



Hunger in America 2014

Executive Summary for Roadrunner Food Bank



A Report on Charitable Food Distribution in New Mexico in 2013

Glossary

AGENCY

A charitable social-service organization that operates a program(s) that provides food and grocery items supplied by a food bank directly to clients in need.

CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE

A private social safety net system in which food and grocery items are provided to people in need through charitable feeding programs, such as pantries, shelters, and meal programs.

CLIENT

An individual or a household member who receives food from Roadrunner Food Bank. Clients are counted differently depending on whether they visit meal or grocery programs. At meal programs, only individuals present are counted as clients since they typically consume the meal on-site. At grocery programs, all members of the household are counted as clients since they will likely benefit from the food received at the program.

DUPLICATED CLIENTS

The number of times clients are reached through food distributions, from Roadrunner Food Bank, during a given period of time.

FOOD BANK

A non-profit organization that solicits, receives, inventories and distributes donated food and grocery products pursuant to industry and appropriate regulatory standards. Food banks distribute donated food to charitable social service agencies, which provide the products directly to clients through various programs. Some food banks also distribute food directly to clients in need.

FOOD PROGRAM

A specific service operated by a charitable agency that distributes food. For *Hunger in America 2014*, food programs are classified as either meal or grocery programs. Many food banks and agencies also operate non-food programs to assist clients with other needs.

FOOD SECURITY & FOOD INSECURITY

As defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), food security is the household-level economic and social condition of reliable access to adequate food

for an active, healthy life for all household members. A household is food insecure if, in the previous year, they experienced limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate foods.

GROCERY PROGRAM

A program that distributes non-prepared food and grocery items for off-site use, usually for preparation in the client's home. Grocery programs include all types of food pantries, home-delivered grocery programs, mobile pantries, BackPack Programs, and community gardens.

MEAL PROGRAM

A program that provides prepared meals or snacks to clients at the program site or in their homes. Meal programs include all congregate meal programs, as well as (soup) kitchens, shelters, group homes, rehabilitation programs, transitional housing programs, and community kitchens.

NON-FOOD PROGRAM

A program that serves a purpose other than food distribution to help clients access other resources, such as clothing or furniture donations, legal assistance, housing or education assistance, as well as referrals to other community organizations that also offer assistance.

POVERTY/FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL

A household is considered to be living in poverty if the household income, relative to the number of household members, falls below an amount annually established by the federal government. During the survey period for *Hunger in America 2014*, the federal poverty level was \$23,550 for a family of four. Income as a percentage of the federal poverty level is used to determine eligibility for federal nutrition programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

SNAP

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, is the largest of the federal nutrition programs and provides eligible recipients with financial resources to buy groceries.

UNDUPLICATED CLIENTS

The number of unique individuals who receive food assistance from Roadrunner Food Bank during a given period of time.

About Feeding America

Feeding America is a nationwide network of 200 member food banks that serve all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. As the largest domestic hunger-relief charity in the United States, the Feeding America network of food banks provides food assistance to an estimated 46.5 million Americans in need each year, including 12 million children and 7 million seniors.

The Feeding America national office supports member food banks across the country by securing food and funds for the food banks; by building partnerships that benefit the network nationally and also provide support

for food bank programs; supporting programs that help improve food security among the people and communities served; and by raising awareness about the problem of hunger and advocating on behalf of food insecure Americans.

In turn, the food banks distribute donated food to community-based hunger-relief agencies across the country and help support feeding programs such as food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, senior centers, and mobile programs that directly serve people in need.

About Roadrunner Food Bank

Roadrunner® Food Bank, a Feeding America member, is the largest nonprofit dedicated to solving hunger in New Mexico and operates locations in Albuquerque and Las Cruces. Last year, the Food Bank distributed more than 28 million pounds of food through its own programs, a statewide network of partner agencies and regional food banks, helping 70,000 children, seniors and adults weekly. Roadrunner Food Bank kept 22 million pounds of food out of landfills last year through its Food Rescue Program.

ROADRUNNER FOOD BANK SERVES
7 0 , 0 0 0
PEOPLE EACH WEEK

About the *Hunger in America* Series

Hunger in America is a series of quadrennial studies conducted by Feeding America and its member food banks that provides comprehensive demographic profiles of people seeking food assistance through the charitable sector and in-depth analyses of partner agencies that provide food assistance.

Hunger in America is the largest study of its kind. The data collected help guide the development of programs and solutions that improve food security for individuals and their households and inform public awareness and

policy development for addressing hunger in the United States.

Nationally, *Hunger in America 2014* is the sixth and most comprehensive study in the *Hunger in America* series. Locally, through interviews with 659 clients and surveys from 377 eligible partner agencies, there is a more comprehensive understanding of the people served by Roadrunner Food Bank, the personal and economic circumstances of their households, and the response of our partner agencies that provide assistance to those in need.



