

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

No Food Security without Economic Security: Addressing Hunger in Two Albuquerque Communities

Background

Food security is when you can get healthy, affordable, familiar food easily in your neighborhood. It means you can get enough food to stay healthy and not be hungry.

Economic security is when you have enough money to cover what it costs to live. In the US this means you have enough money to pay for transportation, childcare, healthcare, housing, and utilities.

When people live in communities with limited income and a high rate of poverty, it is hard to make sure there is enough money for healthy food. New Mexico has the second highest rate of poverty in the nation.

Food Insecurity in New Mexico

- 1 in 8 **people** in New Mexico is at risk of hunger.
- 1 in 8 **seniors** in New Mexico is at risk of hunger.
- 1 in 5 **children** in New Mexico is at risk of hunger.
- Nearly 1 in 3 **college students** at the University of New Mexico is at risk of hunger.

New Mexico People of Color:

- 1 in 6 **Hispanic** persons in New Mexico is at risk of hunger.
- 1 in 5 **Black** persons in New Mexico is at risk of hunger.

*This is compared to 1 in 13 **non-Hispanic White** persons in New Mexico who is at risk of hunger.*

More Data for Other Racial / Ethnic Groups

- 1 in 6 **Vietnamese Americans** is at risk of hunger.
- 1 in 5 **Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander** persons is at risk of hunger.
- 1 in 5 **Native Americans** is at risk of hunger
 - During the COVID-19 pandemic, one study found that 1 in 2 Native Americans was at risk of hunger

Immigrant and Refugee Groups:

- Risk of hunger for **immigrant and refugee** groups ranges from 1 in 3 to as much as 4 out of 5

This report looks at two specific neighborhoods in Albuquerque, New Mexico: the International District and the South Valley.

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Neighborhood Data

The International District is a neighborhood to the east of central Albuquerque. It has a population of about 29,000 people. Immigrant and refugee populations create a diverse mix of cultures in the International District, with about 1 in 5 people being born in another country. The International District is a rich mix of racial groups, including a higher percentage of Native Americans (10%) than in the South Valley or the city of Albuquerque.

The International District neighborhood also has a higher rate of some challenges than the City of Albuquerque overall.

- Median household income is less than half of the median income for Albuquerque
- Poverty rate is more than twice the poverty rate for Albuquerque
- Food insecurity is 10% higher than Albuquerque

It also experiences higher rates of crime than Albuquerque. Many of these challenges can trace their roots back to neighborhood changes. In the 1970's, Route 66 was rerouted and caused many businesses to close. Around the same time, when Kirtland Airforce Base relocated base housing onto the base, many houses and apartment buildings were boarded up or sold to absentee landlords.

Despite these challenges, the International District has strengths that are directly tied to the diversity of its residents. It offers a variety of ethnic stores and restaurants that are valuable to the City of Albuquerque. It is also home to the state fairgrounds.

The South Valley is a neighborhood on the southern border of the City of Albuquerque, in Bernalillo County. It has a population of about 40,000 people. Nearly 4 out of 5 people in the South Valley are Hispanic, but there are many different racial groups among this Hispanic population.

The South Valley neighborhood has a higher rate of some challenges than the City of Albuquerque overall.

- Median household income is only 71% of Albuquerque
- Poverty rate is 6% higher than Albuquerque
- Food insecurity is 2% higher than Albuquerque

The South Valley also has a rich history and culture and a beautiful landscape. This area has been occupied by Spanish and Mexican families for centuries and many families have been living here for generations. It has traditionally been a farming community and still has irrigation ditches linked to the Rio Grande.

In April and May 2022, we talked to 76 community members from these two neighborhoods. We asked them more about their thoughts and ideas related to food security. Everyone we talked to was a recipient of food distribution services in one of these neighborhoods.

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Findings

People in the South Valley and International District have a vision of living in neighborhoods where they have increased food access by growing their own food and being able to go to food stores nearby. They also have a vision of living in clean neighborhoods with green space where they can afford available foods and the other costs of living.

- *Community gardens would be in the ideal neighborhood to help with food access and affordability (VBMS)*
- *Should have more [farmers] markets... in the area...Markets are cheaper than stores...(SVDP)*
- *Would be a nice clean neighborhood, people would be more active and outside more (RGFP)*

To improve food access, they see a need for businesses and organizations to support locating food stores in the area. They also see community members and groups working together and building resources to support community gardening.

- *Lack of available [food] stores –not many options within walking distance (JAMS)*
- *The city working more with communities. City Council and the mayor coming together (RGFP)*
- *Finances from the government to produce dairy, vegetables, etc. (SVDP)*
- *The community to help each other learn how to grow things (VBMS)*
- *The people here are a really good team for helping (SVDP)*

To improve economic security, community members see a need to address poverty, homelessness, drug addiction, crime, and safety. Community members see a need to improve the affordability of food and other costs of living. They can imagine working with community centers, places of faith, volunteers, healthcare providers, and others to make this happen. Indeed, they see many of these groups already engaging in some activities to help out.

