinated community food security system for Southern Ocean County?

This question transformed the conversation. Rather than focusing exclusively on food distribution, participants explored how transportation, healthcare, education, technology, communications, volunteer engagement, housing stability, and cross-sector partnerships all influence food security outcomes. Throughout the day, the discussion expanded from individual programs toward a broader understanding of the regional ecosystem required to ensure equitable access to healthy food.

This systems perspective became one of the convening's defining accomplishments. Participants consistently recognized that food insecurity cannot be addressed simply by increasing the amount of food available. Access depends equally upon transportation, operating hours, referral systems, cultural responsiveness, public awareness, coordination among organizations, and the ability of residents to navigate a complex network of services with dignity and confidence.

A Different Kind of Community Conversation

The design of Together at the Table intentionally emphasized collaborative dialogue rather than traditional conference presentations. Participants represented nonprofit organizations, food providers, healthcare institutions, schools, municipal government, philanthropy, faith communities, businesses, and other civic partners. This diversity of perspectives proved to be one of the convening's greatest strengths.

Rather than evaluating existing programs, facilitators invited participants to imagine what Southern Ocean County's food security system could become if organizational boundaries were no longer barriers to collaboration. Participants were encouraged to identify opportunities rather than deficiencies, to explore possibilities rather than constraints, and to think beyond the interests of their individual organizations.

The result was remarkable convergence. Although each breakout table approached different questions, the discussions repeatedly identified the same underlying barriers, opportunities, and priorities. The consistency of these themes gives particular weight to the findings presented in this report. They are not the product of a single discussion or isolated opinion. They represent patterns that emerged independently across dozens of conversations involving leaders from multiple sectors and communities.

The Data Behind the Day

Jonathan Rowe, Vice President of Operations, and Jazmyn Ball, Growing Healthy Pantries Program Manager, presented the key findings from Fulfill's Service Area Assessment to the full convening. The presentation opened with Fulfill's own equity statement — "Where you live should not determine your access to the food you and your family need to thrive" — and proceeded to demonstrate, through data, exactly how far Southern Ocean County falls from that standard.

Fulfill distributes 18.6 million pounds of food annually through 300 partner agencies to more than 150,000 neighbors monthly across Monmouth and Ocean Counties. Despite serving both counties, Fulfill distributes 150 meals per food-insecure person in Monmouth

but only 107 in Ocean — a gap that reflects historical patterns of network development rather than any intentional choice.

Southern Ocean County is the most acutely underserved zone in the entire service area. It includes nine ZIP codes, 13,310 food-insecure residents, 29 partner agencies, and approximately 1 million pounds distributed annually, but to reach Monmouth County levels, the region would need 1.3 million additional pounds of food per year. Six of nine ZIP codes have zero or one food pantry.

The SAA availability grid presented to the room was perhaps its most striking single slide. Across eight Southern Ocean County communities, including Barnegat, Forked River, Little Egg Harbor, Long Beach Township, Manahawkin, Tuckerton, Waretown, and West Creek, there is zero weekday evening coverage at any food pantry in the region. Zero. Saturday coverage exists only in Forked River and Tuckerton. Sunday coverage is absent entirely.

This means that the 36% of Ocean County households qualifying as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed, meaning working families who cannot access food assistance during weekday morning hours) have essentially no formal food assistance available to them at the times they can use it.

The Feeding America Client Survey, administered to 1,049 adults in September-October 2025, documented the severity of need among those the network currently serves. Eighty percent reported that food sometimes or often didn't last due to lack of money. Seventy-seven percent could not afford balanced meals. Fifty-two percent cut meal size or skipped meals; of those, 37% did so almost every month, confirming that this is a structural condition, not an occasional hardship.

Nutrition security data amplified the picture: 64% found it hard to regularly get and eat healthy foods; 69% say healthy foods are too expensive; 32% report healthy foods are too far or hard to reach. Thirty percent report at least one dietary concern, with diabetes-friendly diets (17%) and heart-healthy diets (12%) as the leading needs. These are exactly the populations that standard pantry distributions are least well-equipped to serve.

Transportation data underscored the access problem: 50% of clients have no vehicle available at home. Nearly half arrived at pantry sites through informal arrangements, relying on rides from family or friends (18%), walking (12%), or public transit (approximately 5%).

Six listening sessions produced themes presented to the room with direct neighbor voices. These quotes are reproduced here because they represent the lived experience behind the statistics:

- “It’s very difficult to thrive in the state of New Jersey, especially for our seniors.”
- “They stopped [her food stamps] because she can’t find a job. So, unless you’re a student or working, you don’t qualify for food stamps.”
- “The pantries need to be open a couple more hours. Multiple days and nights.”
- “I can’t take going somewhere where they’re just going to hand me a bunch of stuff. And then I feel like I have to throw it out.”
- “Unless it’s on sale, we’re not buying it.”
- “Honestly, this forum is great, [but] I don’t see anything happening from it.”

This last quote was the challenge for the day, to ensure that meaningful change would result.

Beyond Food Distribution

Perhaps the most important shift that occurred during the convening was conceptual. Participants arrived expecting to discuss food distribution. They left discussing community infrastructure.

By the conclusion of the day, conversations had expanded well beyond pantry capacity or volunteer recruitment. Participants described a future in which food security is supported through coordinated transportation systems, shared technology platforms, trusted neighborhood partnerships, integrated healthcare referrals, school-based outreach, culturally responsive programming, flexible distribution models, and sustained collaboration among organizations.

In effect, the community reframed the challenge. The question was no longer: *How do we distribute more food?* It became: *How do we build a community system that ensures every resident can reliably access healthy food with dignity?*

That distinction shapes every finding and recommendation presented in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 2

What the Community Told Us: Four Findings That Define the Path Forward

Looking Beyond Individual Conversations

One of the most striking outcomes of the Together at the Table convening was the remarkable consistency of the conversations. Participants represented different organizations, professions, geographic communities, and lived experiences. While we did not include a participant category of those with lived experience, several participants self-identified. They sat at different breakout tables and responded to different facilitation questions. Yet they repeatedly arrived at the same underlying conclusions.

This convergence matters. Community convenings often produce lengthy sets of recommendations, each reflecting the priorities of a particular organization or stakeholder group. That did not happen here. Instead, participants consistently moved beyond organizational perspectives and began describing the characteristics of a stronger regional food security system.

The findings presented in this chapter are therefore not summaries of individual breakout discussions. They are the synthesis of recurring themes that emerged independently across the convening. Together, they reveal a community that is ready to think differently about food insecurity and ready to work differently in addressing it. Four overarching findings define the path forward.

Finding One
Coordination, Not Commitment, Is the Missing Ingredient

Perhaps the strongest message to emerge from the convening was that Southern Ocean County does not lack organizations committed to addressing food insecurity.

Participants consistently praised the dedication of nonprofit organizations, volunteers, faith communities, schools, healthcare providers, municipal agencies, businesses, and funders already working throughout the region. The existing network of organizations represents a vital community asset.

The challenge is not commitment. The challenge is coordination. Throughout the discussions, participants described organizations that frequently pursue similar goals

without consistent mechanisms for sharing information, coordinating services, aligning schedules, recruiting volunteers collectively, or planning strategically together. The result is the system that exists across Southern Ocean County today in which organizations work hard, often very successfully within their scope, but frequently in parallel rather than in partnership.

Participants envisioned a different future. They described a regional food security system in which organizations retain their unique missions while operating within a broader collaborative framework. Such a system would include shared referral pathways, coordinated communications, collaborative planning, strategic gap-filling, common resource mapping, stronger volunteer coordination, and regular opportunities for joint learning and problem solving.

Importantly, participants never suggested creating another organization responsible for delivering services. Instead, they described the need for a structure that strengthens relationships among existing organizations. This distinction is fundamental. Communities solve complex challenges not only through strong organizations but also through strong relationships among organizations.

The Mentimeter polling reinforced this finding. When participants were asked what they personally committed to doing after the convening, most responses focused on collaboration, partnership development, resource sharing, coalition building, networking, and continuing the conversation. Participants left thinking less about expanding their own organizations and more about strengthening the regional system.

> **Key Insight**: Southern Ocean County's greatest opportunity is not creating more organizations. It is intentionally connecting organizations that already exist and supporting their capacity to address food security.

Finding Two
Transportation Is the Structural Barrier That Connects Every Other Challenge

No issue surfaced more consistently during the convening than transportation. Regardless of whether participants were discussing food pantries, schools, healthcare, volunteer recruitment, operating hours, nutrition, cultural responsiveness, or neighborhood outreach, transportation repeatedly emerged as the factor limiting access to every other solution.

Participants did not describe transportation as simply another operational issue. They described it as foundational infrastructure.

- Food cannot improve health if residents cannot reach distribution sites.
- Expanded pantry hours have limited value if transportation is unavailable during those hours.
- Healthcare providers cannot effectively refer patients to food resources if those resources remain inaccessible.
- Volunteers cannot support organizations they cannot reach consistently.

This systems perspective represents one of the convening's most important insights. Transportation influences nearly every other dimension of food security. Participants therefore proposed the expansion of numerous complementary strategies, including partnerships with Ocean Ride, neighborhood distribution sites, satellite food hubs, community refrigerators, school-based pickup locations, mobile food markets, and home delivery for seniors and individuals with disabilities.

Although these ideas differed in their implementation, they reflected a shared philosophy: bring services closer to people whenever possible instead of expecting people to overcome transportation barriers. In other words, find ways to meet people where they are.

The Mentimeter polling strongly reinforced this conclusion. Participants ranked operational and capacity issues, including transportation barriers and senior home delivery, as the community's highest priority for action. Transportation assistance to pantry sites emerged as one of the two highest priorities for investment during the next twelve months. Open-ended responses repeatedly identified transportation as the defining barrier affecting food security throughout Southern Ocean County.

> **Key Insight:** Transportation is not simply one recommendation among many. It is the connective tissue that determines whether nearly every other investment succeeds.

Finding Three
Food Access Must Reflect the Realities of People's Lives

Throughout the convening, participants consistently emphasized that food security is about much more than food availability. Residents increasingly balance multiple jobs, caregiving responsibilities, transportation challenges, changing work schedules, language barriers, and financial pressures. A food assistance system designed around

organizational convenience rather than community realities inevitably leaves some residents behind. Participants envisioned a system that meets people where they are.

Ideas discussed throughout the day included:

- evening and weekend pantry hours; neighborhood-based distribution sites;
- online ordering and appointment scheduling;
- expanded client choice;
- culturally appropriate foods;
- multilingual communications;
- community refrigerators;
- food lockers;
- mobile food distribution;
- simplified referral systems.

Although each recommendation addressed a different aspect of food access, together they reflected a common principle: The system should adapt to residents. Residents should not have to adapt to the system.

Perhaps most strikingly, participants consistently framed dignity as a design principle rather than simply a value.

- A dignified food system preserves personal choice.
- It reduces unnecessary barriers.
- It minimizes stigma.
- It respects culture and circumstance.
- It enables residents to obtain healthy food without unnecessary complexity or judgment.

The Mentimeter polling further strengthened this finding. Participants most frequently defined food security using words such as **comfort**, **dignity**, **safety**, **access**, **health**, **equity**, **peace of mind**, and **human rights**. These responses suggest that participants understand food security as a condition of overall well-being rather than simply the absence of hunger.

> **Key Insight**: The most effective food security systems are designed around people rather than programs.

Finding Four

Community Partnerships Are Southern Ocean County's Greatest Untapped Asset

Throughout the convening, participants consistently described food security as a shared community responsibility rather than the sole responsibility of food providers.

Schools, healthcare providers, libraries, municipal and county offices, faith communities, housing organizations, businesses, and civic groups all possess trusted relationships, physical space, professional expertise, and community credibility that can strengthen food access.

Participants envisioned broadened roles for many of these institutions:

- Schools functioning as neighborhood food hubs.
- Healthcare providers integrating food insecurity screening into routine care, and proscribing food as medicine.
- Faith communities hosting community refrigerators and volunteer initiatives, as well as distributing food.
- Libraries serving as trusted centers for information and referrals.
- Municipal governments supporting neighborhood outreach.
- Businesses expanding employee volunteerism and leveraging community investment.

This broader understanding of partnership changes how food security is viewed. Rather than concentrating responsibility within a relatively small network of organizations, it distributes responsibility across the institutions that shape community well-being through collective impact.

Participants also recognized that stronger partnerships create reciprocal benefits.

- Students learn more effectively when they are well nourished.
- Patients experience better health outcomes.
- Older adults remain healthier and more independent.
- Families become more economically stable.
- Communities become more resilient.

Food security therefore becomes a community development and empowerment strategy rather than simply a charitable activity.

> **Key Insight**: Every trusted community institution has a role to play in strengthening food security.

Technology Can Build a Smarter, Simpler, More Connected Food System

Although technology was not the central focus or a finding of the convening, it emerged repeatedly as an important enabler of coordination.

Participants envisioned technology simplifying access for residents while strengthening communication among organizations.

Ideas included:

- regional resource directories;
- coordinated referral systems;
- online scheduling;
- multilingual communications;
- shared volunteer platforms;
- inventory visibility;
- digital outreach;
- community dashboards.

Importantly, participants consistently emphasized that technology should strengthen human relationships rather than replace them. Technology should remove administrative barriers. It should simplify navigation. It should make collaboration easier. Most importantly, it should allow staff and volunteers to devote more time to serving residents.

Technology therefore becomes community infrastructure, not as an end, but as a tool for making an already strong community even stronger. This could also include controlled environment agriculture and hydroponic farming.

> **Key Insight**: Technology should simplify the experience of residents in seeking food security while strengthening collaboration among organizations.

Table Facilitation Feedback, Observations and Insights

Following the convening we had the opportunity to gather data from the facilitators and note takers. That debrief accomplished something quite different from the convening itself. Rather than validating the content of the participant notes, it elicited the facilitators' and recorders' interpretations of the conversations, group dynamics, emotions, and underlying assumptions that would not be evident from written table notes.

The facilitators consistently described the convening as exceeding expectations in its level of openness, willingness to collaborate, and cross-sector engagement. Rather than confirming the common perception that organizations in Southern Ocean County operate in silos or protect their own turf, participants demonstrated a genuine appetite for

partnership. At the same time, the discussion revealed several structural barriers—including limited organizational capacity, transportation challenges, volunteer shortages, insufficient local government engagement, and the lingering socioeconomic effects of Superstorm Sandy—that continue to impede progress despite this willingness to collaborate.

Perhaps most importantly, facilitators observed that many organizations simply did not know one another or understand the services each provided. This suggests that one of the greatest opportunities is not necessarily creating new programs but building stronger connections among existing organizations.

The facilitator debrief revealed that the *Together at the Table* convening achieved outcomes extending well beyond the generation of ideas. While participants identified numerous challenges related to food insecurity, the most significant finding was the emergence of a strong regional readiness for collaboration. Rather than exposing competition among organizations, the convening uncovered an untapped willingness to work together, a desire to build relationships, and a shared recognition that no single organization can address food insecurity alone. Collectively, the facilitators' reflections suggest that Southern Ocean County possesses substantial collaborative potential that can be activated through intentional network-building, organizational capacity development, and sustained cross-sector leadership.

Collaboration Readiness as the Convening's Defining Outcome

The strongest and most consistent theme across facilitator observations was the remarkable openness participants demonstrated toward collaboration. Facilitators noted that organizations entered discussions with curiosity rather than defensiveness, listening respectfully to one another, sharing challenges candidly, and offering assistance instead of protecting organizational territory. Participants consistently asked how they might support one another rather than defending existing approaches or competing for resources.

Several facilitators acknowledged that these interactions challenged longstanding assumptions about organizational dynamics within Southern Ocean County. Rather than encountering parochialism or territorial behavior, participants expressed enthusiasm for learning about neighboring organizations and exploring opportunities for partnership. This shift in perspective represents a significant finding because it suggests that organizational culture is no longer the principal obstacle to regional collaboration.

Instead, the convening demonstrated that organizations are prepared to work collectively when intentional opportunities exist for relationship-building. This finding reframes future

investments: creating regular opportunities for organizations to meet, exchange knowledge, and establish trust may produce substantial improvements in regional coordination with relatively modest investments.

Fragmentation Rather Than Competition

Closely related to collaboration readiness was another important insight: many organizations simply did not know one another. Facilitators repeatedly observed that organizations serving similar populations, operating within the same geographic areas, or addressing comparable issues often had little awareness of one another's services, expertise, or existing partnerships. Participants frequently discovered during the convening that neighboring organizations possessed complementary resources or programs they had never previously encountered.

This distinction between fragmentation and competition has important strategic implications. Competition typically reflects conflicting interests or limited willingness to collaborate, whereas fragmentation reflects insufficient communication and coordination. Fragmentation is considerably more solvable through networking, shared information systems, referral pathways, and regular convenings.