Methodology

Rich data from two widely distributed surveys comprise the basis for the *Hunger in America 2014* results. For the first time in this study's history, almost all data were collected through electronic surveys. The surveys were conducted in two sequential stages: first, partner agencies completed the Agency Survey; then, clients at select agencies' food programs completed the Client Survey.

The Agency Survey was fielded from October 2012 to January 2013 and contained detailed questions about agencies' services, capacity, and food distribution, including a specific set of additional questions regarding the individual food programs operated by the partner agency.

The Client Survey, fielded from April through August 2013, was implemented through a vast force of data collectors, many of whom were volunteers. In lieu of face-to-face interviews used in years past, *Hunger in America 2014* utilized touchscreen tablet computers and a proven computer software program that allows respondents to simultaneously read and have survey questions read to them through private headphones, maximizing confidentiality. Data collectors followed a prescribed study plan in order to select a random sample of clients at 98 meal and grocery programs across the Roadrunner

Food Bank service area. More than 650 clients responded to questions about themselves, their households, and the circumstances that led them to seek assistance from the charitable food network.

Subsequent to the Agency and Client Surveys, the research vendor, Westat, analyzed the data collected and, together with the Urban Institute, produced the national and local reports, including for Roadrunner Food Bank, in the spring and summer of 2014. Following the initial data computations and release of reports, a subsequent analysis was performed for Roadrunner Food Bank in order to remove outlier weights and increase the statistical precision of estimates. This expert analysis was undertaken by the Feeding America Technical Advisory Group.

While this subsequent analysis greatly improved the precision of the estimates, there are still limitations within this study. One of the most important limitations to note is that programs serving children exclusively, such as BackPack and Afterschool Snack, are notably underrepresented due to the inability to survey minors. Consequently, this report's estimate of the number of children served by Roadrunner Food Bank is likely lower than the true number of children reached.

ROADRUNNER FOOD BANK PARTNERS WITH 515 LOCAL AGENCIES



515 AGENCIES

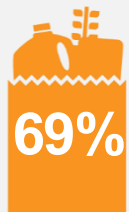
PARTNERED WITH ROADRUNNER FOOD BANK REACH CLIENTS IN NEED THROUGH **681 FOOD PROGRAMS**



