



Webinar: Beyond the Pantry: Rethinking Food Security in Newcomer Populations

September 2, 2026

Transcript

Introduction

Jasmine Griffin (JG): Hello, and welcome, everyone. Thank you so much for joining us today for Beyond the Pantry, Rethinking Food Security in Newcomer Populations. My name is Jasmine Griffin, and I am a licensed professional counselor with over a decade of experience in mental health, program management, and trauma-informed care in both nonprofit and government settings.

JG: Before joining Switchboard, I was the Health and Wellness Senior Program Manager at IRC Dallas, where I also served as Interim Deputy Director. I hold a Bachelor's in Sociology and Criminology, and a Master of Professional Counseling.

JG: I'm really excited to be bringing this topic to you all today alongside Aley Kent. Aley has worked with food security and farm viability projects in the United States for nearly 25 years. She joined the IRC in 2014, supporting a national network of food and agriculture programs with program strategy, staff development, and evaluation.

JG: Previously, Aley provided urban agriculture technical assistance with Cornell Cooperative Extension, founded and directed an urban youth agricultural service learning program, and spent almost a decade with Heifer International's U.S. program funding, and partnering with grassroots groups working to fight hunger and poverty.

JG: As an independent consultant, Aley has supported organizations to develop more effective programs and stronger leadership capacity at the community level. She holds a bachelor's in sustainable agriculture and sociology from Cornell University.

JG: By the end of this session, you will be able to describe how food insecurity impacts newcomer wellness, stability, and integration. Explain evidence-informed and community-based approaches that support food security among newcomer populations.

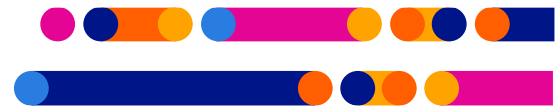
JG: And apply culturally responsive and trauma-informed strategies when supporting clients experiencing food insecurity.

1. Describe How Food Insecurity Impacts Newcomer Wellness, Stability, and Integration

JG: We're gonna go ahead and jump right in to our first learning objective, describe how food insecurity impacts Newcomer wellness, stability, and integration.

JG: As you all know, we love to use Slido, so please pull out your phones and scan that QR code on the screen, or you can join us at slido.com and typing in that code 8916-676.

JG: Our first question for you today is, when you hear the phrase, food insecurity, what words or feelings come to mind? Hungry. Uncertainty. Sadness. worried, starvation, famine, snap I'm seeing come up.



JG: The impact, stress, poverty, anxiety, malnutrition... Lots of anxiety, worry, the children, the fear, having trouble accessing food, overall lack... Food deserts.

JG: Being unfamiliar, yes. Sacrifices. Violence. Y'all are hitting on a lot of different feelings and a lot of thoughts that are coming up for you. Thank you so much for sharing. This gets us prepared to jump right in to this learning objective, so I really appreciate you all sharing your thoughts and feelings in this word cloud.

JG: So, as we saw on Slido, food insecurity can mean different things to different people. Before we talk about how it affects newcomer families, let's establish a shared understanding of what we mean when we use the terms food security and food insecurity.

JG: One important thing to remember is that food security isn't simply something a family either has or doesn't have, it's not something they answer yes or no to.

JG: Instead, it exists along a range. We'll start with high food security, which means a household has consistent, reliable access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

JG: Families are able to obtain the foods they need without worrying about whether they'll have enough for tomorrow. This is what we ultimately hope every family experiences.

JG: Next, we have marginal food security. Families may begin worrying about whether food will last, or whether they'll be able to afford groceries, but they generally haven't had to significantly change what or how much they eat.

JG: So, even though actual food intake may not have changed, that uncertainty can still create stress and anxiety, as you all identified on the Slido. Next is low food security. At this stage, families often begin making difficult compromises. They may purchase less expensive foods, reduce the variety or the quality of their foods.

JG: Or even rely on strategies to stretch their food budget. They're still trying to avoid reducing the amount of food they eat, but maintaining a nutritious and balanced diet becomes much more difficult.

JG: And at the far right is very low food security. Here, it's where we see the lack of resources. This lack begins affecting eating patterns themselves. Families may skip meals, they may eat smaller portions, or go without food because they simply don't have it. This is the most severe end of the continuum, and often has significant impacts on physical health, emotional well-being, and family stability.

JG: So your clients can move between these categories over time, depending on employment, housing costs, benefits, emergencies, or other life circumstances.

JG: But remember, as service providers, we may encounter clients anywhere along this range. So recognizing those earlier signs gives us an opportunity to connect families with support before challenges become more severe.

JG: So now that we have this shared understanding of what food security looks like across this continuum, let's explore why newcomer families may experience food insecurity and the contributing factors that can make consistent access to food more challenging.

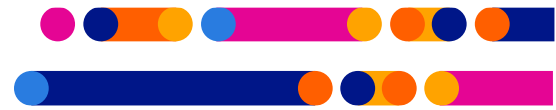
JG: So, why are newcomer families more likely to experience food insecurity? Well, while anyone can experience food insecurity, newcomers often face a combination of challenges during the resettlement process. For example.

JG: Many families arrive with limited financial resources, particularly while they're searching for employment. Even once employment is secured, transportation barriers can make it difficult to consistently reach those grocery stores or food pantries. Families may also be unfamiliar with local grocery stores available, food assistance programs, or how to prepare foods that are readily available to them.

JG: Language barriers can make it difficult to understand eligibility requirements and create challenges in reading food labels, communicating with pantry staff, or navigating other available services.

