



## **April 2022 Community Meeting Results**

Food insecurity is limited or uncertain access to adequate food. There are at least 9,108 senior citizens in the Texas Panhandle who are food insecure. The Mary E. Bivins Foundation hosted community meetings in April of 2022 in Borger, Childress, Clarendon, Dalhart, Hereford, and Perryton. The purpose of the meetings was to (1) share some of the work that the Bivins Foundation has been doing the past few years regarding food insecurity in older adults and (2) gain a better understanding of the challenges that are faced by organizations and individuals working to address the issue. There were 30 unique participants that represented community organizations that provided a feeding service to older adults. Most of the organizations represented had a food pantry, congregate meal, or home delivered meal service.

### **-What does food insecurity for older adults in the community look like?**

“It [food insecurity] is a complicated problem and there are different groups [of older adults] with different levels of food insecurity.” Most seniors are on a fixed income through social security that has not changed despite the fact that cost of living has increased. Many older adults do not have retirement or other financial savings. Seniors are being forced to decide between purchasing food, paying rent, buying medication, and paying for other costs of living (such as utilities, etc.). Food assistance programs have become a necessity for survival for many older adults.

Groceries are more expensive than ever before and many older adults are not getting a balanced diet because fast food and snacks are more affordable. Foods that are available are not appropriate for many older adult’s dietary needs especially those that have chronic health conditions such as diabetes. Many clients who receive a prepared meal at lunch (either through a congregate setting or home delivered) will eat half for lunch and the rest for supper. Many seniors simply cannot afford food, some cannot physically prepare it, and others live by themselves and cannot or will not cook for one person.

Access to food especially fresh fruits and vegetables, especially in rural areas where there are often no grocery stores, is an issue. Transportation challenges affect food insecurity.



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### **-Why do you think food insecurity for older adults is a problem?**

The main reasons participants think food insecurity for older adults is a problem are:

- Limited income and/or financial resources
- No or extremely limited access to food especially in really rural areas
- Transportation challenges
- Pride and not wanting to ask for help

Other factors mentioned were physical challenges, lack of knowledge of resources, and a lack of family or support system nearby. The lack of ability to individualize meals for medical issues or personal preference was also mentioned.

### **-What do you think is the extent of the problem?**

The general consensus of participants is that we really don't know how many older adults in the community are food insecure. Many think there are more than we know and it is more than it was. Estimates varied from 25% to 60% and everyone agreed that the population of older adults needing food assistance programs is growing. One organization said that the largest growing population served by the food pantry is older adults and once they get on the program they do not get off because of a fixed income.

### **-What do older adults who are food insecure look like (i.e. characteristics)?**

Older adults who are food insecure are hungry and silent. Many have worked hard their entire lives and are prideful so they will not tell anyone they are struggling. You would never know older adults are food insecure by looking at them.

- Some are widows
- Some have spouses in nursing homes they are trying to care for
- Some are retired professionals and some are retired minimum age workers
- Some are able-bodied and some have physical disabilities
- Some are healthy and some have temporary or chronic health issues
- Some have family close by and some do not
- Some are living alone and some are raising grandchildren
- Some have a great support system like a church and some do not



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### **-What factors contribute to the problem of food insecurity for seniors in the community?**