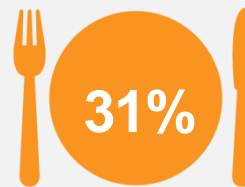
48% RELY ENTIRELY ON VOLUNTEERS



57% ARE FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS



PROVIDE GROCERIES

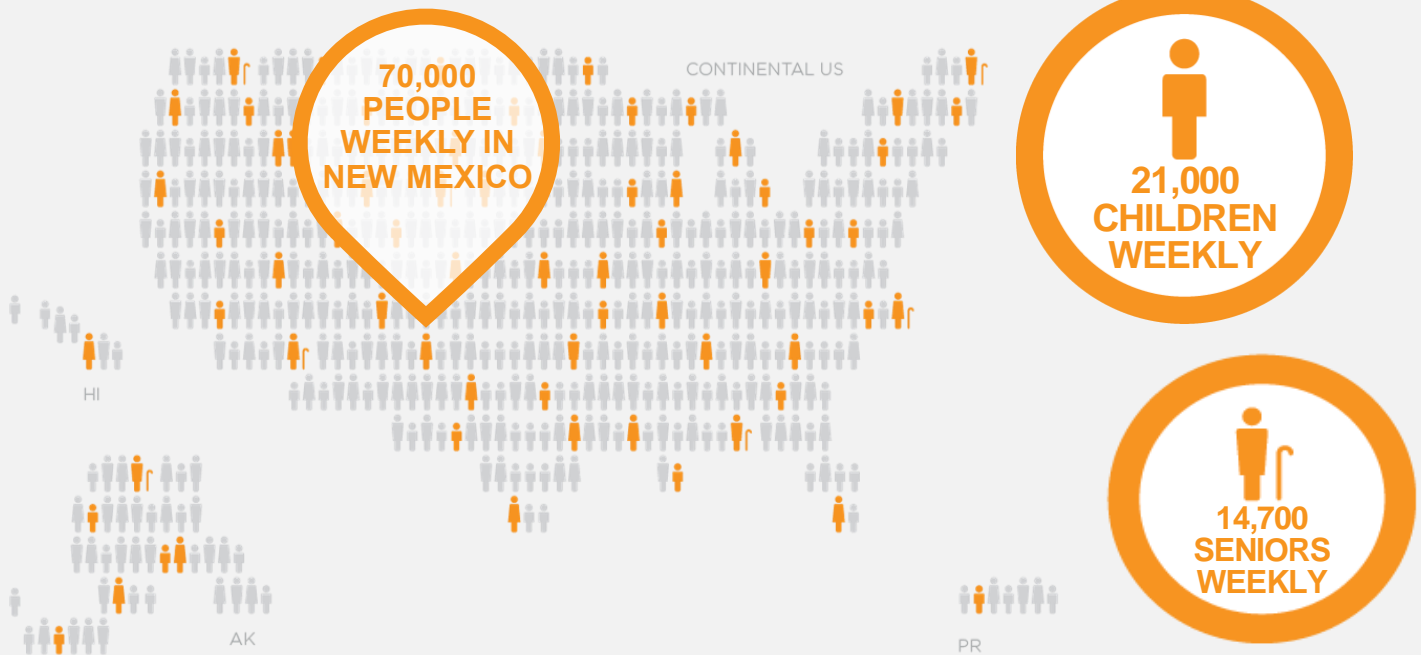


SERVE MEALS

ROADRUNNER FOOD BANK **SERVES 70,000 PEOPLE WEEKLY**



1 IN 5 PEOPLE LIVING IN NEW MEXICO





How Roadrunner Food Bank's Agencies Serve Clients

Roadrunner Food Bank distributes food to more than 500 partner agencies in order to reach clients at risk of hunger.

Partner agencies act as the mechanism for the distribution of food directly to clients through food programs that provide either meals or groceries. Some partner agencies also operate non-food programs with a primary focus on other types of assistance, such as nutrition education, food-related benefits outreach, clothing assistance, or job training. An estimated 57 percent of partner agencies identify as faith-based, while the balance are not faith-based.

Agencies and Food Programs

Partner agencies reach individuals and families in need through various types of food programs.

For the purposes of *Hunger in America 2014*, charitable food programs are categorized into meal programs and grocery programs. Meal programs provide prepared meals or snacks on site or in the client's home to clients who may or may not reside on the agency's premises. Grocery programs distribute non-prepared foods, grocery items and other household supplies for off-site use, usually for preparation in the client's home.

Many meal and grocery programs provide support to individuals of all ages, while others may specifically serve children or seniors. Of the 681 food programs operated by partner agencies of Roadrunner Food Bank, 69 percent are grocery programs, such as food pantries, mobile pantries, and child and senior specific distributions. The remaining 31 percent of food programs fall under the meal program category. Meal programs include (soup) kitchens, Afterschool Snack, and shelters.

In addition to distributing food through its partner agencies, Roadrunner Food Bank also distributes food directly through its own programs, such as 49 childhood hunger sites and over 100 Mobile Food Pantry programs. Overall, Roadrunner Food Bank and its 515 partner agencies operate 681 food programs and 438 non-food and food-related benefit programs across New Mexico.

An estimated 48 percent of partner agencies report having no paid staff. Among the 52 percent of agencies with paid staff, the median number of paid full-time equivalent staff members reported is 4, or the equivalent of 160 staff hours per week. As a result, partner agencies often rely heavily on the efforts of volunteers to operate and support their food programs. Volunteers span all age groups from adults (57%) to seniors (36%) and even children (7%). An estimated 46 percent of programs affiliated with Roadrunner Food Bank report some degree of difficulty recruiting volunteers. However, 65 percent of programs report no difficulties in retaining existing volunteers.



Partner agencies receive funding from a variety of sources, such as local, state, and federal governments; individual contributions; corporate support; and donations. Nevertheless, some agencies have experienced recent cutbacks due to having limited

resources. More than one in four (27%) partner agencies reports making reductions in the year prior to the survey. Specifically, 16 percent of agencies cut their hours of operation, 8 percent laid off staff, and 13 percent had to limit their service area.

Outreach and Other Non-Food Services

Many agencies provide services related to SNAP and many offer services to help clients with non-food needs.

In addition to operating food programs, many agencies partnered with Roadrunner Food Bank also operate programs beyond food distribution, including programs that conduct outreach to assist clients with accessing federal nutrition assistance. These agencies play an important role in helping clients access federal benefits that can increase their food resources, particularly the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which currently helps provide cash benefits to purchase food to 47.6 million people nationwide.¹

An estimated 30 percent of partner agencies provide some form of assistance connecting clients to SNAP benefits, such as screening clients for eligibility, engaging in outreach activities to educate clients about the program, or helping clients recertify for the program to maintain benefits they already receive. In addition, 26 percent provide information about or assistance in accessing benefits through the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides assistance to pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children up to age five.



**30% OF AGENCIES
OFFER ASSISTANCE
WITH SNAP**

In addition to federal program assistance, partner agencies also operate 421 non-food programs to provide other critical non-food goods and services to those in need. The non-food programs offered by agencies include clothing, furniture, or housing assistance, utility and heat assistance, health clinics, job training, financial assistance, and general information and referrals to other services. In addition to the core services of food distribution provided through the Roadrunner Food Bank network, the wide array of non-food services helps clients address the other economic and social hardships they may face.

¹ "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation and Costs: Fiscal Year 2013," U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, last modified July 11, 2014.