The debrief therefore suggests that Southern Ocean County's food security ecosystem is not fundamentally divided by organizational rivalry but rather by disconnected relationships. Building stronger connections among existing organizations may significantly improve service delivery without requiring entirely new programs.

Untapped Social Capital and Organizational Capacity

The facilitators consistently described participants as highly motivated to collaborate. Organizations expressed willingness to coordinate services, share resources, and collectively address regional needs. However, nearly every conversation eventually returned to practical constraints.

Participants identified recurring barriers including limited staffing, insufficient volunteer capacity, inadequate funding, and lack of time to cultivate partnerships. These obstacles were particularly evident when organizations were invited to envision ideal solutions. Participants generated ambitious and innovative ideas for improving food access and strengthening community resilience, but almost immediately qualified those ideas by acknowledging they lacked the personnel or financial resources necessary for implementation. This pattern suggests that creativity is not the limiting factor within the regional food security network. Rather, organizational capacity constrains the ability to translate innovative ideas into sustained action.

Equally important, facilitators observed a strong demand for organizational development support. Participants requested assistance with fundraising, major donor cultivation, volunteer recruitment and retention, leadership development, organizational growth, and change management. One pantry director described losing nearly half of the organization's volunteers after implementing operational changes, illustrating that even positive organizational improvements can strain small volunteer-dependent organizations.

These findings indicate that future investments should extend beyond funding food programs alone. Strengthening organizational infrastructure will likely increase the effectiveness and sustainability of the entire regional food security ecosystem.

Food Insecurity as an Interconnected Systems Challenge

The discussions consistently reinforced that food insecurity cannot be understood solely as a question of food distribution. Participants described an interconnected system in which transportation, housing, social isolation, workforce demands, and community resilience all influence residents' ability to access nutritious food.

Transportation discussions were especially revealing. Rather than focusing exclusively on the availability of transportation, participants emphasized the interaction between transportation and service accessibility. Pantry operating hours, evening availability, weekend schedules, and employment obligations all affected whether residents could realistically obtain assistance. Transportation therefore emerged not as an isolated logistical problem but as part of a broader access equation involving both mobility and timing.

Another unexpected theme involved the continuing influence of Superstorm Sandy. Facilitators reported that participants repeatedly connected present-day food insecurity to long-term changes initiated by the storm more than a decade earlier. Housing displacement, conversion of homes into seasonal properties, declining affordability, demographic shifts, weakened neighborhood networks, and increasing social isolation were all identified as contributing factors.

Several participants described loneliness itself as an emerging community challenge, with some residents reportedly experiencing extended periods without meaningful social interaction. These observations suggest that food insecurity is deeply connected to broader questions of community cohesion, housing stability, and social connectedness.

Taken together, these discussions reinforce the need for systems-based approaches that integrate food assistance with housing initiatives, transportation planning, health services, community development, and social support networks.

Human Capacity, Burnout, and Community Leadership

Although the overall atmosphere of the convening was optimistic, facilitators also detected significant fatigue among many participating organizations. Providers described operating with limited staff, shrinking volunteer pools, increasing demand, and insufficient time to pursue collaborative opportunities.

Ironically, those organizations most enthusiastic about collaboration often possessed the least capacity to sustain it. This paradox underscores the importance of creating dedicated infrastructure to support ongoing partnership development rather than expecting already overextended organizations to assume additional responsibilities independently.

Facilitators also noted recurring frustration regarding local government engagement. Participants expressed concerns that nonprofit organizations often feel overlooked, insufficiently supported, or inadequately recognized for their contributions. While this issue was not explored in depth during the convening, its repeated appearance suggests an opportunity to strengthen relationships between nonprofit organizations, municipal leaders, and county agencies.

Another encouraging observation involved participant diversity. Facilitators praised the broad representation achieved during the convening while simultaneously identifying important voices that remain absent from the regional conversation. Schools, municipal governments, faith-based organizations, veterans' organizations, civic associations, and additional municipalities from southern portions of the county were all identified as important future participants.

Perhaps most importantly, facilitators observed that several participants brought lived experience with food insecurity into the discussions. Although these individuals were not intentionally recruited for this purpose, their perspectives consistently grounded conversations in practical realities and enriched dialogue by connecting policy discussions with personal experience. Future convenings would likely benefit from intentionally incorporating more residents with lived experience as active contributors to planning and decision-making.

A Foundation for Sustained Collective Action

Across all facilitator reflections, one consistent message emerged beneath the explicit discussions. Participants appeared to leave the convening with a new understanding that they were not working in isolation. Many discovered organizations they had not previously known, recognized opportunities for partnership, and expressed renewed confidence that collaboration is both feasible and desirable.

The emotional climate reflected this transformation. Participants were energized by meeting new partners, identifying shared goals, and imagining ambitious possibilities for collective action. At the same time, they remained concerned about persistent funding limitations, transportation challenges, volunteer shortages, organizational burnout, and the complexity of food insecurity itself. Nevertheless, optimism consistently outweighed pessimism.

These findings point toward several strategic priorities for future action. First, Southern Ocean County appears ready to embrace collaborative leadership if ongoing opportunities for relationship-building are sustained. Second, improving connectivity among organizations may produce greater impact than creating entirely new programs. Third, organizational capacity-building—including leadership development, fundraising support, volunteer management, and operational strengthening—should accompany future programmatic investments. Finally, food insecurity should be addressed as a multidimensional systems issue that intersects with housing, transportation, health, social isolation, and community resilience.

Bringing the Findings Together

Taken together, the participant discussions and facilitator reflections point to a single overarching conclusion: Southern Ocean County's greatest opportunity is not creating new organizations or programs, but strengthening the connections among the many committed organizations that already serve the community. Participants consistently reframed food insecurity as a systems challenge requiring coordinated leadership, shared information, accessible services, and cross-sector partnerships rather than isolated organizational efforts. At the same time, the facilitator debrief revealed an unexpected and equally important finding—a remarkable readiness for collaboration. Rather than encountering competition or territorial behavior, facilitators observed openness, trust, and a genuine desire to work together, suggesting that fragmentation, not commitment, is the primary barrier to progress.

These combined findings suggest that future investments should focus on building the infrastructure that enables collaboration: strengthening organizational capacity, creating regular opportunities for relationship-building, improving communication and referral networks, addressing structural barriers such as transportation, and designing services around the lived realities of residents. By leveraging the region's existing social capital and fostering sustained collective action, Southern Ocean County is well positioned to transform a network of dedicated organizations into an integrated, resilient food security ecosystem capable of producing lasting improvements in community well-being.

Chapter 3

Signals of Community Readiness and Opportunity

Every community convening produces expected themes. Participants identify familiar barriers, describe operational challenges, and propose improvements grounded in their experience. The Together at the Table convening did all of those things. It also revealed several patterns that were not fully anticipated.

These ideas surfaced independently across different tables and discussion topics. Their recurrence suggests that they were not isolated observations. They represent shared perceptions about where the current system is constrained, where the community sees untapped opportunity, and where there may be unusual readiness for action.

Together, these revelations provide an important complement to the four principal findings. They show not only what participants believe should change, but also where energy, creativity, and commitment are already beginning to coalesce.

Transportation Came Up Regardless of the Topic

Transportation was expected to be discussed as one barrier among many. What was not anticipated was how consistently it would surface in conversations that were ostensibly about something else.

Participants returned to transportation while discussing a wide range of issues, including:

- pantry operating hours;
- healthcare referrals;
- senior services;
- volunteer recruitment;
- geographic inequities;
- cultural responsiveness;
- neighborhood outreach;
- school partnerships;
- access to fresh and nutritious food.

This pattern revealed that transportation is not simply a discrete service gap. It is a force that shapes the effectiveness of nearly every other part of the food security system. For example:

- A pantry may have adequate food but remain inaccessible.

- A healthcare provider may identify a patient in need of nutritional assistance but lack a realistic referral option.
- A new evening program may expand operating hours but still fail to reach residents who are without transportation.
- A volunteer initiative may attract interest but struggle to mobilize people across a geographically dispersed region.

The Mentimeter responses reinforced this point. Open-ended comments repeatedly described transportation, limited access, and pantry hours as central barriers. Participants also ranked transportation assistance among the highest priorities for the next twelve months.

> **Key Insight:** Transportation should be treated as a cross-cutting design consideration in every future initiative. Each pilot, partnership, technology investment, and service expansion should answer a basic question: How will residents realistically reach and use this resource?

Schools Emerged as Potential Community Hubs

Participants discussed schools far more broadly than anticipated. Rather than focusing only on school meals or child nutrition, they repeatedly described schools as trusted neighborhood institutions that could support many dimensions of food security. Potential roles included:

- food distribution before or after school;
- summer and weekend access;
- family resource navigation;
- nutrition education;
- volunteer recruitment;
- outreach to caregivers;
- referrals to community services;
- hosting community refrigerators or lockers;
- convening neighborhood partners.

This expanded view reflects the unique role schools play in community life. They are familiar, geographically distributed, and connected to children and families across income levels and backgrounds. Participants appeared to see schools not simply as service sites, but as anchors of community trust.

Key Insight: School partnerships should be developed as part of a broader community hub strategy. The strongest opportunities may involve working with a small number of school districts or individual schools to test integrated "community schools" models that combine food access, family outreach, referrals, and community engagement.

Community Refrigerators and Food Lockers Emerged Independently

Community refrigerators and secure food lockers appeared independently in multiple conversations. These ideas were not introduced as formal recommendations by presenters or facilitators. Participants raised them organically while discussing transportation, operating hours, neighborhood access, dignity, and innovation.

That convergence is notable. Community refrigerators and food lockers address several barriers simultaneously:

- limited pantry hours;
- transportation challenges;
- stigma;
- privacy;
- geographic distance;
- scheduling conflicts;
- access to fresh food.

They also represent a different philosophy of food access. Traditional models often require residents to adapt to organizational schedules and procedures. Decentralized access points place food closer to where people already live, work, learn, or worship.

The Mentimeter commitments included a specific interest in seeking funding for food lockers at partner churches, further indicating that the idea had moved beyond general discussion for at least some participants.

Key Insight; The region may be ready for a carefully designed pilot involving community refrigerators and secure food locker sites. Any pilot should address food safety, maintenance, host-site responsibility, accessibility, restocking, data collection, and community awareness from the outset.

Healthcare Partnerships Were Discussed More Frequently Than Anticipated

The relationship between food and health emerged repeatedly throughout the day.

Participants discussed healthcare providers not merely as referral sources, but as active partners in identifying, addressing, and preventing food insecurity. Ideas included:

- routine screening for food insecurity;
- direct referral pathways;
- medically tailored meals;
- nutrition counseling;
- produce prescription programs;
- coordinated case management;
- support for older adults and individuals with chronic illness;
- shared data and outcome measurement where appropriate.

The frequency of these conversations suggests that many participants already view food security as a critical health issue, not only as a social service or charitable concern.

This is a meaningful shift. It creates the possibility of partnerships built around shared outcomes, including improved chronic disease management, reduced hospital utilization, better maternal and child health, reduced stress, anxiety and depression, and greater independence among older adults.

Participants also explicitly called for expansion into healthcare sectors when identifying desired partnerships at the conclusion of the convening.

> **Key Insight:** Healthcare engagement should become a formal workstream within the regional strategy. Early action could include a small working group involving hospitals, health departments, community health organizations, and food providers to identify one or two practical demonstration projects.

Dignity Became a Practical Design Principle

Participants had been expected to discuss food distribution, access, funding, operating capacity, and logistics. The focus by participants on dignity as a consistent and overarching theme was unexpected and reflected a recognition of its vital role. Participants repeatedly connected food security with:

- choice;

- autonomy;
- cultural responsiveness;
- compassion;
- privacy;
- reduced stigma;
- welcoming environments;
- flexible access;
- freedom from judgment.

These were not presented as abstract values. Participants treated them as criteria for program design. For example:

- Evening access was discussed not only as a matter of convenience, but as a way to make services accessible to working families.
- Client choice was described not only as a preference, but as a means of preserving agency.
- Multilingual communication was not viewed merely as outreach, but as a way of ensuring equitable participation.
- Community refrigerators and lockers were seen not only as logistical innovations, but as tools that could increase privacy and reduce stigma.

The Mentimeter word cloud defining food security strongly reinforced this theme. Comfort, safety, dignity, health, autonomy, choice, equity, stability, and peace of mind all appeared among participants' responses.

> **Key Insight:** Future initiatives should be evaluated not only for reach and efficiency, but also for the experience they create for residents. A simple dignity review could be incorporated into pilot design by asking:
>
> - Is the service easy to understand?
> - Is it accessible at realistic times and locations?
> - Does it preserve choice?
> - Is it culturally responsive?
> - Does it minimize stigma?
> - Does it treat residents as partners rather than recipients?

Innovation Came from the Edges of the Conversation

Many of the convening's most promising ideas did not emerge from formal presentations or the materials that had been prepared by the organizers in advance. They emerged through

table conversations, informal exchanges, and commitments made near the end of the day. Participants proposed:

- shared volunteer corps;
- food lockers;
- neighborhood refrigerators;
- school-based hubs;
- mobile and pop-up distribution;
- home delivery partnerships;
- regional technology platforms;
- healthcare integration;
- shared resource directories;
- annual convenings;
- a permanent coalition.

This matters because it suggests that the community does not lack ideas. The more significant challenge is creating a disciplined process for selecting, testing, evaluating, and scaling those ideas. Without such a process, innovation may remain episodic and dependent on individual champions. With a shared structure, Southern Ocean County can develop a shared portfolio of pilot projects and learn systematically and collectively from experience.

> **Key Insight:** The proposed coalition should establish a simple innovation process that includes:
>
> - identifying a clearly defined problem;
> - selecting a limited pilot population or geography;
> - assigning responsible partners;
> - establishing measures of success;
> - testing the approach;
> - documenting lessons;
> - deciding whether to expand, revise, or discontinue the initiative.

Participants Want Consistent and Structured Collaboration

Perhaps the most important surprise was the strength of participants' desire to remain connected.

Participants did not appear satisfied with a one-time event. They asked what would happen next. They expressed interest in further meetings. They offered to make introductions. They

committed to continued collaboration. They asked to join a coalition. They volunteered to help with implementation.

The Mentimeter results provide especially strong evidence of this readiness. Seventy participants recorded commitments after the convening, with responses centered overwhelmingly on connecting, collaborating, sharing resources, creating partnerships, supporting a coalition, and continuing the conversation. Fifty-six participants also provided contact information because they wanted to participate in what comes next.

This level of voluntary engagement is unusual and valuable. It suggests that the convening did more than generate agreement. It generated a preliminary constituency for action. However, momentum is a perishable asset. A long delay between convening and follow-up could weaken the relationships and enthusiasm generated during the day.

> **Key Insight:** Follow-up should occur quickly and visibly. Participants should receive:
>
> - a concise summary of the convening through the final report;
> - information about the next phase;
> - a clear invitation to participate;
> - early evidence that their contributions are influencing decisions.

Participants Left More Hopeful Than Discouraged

Food insecurity is a difficult subject. Participants confronted significant service gaps, persistent inequities, rising demand, and structural barriers. Yet the emotional tone at the end of the convening was notably positive.

Participants described the experience using the following words, arranged as a word cloud:



Hopeful was the most frequently submitted word. Participants also rated their confidence that meaningful change could be achieved within three years at 3.7 out of 5. The convening itself received an average rating of 4.7 out of 5 from the respondents who completed the closing evaluation. This optimism should not be interpreted as underestimating the challenge. Rather, it reflects confidence in the people and institutions assembled to address it.

> **Key Insight:** The regional strategy should pair urgency with possibility. Communications should be candid about the scale of the challenge while emphasizing that meaningful progress is achievable through disciplined collaboration and sustained effort.

Patterns Reveal a Community at an Important Point of Readiness

Participants are not simply asking for more resources within existing structures. They are questioning whether those structures are organized in the most effective way. They appear receptive to new service models. They see food security as connected to health, education, transportation, and community development. They are willing to collaborate across organizational boundaries. They want to remain involved. Most importantly, they appear prepared to move from identifying problems into testing solutions.

> **Key Insight**: The convening revealed not only a shared diagnosis of the problem, but also a community increasingly ready to act collectively.

The convening demonstrated that Southern Ocean County is not lacking in commitment. Instead, the existing commitment needs to be converted into coordinated action. The next chapter translates this readiness into five strategic priorities for building a more connected, accessible, and resilient food security system.

Chapter 4

Five Strategic Priorities and Recommended Actions for Building a Coordinated Food Security System

The Together at the Table convening generated dozens of thoughtful recommendations. Participants proposed new partnerships, expanded outreach, transportation improvements, technology investments, neighborhood initiatives, volunteer strategies, and innovative approaches to improving food access throughout Southern Ocean County.