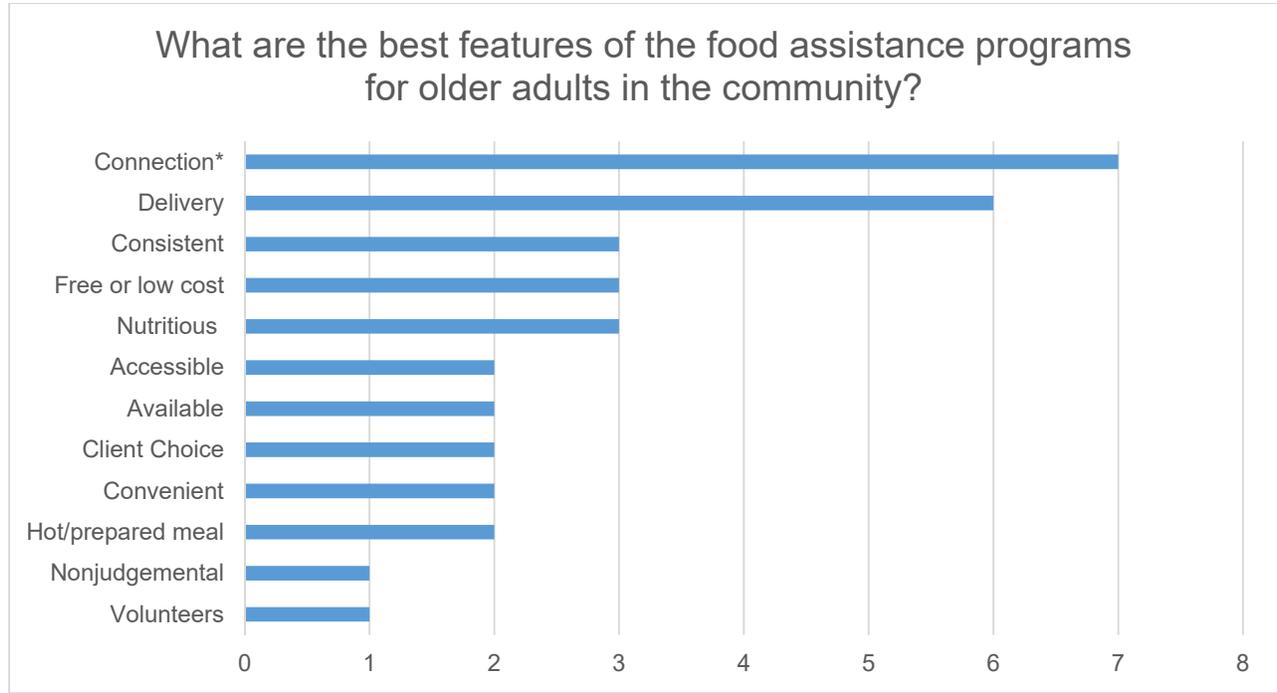
- Lack of money
  - Fixed income does not cover the cost of living especially in light of inflation.
- Lack of reliable transportation.
- Lack of ability care for self due to physical health challenges or mobility issues.
- Lack of family or other support system.
- Lack of food availability in some communities.
- Some mental health issues including some substance abuse.

### **-How do older adults in the community cope with food insecurity?**

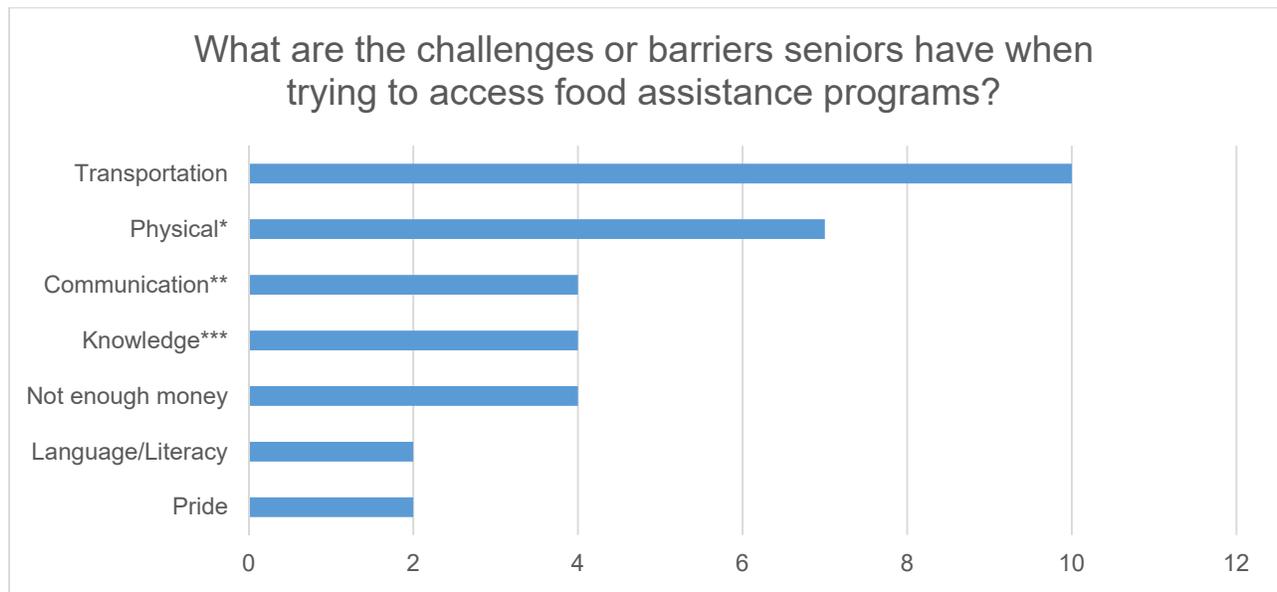
Older adults cope with food insecurity quietly. An older adult who was food insecure stated “I don’t want anyone to know I’m going hungry.” Many older adults who are food insecure train their bodies to eat less and less and many do not eat at all and go hungry. Eventually some reach out to food assistance programs. Food insecurity is mentally taxing. Some older adults are embarrassed by it, stressed and anxious, and it can lead to depression and other mental health issues.