JG: Many parents are also balancing competing priorities, like finding housing, enrolling their kids in school, attending appointments, learning English, and maintaining employment.

JG: Purchasing or preparing meals that are culturally familiar, aligned with religious and dietary practices, or complement their needs can understandably become one more challenge to manage.



JG: So these concerns often overlap and compound one another, increasing a client or family's risk of experiencing food insecurity. So looking at this broad list shows us how food insecurity is connected to many other aspects of a client's life.

JG: For newcomers, food security is also about being able to access nutritious, culturally preferred foods in ways that preserve dignity, choice, and well-being.

JG: So one of the most important shifts we can make as service providers is to recognize that food insecurity rarely exists on its own. When a client tells us they're struggling to access food, it's often a signal that other challenges are affecting their ability to meet their basic needs.

JG: For example, if someone doesn't have reliable transportation, they may not be able to reach a grocery store or a food pantry. If they're working multiple jobs, they may not have time to visit a pantry during operating hours.

JG: If they're navigating legal or immigration concerns, those stressors may compete with their ability to prioritize food. Housing instability, healthcare costs, childcare responsibilities, and limited community connections can all influence whether a family is able to consistently access nutritious food. So rather than us asking, how do we solve this client's food problem, or saying, we need to get this client food.

JG: We can begin asking what other barriers might be contributing to this client or this family's food insecurity. And let's figure out what is getting in the way of the client successfully being food secure.

JG: That mindset shift helps us provide more holistic, client-centered support. So I'm curious how this compares to what you're seeing in your own work in the field. So let's head over... back over to Slido.

JG: And here I would like to answer... for you all to answer this question, which barrier do you see most often in your clients? Is it cost, transportation, language?

JG: Cultural food access. Or limited knowledge of resources. So I hope that you all are noticing the variety of answers that are coming through, because these barriers don't exist independently. They typically always overlap between each other.

JG: Okay, so let's wrap up this section by talking about why this matters. Food insecurity rarely affects just one part of a person's life. Instead, it creates ripple effects.

JG: That extend across nearly every aspect of well-being and successful integration. So let's start with physical health. When families don't have reliable access to nutritious food, they may skip meals, eat less nutritious options because they're more affordable, or experience chronic fatigue.

JG: Over time, this can worsen existing health conditions and make it more difficult to manage daily responsibilities. But the effects don't stop there. Food insecurity also takes an emotional toll.

JG: Many families experience ongoing stress about how they'll feed their children. Parents often describe feelings of guilt, shame, anxiety, or frustration when they're unable to provide the foods their children need or prefer.

JG: Those emotional impacts can then affect family stability. When clients face this amount of stress, especially if they're parents, it can lead to chronic stress. This might make them have less patience, family conflict may increase.

JG: And children in schools often will experience the effects as well. This can be seen through hunger or stress at home, or even acting out, behaviors or difficulty concentrating in school.

JG: So, finally, these challenges can make successful integration much more difficult. Our clients are trying to adapt to life in the United States, they're trying to learn English, attend school, keep a new job, or participate in the community while also worried about where their next meal is coming from.

JG: Food insecurity can affect attendance, concentration, employment stability, and opportunities to build social connections. The important takeaway from this objective isn't just to point out that food insecurity causes all these challenges for your clients.

JG: It's more about reminding you that food insecurity can contribute to or intensify challenges across multiple areas of your client's life. That's why I want to stress that addressing food insecurity can't be solved by simply



providing food to your clients. We have to look at and think about how food is supporting overall well-being and successful integration.

JG: So we're gonna move on to our second objective. So, so far we've explored what food insecurity is, why newcomer families may experience it, and how it can affect wellness, stability, and integration.

2. Explain Evidence-Informed and Community-Based Approaches That Support Food Security Among Newcomer Populations

JG: So we're going to shift from understanding the issue to looking at what organizations can actually do. Every organization or program has a role to play regardless of your size, funding, or capacity.

JG: In this section, we'll look at practical, evidence-informed, and community-based approaches that you can use to strengthen food security support. So the framework we're using comes from the International Rescue Committee's New Roots Technical Unit, which Aley is a part of, and reflects approaches organizations can use based on their capacity and community partnerships.

JG: So we'll look at these three approaches, connect, build, and system strengthening, and then we'll see what these approaches can look like in practice, and also hear from Aley.

JG: So, Connect focuses on linking newcomers to food resources and benefits that already exist. BUILD involves developing or expanding agency-led food security initiatives, and system strengthening focuses on strengthening the relationships, coordination, and partnerships that support the broader local food system.

JG: So these approaches give organizations different ways to contribute to food security. An organization or program may primarily connect, it may have the capacity to build, and it may participate in system strengthening, or it can do a combination of all three.

JG: The beautiful thing is that these approaches can also build on one another over time, as you'll hear in Aley's examples that she'll provide to us shortly.

JG: Before we dive deeper into each approach and examples that you can put into practice, we want to hear from you. So, after hearing those brief definitions, which approach best describes your organization or your program today? Is it Connect?

JG: Is it build? System Strengthening? We do a little bit of all of these, or we don't do anything. I'd love to see the range here. And to also see that everyone is doing a little bit of something. Organizations are working at different levels of capacity.

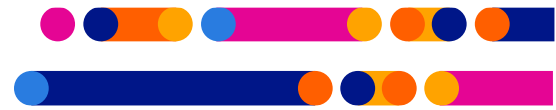
JG: Resources and partnerships, so there isn't one starting point that applies to everyone. Some organizations are primarily focused on connecting clients to existing resources while others are developing programs or participating in broader community efforts.