Viewed individually, these ideas represent valuable opportunities. Viewed collectively, they reveal something much larger. They describe the characteristics of a coordinated regional food security system.

This distinction is important. Communities rarely transform complex systems by implementing isolated recommendations one at a time. They create lasting change by pursuing a limited number of mutually reinforcing priorities that guide investment, partnership, innovation, and decision making over time.

The recommendations presented in this chapter are therefore organized into five strategic priorities. Together they provide a framework for building a more connected, equitable, resilient, and resident-centered food security system. No single organization can accomplish these priorities independently. Likewise, no individual recommendation will solve food insecurity.

Progress will require sustained collaboration among nonprofit organizations, public agencies, schools, healthcare providers, municipalities, businesses, faith communities, residents, and funders. The opportunity before Southern Ocean County is not simply to improve existing programs. It is to strengthen the community system that connects them.

This chapter begins with a diagram of the “Strategic Framework for Collective Impact” that is intended to serve as a conceptual map for the remainder of the report. The framework is best understood as a cycle of coordinated action and continuous improvement, centered on the experience of residents.

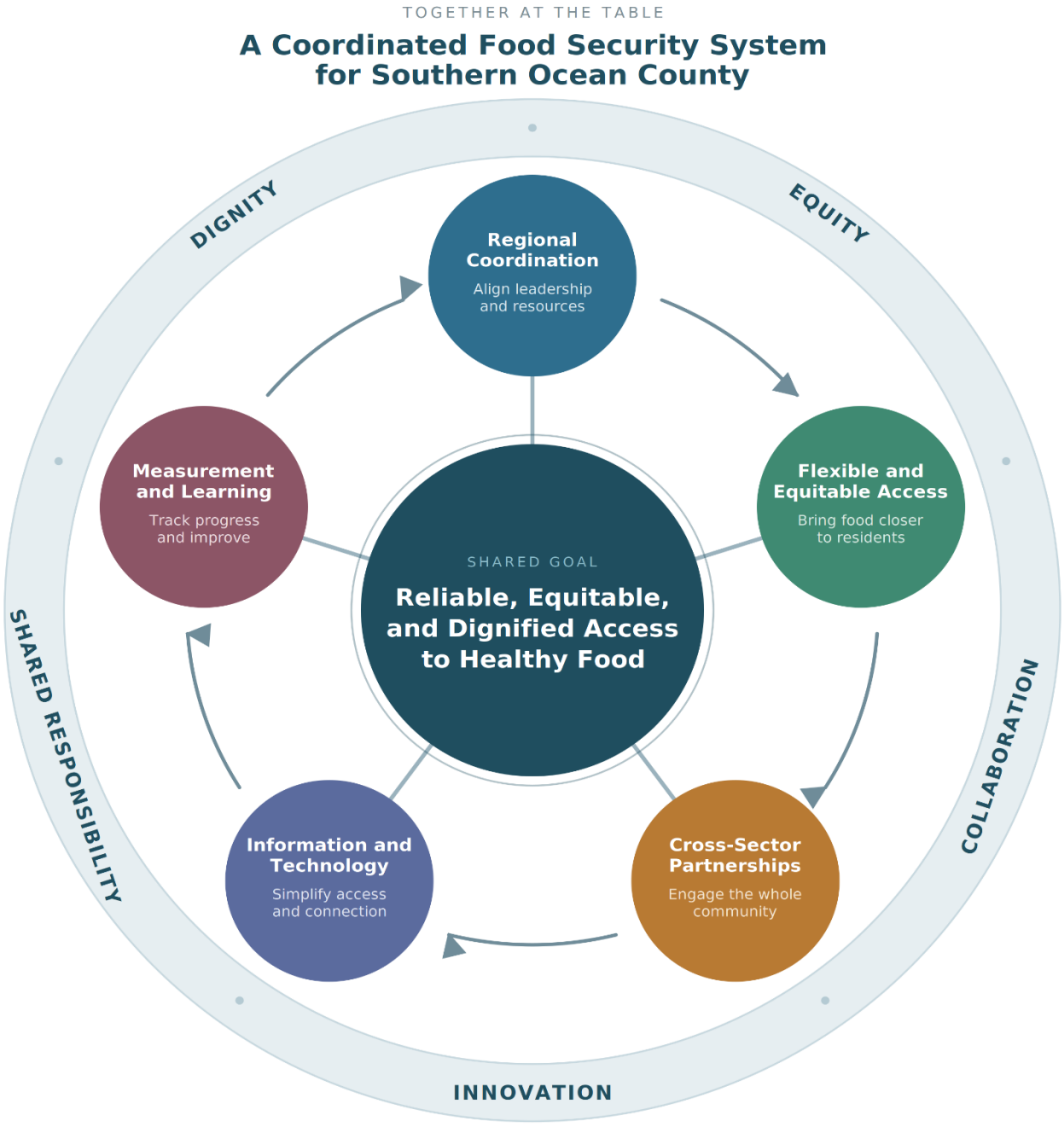


Figure 1. A Coordinated Food Security System for Southern Ocean County

The five strategic priorities operate as a mutually reinforcing system. Together, they strengthen the community infrastructure needed to ensure reliable, equitable, and dignified access to healthy food.

Strategic Priority One and Recommended Actions: Build the Regional Coordination Infrastructure

The clearest conclusion to emerge from the convening was that Southern Ocean County already possesses many of the organizations, leadership, expertise, and commitment necessary to improve equitable food security in the region. What it lacks is the coordinated infrastructure that would enable those assets to function as a powerful regional system.

Participants repeatedly described the need for a permanent collaborative structure capable of bringing organizations together to align priorities, identify needs, organize initiatives, share information, and sustain momentum beyond individual projects or convenings. They envisioned a community backbone that would support collaboration while preserving the independence and unique strengths of participating organizations. The proposed **Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition** represents this opportunity.

Rather than directing programs, the coalition would help participating organizations work together more effectively by providing consistent opportunities for communication, planning, learning, and collective problem solving.

Recommended Actions

First Six Months

- Establish and launch the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition.
- Identify the backbone organization and leader responsible for growing the Coalition.
- Create a representative Steering Committee comprised of the CEOs and EDs of member organizations.
- Adopt a shared vision, organizational charter, and guiding principles.
- Create working groups aligned with the strategic priorities.

Years One Through Three

- Develop annual work plans.
- Coordinate regional advocacy.
- Secure multi-year funding to sustain the staffing support for the Coalition and to fund pilot initiatives.
- Convene annual community summits.
- Publish annual progress reports.

Indicators of Success

- Coalition established and meeting regularly.
- Broad representation across sectors.
- Increased collaboration among participating organizations.
- Shared priorities guiding regional initiatives.
- Growing participation over time.
- Measurable outcomes.

Strategic Principle: Communities create lasting change when they invest as intentionally in collaborative relationships as they do in their own programs.

Strategic Priority Two and Recommended Actions: Expand Flexible, Equitable, and Dignified Food Access

Participants consistently emphasized that improving food security requires more than distributing additional food. Residents must be able to access nutritious food conveniently, consistently, and with dignity. Food systems should reflect the realities of people's lives rather than requiring residents to adapt to organizational schedules or geographic limitations.

Throughout the convening, participants described a future characterized by flexibility. Among the key factors were:

- Food must be available closer to where residents actually live.
- Evening and weekend access.
- Transportation support.
- Mobile distribution.
- Community refrigerators.
- Food lockers.
- Client choice.
- Fresh produce.

These ideas are united by one principle: access should be designed around residents. The Mentimeter polling strongly supports this priority. Evening and weekend pantry hours received the highest level of support among proposed investments, followed closely by transportation assistance and the establishment of a Food Security Coalition.

Recommended Actions

- Pilot the establishment of community refrigerators and food lockers.
- Expand evening and weekend pantry hours.
- Develop neighborhood food hubs.
- Increase mobile and pop-up distribution with increased capacity.
- Strengthen transportation partnerships.
- Expand home delivery for seniors and residents with disabilities.
- Increase access to fresh produce.

Indicators of Success

- Reduced transportation barriers.
- Increased participation.
- Greater geographic coverage.
- Expanded client choice.
- Most critically, higher resident satisfaction.

> **Strategic Principle**: Residents should not have to overcome unnecessary barriers to obtain healthy food.

Strategic Priority Three and Recommended Actions: Build Partnerships That Extend Beyond Food

Food security is deeply connected to education, health, housing, transportation, employment, and community well-being. Participants at the convening consistently challenged the assumption that hunger relief organizations alone should carry responsibility for addressing food insecurity. Instead, they envisioned a broader coalition in which schools, healthcare providers, municipalities, businesses, faith communities, libraries, colleges, civic organizations, and residents all become active partners. This shift from organizational responsibility to community responsibility represents one of the report's central themes. Each institution contributes different strengths:

- Schools contribute trusted relationships.
- Healthcare providers can identify needs early and target nutritional assistance.

- Faith communities mobilize volunteers.
- Municipal governments coordinate local resources.
- Businesses contribute funding, expertise, and volunteers.

Together they create a stronger community ecosystem.

Recommended Actions

- Launch a Healthcare and Food Security Collaborative.
- Expand partnerships with school districts.
- Engage municipal leadership.
- Strengthen faith community involvement.
- Develop employer engagement strategies.
- Increase collaboration with higher education institutions.

Indicators of Success

- Increased cross-sector participation.
- New collaborative initiatives.
- Expanded referral networks.
- Earlier identification of food insecurity.
- Greater community awareness.

> **Strategic Principle**: Food security improves when every trusted community institution becomes part of the solution.

Strategic Priority Four and Recommended Actions: Build a Smarter Community Food System

Participants repeatedly described technology as a systems enabler. For example, technology should:

- Simplify access and reduce barriers.
- Improve communication.
- Strengthen coordination.
- Reduce duplication.
- Support better decisions.

Most importantly, technology should make the resident experience easier while allowing organizations to collaborate more effectively.

Examples discussed during the convening included:

- shared resource directories;
- coordinated referral systems;
- volunteer platforms;
- multilingual communications;
- inventory visibility;
- appointment scheduling;
- shared calendars;
- community dashboards.

Participants consistently emphasized that technology should support collaborative relationships rather than replace them.

Recommended Actions

- Develop a regional resource directory.
- Improve referral systems.
- Explore shared volunteer management.
- Expand multilingual communication.
- Create a community food dashboard.
- Improve information sharing among providers.

Indicators of Success

- Simpler navigation.
- Reduced duplication.
- Faster referrals.
- Improved coordination.
- Better information for planning.

Strategic Principle: Technology should reduce complexity for residents and increase connectivity among organizations.

Strategic Priority Five and Recommended Actions: Measure Progress, Learn Together, and Sustain Momentum

Perhaps the strongest indicator of success from the convening was participants' desire to continue working together. Communities sustain change through shared undertakings, including:

- Organizational learning.
- Regular reflection.
- Visible progress.
- Shared accountability.
- Celebration of success.
- Continuous improvement.
- Participants repeatedly asked what would happen next.
- This report answers that question.

The work ahead should be viewed not as implementation of a fixed plan, but as an ongoing cycle of learning and adaptation. The Mentimeter polling demonstrates that participants are ready for this next step. Confidence in achieving meaningful change averaged 3.7 on a five-point scale, and more than fifty participants volunteered to remain actively involved in the next phase of work.

Recommended Actions

- Develop a shared measurement framework.
- Publish annual progress reports.
- Maintain coalition working groups.
- Host annual Together at the Table convenings to sustain and grow the coalition.
- Evaluate pilot initiatives.
- Share lessons learned.

Indicators of Success

- Annual community reporting.
- Increased collaboration.
- Successful pilot expansion.
- Stronger funder engagement.
- Continuous improvement across the regional system.

Strategic Principle: Communities improve what they measure and sustain what they celebrate.

Putting Priorities into Practice

Taken together, these five priorities represent more than a collection of recommendations. They describe a different way of thinking about food security. Instead of asking how one organization can expand its services, they ask how an entire community can align its resources. Instead of focusing solely on food distribution, they emphasize transportation, partnership, dignity, technology, and shared accountability. Instead of viewing collaboration as occasional, they envision collaboration as the way Southern Ocean County works.

This framework also recognizes an important reality. The region does not need to solve every challenge simultaneously. Meaningful change can begin with carefully selected pilot projects that demonstrate success, build trust, generate momentum, and create opportunities for broader system transformation.

Several initiatives are particularly well suited for early implementation because they emerged repeatedly throughout the convening, align with the strategic priorities, and offer visible opportunities for collaborative action. This potential “early win” initiatives are listed below.

Summary of five "Early Wins" that would be highly visible, collaborative, and achievable within 12 months:

1. Launch the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition.
2. Pilot one community refrigerator and one food locker.
3. Expand evening hours at selected pantry sites with appropriate outreach.
4. Establish a Healthcare and Food Security Working Group.
5. Develop a regional food resource directory.

The next chapter highlights these opportunities through a list of promising opportunities for early action. These are examples of the creative thinking already emerging across Southern Ocean County and are initiatives that may be particularly attractive for early investment by community stakeholders to demonstrate the value of collaborative action within the next one to three years.

Chapter 5

Promising Opportunities for Early Action

Ten Initiatives That Could Accelerate Progress

The Together at the Table convening generated a remarkable range of ideas for strengthening food security throughout Southern Ocean County. Some focused on improving existing services. Others challenged participants to think differently about how food access could be organized, coordinated, and delivered.

While no single initiative will solve food insecurity, several ideas emerged repeatedly across breakout discussions, Mentimeter polling, and informal conversations. They share three important characteristics. First, they reflect the priorities expressed by participants rather than recommendations developed independently by the consultants. Second, they are inherently collaborative. None depends on a single organization acting alone. Third, they offer opportunities for visible progress that can build momentum, strengthen relationships, and demonstrate the value of regional coordination.

The following initiatives are presented as a portfolio of opportunities rather than a prescribed sequence. Together they illustrate how Southern Ocean County can begin translating shared aspirations into practical action.

Opportunity One: Launch the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition

Nearly every discussion returned to the need for an ongoing structure that brings organizations together on a regular basis. Participants envisioned a coalition that would coordinate communication, facilitate partnerships, identify emerging issues, support collaborative problem solving, and maintain momentum between annual convenings.

The coalition would not replace existing organizations or direct their work. Instead, it would strengthen the relationships that allow organizations to work together more effectively. A permanent collaborative structure creates the foundation upon which every other recommendation in this report depends.

Opportunity Two: Create Community Refrigerators and Neighborhood Food Lockers

Participants repeatedly proposed community refrigerators and secure food lockers as practical ways to improve neighborhood access while reducing transportation barriers and stigma. These models allow residents to obtain food closer to where they live and at times that better reflect daily schedules.

A carefully designed pilot involving one refrigerator and one locker could provide valuable lessons before broader expansion. These initiatives represent highly visible demonstrations of innovation while advancing dignity, accessibility, and community partnership.

Opportunity Three: Establish School-Based Community Food Hubs

Participants consistently viewed schools as trusted institutions with the potential to serve families beyond the traditional school day. Possible activities include:

- food distribution;
- summer meal support;
- nutrition education;
- family resource navigation;
- Health, welfare and food insecurity referrals;
- volunteer engagement;
- community outreach.

Rather than creating new facilities, this initiative builds upon existing community infrastructure. Schools provide trusted neighborhood locations already connected to children and families across Southern Ocean County.

Opportunity Four: Strengthen Food and Healthcare Partnerships

Participants repeatedly emphasized the relationship between food security and health outcomes. Potential initiatives include:

- routine food insecurity screening;
- referral systems;
- produce prescription programs;
- medically tailored meals;
- nutrition counseling;

- coordinated care planning.

Healthcare providers increasingly recognize food as a critical social determinant of health. Improved nutrition contributes to healthier families while reducing long-term healthcare costs.

Opportunity Five: Expand Transportation Solutions

Transportation emerged more consistently than any other operational issue discussed during the convening. Participants proposed:

- partnerships with Ocean Ride;
- volunteer transportation;
- neighborhood pickup sites;
- expanded home delivery;
- satellite distribution locations;
- mobile food markets.

Rather than relying on one solution, participants envisioned multiple complementary approaches tailored to different populations. Transportation improvements increase the effectiveness of nearly every other investment.

Opportunity Six: Build a Regional Food Resource and Referral Platform

Residents often struggle to determine:

- where food is available;
- eligibility requirements;
- hours of operation;
- available services;
- transportation options.

Participants envisioned a shared digital platform that could simplify access while improving coordination among providers. Information is itself a form of access. Possible features include:

- searchable resource directory;
- multilingual information;
- appointment scheduling;
- referral tracking;

- interactive mapping;
- volunteer opportunities.

Opportunity Seven: Create a Regional Volunteer Network

Many organizations described challenges recruiting and retaining volunteers. Rather than competing independently, participants envisioned a coordinated volunteer system that would allow community members to identify opportunities across multiple organizations. Shared recruitment, training, recognition, and scheduling could increase volunteer participation while reducing duplication. Volunteers represent one of Southern Ocean County's greatest community assets.