WEEKLY CLIENTS

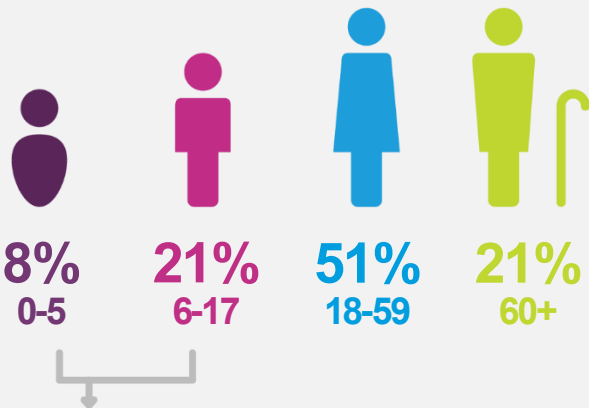


681 FOOD PROGRAMS REACH 70,000 CLIENTS



EVERY WEEK

CLIENT AGE



HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY



 87% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN ARE FOOD INSECURE

HOUSEHOLD COPING STRATEGIES

 75% OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORT PURCHASING INEXPENSIVE, UNHEALTHY FOOD TO FEED THEIR FAMILY

 78% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN REPORT USING THIS COPING STRATEGY

HOUSEHOLD MILITARY SERVICE



**ONE IN FOUR ROADRUNNER
FOOD BANK HOUSEHOLDS
HAVE A MEMBER WHO HAS
SERVED IN THE US MILITARY**

HOUSEHOLD SPENDING TRADEOFFS

61% HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
FOOD AND UTILITIES

59% HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
FOOD AND MEDICAL CARE

30% HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN
FOOD AND EDUCATION

EDUCATION

**20% OF HOUSEHOLDS
HAVE A MEMBER WITH A POST
HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION**

**1 IN 13
ADULTS IS A
STUDENT**

HOUSEHOLD HEALTH



50%

OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE
A MEMBER WITH
HIGH BLOOD
PRESSURE



33%

OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE
A MEMBER WITH
DIABETES



AND AMONG HOUSEHOLDS WITH SENIORS
**RATES ARE
HIGHER**



73%

46%



The People Served By Roadrunner Food Bank

Households served by Roadrunner Food Bank represent a variety of sizes and compositions, races and ethnicities, ages, and languages spoken. In addition to their diverse characteristics, clients also face a wide array of obstacles to food security, such as poor health status, housing instability, unemployment and insufficient income.

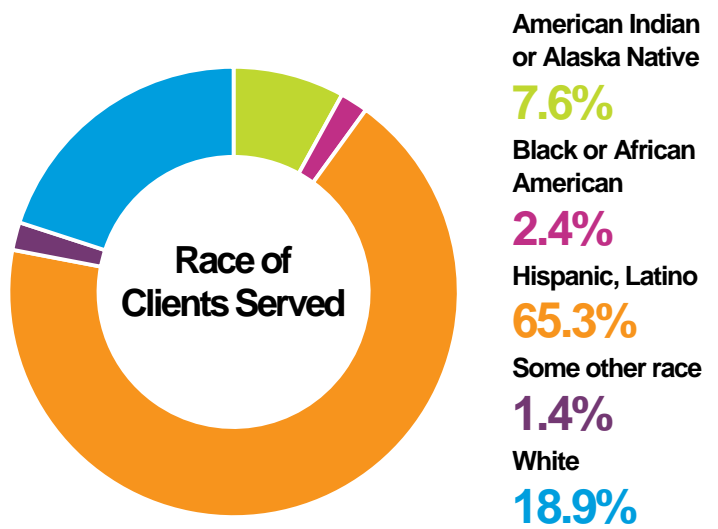
Demographics

Roadrunner Food Bank client households are diverse in size, age, and race, with many containing vulnerable household members such as children and seniors.

Nearly 33 percent of Roadrunner Food Bank client households include at least one child, a rate on par with than the general population (32%).² Overall, Roadrunner Food Bank serves an estimated 14,700 seniors age 60 or older and 21,000 children each week, although the actual number of children served is underrepresented in this estimate because client-level surveys cannot be collected at child-only programs.

Children and seniors are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of food insecurity. For children, inadequate nutrition is associated with adverse effects in school that have other, long-term consequences.³ Additionally, seniors living in food insecure households are often missing out on nutrients that are critical to the unique conditions related to aging.⁴

Among all Roadrunner Food Bank clients, 19 percent identify as white, 2 percent as African American, and 65 percent as Latino. An additional 8 percent of clients identify as American Indian or Native American while the remainder did not identify as a specific race.



Language barriers may present challenges to some clients facing hunger. For 82 percent of Roadrunner Food Bank client households, the primary language spoken by adults at home is English, although many clients indicated that their household speaks more than one primary language. More than one in three (36%) client households uses Spanish as a primary language spoken by adults. However, since the Client Survey was only offered to respondents in five languages (English, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, and Vietnamese), these are likely underestimates of the primary languages spoken by adults at home.

² "America's Families and Living Arrangements," 2013 Current Population Survey (CPS), U.S. Census Bureau.

³ J.M. Murphy, et al. "Relationship Between Hunger and Psychosocial Functioning in Low-Income American Children," *Journal of American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 37, no. 2 (1998): 163-170.