JG: So as you see, all three of these have a place in strengthening food security. So let's move forward so we can dive into Connect. So, Connect is often the easiest or more practical place for organizations to start. When we talk about Connect, we're talking about helping clients access resources that already exist in the community.

JG: So you'll notice that these strategies in this section are divided into two levels of lift, lighter lift and moderate or heavy lift. The distinction reflects the amount of organizational time, coordination, infrastructure, and ongoing support required to implement the strategy.

JG: So let's start with the lighter lift strategies, which rely primarily on improving access to existing community resources rather than creating new programs.

JG: So, building a list of local food resources is one example. Organizations can research food pantries, food banks. Community meal programs, gleaning opportunities, and other food access points, and maintain that information for staff and clients.



JG: Also, helping eligible families access SNAP or WIC benefits is another example. Staff may provide information, make referrals, help clients understand the process, or connect them with appropriate application assistance.

JG: Organizations can also refer SNAP-eligible clients to employment and training programs that may support longer-term economic stability. These strategies build on resources that already exist and require staff knowledge and time to maintain accurate information and make meaningful connections.

JG: The moderate or heavy lift strategies involve a greater level of coordination. Providing orientations to local food access points requires staff to develop more structured processes for helping clients understand and navigate those resources.

JG: Organizations can also take a more active role in helping clients access programs that maximize their available benefits. That may involve additional follow-up, coordination, or assistance navigating multiple services.

JG: Another example is facilitating food drop-offs or deliveries through partner organizations. This requires coordination between the organization, the partner, and the client, along with attention to scheduling, transportation, staffing, and logistics. So these strategies still fall within Connect because the organization is helping clients access existing community resource... resources. But again, the level of organizational investment is greater.

JG: The same principle applies beyond food resources. Switchboard recently published guidance on Medicaid changes and alternative health supports for newcomers, so you'll see that in the chat.

JG: This resource highlights several pathways providers may need to help clients explore and reinforce the importance of keeping resource information current as programs and policies change.

JG: So food resources work the same way. A referral list is useful when the information is current, and the resource is reasonably accessible to the client.

JG: Transportation, hours of operation, language access, cultural and dietary considerations can influence whether a client can actually use a resource. So an effective connection requires knowledge of that local resource.

JG: Making sure that information is current, and an understanding of the barriers that may affect access. So as you look into these two columns, think about the level of capacity your organization or program currently has. Some may begin by developing and maintaining a strong resource list, or updating their current one. Others may have the staffing and partnerships to provide orientations, coordinate deliveries.

JG: Or provide more hands-on navigation. Both are ways to strengthen connection to resources that already exist. So let's dig deeper, in building a list. of food resources.

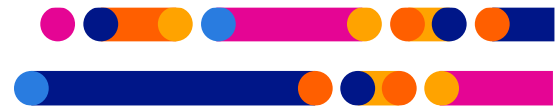
JG: So, a local food resource list can be a simple and useful tool for both staff and clients, as I mentioned. This can include those food pantries, the food banks, community meal programs. gleaning opportunities, and the USDA has this amazing toolkit on how to start, how to get started with gleaning. You'll see that in the chat. Also farmers markets, community gardens, and other local food access points.

JG: A useful resource list includes the information staff and clients need. to determine whether a resource is accessible and appropriate. It provides the eligibility or the access requirements, language supports if it's available, and whether appointments are required.

JG: For newcomer serving organizations, we always want to consider access to transportation and the types of food available, including those culturally familiar foods and dietary needs for our specific clients.

JG: These details can make the difference between receiving a referral and being able to successfully access that resource. So we're going to be dropping a few resources in the chat that can help you identify food resources and community-based support.

JG: These can be useful starting points as you're developing or updating your organization's or program's local resource list. I also want to share, Switchboard's resource that can support the work behind these lists. We have a couple. So, the Community Resource Mapping Template.



JG: Can help organizations identify and organize resources available in their communities. While another resource that you see is building community partnerships across the resettlement landscape, that provides practical guidance for developing relationships with organizations that can strengthen services for newcomers.

JG: These resources are useful when you're moving from just knowing what the resources that exist to developing a more intentional network of community connections.

JG: So, maintaining the list does require ongoing attention, resources change, programs open and close, hours and locations change, and services may change over time.

JG: So staff can also develop a client-facing list as a navigation tool used to help clients identify which resource fits best for their circumstances, and explain what they can expect when accessing them.

JG: This is a practical starting point for organizations looking to strengthen food security supports with the resources and partnerships that they already have.

JG: So now we're going to move forward from Connect to Build. So, BUILD involves taking a more active role in developing, expanding, or coordinating food security initiatives.

JG: The examples on this slide range from moderate lift to heavy lift. Because they require greater organizational investment, such as staff capacity, funding, infrastructure, coordination, or establishing and maintaining ongoing partnerships.

JG: The examples range from securing and distributing bulk food to connecting clients with gardening or farmland opportunities, developing a local market that accepts food benefits, or becoming a SNAP employment and training provider.

JG: These approaches involve the organization helping create or expand food access, rather than primarily connecting clients to something that already exists.

JG: So let's take a closer look at securing bulk food and coordinating pickup or distribution. So, securing food in bulk and coordinating pickup or distribution is an example of an organization taking a more active role in expanding food access for clients.

JG: So this can involve developing relationships with farmers, grocery stores, food banks, food rescue organizations, wholesalers, or refugee-owned businesses.