Opportunity Eight: Develop a Community Food Security Dashboard

Participants emphasized the importance of measuring progress.

A shared dashboard could monitor:

- food insecurity trends;
- geographic access;
- participation;
- volunteer engagement;
- transportation utilization;
- partnership development;
- pilot outcomes.

The purpose would be learning rather than compliance. Reliable information enables better decisions and helps organizations identify emerging needs before they become crises. Communities improve when they measure what matters.

Opportunity Nine: Create a Community Innovation Fund

Participants generated far more promising ideas than can be implemented simultaneously. Several suggested establishing an innovation fund to support collaborative pilot projects proposed by organizations working together. The fund could prioritize initiatives that:

- involve multiple partners;
- test new approaches;

- generate measurable learning;
- demonstrate scalability;
- strengthen regional collaboration.

Small grants can often produce disproportionate learning. Innovation is most effective when communities intentionally create opportunities to experiment, evaluate, and adapt.

Opportunity Ten: Make Together at the Table an Annual Community Forum

Participants overwhelmingly expressed interest in continuing the conversation.

Rather than treating the convening as a one-time event, many envisioned an annual gathering that would:

- review progress;
- celebrate accomplishments;
- share lessons;
- strengthen partnerships;
- identify emerging issues;
- launch new initiatives.

The Mentimeter evaluation reflected this enthusiasm. Participants rated the convening very highly and many volunteered to remain involved in future work, providing a strong foundation for sustained engagement. Annual convenings reinforce accountability while maintaining the relationships that drive long-term collaboration.

Selecting the First Demonstration Projects

Although all ten opportunities merit consideration, participants consistently highlighted several initiatives that appear especially well suited for early implementation because they combine broad community support, visible impact, and opportunities for collaboration.

Highest-Priority Early Actions

1. Launch the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition

Provides the organizational infrastructure necessary for all subsequent work.

2. Pilot Community Refrigerators and Food Lockers

Creates visible improvements in neighborhood access while testing innovative service models.

3. Expand Evening and Weekend Food Access

Responds directly to one of the strongest priorities identified through the Mentimeter polling.

4. Convene a Healthcare and Food Security Working Group

Builds partnerships around one of the most promising opportunities identified during the convening.

5. Develop a Regional Food Resource Directory

Provides an immediately useful tool for residents, providers, and referral partners while laying the foundation for future technology investments.

A Portfolio Approach to Innovation

One of the most encouraging aspects of the convening was that participants did not search for a single transformative solution. Instead, they generated a portfolio of complementary ideas that reinforce one another. Some focus on improving access. Others strengthen collaboration. Still others expand partnerships, simplify information, or encourage innovation.

Taken together, they reflect an important evolution in the community's thinking. Participants increasingly understand that lasting progress will result from multiple coordinated improvements rather than one large initiative. This approach reduces risk, encourages experimentation, and allows the community to learn from experience before investing at greater scale.

> **Key Insight**: The most successful community strategies are built through a series of well-designed pilot projects that demonstrate success, strengthen trust, and create the confidence to pursue larger system change.

The next chapter translates these opportunities into an implementation roadmap that identifies how the community can move from planning to coordinated action over the next three years.

Chapter 6

From Vision to Action

The Together at the Table convening demonstrated that Southern Ocean County possesses many of the ingredients necessary to build a stronger and more equitable food security system. Dedicated organizations, experienced leaders, committed volunteers, engaged funders, innovative ideas, and broad community support are already in place.

The challenge now is not deciding whether to act. The challenge is organizing collective action in ways that build trust, demonstrate progress, and create lasting change.

Successful community initiatives rarely begin with large-scale transformation. They begin by strengthening relationships, testing promising ideas, learning from experience, and gradually expanding what works.

For this reason, the implementation roadmap presented below emphasizes disciplined progress rather than rapid expansion. Each phase builds upon the accomplishments of the previous one, creating a foundation for long-term system change.

An Implementation Roadmap for Collective Impact

Phase One: Organize - Building the Foundation

Suggested Timeframe: First 6 Months

The first phase focuses on creating the collaborative infrastructure needed to support all future work.

Rather than launching multiple new programs immediately, community leaders should first establish the relationships, organizational and leadership backbone, governance, communication channels, and shared expectations that will enable organizations to work together effectively.

Primary Objectives

- Establish the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition.
- Recruit a representative Steering Committee.
- Identify the backbone organization and leader responsible for growing the Coalition.
- Confirm a shared vision and guiding principles.

- Create working groups aligned with the five strategic priorities.
- Develop regular communication channels.
- Publish the final report and share findings throughout the community.
- Invite participants to join implementation efforts.
- Identify potential funding partners.

Expected Outcomes

By the conclusion of Phase One, organizations should have a shared structure for decision making, regular opportunities for collaboration, and a clear understanding of the priorities that will guide future work.

Early Success Indicators

- Coalition formally established.
- Steering Committee convened.
- Quarterly meetings scheduled.
- Working groups formed.
- Strong participation across sectors.
- Communication plan implemented.

Milestone

Southern Ocean County has moved from a successful convening to an organized regional collaborative.

Phase Two: Pilot - Demonstrating What Works

Suggested Timeframe: Months 6 through 18

With collaborative infrastructure established, the community can begin testing several highly visible initiatives that emerged repeatedly during the convening.

Pilot projects should be intentionally limited in scope. Their purpose is learning.

Well-designed pilots generate evidence, strengthen relationships, build confidence, and reduce risk before broader implementation.

Participants repeatedly emphasized the value of experimentation supported by careful evaluation.

Potential Demonstration Projects

Community Access

- Community refrigerator pilot.
- Food locker pilot.
- Expanded evening pantry hours.
- Mobile food distribution.
- Transportation partnerships.

Healthcare

- Food insecurity screening.
- Referral pathways.
- Healthcare working group.

Schools

- School-based food hub demonstration.
- Family resource navigation.

Technology

- Regional food resource directory.
- Shared referral platform prototype.

Volunteer Engagement

- Regional volunteer recruitment campaign.
- Shared volunteer database.

Expected Outcomes

By the conclusion of Phase Two, Southern Ocean County should possess practical experience implementing collaborative initiatives while identifying approaches worthy of broader investment.

Early Success Indicators

- Multiple pilot projects underway.
- Strong resident participation.
- Positive community feedback.

- Increased organizational collaboration.
- Measurable improvements in access.
- Lessons documented for future expansion.
- Community Innovation Fund established

Milestone

The community has demonstrated that collaborative approaches produce measurable improvements.

Phase Three: Scale - Expanding Successful Models

Suggested Timeframe: Years 2 and 3

Successful pilot projects should now be expanded thoughtfully across Southern Ocean County. Scaling does not mean simply replicating programs. It means adapting successful approaches to different neighborhoods, populations, and organizational settings while preserving the principles that made them successful. Throughout this phase, the coalition becomes increasingly important as a mechanism for coordinating expansion and maintaining consistency.

Primary Objectives

- Expand successful pilot projects.
- Increase geographic coverage.
- Engage additional organizations.
- Strengthen healthcare partnerships.
- Expand municipal participation.
- Increase business engagement.
- Improve technology integration.
- Develop sustainable funding strategies.
- Meet Collective Impact standards

Expected Outcomes

Residents throughout Southern Ocean County experience greater consistency in food access, improved coordination among providers, and stronger connections between food security and other community systems.

Success Indicators

- Expanded community access.
- Increased coalition membership.
- Stronger referral networks.
- Broader geographic reach.
- Improved resident outcomes.
- Greater public awareness.

Milestone

Collaborative initiatives have become part of the community's operating system rather than isolated projects.

Phase Four: Sustain - Creating a Culture of Continuous Improvement

Suggested Timeframe: Year 3 and Beyond

Long-term success depends upon maintaining collaboration, evaluating progress, adapting to changing community needs, and continually strengthening relationships among participating organizations.

The goal is no longer implementing recommendations. It is creating a community culture in which collaboration becomes routine. Organizations regularly learn together. Innovation becomes expected. Progress is measured consistently. Residents help shape future priorities.

Long-Term Priorities

- Publish annual Food Security Reports.
- Maintain community dashboards.
- Continue annual Together at the Table convenings.
- Evaluate strategic priorities.
- Refresh implementation plans.
- Develop new pilot initiatives.

- Share promising practices.
- Celebrate community accomplishments.
- Evaluate Collaborative Impact

Long-Term Success Indicators

Southern Ocean County increasingly demonstrates:

- stronger collaboration;
- greater food access;
- improved transportation solutions;
- stronger healthcare partnerships;
- increased resident engagement;
- sustained innovation;
- measurable reductions in barriers to food access.

Milestone

Continuous collaboration has become part of how Southern Ocean County addresses complex community challenges.

Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation will require leadership from many organizations rather than any single institution. The following roles emerged naturally throughout the convening.

Community Partner	Primary Role
Fulfill	Community leadership, food system expertise, coalition partner, implementation support
Grunin Foundation	Strategic investment, convening, capacity building, innovation support, ID backbone organization for the Community Innovation Fund
Food Providers	Service delivery, innovation, resident engagement

Community Partner	Primary Role
Healthcare Organizations	Screening, referrals, health partnerships
Schools	Community hubs, outreach, family engagement
Municipal Governments	Local coordination, public awareness, transportation partnerships, consider participation in Community Innovation Fund projects
Faith Communities	Volunteers, neighborhood engagement, hosting initiatives
Businesses	Volunteerism, financial support, logistics, innovation, Community Innovation Fund
Residents	Lived experience, advisory roles, evaluation, community leadership

One of the convening's most encouraging outcomes was that participants consistently viewed implementation as a shared responsibility rather than expecting any one organization to lead every initiative.

Funding the Work

Participants also recognized that implementation will require investment. At the same time, many of the highest-priority recommendations rely more on coordination than on major new expenditures.

A Community Innovation Fund is critical to this work and should be organized with a backbone organization identified and engaged, goals and vision developed, a pilot to support identified, metrics for measuring success developed, and a timetable for future activities established.The implementation strategy should pursue a balanced approach to funding. It will be important for the backbone organization to be invested in promoting a strategy for supporting sustained economies of scale in all programing, operations, and infrastructure.

Near-Term Investments

- Coalition staffing and coordination.
- Communications and outreach.
- Pilot project support.
- Community engagement.
- Evaluation.

Longer-Term Investments

- Transportation initiatives.
- Technology platforms.
- Expansion of successful pilots.
- Shared data systems.
- Sustainable staffing.

Funding should be viewed not simply as support for individual programs, but as an investment in the regional infrastructure that enables organizations to work together more effectively.

Managing Risk

Every collaborative initiative involves uncertainty.

Participants acknowledged several implementation risks, including limited organizational capacity, competing priorities, changes in leadership, funding constraints, and the challenge of maintaining momentum after the convening.

These risks can be reduced through intentional planning.

Successful collective initiatives typically share several characteristics:

- clearly defined roles;
- transparent communication;
- realistic expectations;
- regular opportunities for shared learning;
- visible early successes;
- ongoing evaluation;
- works through resistance to change;
- celebration of progress.

The roadmap presented in this chapter is designed to build these elements into the implementation process from the outset.

Looking Ahead

Implementation should not be understood as the final stage of this report. It is the beginning of a longer journey. The convening demonstrated that Southern Ocean County already possesses the relationships, creativity, and commitment needed to strengthen food security.

The roadmap presented here provides a practical path for translating those strengths into coordinated action. Progress will not be measured by the number of meetings held or reports produced. It will be measured by whether residents experience easier access to healthy food, stronger community support, reduced barriers, and greater dignity.

That outcome depends not on any single recommendation contained in this report. It depends on the community's continued willingness to work together.

> **Key Insight**: Lasting change will come not just from implementing the recommendations, but from steadily building the relationships, trust, and shared capacity that allow Southern Ocean County to solve increasingly complex challenges together.

Chapter 7

A Call to Collective Leadership

The Opportunity Before Southern Ocean County

The Together at the Table convening was not simply a successful meeting. It marked a shift in how Southern Ocean County frames food insecurity from a set of discrete organizational challenges to a shared systems problem requiring coordinated infrastructure. Participants entered expecting to discuss food distribution. By the end of the day, the conversation moved to system design, cross-sector accountability, and the structural conditions that determine whether residents can access food at all.

This shift carries a direct policy implication. Food insecurity in Southern Ocean County cannot be resolved through programming alone. It requires addressing the structural barriers, transportation chief among them, but also housing cost burden, healthcare access, and economic instability that determine whether existing food resources are actually reachable. Coordination infrastructure and structural-barrier removal are not separate agendas, they are the same agenda viewed from two angles. A coalition that coordinates organizations without also addressing the barriers residents face will improve efficiency without improving access.

A Community Rich in Assets

Southern Ocean County does not begin this work from a deficit. The region has an established base of nonprofit providers, healthcare institutions, schools, faith communities, municipal government, businesses, and philanthropic partners, each with earned community trust and operational expertise. This report is not a critique of that existing capacity, it is a recommendation to connect it, and to direct policy attention toward the conditions surrounding it.

For funders and partner organizations, the practical implication is twofold. First, prioritize the connective infrastructure, data-sharing agreements, referral systems, and shared governance that allows existing capacity to function as a system. Second, direct a defined

share of policy and funding attention toward the social determinants that convening participants identified as preventing access to that capacity in the first place.

Collaboration Is the Strategy

Reports on food insecurity often default to a single recommendation: more funding, more programs, more services. This report's central finding is different, and it should shape how Fulfill, the Grunin Foundation, and partner organizations allocate resources going forward. The highest-leverage investment identified through this convening is structural coordination paired with deliberate attention to the barriers that sit outside any single food provider's control.

Transportation surfaced repeatedly across nearly every breakout conversation, regardless of topic, confirming that it functions as a structural determinant of food access rather than a secondary logistical detail. Policy and funding decisions should treat transportation accordingly: as a cross-cutting design requirement built into every initiative in this report, not a standalone line item. The same logic extends to the broader social determinants participants raised including housing cost pressure, healthcare access, and economic instability which surfaced as forces that push food insecurity higher. The Coalition's policy agenda should therefore explicitly include advocacy and partnership work on these upstream conditions, not solely coordination of downstream food distribution.

From Planning to Practice

This report deliberately moves from findings to strategic priorities to a phased implementation roadmap. That structure should be treated as a working framework, not a fixed blueprint, and it should be built to accommodate policy work alongside direct service coordination. Practically, this means the Coalition's early workplan should include a defined policy and structural-barriers track addressing transportation access, housing-related food insecurity drivers, and healthcare-sector partnership running in parallel with the service-coordination pilots in Chapter 5 and evaluated on the same quarterly cadence against the indicators in Chapter 4.

The Importance of Early Success

Sustained cross-sector engagement depends on visible, credible progress within the first implementation phase. Partners and funders should prioritize early initiatives that are achievable within 6–12 months and that demonstrate both coordination value and structural-barrier impact. Opportunities include launching the Coalition itself, piloting a

transportation solution, piloting community refrigerators or food lockers, expanding evening and weekend access points, and formalizing healthcare referral partnerships that screen for food insecurity as a health-related social need.

Pairing a visible coordination win such as the Coalition launch with a visible structural-barrier win, a transportation pilot, in the first year will build partner and funder confidence. This signals that the Coalition intends to address root causes, not simply administer existing programs more efficiently.

The Role of Every Community Partner

The convening was notable for the absence of jurisdictional debate over which organization is responsible for solving food insecurity, and for how naturally participants connected food access to other social determinants. Healthcare organizations identified residents whose health is directly affected by food insecurity, reflecting a recognition that food access is a health outcome, not a separate concern. Participants acknowledged that municipal governments hold authority over transportation infrastructure and zoning that shape where residents can physically access food. Participants also recognized that businesses and employers shape the economic stability that determines whether residents can afford food and transportation costs.

For implementation planning, this means Coalition governance and MOUs should assign roles not only for food distribution, but explicitly for the structural determinants each partner is positioned to influence, healthcare screening and referral, municipal transportation, land-use decisions, and employer-side economic stability initiatives.

A Message to Community Leaders

The Coalition's success will depend on leadership that prioritizes system-level outcomes over individual organizational visibility, and that is willing to advocate on structural policy issues that extend beyond any one organization's direct service mandate. This requires patience, since structural and policy change moves on a longer timeline than program pilots. A willingness to hold both agendas simultaneously rather than treating direct service and policy advocacy as competing priorities for limited attention is necessary.

The Invitation

This report is not intended for implementation by a single organization on behalf of the community, it is a framework for action, service coordination and structural policy change.

Fulfill, the Grunin Foundation, and partner organizations should treat the recommendations in Chapters 4–6, alongside the structural-barrier and social-determinants priorities identified here, as a shared work plan requiring co-investment.