⁴ "Spotlight on Senior Health," *Feeding America and the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger*, 2014.

Health

The client population served by Roadrunner Food Bank faces significant health challenges, including diabetes and high blood pressure.

Nearly half (46%) of all survey respondents report having fair or poor health. In addition, 25 percent of households report that at least one member of their household other than the respondent is in poor health. Households who are facing both poor health and food insecurity must overcome multiple challenges, including maintaining a good diet to manage disease.

For the first time, *Hunger in America 2014* included questions about diet-related diseases. Illnesses like high blood pressure and diabetes are prevalent among households served by Roadrunner Food Bank. In one-third of client households (33%), at least one member has diabetes. Half of client households (50%) report at least one member has high blood pressure. Among households with seniors, the rates of diabetes (46%) and high blood pressure (73%) are notably higher.

These health conditions likely increase household expenses related to medical care, especially for individuals without health insurance.

In general, health challenges create additional financial strains, especially for households with already limited budgets or that lack access to sufficient medical coverage. Thirty-one percent of client households report that no members of the household have health insurance, including Medicaid or Medicare; however, it is important to note that data collection was completed before the full implementation of the Affordable Care Act and thus, client coverage may have improved.

Even with insurance, medical debt can accumulate due to deductibles and uncovered services. An estimated 44 percent of client households report having unpaid medical bills. Budget constraints related to healthcare are further revealed in the spending tradeoffs reported by client households. More than half (59%) of households report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care in the past year, with 19 percent reporting facing this tradeoff every month.



33%
OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE
A MEMBER WITH
DIABETES



50%
OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE
A MEMBER WITH
**HIGH BLOOD
PRESSURE**

Housing

Most Roadrunner Food Bank client households reside in stable housing, but many clients have experienced recent housing transitions.

The overwhelming majority (89%) of client households reside in non-temporary housing, meaning that housing is either stable or has the potential to be a long-term living situation. Clients most commonly live in houses/townhouses (43%) or apartments (23%). Thirty-three percent of households living in non-temporary housing own their residence either outright or with a mortgage, while 52 percent rent or lease their home.

The remaining 11 percent of client households report living in temporary housing or housing that is not intended to be a long-term residence, such as a shelter, motel, car, or on the street.

Respondents also report recent housing transitions, indicating some level of instability in their living situations regardless of their type of residence.

Employment

Roadrunner Food Bank client households struggle to secure adequate employment.

Employment status is a critical factor affecting client households' income and, thus, access to food. More than half (53%) of client households report that at least one household member has been employed in the past year. This rate is even higher for households with children (70%) and notably lower for households with seniors (30%).

Sixty-two percent of employed households report that the longest-employed person, meaning the person that has worked the greatest number of months in the past year, typically worked part-time, suggesting limitations in the household's earning potential.

1 IN 7 

**RESPONDENTS HAS EXPERIENCED
A FORECLOSURE OR EVICTION
IN THE PAST 5 YEARS**

More than a quarter (27%) of respondents has lived in two or more places in the past year. One in 7 (14%) respondents has experienced an eviction or foreclosure in the past five years. Some types of housing transitions may reflect clients' strategies for making ends meet. For example, 23 percent of respondents began living with another person or family in the past year.

**53% OF HOUSEHOLDS
WERE EMPLOYED
IN THE PAST YEAR**

For many households, securing and maintaining employment can be challenging and require a significant amount of time. Factors such as age and health status also can directly impact a household member's ability to seek employment. Forty-seven percent of client households have no member employed, which includes client households where at least one member is unemployed and has sought work in the past four weeks (21%) as well as households where at least one member is out of the workforce due to a disability, poor health, or retirement.

Education

Many Roadrunner Food Bank clients are educated beyond high school while some adult clients are currently enrolled in school.

Twenty-nine percent of households have at least one adult member with education beyond high school. This includes individuals with a business, trade, or technical license or certificate, those that have attended college, as well as those with two or four-year college degrees. Looking at all adult clients, 20 percent have an educational level beyond high school. While 49 percent of adult clients have earned at least a high school diploma or equivalent, many have also attended or graduated from college (16%).

In addition to past educational attainment, many adult clients are working towards future educational goals. Among adult clients, 8 percent are currently students.

Juggling competing responsibilities, including school, household budget management, and food security, can be challenging. Thirty percent of households report having to choose between paying for food and paying for education for a child and/or an adult each year.

1 IN 13 ADULTS IS A STUDENT
5% ARE FULL-TIME & 3% ARE PART-TIME



Income and Poverty

Roadrunner Food Bank clients subsist on lower incomes, with a majority reporting that they live below the poverty line.

A larger household size may increase household expenditures, which can be difficult to manage if some household members are not in the workforce such as children or retirees. More than one in three (36%) client households have only one member, while 35 percent have two to three members, and 29 percent have four or more members.