JG: Also, raising funds to purchase food, and coordinating transportation, storage, packing, and distribution. There is also an opportunity to intentionally consider what food is being made available. Culturally familiar foods, dietary practices, and the logistics of when and how families receive food can all shape whether the effort meets the community's needs.

JG: So you can also ask your communities to donate grocery gift cards to your organization or programs, or to support your local food pantries by donating food items.

JG: So, for organizations thinking about developing these types of partnerships, we're going to drop a couple of resources in the chat. The first one, United Way, can be a useful starting point for identifying local organizations and community resources, including food assistance.

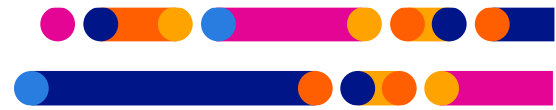
JG: You can use the National Directory to locate your local United Way, and the second link is the United Way of King County, their food resource page. This provides you an example of how a local United Way organizes food assistance information.

JG: Build is where partnership becomes very important. Organizations don't have to provide or purchase all the food themselves. Partnerships can bring together food, funding, transportation, volunteers, and community knowledge.

JG: Aley, I would love to invite you to share an example of what this looks like in practice.

Aley Kent (AK): Great. Thank you so much, Jasmine. It's an honor to be here today with this group. Yeah, so thinking about an example of this distribution model, this past winter, IRC Spokane's office in Washington state moved rapidly to organize a mobile distribution model, and so here's how it works. So each week.

AK: Community members experience foods... experiencing food insecurity can be referred to the... their distribution list, and people can be referred or either... or self-refer as well.



AK: This includes an address for delivery, dietary considerations, and other requests or needs. Distribution happens every other week, and what they do is they procure bulk food from a large-scale... from large-scale food security partners. So, in Spokane's area, Second Harvest and Northwest Harvest provide the staple produce throughout the year, forming the base of each box.

AK: And then these boxes are supplemented with additional resources. So during harvest season, during the growing season, they can add culturally relevant produce from their garden. So they also have a gardening program as part of their organization, so they can direct that food into the food boxes.

AK: This past year, they also secured about \$15,000 from churches and other private donors, which meant that they could source halal meat for those boxes by working Both with local farmers and some other, larger distribution chains.

AK: Then team members and a dedicated group of volunteers will pack the boxes according to each, registrant's, you know, specific requests or dietary needs, and volunteers then deliver the boxes the same day.

AK: And, you know, according to the drop-off times and locations that were in the referral form, so they could sort of plan to be there when the box arrives.

AK: Just one more thing to highlight, clients can share their preferred language during the referral, so with that information, IRC has been able to include print resources or QR codes and audiovisual, you know, to audio or video resources for their preferred language.

AK: On topics beyond food security, such as upcoming changes to healthcare, or other benefits, or summer childcare programs, other local classes that might be of interest.

AK: So it's been a really good way for them to just continue that... that connection with the community, and also just stay on top of what, you know, what the status is. with our clients. Back to you, Jasmine.

JG: Awesome, Aley. Thank you so much. I feel like what stands out in this example is how multiple resources came together. The model that you described for Spokane was designed around how families would actually receive and use that food. So we're gonna look now at different ways organizations can strengthen food security by strengthening the systems and relationships around the work.

JG: So our third approach is systems strengthening. This category can sometimes sound like it refers only to changes we see in current policies, but there are meaningful systems-level actions organizations can take within their communities.

JG: Systems strengthening moves us beyond an individual service or program and focuses on the relationships, coordination, and infrastructure that support food security across the community.

JG: So that can include our lighter lift examples that involve joining or creating opportunities for coordination, so creating an office-level task force.

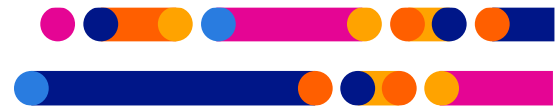
JG: Networking and participating in food coalitions for... or our, moderate lift strategies involve developing partnerships that support broader community efforts.

JG: So, you're sharing information and expertise in order to coordinate efforts and create strong connections. The key here is collaboration. Organizations are strengthening the local food system by working with others, rather than working independently. So let's look deeper into forming a task force.

JG: An office-level food security task force creates structure for ongoing coordination. The group can bring together representatives. from internal teams and community partners, such as food security organizations, food pantries, faith-based organizations, CBOs, and other groups connected to the local food system.

JG: The structure can be relatively small, about 3 to 6 people, with regular meetings, and a designated person who's responsible for planning, scheduling, and following up.

JG: The group can share information, identify emerging needs, coordinate responses, and determine where collective action is useful. So for organizations or programs that are interested in connecting with broader food security efforts in their community, we're gonna drop a resource in the chat that can help you identify food policy councils in similar collaborative structures.



JG: So, food policy councils bring together community stakeholders to examine local food systems, identify challenges and opportunities, and coordinate efforts to strengthen food access and food systems.

JG: So this can be a useful starting point for learning who is already doing this work in your community and identifying opportunities for connection and partnership, rather than duplicating those efforts.

JG: Aley, we'd love to hear from you again on an example of this.

AK: Great. Just making sure my mic is on. So, this example is from IRC Tucson. They developed the BRIDGE Task Force, which is short for Benefits, Response, Impact Development, and Guidance Effort. The task force formed in November 2025.

AK: And it began as a food security task force in response to increases in food insecurity expected after the HR1 eligibility changes last Last summer and fall.

AK: So, the task force is, you know, it meets bi-weekly, they have a standing agenda item... items of, you know, updates to current policies, updates on what staff are hearing from clients, partners, and DES about what's happening in the field. It has also since grown to encompass their response to further eligibility limitations across benefit programs, like health insurance.