The only policies that affect hunger or food insecurity for older adults in the community that were mentioned were required paperwork; financial requirements; and other eligibility requirements to receive assistance. The salient point was that many older adults do not meet the income requirements for certain assistance programs but do not have enough income to purchase the food needed to be food secure.

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*\*Connection includes the interaction with the older adults, the chance to check on the older adult, and the general socialization that occurs between providers and clients.*



*\*Physical challenges include limited mobility, disabilities, limited strength, and illness*

*\*\*Communication challenges include the fact that society is moving towards electronic communication and older adults are typically not*

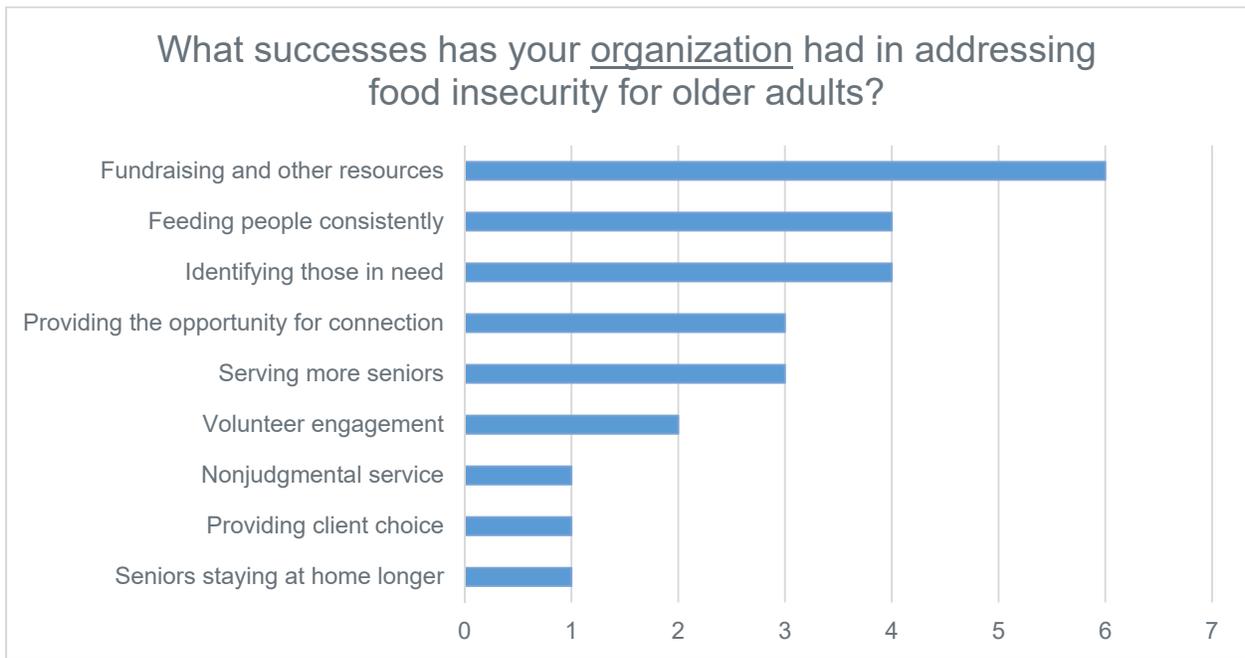
*\*\*\*Knowledge challenges include knowing what is available to whom, where and when to go, and how to access*



## April 2022 Community Meeting Results

### SUCCESSSES

The next questions that were asked were (1) what successes has your organization had in addressing food insecurity for older adults; (2) are those successes the same or different than other organizations in the community; and (3) what successes has the community had in addressing food insecurity for older adults?