A majority (83%) of client households are living in poverty with annual household incomes at or below the federal poverty level. In 2013, the year in which the data were collected, the federal poverty guideline for a family of two was \$15,510 while the guideline for a family of four was \$23,550.⁵

83% OF HOUSEHOLDS LIVE IN POVERTY

The federal poverty guidelines are used to determine income eligibility for federal assistance programs such as SNAP and WIC. Although eligibility for federal nutrition assistance programs is contingent on a variety of criteria,

including household size, assets, and citizenship status, household income can be an indicator of a household's potential eligibility for these safety net programs.

The majority of client households (88%) fall at or below 130 percent of the poverty guideline, which is the federal income threshold for SNAP eligibility. An additional 9 percent of households fall between 131 and 185 percent of the poverty guidelines. Although these households may not be eligible for SNAP, they may be eligible for WIC or reduced price meals through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).

Lastly, 3 percent of households report incomes above 185 percent of the poverty guideline, and thus are likely ineligible for any federal assistance, leaving the charitable sector as one of the few sources of food assistance they can receive. It is critical to also note that client households who may appear income-eligible for federal assistance, may have assets or other extenuating circumstances that preclude them from being eligible.

⁵ "2013 Poverty Guidelines," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Military Service

One in four households has at least one member that has served in the U.S. military.

For the first time, *Hunger in America 2014* respondents were asked about U.S. military service among members of their household. More than one in four (26%) client households reports that at least one member has ever served in the U.S. military.



26% OF ROADRUNNER FOOD BANK HOUSEHOLDS HAVE A MEMBER WHO HAS SERVED IN THE UNITED STATES MILITARY



Client Food Insecurity and Coping Strategies

Food Insecurity

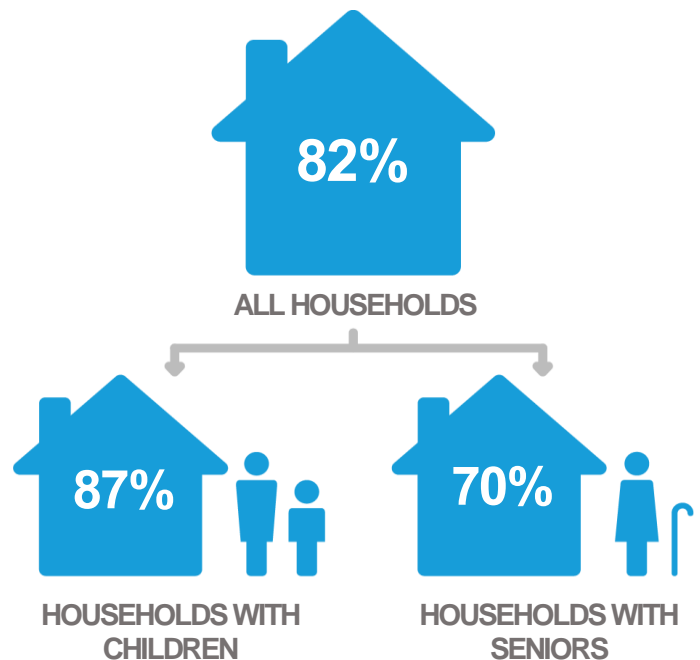
A large majority of Roadrunner Food Bank households are food insecure.

Food security refers to the household-level economic and social condition of reliable access to an adequate amount of food for an active, healthy life for all household members. Using the USDA Economic Research Service's validated six-item Core Food Security Module, *Hunger in America 2014* reveals that 82 percent of Roadrunner Food Bank client households are food insecure, meaning that they were without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food at some point during the past year. Nationally, according to the USDA, only 14.5 percent of households are food insecure while locally, 18.6 percent of New Mexicans are food insecure, highlighting the heightened need among Roadrunner Food Bank client households.⁶

Children are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of food insecurity because of the association between food insecurity, health, and cognitive development.⁷ Roadrunner Food Bank client households with children face an increased risk of food insecurity, with 87 percent classifying as food insecure.

Households with seniors are only at slightly lower risk of food insecurity than all Roadrunner Food Bank client households, as 70 percent of client households with seniors are food insecure. Seniors can also face unique

barriers to accessing nutritious food, such as decreased mobility, fixed incomes, health issues, or specific dietary needs.



⁶ Alicia Coleman-Jensen, Mark Nord, and Anita Singh, "Household Food Security in the United States in 2012," *U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service*.

⁷ K. Alaimo, C.M. Olsen, and Edward A. Frongillo, "Food Insufficiency and American School Children's Cognitive, Academic, and Psychosocial Development," *Pediatrics* 108, no. 1 (2001): 44-53.

Federal Program Participation

More than half of Roadrunner Food Bank client households report currently receiving SNAP benefits.

Client households may also receive assistance through federal nutrition assistance programs. Chief among these federal nutrition programs is SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. While the SNAP income eligibility ceiling in this state is 165 percent of the poverty guidelines, equivalent to \$38,858 for a family of 4 during the *Hunger in America 2014* survey period, other factors such as a household's overall assets, net income, or restrictions based on household composition are also used to determine eligibility for participation.