Looking Forward

Southern Ocean County has the organizational density, leadership relationships, and cross-sector willingness that many regions lack. It also has, from this convening, a clear and specific mandate: food security in this region is inseparable from transportation access, housing stability, healthcare integration, and economic security. What remains untested is whether the community sustains attention to both coordination and structural change simultaneously over multiple years.

Final Reflection

The convening produced a clearly articulated shared vision, and a clear diagnosis: food insecurity in Southern Ocean County is inseparable from the structural and social conditions surrounding it. The task now facing Fulfill, the Grunin Foundation, and partner organizations is converting that vision into a resourced, governed, and measured system, one that pursues coordination and structural-barrier removal as a single strategy, not two competing priorities.

Appendix 1 – Summary of the Convening Design and Facilitation

Together at the Table: Mobilizing for Food Security in Southern Ocean County Food

On July 15, 2026, Fulfill and the Grunin Foundation convened approximately 110 stakeholders at the Mainland Hotel in Southern Ocean County, New Jersey, for a half-day forum on food security in the region. The convening was facilitated by The Br'Island Group, a New Jersey-based strategic consulting firm. It was the most significant gathering of food security stakeholders in Southern Ocean County in recent memory and represented a meaningful first step toward the coordinated regional response that the data demands.

The convening followed the completion of Fulfill's Service Area Assessment (SAA), a rigorous, multi-dimensional study of food insecurity across Monmouth and Ocean Counties. The SAA revealed serious and persistent disparities: Ocean County has higher food insecurity rates and larger absolute numbers of food-insecure residents than Monmouth County yet receives significantly fewer resources through Fulfill's network. Southern Ocean County, the geographic focus of the convening, contains multiple ZIP codes with virtually no pantry network presence, inadequate fresh produce distribution, and almost no evening or weekend food access.

The convening brought together pantry operators, healthcare and social services professionals, faith community leaders, county and municipal officials, funders, business community representatives, and residents with lived experience of food insecurity. Organized around four gap dimensions identified in the SAA, twelve breakout tables engaged in structured conversations using a Dream Big Together framework that prioritized imagination and possibility before moving to concrete actions.

This appendix summarizes the assessment and what was heard across those twelve tables.

> **HEADLINE FINDING:** The data is clear and the community is ready. What is missing is the infrastructure for collaboration. The most urgent recommendation of this report is the creation of a Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition with a dedicated backbone function, supported by Fulfill and the Grunin Foundation, to coordinate the work that no single organization can accomplish alone.

Summary of Key Findings

- Food insecurity in Ocean County exceeds Monmouth County in both rate (11.1% vs. 9.2%) and absolute numbers (71,680 vs. 59,420), yet Fulfill distributes significantly more meals per food-insecure person in Monmouth (150) than Ocean (107).
- Southern Ocean County contains 12 ZIP codes below Fulfill's service target and three ZIP codes with virtually no pantry network presence. The most acute geographic gaps and cold spots are concentrated in Toms River (08757), Whiting/Manchester (08759), New Egypt (08533), and Beachwood (08722), alongside severe produce deficits in Waretown (08758) and Little Egg Harbor (08087).
- Evening and weekend food distribution is nearly nonexistent across the region, structurally excluding the 36% of Ocean County households that qualify as ALICE.
- Fresh produce distribution falls below the nutritional standard of 16 lbs per month in 15 Ocean County ZIP codes, with several communities receiving just 1 lb per food-insecure person.
- More than 100 participants from approximately 60 organizations across 8 sectors participated, representing the broadest cross-sector gathering on food security in Southern Ocean County in recent memory.
- Mentimeter priority-setting results will be incorporated into the final version of this report upon receipt of complete Mentimeter data from the convening.
- The Ocean County Food Security Coalition was identified as a top-three strategy priority by a significant share of participants in the Poll 7 dot-vote, reflecting broad recognition that coordination infrastructure is the prerequisite for all other strategies.
- Participant commitments and named partnership introductions were captured through the Mentimeter commitment round; full tallies will be incorporated in the final report.

Organizing the Convening

The Grunin Foundation and Fulfill invited The Br'Island Group to serve as facilitators for a regional convening focused on Southern Ocean County. The purpose of the convening was not merely to present Fulfill's findings, but to use those findings as a launching point for genuine community dialogue about what could be different.

A June 26 planning call with the full team refined the facilitation architecture and produced several key decisions that shaped the day's design. Chief among them was the recommendation that every breakout group open with a Dream Big Together question before moving to operational analysis.

Subsequent planning meetings confirmed the venue, set participant outreach timelines, finalized the twelve-table breakout structure, and organized a July 9 facilitator briefing session at which Grunin Foundation and Fulfill staff and volunteers from OceanFirst Bank were trained as table facilitators and recorders.

Invitations were extended through Fulfill's and the Grunin Foundation's existing networks, supplemented by outreach through organizations and institutions including the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce and community organizing contacts. The invitation list was assembled to represent the full ecosystem of stakeholders relevant to food security in Southern Ocean County: food pantries and food providers, healthcare and social services organizations, faith communities, municipal and county government, funders and philanthropic organizations, business and chamber representatives, neighbors and residents with direct experience of food insecurity.

Particular attention was paid to ensuring representation from Southern Ocean County specifically, recognizing that participants from northern Ocean County or Monmouth County bring different institutional contexts and relationships. A pre-event communication was distributed to registered participants before the convening, including a high-level summary of the SAA findings at the county level, the day's agenda, and dietary restriction requests for catering.

The Convening Design

The Br'Island Group designed the convening around three phases: a plenary data presentation by Fulfill's team, ninety minutes of structured breakout discussion across twelve tables organized by gap dimension, and a synthesis and commitment-building plenary. The breakout architecture was organized around the four gap dimensions identified in Fulfill's SAA: geographic access gaps, temporal access gaps, cultural and dietary gaps, and operational and capacity gaps.

Each breakout group followed a structured facilitation sequence: a Dream Big Together question opening (with five minutes of protected silence before the first response), four core discussion questions grounding the conversation in what is achievable, and a closing Partnership Question inviting participants to name issues and opportunities beyond the prepared agenda. All twelve tables used Padlet for real-time capture, with Grunin Foundation and Fulfill staff serving as trained table recorders alongside a designated facilitator at each table.

Mentimeter was used throughout the plenary sessions for real-time polling, priority-setting, and the commitment round. Twelve polls were administered across five phases of

the day, producing quantitative data on participant priorities, confidence levels, and commitments that are analyzed separately.

Opening Presentations

Jeremy Grunin, the President of the Grunin Foundation, opened the convening with welcome remarks that acknowledged the breadth of perspectives in the room and framed the day's purpose: to listen, to learn from one another, and to begin building the partnerships that Southern Ocean County needs. Triada Stampas, President and CEO of Fulfill, followed with remarks that situated the convening within Fulfill's strategic commitment to the region and affirmed that what participants said today would shape the future of food security across Southern Ocean County.

The SAA Findings and Analysis

Triada Stampas, Jonathan Rowe, Vice President of Operations, and Jazmyn Ball, Growing Healthy Pantries Program Manager, presented the key findings from Fulfill's Service Area Assessment to the full convening. The presentation was organized around the Southern Ocean County-specific data that formed the empirical foundation for the day's discussions. The following is a summary of the findings as presented.

The SAA documented a significant and persistent disparity between Monmouth and Ocean Counties in both the level of food insecurity and the adequacy of the food distribution response. In Monmouth and Ocean Counties combined, 131,100 residents experience food insecurity, approximately one in ten residents overall (10.2%). However, food insecurity is higher in Ocean County than Monmouth County in both rate (11.1% vs. 9.2%) and absolute numbers (71,680 vs. 59,420).

More striking is the distribution disparity. Fulfill distributes 150 meals per food-insecure person in Monmouth County but only 107 in Ocean County. This gap is not marginal; it represents a structural imbalance in how Fulfill's network has developed historically, reflecting what Triada Stampas has described as "gravitational pull" toward Monmouth, where Fulfill's own kitchen and legacy partnerships are located.

At the ZIP code level, the disparities are even more acute. Twelve Ocean County ZIP codes fall below Fulfill's service area target of 64.4 meals per food-insecure person. Three ZIP codes, Toms River (08757), Whiting (08759), and New Egypt (08533), have virtually no pantry network presence. Beachwood (08722) receives just four meals per food-insecure person. Fresh produce distribution is even more deficient: fifteen Ocean County ZIP codes fall below the recommended nutritional standard of sixteen pounds per month, with Waretown, Whiting, Lavallette, Point Pleasant Beach, and Brick receiving just one pound per food-insecure person per month.

> **KEY DATA POINT:** Fulfill distributes 150 meals per food-insecure person annually in Monmouth County and 107 in Ocean County. Beachwood, in Southern Ocean County, receives just 4 meals per food-insecure person. The regional average high is 436 in Red Bank.

The child food insecurity disparity is the most striking single equity gap in the dataset and deserves particular emphasis. Ocean County has 22,610 children facing food insecurity at a rate of 14.0%, which is nearly double Monmouth County's 9,980 children at a rate of 7.4%. Ocean County also has significantly more seniors 60+ below the poverty line (13,986 vs. 11,414) and a substantially higher share of ALICE households (36% vs. 23%). In every measure of vulnerability, Ocean County's need exceeds Monmouth's by a meaningful margin.

The Neighbor Voice: FACS Survey and Listening Sessions

Fulfill supplemented the geographic analysis with data from the Feeding America Client Survey (FACS), administered to 1,049 adults receiving or engaging with Fulfill services, and from a series of Neighbor Listening Sessions conducted at five sites across the service area. Jazmyn Ball, who led the listening sessions, shared findings that humanized the statistical data with the direct voices of Southern Ocean County residents.

The FACS data, administered to 1,049 adults across Monmouth and Ocean Counties in September-October 2025, documented severe and recurring food insecurity among the population being served. Eighty percent reported that food sometimes or often didn't last due to lack of money; 77% could not afford balanced meals. Fifty-two percent cut meal size or skipped meals in the past year; of those, 37% did so almost every month, confirming that food deprivation is a structural condition for a large share of the client population, not an occasional crisis. Fifty-four percent ate less than they felt they should, and 40% were hungry but did not eat because there wasn't enough money for food.

Financial tradeoffs driven by housing costs and healthcare were the dominant stressors in Ocean County, exceeding Monmouth County by significant margins. Structural barriers, including transportation and mobility (36 mentions in Ocean County vs. 20 in Monmouth), limited pantry hours (34 vs. 22), and lack of cooking facilities (18 vs. 11), compounded the already severe need. The listening sessions surfaced experiences of stigma as well: "They're supposed to help, but they judge you instead."

The six listening sessions conducted across the service area, including at Starve Poverty in Barnegat, produced six distinct themes documented in Fulfill's presentation. These themes are presented here with the direct neighbor quotes that Fulfill shared with the

convening room, because they represent the most important content in the entire data presentation: the lived experience behind the statistics.

- Economic insecurity makes thriving feel out of reach: “It’s very difficult to thrive in the state of New Jersey, especially for our seniors.”
- Food assistance programs contain gaps and eligibility barriers: “They stopped [her food stamps] because she can’t find a job. So unless you’re a student or working, you don’t qualify for food stamps.”
- Food pantries are essential, but access and availability can be improved: “The pantries need to be open a couple more hours. Multiple days and nights.”
- Choice, fresh foods, and variety matter to dignity and health: “I can’t take going somewhere where they’re just going to hand me a bunch of stuff. And then I feel like I have to throw it out.”
- Inflation forces difficult tradeoffs and food rationing: “Unless it’s on sale, we’re not buying it.” / “[You] cut back on what you used to buy.”
- Desire for systemic advocacy and community-based solutions: “Honestly, this forum is great [but] I don’t see anything happening from it.”

Fulfill’s own key takeaways from the SAA presentation closed with a framing that the convening’s table discussions confirmed: access is limited by both where and when food is available; service quality is not the primary issue, but choice and variety matter; and food sacrifices and budget tradeoffs point to the need for more holistic and intentional program collaboration. That call for “holistic and intentional program collaboration” is Fulfill’s own language for what the Southern Ocean Food Access Collaborative is designed to provide.

The SAA mapped the current pantry network across Ocean County and identified multiple ZIP codes with thin or absent coverage. Eight ZIP codes were identified as having limited network presence: Toms River (1 pantry), Whiting/Manchester (1 pantry), Lakehurst (1 pantry), New Egypt (1 pantry), Seaside Heights (2 pantries, highest food insecurity rate in the service area), Manahawkin (1 pantry), Tuckerton (1 pantry and 1 soup kitchen), and Little Egg Harbor (1 pantry).

The SAA also documented additional program gaps: Fulfill’s Senior Staples program serves only 53 Ocean County seniors per month, despite nearly 14,000 seniors 60+ below the federal poverty line. Child nutrition programs (Kids Café, Backpack, Summer Food) are concentrated in Monmouth County despite higher need in Ocean County. Home delivery programming is limited and largely ad hoc. Evening and weekend availability is essentially absent across Southern Ocean County, a structural exclusion that particularly affects ALICE households.

Participant Profile

The convening drew more than 100 participants representing approximately 60 organizations across 8 sectors. The mix of participants was notable for its breadth: the room included front-line pantry operators alongside senior officials from county government, large healthcare systems alongside small faith-based food ministries, major philanthropic partners alongside community advocates.

Several aspects of the participant mix should be noted. The healthcare sector was represented by three participants from Hackensack Meridian's Southern Ocean Medical Center, two community health partners from Robert Wood Johnson, and representatives from the Horizon Foundation. County government was represented by the Ocean County Health Department, the Office of Senior Services, the Bureau of Social Services, and at least one county commissioner. A member of the New Jersey General Assembly was also in attendance. Multiple regional foundations and corporate funders were present. This combination of service capacity, government authority, and philanthropic capital in a single room was exceptional and suggests real potential for the kind of coordinated action this report recommends.

Breakout Session Findings

Twelve breakout tables of approximately ten participants each engaged in structured 90-minute discussions organized around the four gap dimensions identified in Fulfill's SAA. Three tables addressed Geographic Access Gaps (Groups A1, A2, A3), three addressed Temporal Access Gaps (Groups B1, B2, B3), two addressed Cultural and Dietary Gaps (Groups C1, C2, C3), and three addressed Operational and Capacity Gaps (Groups D1, D2, D3).

Each table followed the same facilitation sequence: a Dream Big Together opening question (with five minutes of protected silence), four core discussion questions, and a closing Partnership Question. Table facilitators were Grunin Foundation and Fulfill staff, briefed at a July 9 training session. Recorders captured recommendations and partnership opportunities in real time using Padlet. Following lunch, each table facilitator reported back to the full room in 90 seconds: two recommendations and one partnership or new issue from the Partnership Question.

The summaries below synthesize the Padlet board content from each group's tables. Where multiple tables covered the same dimension, themes are combined and notable differences are identified.

Before detailing the findings of each group, it is worth naming what emerged from all twelve tables simultaneously. Four themes appeared across every breakout dimension

without exception, suggesting they represent the deepest consensus of the convening as a whole.

Transportation was identified as the dominant barrier. Every table, regardless of its assigned gap dimension, identified transportation as a critical obstacle to food access. This was the most consistent single finding of the day, appearing in the recommendations of at least seven of twelve tables.

Flexible pickup and food locker models were named independently by tables in the Geographic, Temporal, Cultural, and Operational dimensions, which was a striking degree of convergence on a specific technological solution that participants had arrived at without coordination.

Co-location of services, such as food access combined with healthcare, social services, senior programs, and other supports in a single accessible hub, was proposed by five separate tables across three gap dimensions. The vision of a Southern Ocean County one-stop hub emerged organically rather than from the facilitation questions, which did not specifically prompt for it.

Formal coordination infrastructure was called for by at least six tables. The desire to "keep gathering us regularly" (D3) and to "replicate our work today" (A1) represents a grassroots demand for exactly the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition that this report recommends. It did not come from the facilitators; it came from the tables.

> **CONSENSUS DIRECTION:** Move from a collection of separate programs toward a coordinated, flexible, and customer-centered food access network, one that meets residents where they are, at times they can use, and with the transportation, information, and supportive services needed to succeed. Create a steering group that strengthens the network and builds collaboration.

Group A: Geographic Access Gaps

The three Geographic Access Gap tables (A1, A2, A3) convened participants with direct knowledge of Southern Ocean County's communities, including pantry operators, municipal officials, faith community leaders, and healthcare representatives from the most acutely underserved ZIP codes.

GROUP A1, A2 & A3 GEOGRAPHIC ACCESS GAPS | Three Tables

Key Themes and Recommendations

Group A tables focused on mapping and filling geographic gaps in the Southern Ocean County food access network. Their combined output identified the need for a formal coalition structure, data-driven site selection, mobile distribution capacity, and deeper investment in partnerships with non-member organizations. All three tables named transportation as a barrier intersecting with geographic access.