AK: And, you know, then task force members are then, you know, tasked with providing information sessions for staff, partners, and clients, on the changes to current policies, and So, I mean, a couple key pieces of this is that they wanted to... what they've really prioritized is having representation on this office-level task force from across all program services departments and from leadership.

AK: Which enables timely decision-making. They also... all the task force members also participate on other collaborations out in the community, so, Jasmine was just talking about food policy councils and other... there's other councils and other task forces going on in the community, which want to hear what, you know, what information IRC Tucson has about what's coming out of information in conversations with clients, what is, you know, what are some of the experiences that are happening? Because that is also used to communicate to various decision makers and leaders and people who might want that information. So, and then it also facilitates that, you know, the communication and coordination across everybody in the city. So, it's been a real critical step for them to Just being more strategic on what activities they're taking in the office, but also, what information they are sharing, and how that can hopefully help to change the larger situation and system.

AK: For the better.

JG: That's really awesome what the IRC Tucson office is doing. Aley, thank you for sharing that example. It really shows how a task force can create ongoing structure and bring together information from different parts of the organization and community.

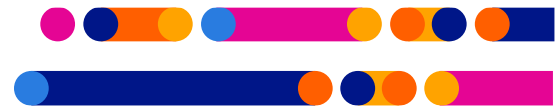
JG: So we've now seen Connect Building Systems strengthen through several different examples, but before we close out this section, Aley is also going to provide another example that brings all three of these approaches together. So, Aley, back over to you.

AK: Oh, thanks. So this is... I wanted to talk a little bit about the Seattle farmers market. So IRC Seattle, sort of inherited a farmer's market that was not initially theirs, but they became an anchor partner and, and they currently now run the market.

AK: It is in a community that is, you know, has... people might call a food desert, there's not a lot of good access to food, but there's a lot of people that are looking for all kinds of culturally relevant produce.

AK: And other hard-to-find items, and just having a place to go as well. So this market thrives because of a mix of local collaborators. There's, you know, the county government that has jurisdiction over the land, healthcare and senior centers that distribute Health Bucks. that people can then spend at the market, youth groups that provide entertainment to, you know, and then local businesses that appreciate the local activity that the market brings to the area. But yeah, so... but more broadly, right, food security affects entire communities, not just ORR populations.

AK: In particular, it's important to remember that many businesses are also suffering from reduced SNAP spending in the local economy. Indeed, yesterday, I was just on a call hearing about how SNAP cuts in Alabama



and Nebraska, among other states, are affecting grocery stores. There's some rural grocery stores that have actually already closed.

AK: As well as farmers, and many other businesses, all the way through things like trucking, And machinery and things that are all sort of integrated with... with food sales, because there are billions of dollars that are not being spent now in state economies because of Because of cuts to SNAP. So, you know, food security is healthcare, food security impacts education, like Jasmine was talking about earlier, it impacts employment, and it connects many aspects of the local economy. And so there's many other groups out there who are often already working on these issues.

AK: There's multiple... this means that there's multiple entry points, to food, and that's a leverage point, gives you a leverage point to engaging in system strengthening work. It opens doors to unlikely partners as you consider program development, or ways that you could you know, intersect with food security, even in an existing program that you have? How, you know, how can you build that in? How can you draw that line? It's very... the nice thing about food is that it touches so many things, and so, there might be ways to integrate a food piece or a, yeah, a food security piece to the programs that you already have. And also, remember, I also heard Jasmine say this earlier, you know. we or people in our particular organizations may not need to be the lead actor in some cases. There might already be things going on. So, you know, involving a multitude of partners, it adds to the overall resources available. But that's, you know, resources are money, yes. and time, but also other things like vehicles and, like, stuff, and, you know, and connections, and social capital. That can also help to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the effort, you know? And so another piece, too, is right to focus on building that ownership, helping each partner feel their relevance.

AK: And importance. And that then can lead to positive knock-on effects. I did want to mention one good example of that, you know, I was talking about Seattle here, but Spokane, which is across the state from Seattle, going back to that food distribution example that I provided before. they, you know, their consistent purchase of halal meat from Grocery Outlet, which is, like, a grocery distribution, chain. Every week led to a significant shift in their own... in grocery outlets' buying patterns.

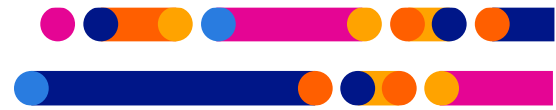
AK: So then that, that business started asking the IRC directly, well, what we'd like to see in future orders, and increase the quantity of halal meat that they stocked. And even better, clients have noticed the ripple effect that you know, the grocers in their neighborhoods that are supplied by Grocery Outlet are also, having more of that food available to them, too. So, again, right, let's, you know, be thinking about that whole sort of economic Web, that is part of the food system, and there's lots of different entry points and potential partners and ways to, you know, chip away and build up, really, what is available to clients.

JG: Awesome, Aley, thank you so much for sharing those examples. As you all heard, connect, build, and system strengthening can definitely overlap. An organization might be connecting clients to an existing resource, or they may be building a new partnership or service around that resource, and then contribute to a broader system that makes the resource more sustainable and accessible.

JG: We're gonna now shift back over to you. We'd like to hear from you. We've looked at several ways organizations can strengthen food security. So let's bring this back to your context, and your program, or your organization. In Slido, share one realistic next step that your organization or program could take to strengthen food security support in your community.