One in four client households (25%) reports never having applied for SNAP benefits. Of these households that have never applied for SNAP, an estimated 41 percent indicate not doing so because they did not believe they were eligible. However, analysis of reported household income shows that, among client households currently not participating, 77 percent report incomes that would suggest that they may be eligible to receive SNAP. As such, these results suggest that additional education and outreach on SNAP could benefit many households served by Roadrunner Food Bank.



Hunger in America 2014 also explores client usage of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), which provides supplemental

foods for low-income pregnant and post-partum women and children up to age five to meet their special nutritional needs. Eligibility for WIC is typically restricted to families with incomes at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level. Eight percent of all households report current receipt of WIC benefits. The study does not allow for analysis of WIC receipt among eligible households (households with a child five years old or younger or households with a pregnant woman). Isolating WIC-eligible households would likely show a greater percentage of client households reporting current receipt of WIC benefits.

Key federal nutrition programs targeted at older children include the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). These programs allow low-income children to receive free or reduced-price lunch and breakfast at school. Among households with school-aged children age 5 to 18 served by Roadrunner Food Bank, 88 percent report participating in free or reduced price school lunch. Despite this relatively higher level of participation, only 37 percent of the same households participate in free or reduced price school breakfast. Lower participation in school breakfast may be explained by the fact that not all schools operate the program; nevertheless, the lower participation rates point to opportunities for School Breakfast Program outreach and program promotion.

Together, charitable food assistance and federal nutrition assistance programs weave a nutritional safety net for households in need; however, despite participation in one or both of these modes of assistance, many client households continue to struggle with food insecurity, which can lead to difficult choices, including spending tradeoffs and coping strategies.

Spending Tradeoffs

Client households frequently face difficult decisions about household resource management in an effort to ensure they have sufficient food.

Roadrunner Food Bank client households often survive on limited budgets and are confronted with choices between paying for food and paying for other essentials.

These dilemmas can put households in the position of choosing between competing necessities. A majority of client households report having to choose between paying for food and paying for utilities (61%), transportation (66%), medical care (59%), or housing (48%) at some point during the year.

Among households making these spending tradeoffs, typically one-fourth report doing so every month. Households also make choices between food and educational expenses (30%); however, because not all households contain students, this rate is lower than the other spending tradeoffs that households regularly face.

Notably, many households have incorporated charitable food assistance into their monthly food budgets to help

cope with the need to make tradeoffs between accessing food and other everyday essentials.

An estimated 68 percent of households plan to acquire food at meal or grocery programs on a regular basis to help with their monthly food budget. This suggests that these households may be depending upon charitable programs to assist in managing their food needs. For such households, charitable food assistance is not just a safety net; it allows clients to address core food expenses so that limited income can be allocated elsewhere in the household budget to address other basic necessities such as rent and utilities.

Conversely, 32 percent of households report waiting to come to a food program until after food has run out, introducing the possibility of experiencing negative health and nutrition ramifications if immediate dietary needs are not met.

HOUSEHOLD SPENDING TRADEOFFS IN THE PAST YEAR



Coping Strategies

Client households employ a variety of unique mechanisms in efforts to secure sufficient food for all members of the household.

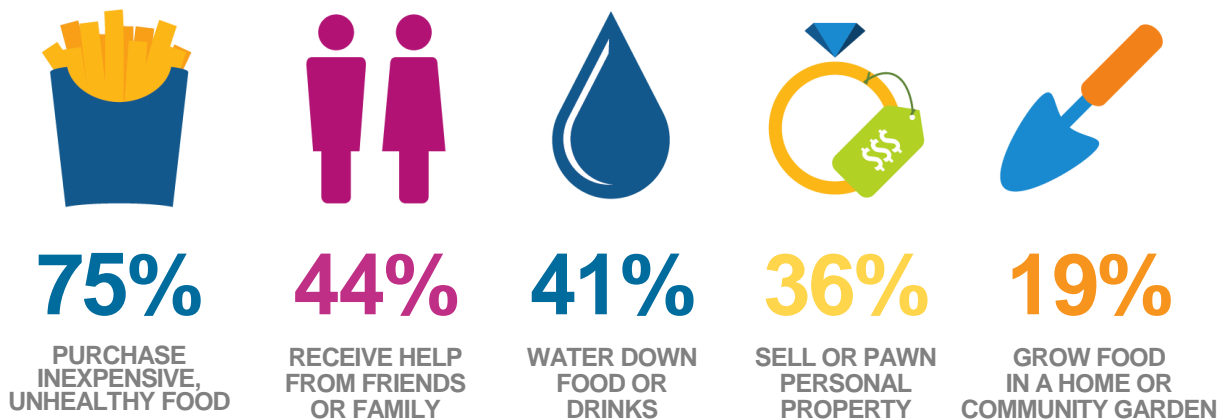
In addition to using federal and charitable nutrition assistance programs and making spending tradeoffs, many households also engage in a number of other coping strategies in order to feed their families.