Dream Big Together: What Tables Envisioned

Group A tables envisioned a fully-resourced Southern Ocean County food access network built on three structural foundations: geographic coverage extending into every underserved ZIP code; a mobile fleet of food trucks and distribution vehicles reaching residents who cannot travel to fixed sites; and a formal coalition governance structure with a representative steering committee that coordinates operations across partner organizations.

Formal Table Recommendations (Two Each)

The twelve recommendations submitted by the three Group A tables in the Phase 4 report-back were:

- A1: Representation is needed: more access, longer hours, and more diverse foods that respond to seasonal variation in population. (In summer, different residents arrive; in winter, different neighbors come.)
- A1: Communication between pantries and partners must include opportunities available today, with a commitment to deepen partnerships in the coming months.
- A2: Improve and expand existing services including volunteers, extended hours, delivery options, and closer coordination with existing partners.
- A2: Explore relationships with non-member pantries and services and learn why they are not currently part of the network.

- A3: Invest in programming around the root causes of food insecurity, including case management and financial success support, recognizing the interdependent nature of hunger.
- A3: Fill geographic gaps through supply chain management, branch locations, identification of resources, and new partnership and host sites.

Opportunities Named

A3's Partnership Question produced the most significant Group A opportunity: bring other partners to the table and maintain today's conversation. Specifically, senior centers and community centers were named as priority partners, with the observation that "people come and stay" at community centers, making them natural anchor points for expanded distribution.

Index Card Themes

The A table index cards added the following specific elements not captured in the formal recommendations:

- A formal countywide coalition with a representative steering committee from each partner organization, and outreach teams to expand the coalition's reach.
- Data-driven planning using GIS and ZIP code analysis to identify underserved communities and guide site selection.
- Development of a mobile pantry fleet of food trucks as a parallel strategy to permanent sites.
- Volunteer recruitment and standardized operating schedules as foundational operational requirements.
- Sustainable funding for staffing as an explicit prerequisite for any expanded access model.

Group B: Temporal Access Gaps

The three Temporal Access Gap tables (B1, B2, B3) addressed the near-total absence of evening and weekend food distribution in Southern Ocean County, which structurally excludes the 36% of Ocean County households qualifying as ALICE.

GROUP B1, B2 & B3 TEMPORAL ACCESS GAPS | Three Tables

Key Themes and Recommendations

Group B tables produced the broadest and most innovative set of models of any dimension, moving well beyond the core question of 'when are pantries open' to reimagine the entire food

access experience. Their combined output featured the widest range of distribution models, the most extensive partner lists, and the most specific service innovations of the convening.

Dream Big Together: What Tables Envisioned

Group B's Dream Big responses envisioned a Southern Ocean County food access system designed entirely around residents' actual schedules and lives: hub-and-spoke distribution networks with evening and weekend hours; DoorDash and Uber-style delivery platforms; food pharmacy models connecting nutrition to healthcare; restaurant vouchers; farmers market vouchers; and neighborhood-based community fridges and little pantries accessible at any hour. The Tuckerton Saturday self-shop model for children was specifically named as an existing practice worth replicating.

Formal Table Recommendations

- B1: Coordinated operational hub for schedules, volunteers, food items, and bulk distributions. Shared infrastructure reduces duplication and improves reliability.
- B1: Coordinate funding and advocacy to address the structural causes of limited access and restricted hours.
- B2: Build a unified volunteer coalition with small stipends to enable weekend and evening coverage.
- B2: Deploy smaller-scale distribution models including family fridges and food lockers as supplements to traditional pantry sites.
- B3: Bridge the timing gap by placing food access in laundromats, recreation centers, and sports facilities where residents already spend time.
- B3: Support agencies to build their own communication networks so the system is not entirely dependent on Fulfill's coordination.

Opportunities and Partnerships Named

Group B's Partnership Questions produced the most extensive partner list of any dimension: Oasis, municipalities, the Ocean County Health Department, Rutgers, 211, Ocean County Vocational-Technical School, Girl Scouts, BlueClaws, YMCA, faith communities, VFWs, Cub Scouts, Tuckerton Market, local businesses, corporate social responsibility programs, emergency services, utilities, and local farmers. The breadth of this list is itself a finding. B tables saw a wider coalition of potential partners than any other group.

Index Card Themes

The B table index cards added critical specificity to the temporal access vision:

- Evening and weekend programs anchored in schools, which have facilities, relationships with families, and existing food program infrastructure through Kids Café and Summer Food.
- Hub-and-spoke service design with a central coordinating hub and neighborhood distribution spokes.
- Food pharmacy model explicitly named as a priority, connecting medically tailored nutrition to healthcare settings.
- Reduced stigma through universal access, which would involve removing eligibility verification barriers that deter some of the most food-insecure residents.

Group C: Cultural and Dietary Gaps

The two Cultural and Dietary Gap tables (C1, C2) addressed the inadequacy of current food distribution in meeting the diverse cultural, medical, and dietary needs of Southern Ocean County's residents. These tables tended to surface some of the most emotionally resonant testimony of the day, including stories about food that could not be used due to a lack of cooking facilities, food that was culturally unfamiliar, and neighbors who felt that the system was not designed for them.

GROUP C1, C2 & C3 CULTURAL & DIETARY GAPS | Three Tables

Key Themes and Recommendations

Group C tables brought the most client-centered framing of the convening, emphasizing dignity, convenience, and the specific unmet needs of particular populations. They produced the most evocative vision of what food assistance could become and named specific vulnerable populations, including tent communities near the Ocean County Mall, not previously identified in the SAA.

Dream Big Together: The Most Evocative Vision of the Convening

Group C's Dream Big response produced what may be the most striking single idea of the entire day: a reimagining of food assistance as a combination of Instacart and a coffee shop. Online ordering and home delivery for homebound and transportation-limited residents; combined with a welcoming physical gathering place for those who visit in person, designed to feel comfortable and dignified rather than transactional. This dual-mode model, one infrastructure serving two very different access needs simultaneously, is a genuinely innovative framework worth developing.

Formal Table Recommendations

- C1: Sustain access to culturally responsive foods including proteins. Serve clients with what they need and in the manner that respects how they receive support.
- C1: Strengthen fresh food access through home gardeners, school gardens, direct store retail donations, value-added products, and cold storage capacity including flash freezing.
- C2: Understand the populations being served. Raise awareness so that partners know what services exist and clients know how to access them. Create transportation access.
- C2: Learn how to best support communities with specific dietary needs, including heart disease and other chronic health conditions.
- C3: Work with Southern Ocean County partners to increase client choice using food lockers and online ordering systems.
- C3: Build a strong network for delivery of fresh food working with farms, Wawa, 7-Eleven, and other retailers to expand distribution.

Specific Populations and Locations Named

Group C identified several specific underserved populations and assets not previously captured in the SAA or planning documents:

- Tent communities near the Ocean County Mall, a population experiencing homelessness not addressed in the current distribution network.
- Mt. Zion in Lacey: four rooms available and suitable for veterans' network programming.
- St. Stephens in Waretown: one room currently serving approximately four people, a site with capacity to serve more.
- Homebound and transportation-limited residents require online ordering and delivery infrastructure rather than site-based access.
- Residents without cooking facilities, including those in hotels, shared housing, or transitional situations, who cannot use standard pantry distributions.

Partnership Opportunities Named

C tables named cultural chambers of commerce, 4-H clubs, university agriculture programs, Home Depot and Lowe's (for shelving to support client-choice transition), schools, gas stations, and libraries as partners for produce distribution. The observation that trust must be built before access can be expanded was named explicitly: "We need to build trust" was a direct quote from the C2 table report.

Index Card Themes

The C table index cards emphasized practical nutrition support alongside access: recipe cards using distributed foods, meal-stretching guidance, disease-specific dietary

information (diabetes, Medicare/medical nutrition needs), farm share programs, shared access to produce pallets, and transportation vouchers. A research question was also raised about the geographic distribution of FACS survey respondents, specifically, what percentage came from each county, which represents a legitimate data gap that Fulfill should address in future survey design.

Group D: Operational and Capacity Gaps

The three Operational and Capacity Gap tables (D1, D2, D3) addressed the infrastructure limitations of the current pantry network: inadequate refrigeration, limited volunteer capacity, underdeveloped senior programming, the concentration of children's nutrition programs in Monmouth, and the absence of coordinating mechanisms that would allow organizations to work more effectively together.

GROUP D1, D2 & D3 OPERATIONAL & CAPACITY GAPS | Three Tables

Key Themes and Recommendations

Group D tables focused on overcoming the operational constraints of the current pantry network, including inadequate cold storage, volunteer burnout, limited senior programming, and disjointed coordination. Their output emphasized capacity investments, co-location of services at anchor institutions, and an explicit demand for a regional backbone coalition to unify operations.

Dream Big Together: What Tables Envisioned

Group D tables envisioned a modern, fully equipped regional infrastructure supported by a centralized warehousing and distribution hub, expanded cold storage capacity across local pantries, a shared regional volunteer corps with stipend options for off-hours shifts, and seamless home-delivery logistics for homebound residents and seniors.

Formal Table Recommendations

- D1: Expand cold storage and physical infrastructure at local pantry sites while establishing co-located services (such as healthcare screening and social work navigation) at accessible community venues like The Lighthouse Center in Waretown.
- D2: Develop targeted senior home-delivery routes and senior-center food partnerships to reach isolated older adults, integrating social connection with nutritional support.

- D3: Create a unified regional communication network and shared calendar for pantry hours, inventory, and volunteer needs to eliminate service overlap and simplify navigation for residents.

On Collective Impact and Coordination

The Group D tables were asked a specific question about what it would take to shift from fragmented individual efforts to a coordinated regional approach: organizations regularly checking in, sharing what they're learning, and working from the same playbook. The response was direct and consistent across all three D tables that a collaborative infrastructure is needed – a Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition.

Opportunities and Partnerships Named

Group D identified major anchor institutions and infrastructure partners to host distribution and logistics, including Hackensack Meridian Southern Ocean Medical Center, AtlantiCare, the Ocean County Department of Health, Senior Centers, Family Promise, and potential last-mile logistics collaborations with Amazon.

Index Card Themes

- Investment in paid coordination staff to relieve volunteer administrative burden.
- Mobile cold-storage units and refrigerated vans for rapid deployment to low-density areas.
- Shared data-sharing protocols across agencies to streamline intake while protecting neighbor privacy and dignity.

Partnership Question: New Issues and Opportunities

Every table closed with a Partnership Question inviting participants to name issues, opportunities, or relationships beyond the prepared agenda. This question produced some of the most specific and actionable content of the day. Across all twelve tables, the following new themes emerged:

Partnership Opportunities

- Causeway CARes and farmers markets: Group B1 named these specifically alongside senior facilities and community events as priority collaboration targets.
- Schools, principals, counselors, social workers, and family advocates as distribution points: named by B1 as an underutilized entry point into the network.
- Cultural chambers of commerce: named by C1 as a critical connector to communities not currently reached by the network.
- 4-H clubs and university agriculture programs: named by C1 as fresh produce and educational partners.

- Vacant schools and available buildings as co-located service hubs: named by C3 as an asset hiding in plain sight.
- The Lighthouse Center in Waretown: named by D1 as an organization with space and willingness to partner, was the most specific and immediately actionable site lead of the convening.
- Senior centers as food-plus-connection hubs: named by D2, with specific reference to the Ocean County Department of Health, Social Services, Southern Ocean County Hospital, schools, and childcare providers as co-location partners.
- Hackensack Meridian and AtlantiCare hospitals: named by D3 as anchor institutions with large Southern Ocean County footprints and facilities suitable for a hub model.
- Amazon delivery and logistics capacity: named by D3 as an innovative partner for last-mile food delivery.

New Issues Surfaced Beyond the Prepared Agenda

- A formal interfaith/clergy association does not currently exist in Southern Ocean County, but the relationships are present and could be organized. This is a latent asset with particular importance for reaching clients who are reluctant to engage with formal institutions (D2).
- Tent communities near the Ocean County Mall were identified as a specific underserved population not addressed in the current network (C2).
- Trailer parks and other non-traditional residential communities were named as priority equity targets (D table index cards).
- Existing smaller coordination meetings are not widely publicized, meaning existing coordination infrastructure is underutilized (D3).
- The geographic distribution of FACS survey respondents by county is unknown, which limits the ability to draw county-specific conclusions from the client survey data (C table).

Appendix 2 – Mentimeter Poll Results

Community Perspectives from the Together at the Table Convening

About the Polling

Throughout the Together at the Table convening, participants responded to a series of interactive Mentimeter polls designed to gather individual perspectives, identify emerging priorities, and assess the community's readiness for collaborative action.

The polling served several purposes. It encouraged participation from every attendee, including those who spoke less frequently during group discussions. It provided immediate feedback that informed subsequent conversations. It also created an independent source of evidence that could be compared with the themes emerging from the facilitated table discussions.

Perhaps most importantly, the polling demonstrated a remarkable consistency between individual responses and the conclusions reached during the breakout sessions. Together, these two sources of information provide strong confidence that the findings presented throughout this report accurately reflect the perspectives of participants.

Overall Observations

Across all twelve polling activities, several themes appeared repeatedly.

Participants consistently:

- viewed food security as a matter of dignity and well-being rather than simply food availability;
- identified transportation and flexible access as the most significant operational barriers;
- expressed strong support for continued collaboration;
- demonstrated optimism that meaningful progress is achievable;
- volunteered to remain actively engaged in implementation efforts.

Taken together, the polling results reinforce one of the report's central conclusions.

Southern Ocean County possesses both the commitment and the readiness necessary to build a more coordinated regional food security system.

Poll 1

In One or Two Words, What Does “Food Security" Mean to You?

Purpose

To understand how participants define food security before beginning the day's discussions.

Key Results

Participants most frequently associated food security with:

- Comfort, Dignity, Safety, Security, Not hungry, Thriving, Peace, Health, Peace, enough, and Nutrition

Interpretation

Participants viewed food security as a broad condition of community well-being rather than simply the absence of hunger.

This finding influenced many subsequent discussions, particularly those concerning dignity, resident choice, transportation, and culturally responsive services.

Mentimeter Word Cloud Results



Poll 2

What Best Describes Your Role Today?

Purpose

To understand the roles and backgrounds of participants at the food security convening.

Key Results

Participants most frequently described their roles as being:

- Food Pantry/Food Provider, Other, and Healthcare or Social Services

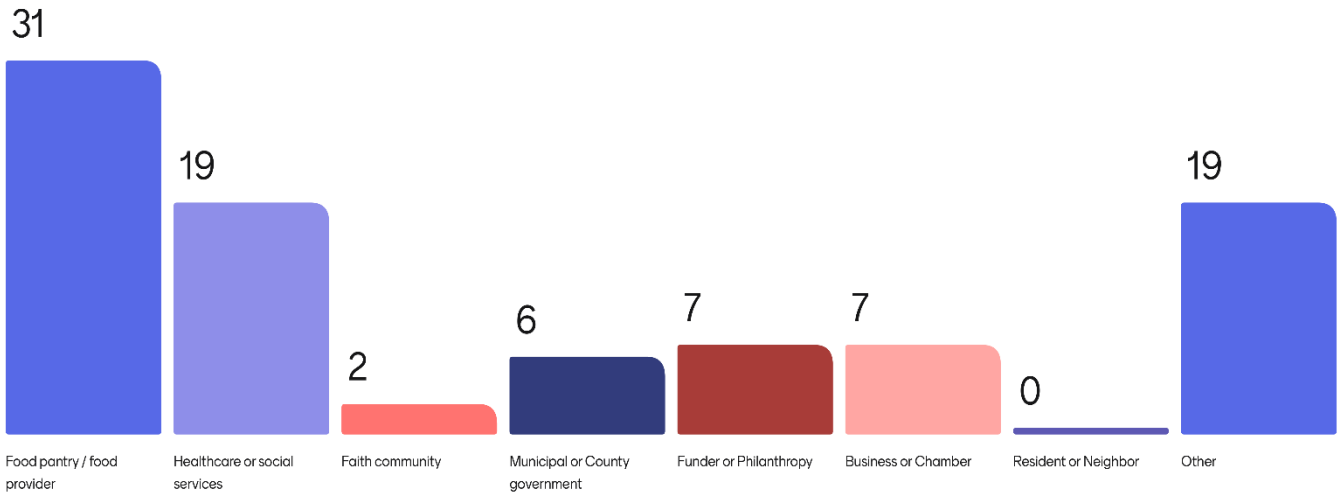
Other roles included:

- Funder or Philanthropy, Business or Chamber, and Municipal or County Government, and Faith Community

Interpretation

Participants represented a wide range of roles and sectors across Southern Ocean County.

Mentimeter Results



Poll 3

How Surprised Are You by the Gaps Between Ocean and Monmouth County?