JG: What are some things that are coming to mind for you all? partnerships. Connecting with food banks. And it can even be something small, such as updating your current resource list. Yeah, creating a list of local food banks. providing resources to the families, building the food resource list first, and then let that lead to partnerships. I love that. Community connecting. I'm seeing a lot of folks mentioning that resource list. It's so valuable.

JG: Share weekly resources, provide a list of clients, provide the list of clients in the area. Look for new connections previously that are non-existent. Yeah, maybe reestablishing some of those old connections.



contact organization and ask about the services that they have. Yes. Building more connections, understanding what culturally preferred foods are. Love that.

JG: Wrap-around services, more awareness and breaking barriers. Connecting with the local farmers, absolutely. I love that the responses are ranging from different areas of build, connect, and system strengthening.

JG: These are all a good reminder that strengthening food security can start at different levels, so please, we're gonna move forward, but please keep Slido open, as we head into our last objective.

JG: So we've been looking at what organizations can do. Now we're going to shift the focus to what happens in the conversation with an individual client.

3. Apply Culturally Responsive and Trauma-Informed Strategies When Supporting Clients Experiencing Food Insecurity

JG: So we'll apply culturally responsive and trauma-informed strategies when supporting clients experiencing food insecurity, and see how that can shape the way we understand food-related needs, connect clients with resources, and preserve dignity and choice.

JG: So, in Slido, I'd like for you to share what makes conversations about food insecurity difficult. So maybe think about what challenges you're experiencing in those conversations that you might be having with your clients.

JG: The vulnerability, language barriers, shame, lack of resources to provide. It's hard to be vulnerable, it touches people's dignity, people are embarrassed, pride...

JG: Food choices, changes to the policies... Asking about culturally appropriate food resources. The limitations on the resources. Feeling like they don't have a quick solution. trauma history... Yes, embarrassment, empathy. Thank y'all so much for sharing. Many of the challenges y'all are mentioning involve stigma. Limited resources, language barriers, uncertainty, And fear of saying the wrong thing, or not knowing what to say.

JG: This is why the way that we communicate really matters. So we're gonna move forward to the next Slido question. What is one thing you wish you knew before discussing food insecurity with your clients?

JG: So, in other words, ask yourself, what do I need to understand before I enter this conversation? This question is really challenging you to shift from thinking Only about what we need to accomplish in the conversation, to thinking about how we can approach the person sitting in front of us.

JG: Knowing about the past through trauma history. Knowing the resources available, if the clients will be emotionally safe. And respected at the food pantries.

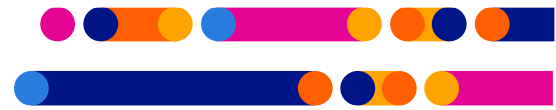
JG: Knowing the client's biggest barrier, the need for food choices, cultural barriers, trauma, it's coming up a lot. Where to find culturally appropriate food.

JG: What does food security look like to them? I love that answer. Biggest needs, the emotional experience, How food impacts the client's identity. Transportation needs...

JG: Communicating the constant changes, guidance, On how much, or what is a normal diet for that client. Their definition of food insecurity. Yeah, a lot of what you all are naming points to the need to prepare for these conversations. So knowing what resources exist, understanding what may be happening beneath the immediate food concern, like you mentioned, trauma.

JG: And being aware of our own assumptions, too. So let's look at a simple framework for approaching these conversations in a way that supports dignity, trust, and connection.

JG: So, think about your role. Whether you're a case manager, a health educator, a supervisor, program manager, volunteer, or clinician, these four steps can help create conversations that preserve dignity, build trust, and connect families with meaningful support. So the framework I'll be using is prepare, engage, listen, and Link.



JG: Throughout this framework, you'll notice I have intentionally combined trauma-informed principles and culturally responsive practices. I want to encourage you to not look at these two practices as separate approaches to use, but to view them as one.

JG: They encourage us to remain curious, avoid assumptions, preserve choice, and build trust. As we move through, prepare, engage, listen, and link, think about how having both lenses can shape your future interactions with your clients.

JG: So what you'll notice is that sometimes it looks like you're offering a choice, and other times it's recognizing the importance of the client's cultural food preferences, or maybe understanding their past experience with food, or how displacement may influence how someone responds to food needs today.

JG: We're dropping a couple resources in the chat that dig deeper into both of these approaches, since I won't be, doing that today, so be sure to check those out.

JG: So let's start with prepare. Preparation happens before the conversation with the client even begins. So the five areas on this slide give us a practical checklist, so you want to know the available resources.

JG: Consider transportation, Think about, language access, identify culturally appropriate options, and reflect on your own assumptions. Preparation allows staff to enter the conversation with useful information, rather than asking the client to figure everything out on their own.

JG: The culturally responsive piece shows up in some very practical ways here, so knowing what a food resource... knowing that a food resource exists isn't enough. We also want to understand what type of food is available at that particular resource.

JG: Whether language is accessible or available, where the resource is located, and whether the resource fits that family's circumstances and needs. The trauma-informed piece includes reducing uncertainty and avoiding unnecessary barriers for our clients.

JG: So, preparation helps us create a conversation where the client has more information to make the right choice that fits their needs, and it also communicates a level of respect to the client, essentially saying.

JG: I know that this transition for you has been difficult, so I have gathered some information to make this a little easier for you to choose what works best for you and your family.

JG: Once we've prepared we move into Engage. So this is where our communication starts to really matter. The way we begin a conversation often determines how comfortable a client feels sharing their experience with us.