Many households (75%) report purchasing the cheapest food available, even if they knew it was not the healthiest option. Unfortunately, this strategy has known risks for negative health outcomes. For example, filling foods with low nutritional value but higher fat, sodium, and sugar content can contribute to obesity, heart disease, diabetes, low energy levels, and poor nutrition.⁸ For this reason, the food bank network increasingly works to provide clients with access to healthier food, such as fresh produce, lean proteins and dairy, and whole grains. Nationally, more than three-quarters of the food distributed by the food bank network classifies as these healthier “foods to encourage.”

Client households also report engaging in other coping strategies in an effort to secure enough food, such as purchasing food in dented or damaged packages (44%) and watering down food or drinks (41%). Nearly half of client households (44%) receive help from family and friends as a strategy to get enough food. Furthermore, more than one in three households (36%) reports having sold personal property in order to obtain enough food for their household. Growing food in a home or community garden is another coping strategy employed by households to secure enough food, with 19 percent reporting doing so in the past year.

The array of spending tradeoffs and coping strategies exercised by clients highlights the elevated level of need in the Roadrunner Food Bank service area. These strategies and choices also signal the need for both a strong system of charitable food assistance and effective federal nutrition assistance policies that combat the problem of hunger.

HALF OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED USING 3 OR MORE COPING STRATEGIES IN THE PAST YEAR



⁸ W.P. James, M. Nelson, A. Ralph, and S. Leather, “Socioeconomic Determinants of Health. The Contribution of Nutrition to Inequalities in Health,” *BMJ* 314, no. 7093 (1997): 1545-1549.

Implications

Hunger in America 2014 illustrates that addressing food insecurity in New Mexico will take the collaborative efforts and services of multiple sectors in the community.

Roadrunner Food Bank partner agencies regularly report that they are observing a high demand for charitable food assistance. Collecting data for *Hunger in America 2014* allows the food bank to quantify the breadth and intensity of this need. The results of this research illustrate that receiving support from hunger-relief charities is a growing and crucial component of the coping strategies that individuals in need turn to in order to secure food for themselves and their families.

The data also suggest that the recovery from the Great Recession in 2008 and 2009 has been slow to reach people in the direst economic circumstances. Although many clients who visit programs partnered with Roadrunner Food Bank are working towards an education and/or searching for work if they are not already employed, they still experience challenges with food security, underemployment, limited income, and

poor health. Roadrunner Food Bank clients often survive on limited budgets and are confronted with choices between paying for food and paying for other essentials like rent or medicine. These dilemmas can put households in the position of choosing between competing necessities and, thus, many clients are relying on federal nutrition programs, as well as routinely turning to Roadrunner Food Bank, in order to meet their nutrition and food budget needs.

Hunger in America 2014 captures information about the scope of services that Roadrunner Food Bank provides to clients facing hunger, as well as the challenges, barriers, and coping methods that these clients experience. The data illuminate the importance of a strong network of partner agencies and programs, coupled with federal policies and programs that support efforts to fight hunger.

What Can I Do?

Roadrunner Food Bank depends on the generosity and support of our community to provide charitable food relief to tens of thousands of individuals in need each week. You can help us feed hungry people by getting involved. If you are interested here are some easy ways to help. If you have other ideas about how to help, please contact Sonya Warwick at 505-349-8682.

Donate

For every \$1 contributed by supporters, we are able to distribute 5 meals. Join our monthly giving society, the Roadrunner Club. Your monthly support allows us to plan ahead and bring more services to communities and hungry people all across the state. Make a gift on our website at www.rafb.org. Donations of food are welcome too! Visit this link for a list of year-round drop off locations in Albuquerque and Las Cruces – www.rafb.org/dropoff

Volunteer

Every day, volunteers are needed to help us prep food for distribution. Spending just a few hours with us a few times a year ensures 70,000 hungry people have food on their tables every week. Individuals, groups, schools and

businesses are all invited to volunteer. We can accommodate just one or two people at a time or up to 50 during a two-hour shift. To volunteer, register for a shift at www.rafb.org/volunteer or call 505.349.8837.

Advocate

Along with our national organization Feeding America, it is important we educate elected officials about the impact of hunger in our community. You can help by sending an email or writing letters to elected officials about legislation which protect or enhance programs that help people experiencing poverty and hunger. Contact our main line at 505-247-2052 for more information or visit www.rafb.org or www.feedingamerica.org.

Social Media

Follow the Food Bank on various social media sites and participate and share in our online conversations. Visit www.rafb.org and find the links to our social media sites on Facebook, twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and our weekly blog.



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Finally, we sincerely thank each of the clients who graciously agreed to share their stories with us through participation in the Client Survey.

For more information about Roadrunner Food Bank, please visit www.rafb.org. For a more detailed technical explanation of the study, please see the Technical Volume of the National Report, which is available at www.feedingamerica.org/hungerinamerica