- *Better income to afford food (RGFP)*
- *A lot of homelessness in the area (JAMS)*
- *Drug addiction is a big issue – people don't know where to go for the help (TGRC)*
- *Safety is a big issue for the community – how can community relationships improve to protect all the members of the community? (TGRC)*
- *The hardest thing is having your bags stolen while you're walking home (JAMS)*
- *If there can be [other kinds of] help—to pay rent and bills (RGFP)*
- *More food, medicine, and education (RGFP)*
- *Help with shoes, clothes, and toys for children would be really helpful (RGFP)*
- *South Valley is county rather than a part of the city - can't vote for mayor of Albuquerque, but those decisions affect the community...Political jurisdictions - paying the same taxes but not having the same resources and access as the city (SVDP)*

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- *Politicians - the governor should see what's going on in the neighborhoods...Where is the tax money going? (VBMS)*
- *Getting together with police to discuss issues, interactions with police to make things safer (RGFP)*

South Valley	JAMS - John Adams Middle School RGFP - Rio Grande Food Project SVDP - SVDP Holy Family
International District	TGRC - Transgender Resource Center of NM VBMS - Van Buren Middle School

Findings in Context

Money is one of the biggest sources of stress for many people. A study by MIT says that it would take \$39.36 per hour, or about \$83,000 per year, for one adult and two children to be able to afford all of the usual costs of living in Bernalillo County, New Mexico.

The cost to live in the U.S. has gone up steadily for decades. Food, transportation, childcare, healthcare, housing, and utilities are all more expensive, but the amount we are able to buy with our wages has barely changed in forty years. Policies can influence economic trends. A recent report showed that CEO pay has skyrocketed 1,322% since 1978 and CEOs were paid 351 times as much as the typical worker in 2020.

If people have more physical access to food but less money to purchase food, they will still have food insecurity. To have long-term food security, we also need efforts to improve economic security to support housing, employment, education, and healthcare.

Racial differences in economic opportunity are often a result of “systemic barriers to wealth accumulation, wage gaps, and numerous biases in hiring practices based on racial identity alone.” Racial gaps in economic security also affect food security. Many studies show that the main barrier to accessing healthy food is cost. Low-income communities and communities of color do not have a wide variety of available grocery stores with affordable prices and variety of food. For some low-income communities, the nearest grocery store can be more than 20 miles away. Without grocery stores nearby, people may get their food at fast-food restaurants and gas stations. These places do not have varieties of produce and other healthy food that is part of a balanced diet. When there is a racial gap in economic security and neighborhood resources, that can have a domino effect. It can lead to racial gaps in food options that then lead to racial gaps in health outcomes. In Bernalillo County, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino populations all have higher rates of diabetes than White populations. These populations of color also report that they are unable to get needed medical care due to cost at higher rates than White populations.

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Recommendations

The following is a list of key recommendations Roadrunner and other partners could consider to take action in addressing hunger in the International District and South Valley neighborhoods of Albuquerque.

What can we do to support food security at the community level?

- Support a coalition approach to increase access to community gardening resources.

Examples include:

- [International District Urban Agriculture Plan through Bernalillo County](#)
- [Sembrando Salud](#) through the Center of Southwest Culture, Inc

What can we do to support food security through work with businesses, government, and elected officials?

- Make sure city, county, and state-level officials are engaged in addressing community food security and economic security needs and their contributions are visible to community members
- Support local legislators to work together with businesses to incentivize and potentially subsidize food stores being located in neighborhoods with low food access. For example:
 - [Lessons learned from Pennsylvania and Maryland on how to incentivize fresh food retail in neighborhoods with low food access](#)
 - [Ideas on how to promote local government's role in food security](#)
 - Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham's [Food, Farm, and Hunger Initiative](#)

What can we do to support food security by improving economic security and quality of life?

- Support coalition-building across groups addressing crime, safety, health, education, senior supports, refugee needs, places of faith, and food pantries to work on common efforts to build economic security
- Consider having the coalition support tools that could benefit all different types of economic needs, such as [Universal Basic Income](#). This tool has been [proven to have a positive impact on food security](#) in many different studies and in different populations.
- This concept could expand on programs that are already in effect, such as the [Guaranteed Basic Income program for undocumented or mixed-status immigrant families](#) being piloted by the New Mexico Economic Relief Working Group.

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Recommendations (continued)

What can food banks and food pantries do to improve what they are already doing?

- Engage with all food banks & pantries in the area to make sure there is shared awareness and support of activities, planning, and resources
- Tailor resources to support specific populations in need, such as those who are unhoused, those with nutrition-related chronic health conditions, and immigrant and refugee groups.

What are some overall recommendations to consider?

- There is no food security without economic security. Combine short-term food access efforts with long-term economic security efforts. This can help make sure you have sustainable outcomes over time.
- Spend time thinking about how you explain the need for economic security efforts. Explore the different [narratives](#) that people in the U.S. use to talk about poverty. Decide which one explains your approach to addressing economic security. This can help you clarify messaging and long-term goals.
- Understand [how policies play a part in racial wealth imbalances](#) and different economic opportunities for different racial groups. Make sure efforts to improve economic security take this context into account.
- Changes in policy and the built environment will have the biggest impact, so prioritize efforts in these areas, while also supporting local community efforts

This report was authored by Apex Evaluation in collaboration with Roadrunner® Food Bank of New Mexico. For more community findings, recommendations, and references, please see the full report [here](#).