JG: Food insecurity can be difficult to discuss because food is connected to family, connected to finances, health, culture, and dignity. Some clients may feel embarrassed, frustrated, or uncomfortable asking for help or accepting help.

JG: So normalizing that conversation can reduce some of that pressure, so we want to validate their experience. We want to use open-ended questions that allow clients to describe their circumstances in their own words, while avoiding assumptions gives us space to understand what is actually happening for that client or family.

JG: And we're respecting privacy, which is also very important. Conversations about food access may involve financial circumstances. Family relationships, immigration-related experiences, or other personal information. So we want to gather what is necessary to understand the client's need.

JG: From a culturally responsive perspective, engagement also gives the client space to tell us what food means for their family, and what kinds of support would feel appropriate.

JG: So let's look at a few examples of what Engage sounds like. So instead of saying, do you need or do you have food, try saying. What foods are you missing the most right now?

JG: Instead of saying, the children have to eat, you can get in trouble for not feeding them. Try saying, when was the last time you went to the grocery store?

JG: Instead of saying, why haven't you gone to the grocery store? Try saying, you know, many families are telling us grocery shopping has become difficult lately. How has that been for you and your family? Or, how do you get to and from the grocery store?



JG: Instead of thinking that all refugees do this for survival, they're just manipulating me and my team to get food. Let's shift that mindset over to clients may need resources to meet their immediate needs, and they may be unsure of whom to trust.

JG: We want to resist thinking that clients' behaviors are manipulative. So let's move forward to listen. As clients begin sharing their experiences. Work on not immediately trying to solve the problem for the clients. Our first responsibility is to understand the problem. So when we listen, we're listening for more than whether someone has enough food, we're listening for the broader context of their experience.

JG: So the financial strain, transportation challenges, housing concerns, health needs, family responsibilities, and past experiences that may shape how they think about food.

JG: For some newcomers, experiences of conflict, displacement, prolonged food shortages, or time spent in refugee camps may continue to influence their relationship with food long after resettlement.

JG: For example, some clients may keep extra food. Some might become anxious about running out, or feel a strong need to stockpile food because of previous experiences with scarcity.

JG: So, rather than viewing these behaviors as unusual or problematic, a trauma-informed approach encourages us to approach them with curiosity and compassion. We might ask ourselves, what experiences could be shaping this person's relationship with food?

JG: This will help move you away from making assumptions or judging your clients. Listening in this way helps us better understand not only what support a client needs today, but also how we can provide that support in ways that build trust and respect their lived experiences.

JG: And the same is true for cultural food practices. Clients may describe foods that are important to their identity, religious practices, or sense of home.

JG: So by listening with both a trauma-informed and culturally responsive lens, we gain a more complete understanding of each client's unique experiences, and can connect them with the supports that are both appropriate and meaningful.

JG: So this is where reflective listening becomes valuable as well. Reflective listening helps uncover barriers that may be hidden. So reflective listening can sound like, tell me more about that.

JG: Or, wow, that sounds really stressful. What has been the hardest part for you? Reflective listening also means remaining curious about how food is experienced by each individual in a family. So you want to ask about preferred foods.

JG: You want to ask about cooking practices, religious dietary considerations, and what meals mean within that family unit or culture. These conversations help us understand not only nutritional needs, but also identify comfort and connection.

JG: So this moves us to the final step in the communication framework, which is Link. This is where we connect what we've learned from the conversation to an appropriate resource or next step.

JG: So the four steps on this slide will help us think about Link as a process, rather than a single referral. So the conversation helps us understand what the client needs.

JG: Resources give us options to share with the client. Navigation can help the client understand how to access those options, and here I want to encourage you to help the client really visualize themselves navigating those resources, so you can ask them, how will you get there? what would get in the way of you not utilizing this resource or not being able to go? This will help you and the client identify barriers that may exist and begin to problem-solve proactively. And then, you want to follow up.

JG: This gives us an opportunity to find out whether the connection was successful and worked for the client. So you can ask your client, what was your experience like, and would you go back again?

JG: The trauma-informed lens shows up through choice, collaboration, transparency, and reducing uncertainty. The culturally responsive lens shows up in the actual fit of the resource. So, whether that resource respects the client's food preferences, language, family circumstances, and cultural practices.



JG: This also brings us back to something we discussed earlier. A referral and a successful connection are not the same thing. Helping a client identify a resource that fits their circumstances and supporting them through the process to access it can make the connection much more meaningful.

JG: So this brings us to one of the most important points in this section, preserving dignity through choice. The strategies on this slide are simple, but they can significantly change a client's experience. We can ask about food preferences, rather than deciding what someone should receive or not. We can consider religious dietary needs and cultural food practices.

JG: We can explore transportation needs, we can respect client decisions about whether and how they want to access food resources for themselves or a family, and we can also provide multiple options and allow the client to determine what fits their family needs.

JG: Choice is particularly important when someone has experienced circumstances where they had very little control over what happened to them or to their family. Offering meaningful choices can support trust and autonomy.

JG: Cultural responsiveness is equally important because food carries meaning beyond nutrition. It can represent family, identity, tradition, religion, familiarity, and connection to the client's home.

JG: So asking about those preferences communicates that the client's experience matters. One of the examples here is moving away from the statement, we have one food pantry you can use, and moving towards more helpful questions or statements that communicate what would be most helpful to you. Let's look at these options together.

JG: This creates a space for the client to tell us what support looks like from their perspective, and it also brings together the skills we've discussed throughout this section.

JG: Prepare with useful information, engage without assumptions, listen to the broader context, and link the client to resources while preserving their choice.