Purpose

To understand the perceptions of participants regarding the identified inequities between food access in Ocean and Monmouth Counties.

Key Results

Participants reported that they were only somewhat surprised, with a median rating of 2.3 out of 5 on the poll.

Interpretation

Most participants from across Southern Ocean County seem to be aware of the food security gap between the two counties.

Mentimeter Results



Poll 4

Which Finding Feels Most Urgent to Address?

Ranked Before Discussions

Purpose

To understand the priorities of participants before their deliberations regarding the urgency to address the gaps identified by the assessment conducted by Fulfill regarding inequities in food access in Ocean and Monmouth Counties.

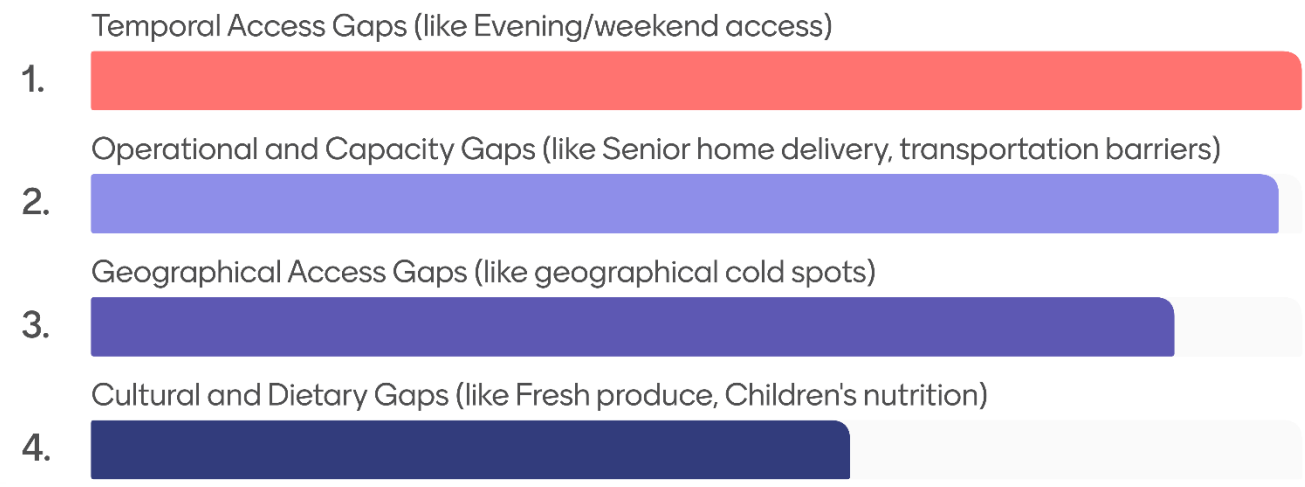
Key Results

Participants ranked Temporal Access Gaps as most urgent, followed by Operational and Capacity Gaps, Geographic Access Gaps and Cultural and Dietary Gaps.

Interpretation

Before their discussions, the largest number of participants ranked Temporal Access (evening and weekend access) as being most urgent.

Mentimeter Results



Poll 5

In one sentence, what is the most important thing you want others to understand about food insecurity in Southern Ocean county?

Purpose

To understand the key food security issues facing Southern Ocean County communities.

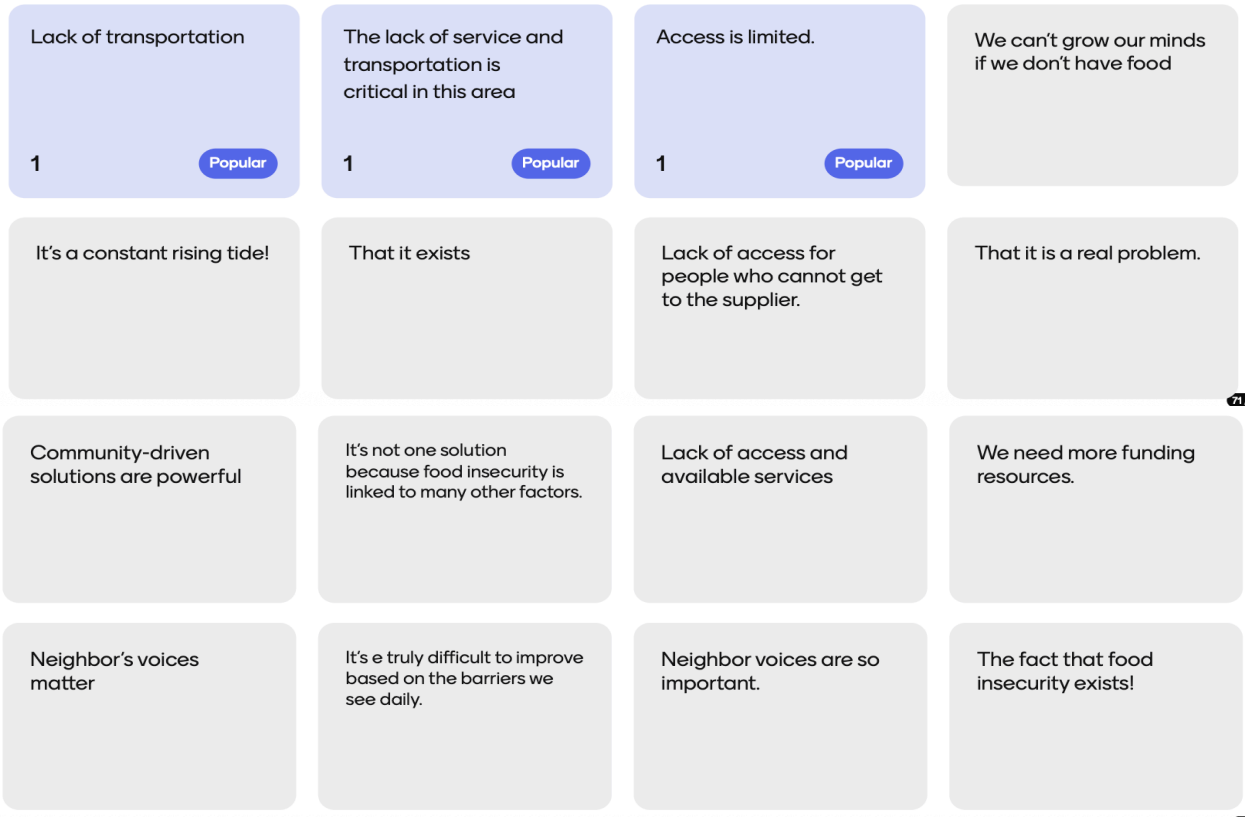
Key Results

Among the wide range of responses, several participants identified the lack of transportation, the lack of service, and limited access to food as being important.

Interpretation

Participants had specific insights regarding the issues facing their neighbors.

Mentimeter Results (representative responses)



more people need help than you would think

Transportation is a real barrier

We have more people in need than one may think—shortage of services

The urgency and quantity of need is overwhelming

Every child needs to have at least three balanced meals a day, no matter what it takes to do that!

It is just as important as every other part of Ocean County.

Transportation system needs major investment

How we can close the gap and make food security something that should never be an issue that needs to be solved again.

It should not be made into a partisan issue.

Because this affects our neighbors, it is everyone's problem. We are all one life event away from food insecurity

Access to transportation and hours of operation of pantries

There is a great need and we need to get better access for our neighbors.

It's about access.

Being in independent living, I can't help the residents that don't come to me for help.

How prevalent it is and its impact on people going to college.

Lack of transportation and hours pantries are open

We live in food deserts

There a lot of needs

More attention must be drawn to this area of our county

There isn't enough awareness about this issue.

Lack of food creates desperation

That there is a needed and should be addressed with a high degree of priority.

What organizations already are doing good work in Southern Ocean County, & can use additional funding or resources to expand their reach & impact?

I want them to understand that a significant percentage of the population is suffering from food insecurity

Individuals are not able to reach their full potential when they're hungry, especially children.

We just don't have enough resources to meet all the need, food, the help, the $$, - getting harder every day

It's about more than meals. It's dignity, wellness & health, safety and embracing community.

Lack of transportation is a major contributing factor to the food insecurity

It takes a village to support, feed, find and execute solutions to these barriers.

Food insecurity is a top priority

Knowing that people don't have transportation to get food.

It's existance

Food security is a basic human right that should be accessible to anyone, anywhere.

What solutions do neighbors actually want

It is the end result of other issues (economic, family) affecting those in need.

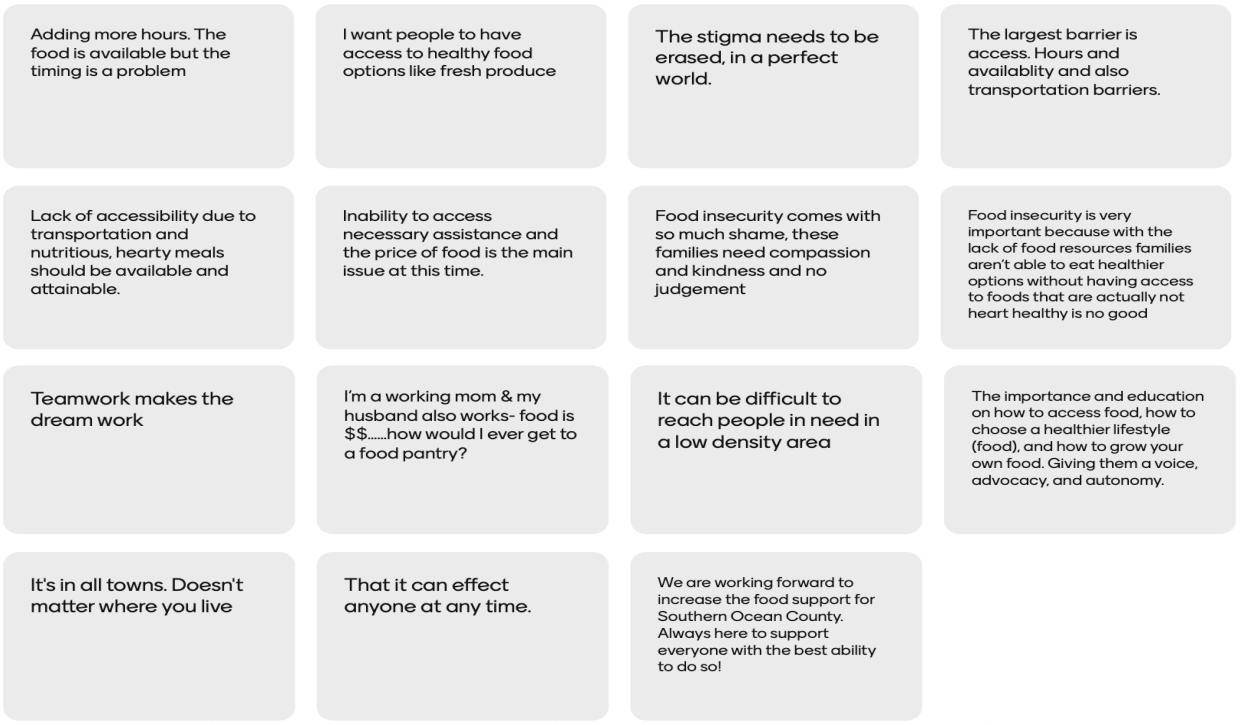
food insecurity is real, right in our backyard

The food is there. The systems are very clunky.

Ability to access food pantries during different times of day/week and transportation.

That it actually exists! The need is real and needs real solutions. Thus why we are here.

Our neighbors are hungry



Poll 6

Which Finding Feels Most Urgent to Address?

Ranked After Discussions

Purpose

To understand the priorities of participants after their deliberations regarding the urgency to address the gaps identified by the assessment conducted by Fulfill regarding inequities in food access in Ocean and Monmouth Counties.

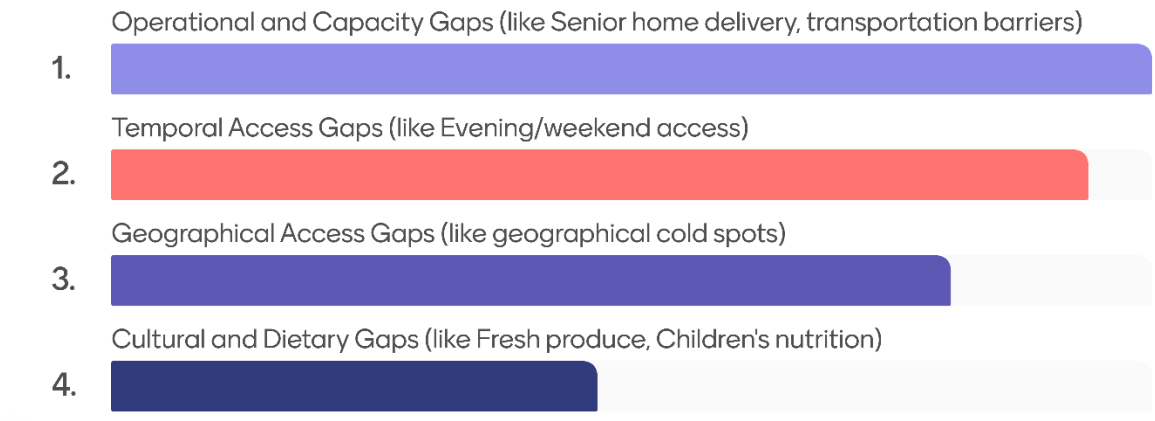
Key Results

Some participants revised their rankings to reflect an increased emphasis on the urgency of Operational and Capacity Gaps, with Temporal Access Gaps, Geographic Access Gaps and Cultural and Dietary Gaps being ranked as slightly less urgent.

Interpretation

After their discussions, more participants ranked Operational and Capacity Gaps (including senior home delivery and transportation barriers) as being most urgent.

Mentimeter Results



Poll 7

Which Strategies Should Be Southern Ocean County's Top Priorities in the Next Twelve Months?

Purpose

To identify the strategic priorities of participants to address food security in Southern Ocean County.

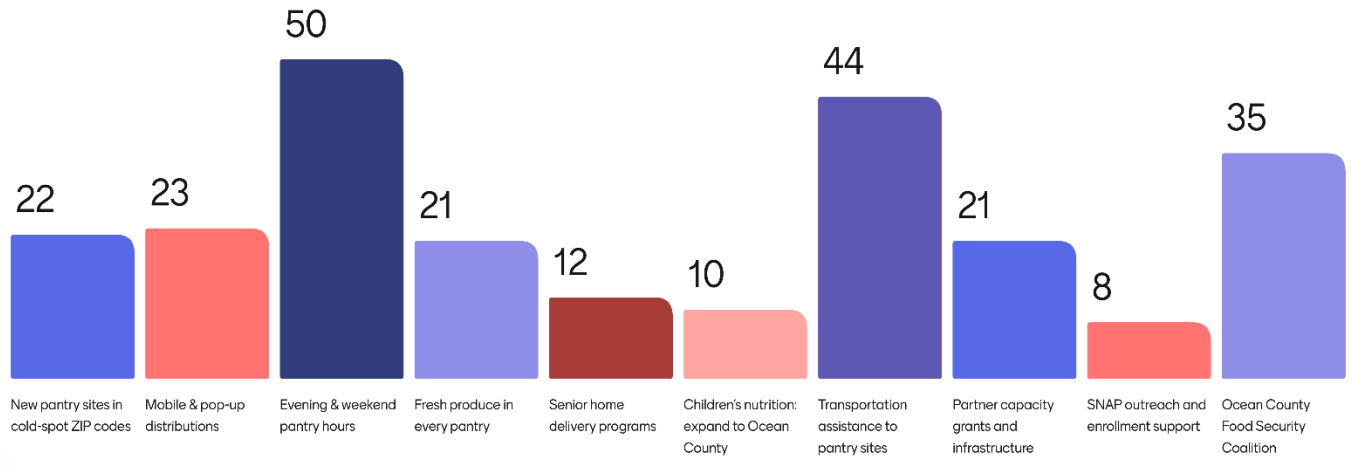
Key Results

Participants ranked three strategies higher than the other options that were offered: expanding evening and weekend pantry hours, transportation assistance to pantry sites, and the creation of an Ocean County Food Security Coalition. Support was also offered for mobile and pop-up distributions, new pantry sites in cold-spot zip codes, fresh produce in every pantry, and partner capacity grants and infrastructure.

Interpretation

The strategies receiving the greatest support appear to offer the greatest impact in advancing food security in Southern Ocean County.

Mentimeter Results



Poll 8

How Confident Are You That a Meaningful Change in Southern Ocean County Food Security is Achievable in the Next Three Years?

Purpose

To identify the level of confidence among participants in the likelihood of achieving a meaningful change to improve food security in Southern Ocean County over the next three years.

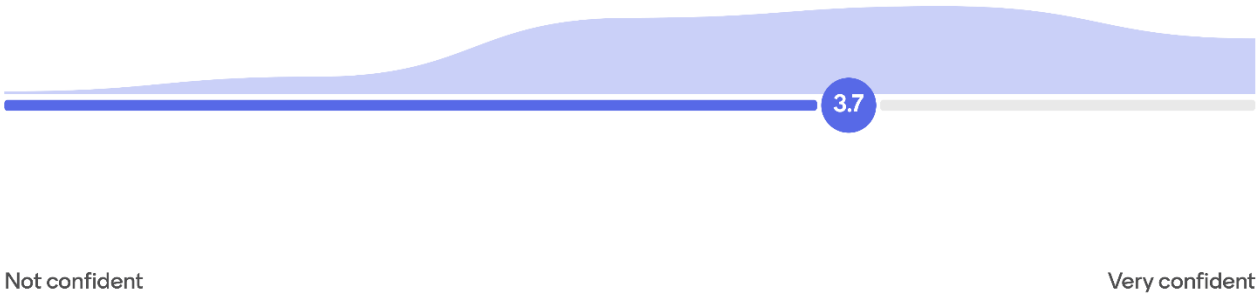
Key Results

Participants ranked their level of confidence as a 3.7 out of 5 in considering the likelihood of achieving a meaningful change in addressing food security across Southern Ocean County.

Interpretation

This suggests that participants are cautiously optimistic in considering the possibility of meaningful change in Southern Ocean County food security.

Mentimeter Results



Poll 9

As a Result of Today, I Commit to _____

Purpose

To identify the willingness of participants to commit to take action to address food security in Southern Ocean County, and to identify their specific commitments.

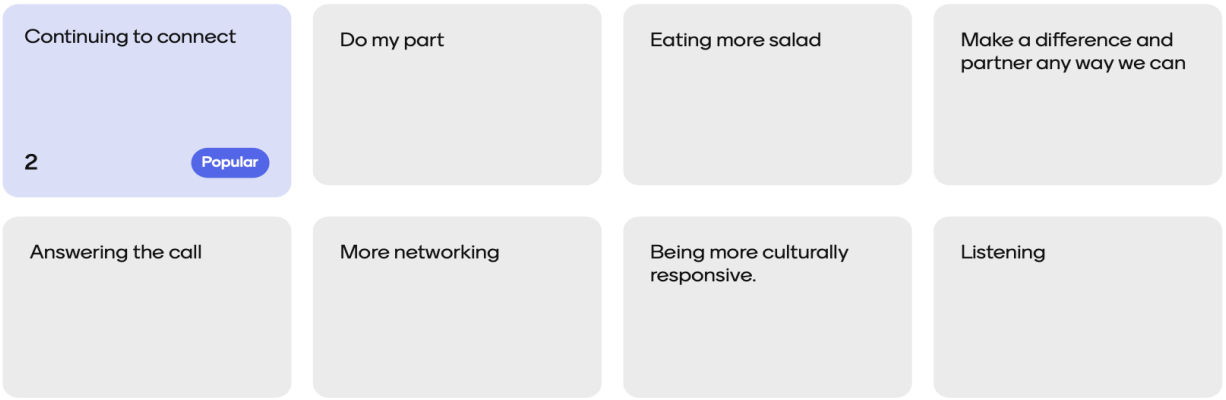
Key Results

Among the responses, participants committed to increase collaborations, expand access, support the proposed food security coalition, and bring more people to the table.

Interpretation

Participants had specific insights regarding the issues facing their neighbors.

Mentimeter Results



Collaborating	Creating more collaborations	community leadership	plan a second convening.
Making a change	Working with my community partners to create change for those in need	Facilitating future conversations.	Connect w other pantry leaders in our plans to work together
share available resources so there is awareness for different programs	A collaborative approach toward addressing food insecurity in southern Ocean County	Connecting with more peers who are looking to achieve the same goal.	Working with partner organizations to find solutions to food insecurity.
Making more connections with other food pantries in my area to work together more frequently	Communication more to be open to collaboration	Joining the coalition that comes out of this meeting.	Exploring more organizations seeking to collaborate or innovate to fill gaps & meet need in Southern Ocean County.
Support this initiative.	Doing more research and making more connections to help my residents further.	Following up on new connections!	Collaborating with coalition
Connecting & Collaborating	Continuing the conversation	Make more connections and partnerships outside my network to serve a greater impact.	Following up with new contacts.
Constant collaboration and intentional effort to provide food security to neighbors in need	Collaborating wth more local partners to enhance support services.	Collaborating with other members in this group	Maintaining new found relationships to keep the conversation open and new processes moving.
Brainstorming new ideas to expand on the services our organization already provides.	Staying connected	Using the opportunity of my monthly HSAC meetings to have local agencies/providers present what their agencies are doing!	Increasing access to our food pantry

Make a difference in southern ocean county food insecurity..

Brining more people to the table

Request funding for food locker at our partner churches

Putting the work in to achieve our goals

continuing to learn more

Working with funders to further explore great ideas shared today.

Sharing the data within my network. Motivating people to get involved. I will be more involved. Establish partnerships

pursuing home delivery opportunities with Fulfill and their agency partners in Southern Ocean County

Continuing my efforts to combat food insecurity by continuing outreach, community partnerships, and combating the stigma.

Potentially holding night hours for our pantry

Actively continuing to build more partnerships in Ocean County

Educating myself on local pantries that are available to families in Southern OC and find resources for them

Scaling up!

consistant communication with multiple organizations in regard to volunteering options

Pay more attention to the needs of the community when it comes to food insecurity and educate on what is available to those who need it in addition to collaborating with other organizations

Learning more about Southern Ocean County by connecting with people in all zip codes and staying curious, listening and connecting.

Making more connections

Bringing more resources togther

Continue helping the community with what I can

Being change to help the community grow, look for resources that will provide families support for food, shelter, future pantry projects.

To reach more people who need help and get it to those people!

Be apart of the process

As a funder, work to keep IN community with Southern Ocean organizations, learn and listen more, fund more

Collaborating more with southern ocean county

Always finding a step moving forward to help to help everyone to the best way possible. Even if it is just one person!

Participating in collaboration and continuing this conversation

Pushing more doors open

Becoming more aware of the barriers people face relating to food and trying to break down those barriers

Staying connected

“convene“ with peers more often

Poll 10

Is There a Specific Partnership or Introduction You Want to Make Before Leaving Today? If so, Name the Organizations.

Purpose

To identify the partnerships or introductions that participants were interested in pursuing.

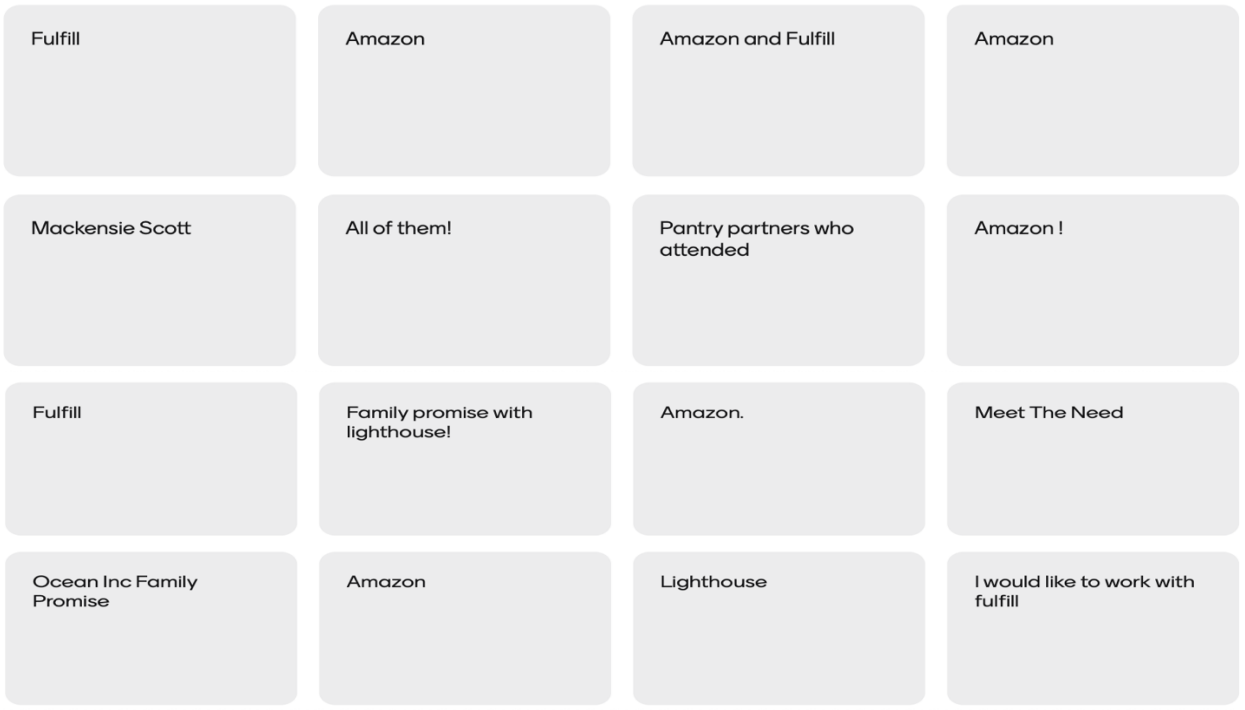
Key Results

Among the responses, participants mentioned Amazon, Lighthouse, Family Promise, Children's Home Society, St. Francis Community Center, and Causeway Cares.

Interpretation

Participants were interested in expanding partnerships and pursuing introductions.

Mentimeter Results



Fulfill, Ocean County Human Services	Need to know who is all in the room	All	Grunin foundation
Expand into healthcare sectors	Friendly Fridge & Share Food Program	Amazon	A list of all and a contact number for each one represented today.
Amazon	Fulfill and their pantry locations	no but please share list of attendees/key contacts	Want others to learn about Lighthouse Center in Waretown.
azon	Fulfill	More county offices and reps	The B.E.A.T Center
Amazon	Logjthouse	Amazon Fulfill	Causeway cares
I will be contacting a Bayville representative today.	Family promise and hope sheds light	Lifehouse	The Children's Home Society of New Jersey- Maternal Child Health grants
Fulfill	All participants	Children's Interagency Coordinating Council	Connect volunteers with non-holiday hours of giving their time
Working with more people who have supplies.	helping hands for pantry at OCC connect with resources available to spread awareness	All organizations	Amazon
Walmart	Saint Francis community center	Amazon	

Poll 11

One Word that Captures Your Experience of Today

Purpose

To understand the experience of participants over the course of the convening.

Key Results

The most frequent responses were Hopeful, Inspiring, Energizing, Fulfilling, Connected, Collaborative, Motivating, Community, Enlightening.

Interpretation

Perhaps the most encouraging finding from the polling was the positive tone expressed at the conclusion of the convening. Participants left energized by the opportunities for collaboration rather than discouraged by the challenges.

Mentimeter Word Cloud



Poll 12

How Would You Rate Today's Convening Overall?

Purpose

To gather general feedback from partnerships regarding their experience with the convening.

Key Results

Participants rated the convening with an average of 4.7 out of 5, which was towards the "Great" end of the ratings scale.

Interpretation

The result of this poll suggests that participants were very pleased with their experience at the convening. Participants appeared to view the convening as worthwhile and expressed strong interest in continuing the work together.

Mentimeter Results



Continuing Community Engagement

One of the strongest indicators of community readiness emerged at the conclusion of the convening.

Fifty-six participants voluntarily provided their contact information and indicated a desire to remain involved in future implementation efforts.

This level of voluntary engagement demonstrates that the convening generated more than agreement around ideas.

It generated a community of practice prepared to help move those ideas into action.

For privacy reasons, individual names and contact information are not reproduced in this report. Instead, they should be retained by Fulfill for future coalition development and implementation activities.

Key Lessons from the Polling

The Mentimeter polling confirms five overarching conclusions that align closely with the facilitated discussions:

1. Food security is understood as a matter of dignity, health, and community well-being, not simply food availability.
2. Transportation and flexible access are the defining operational priorities for Southern Ocean County.
3. Participants strongly support a permanent structure for ongoing collaboration and coordination.
4. The community is optimistic about its ability to make meaningful progress through collective action.
5. Participants are ready to remain engaged in the implementation process.

Taken together, these findings provide compelling evidence that Southern Ocean County is prepared to move beyond planning toward coordinated implementation.

Appendix 3 – Implementation Dashboard Framework

From Community Conversation to Collective Action

While the core chapters of this report detail the strategic priorities, unexpected insights, and early-action opportunities identified during the *Together at the Table* convening, this appendix synthesizes those findings into a single, operational visual tool: The Southern Ocean County Food Security Implementation Dashboard.

Designed as a strategic management framework for the launching of the Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition, the dashboard translates community input into a structured path forward. It aligns the four phases of collective action—Organize, Pilot, Scale, and Sustain—with the five strategic priorities that emerged from stakeholder discussions.

The dashboard serves three primary functions:

1. Visual Roadmap: It maps major milestones chronologically, reinforcing that systemic change is a phased journey rather than a series of isolated projects.
2. Accountability & Tracking: It provides a clear matrix mapping strategic priorities across each phase, establishing baseline focus areas and key success metrics.
3. Cross-Sector Alignment: It highlights the primary contributions required from every sector—from regional food banks and philanthropic funders to healthcare systems, school districts, and local municipal leaders.

By anchoring implementation in the core principles of Collaboration, Dignity, Equity, Innovation, and Shared Responsibility, this dashboard provides stakeholders, funders, and community partners with an immediate, clear visual of both the strategy and the concrete roadmap to achieve reliable, equitable food security across Southern Ocean County.

Implementation Dashboard

Building a Coordinated Food Security System for Southern Ocean County

From Community Conversation to Collective Action

Vision

A Southern Ocean County where every resident has reliable, equitable, and dignified access to healthy food through a coordinated community system built on partnership, innovation, and shared responsibility.

The Four Phases of Collective Action

Phase 1: ORGANIZE	**Phase 2: PILOT**	**Phase 3: SCALE**	**Phase 4: SUSTAIN**
Months 1–6	**Months 6–18**	**Years 2–3**	**Year 3 and Beyond**
Build relationships	Test promising ideas	Expand what works	Embed continuous improvement

Strategic Priorities Across Every Phase

Strategic Priority	**Organize**	**Pilot**	**Scale**	**Sustain**
Regional Coordination	●	●	●	●
Flexible & Equitable Access	○	●	●	●
Cross-Sector Partnerships	●	●	●	●
Information & Technology	○	●	●	●

Strategic Priority	Organize	Pilot	Scale	Sustain
Measurement & Learning	●	●	●	●

Legend: ● Primary emphasis | ○ Foundational work begins

Major Milestones

Phase 1 • Organize

- ✓ Southern Ocean County Food Security Coalition launched
- ✓ Steering Committee established
- ✓ Working groups formed
- ✓ Shared vision adopted
- ✓ Communications strategy implemented

Phase 2 • Pilot

- ✓ Community refrigerator demonstration
- ✓ Food locker pilot
- ✓ Expanded evening pantry hours
- ✓ Healthcare working group
- ✓ Regional resource directory
- ✓ Transportation partnerships

Phase 3 • Scale

- ✓ Successful pilots expanded
- ✓ Additional municipalities engaged
- ✓ School-based food hubs expanded
- ✓ Healthcare referrals strengthened
- ✓ Regional technology platform enhanced

Phase 4 • Sustain

- ✓ Annual *Together at the Table* convening
- ✓ Community dashboard published
- ✓ Annual progress report issued
- ✓ Continuous innovation process established
- ✓ Strategic priorities reviewed annually

Community Partners

Sector	Primary Contribution
Fulfill	Leadership, coordination, implementation
Grunin Foundation	Strategic investment, convening, innovation
Food Providers	Service delivery and innovation
Healthcare	Screening and referrals
Schools	Community hubs and family engagement
Municipal Governments	Local leadership and coordination
Faith Communities	Volunteers and neighborhood outreach
Businesses	Financial support, logistics, volunteers
Residents	Lived experience, evaluation, leadership

Measures of Success

By the end of the initial implementation period, Southern Ocean County should be able to demonstrate measurable progress in five key areas:

- **Community Capacity:** Coalition participation grows annually; cross-sector partnerships increase; collaborative initiatives become routine.
- **Resident Access:** More residents can obtain food close to home; evening and weekend access expands; transportation barriers decline.
- **System Performance:** Referrals become faster and easier; resource information is readily available; organizations coordinate services more effectively.
- **Community Engagement:** Volunteer participation increases; resident feedback informs planning; annual convenings attract growing participation.
- **Community Outcomes:** Improved access to nutritious food; greater dignity and resident choice; stronger community resilience; increased public awareness; measurable reductions in barriers to food access.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

COLLABORATION • DIGNITY • EQUITY • INNOVATION • SHARED RESPONSIBILITY