Q&A Panel

JG: So we've come to the end of the webinar, and I would like to invite Aley back on to answer a couple questions that have come through. If you all have any questions, feel free to drop them in the Q&A box.

JG: Aley, I'm seeing a few questions on community gardens. And someone specifically said, I would love to learn more about community gardens.

What are some best practices or pitfalls you can share about community gardens?

AK: Great. Yeah, no gardens... Are definitely an important piece of the puzzle of certainly nutritional security, if not overall household food security and just calories.

AK: But certainly for a lot of other aspects of health and well-being, and many communities have existing gardens, and other sort of land resources that... that you can refer people to. I would say, in IRC's experience, some of the...

AK: The best practices have to do with really facilitating Shared expectations, and ongoing communication between, like, just so that... so the client knows what they're getting into, what is expected of them, where, you know, like, what... what some of the norms are in the garden, some of the rules are.

AK: Because I find that that is one of the most important pieces of preventing lots of potential problems. Gardens are wonderful. there can also be a lot of, especially if people don't share a language, there can be a lot of misunderstandings and things that can happen. So, it's, you know, it's, yes, it's connecting, and that's actually why the gardening piece in your structure of setting up these sort of connect, build, and system strengthening is why it's in the build, because it does require a little bit of extra... it's not as simple as sort of



just connecting and referring and sending people out. I mean, you can always try that, but we have found that that often leads to.

AK: Just something that's not sustainable, really. So... so having some level of programming where there is a bit of facilitation and partnership, management and maintenance, and also just Ensuring that gardeners have a full understanding of, you know, what resources are available to them, what's expected as far as their management of their space. there's often, an application or something that, you know, will need to be filled out. So, I mean, part of that is just going through that process together. And then, you know, making sure that there's ongoing communication happening. If there are issues that the gardener's running into, or that the garden leadership is taking issue with.

JG: Awesome. I was just reading one of the Q&A... well, it wasn't really a question, but just a comment from someone, who were saying that they have a multicultural food pantry that also serves as a resource site for newcomers. In addition, we'll be partnering with the local RA on community gardens and a refugee farmer's market to be on the site next to the pantry. Super exciting.

JG: I'm offering this up as something that is happening for what we talked about today, no questions, but just wanted to get that comment, love that. Thank you for sharing.

[What would you recommend for supporting clients without funding, or is there a resource that can connect them to funding opportunities?](#)

JG: Another theme of questions that I'm seeing come up is many people are focused on the lack of funding.

AK: Yeah, I mean, this is the... no pun intended, this is the million dollar question, I think, that everybody's dealing with right now, states included. There are several states that are... that are really trying to. address this. You know, they know full well that there are large proportions of their populations that are, missing out on food because of cuts to staff or, you know, ineligibility, new rules around that.

AK: And so, you know, some... there's been a bit of work to, you know, build that communication link between community groups and state decision makers, municipal decision makers, to try to allocate budgets and resources. So that's one piece, is literally just saying, you know, okay, where's the public money? Where is there, like, things that might be available that, you know, we can be leveraging? I think that – I mean – this piece around partnerships and being creative about the types of programmings, or the types of ways you're talking about your programming. Again, like, food is great because it touches many parts of people's lives.

AK: And can be integrated into lots of different programs, so... If you do have a program or you see a grant program that, you know, might speak to youth development or something, for example, or a grant program that talks about I mean, even sort of, like, employment training or workforce development, there might be ways to, you know, parlay that into something where, in the first case, like, youth are involved in growing food, or getting their families involved in growing food, or doing a farm-to-school type thing, where children are getting better You know, getting some good meals at school.

AK: And in the second case, you know, there might be skill-building opportunities that you can You know, involve at a garden site, or at some kind of, you know, market site, where people are learning skills, participating in a garden, or, you know, learning skills through doing a volunteer packing thing, and you can actually integrate, you know, food costs into some of those things as well.

AK: Those are, like. some crazy ideas, maybe, but there are definitely, some important... just this important consideration around, like, really leveraging your partners and seeing what types of things might be available, and having, you know, making sure you're maintaining your relationships with, you know, public decision makers.

AK: And other... other bodies like that, that may have some sway.



JG: Yeah. Very important, and I love that you mentioned, you know, really utilizing current funding opportunities that organizations may have, where they can talk about or weave in food insecurity or food security to their programming. Love that.

JG: We don't have any other questions right now. There was one in the chat that I'll respond to in just a second, it's more personal, but we're gonna go ahead and move forward.

Conclusion

Reviewing Learning Objectives

JG: We now hope that you are able to describe how food insecurity impacts newcomer wellness, stability, and integration, describe... or explain evidence-informed and community-based approaches that support food security among newcomer populations.

JG: And apply culturally responsive and trauma-informed strategies when supporting clients experiencing food insecurity. We have some recommended resources for you all on top of the ones that we dropped in the chat, so I hope you were able to capture all of those, and we will also send this out to you via email.

JG: We would love if you took a moment, 60 seconds, to answer 4 questions on our survey. We're dropping that link in the chat for you. Your feedback really helps us improve future trainings and technical assistance, so we'll pause here for a moment to allow you to complete that. Thank you.

JG: Okay, thank you all so much for being here today, and thank you so much for learning with Switchboard. Please stay connected, and we hope to see you all again soon. Aley, thank you again for being here. It was a pleasure doing this with you.

AK: Yeah, likewise. I'm glad... glad we can do this.

JG: Yes, ma'am. Bye, everyone.

AK: Bye, everyone.

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