In general, the successes were identified as the same as the successes for other organizations in the community except in the case where the organization was the only one providing a specific type of service. Many individuals were not able to answer the question because they are unaware of the successes of the other organizations.

The successes that the community has had in addressing food insecurity revolve around the community support that organizations working in the field have both in terms of donations and volunteers. The fact that there are options available in the community is also considered a success. A couple of communities mentioned the collaborations and partnership between local organizations as a success. The discussion led to the fact that communities need more partnerships and collaboration and more communication to let people in the community know what is available.



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### CHALLENGES

The next questions that were asked were (1) what challenges does your organization have in addressing food insecurity for older adults; (2) are those challenges the same or different than other organizations in the community; and (3) what challenges does the community have in addressing food insecurity for older adults?



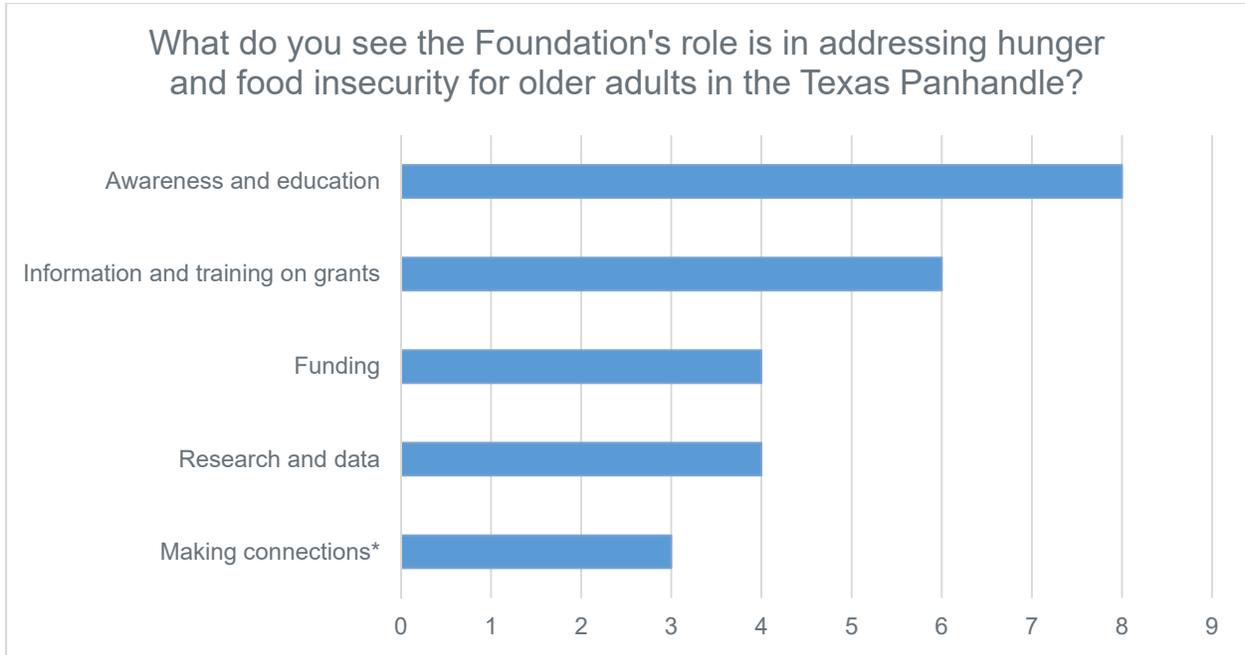
\*Access to specific items included fresh produce, meat/protein, more variety to give clients more choice, and senior specific items such as Ensure.

In general, the challenges for other organizations were considered the same. A couple of individuals did not know. It was pointed out that every community is different and all organizations do not serve the community in the same way.

The challenge that the community has in addressing food insecurity is awareness and knowledge. “Lack of knowledge both from a problem and resource perspective.” There is also no or limited access to food programs in very rural communities.



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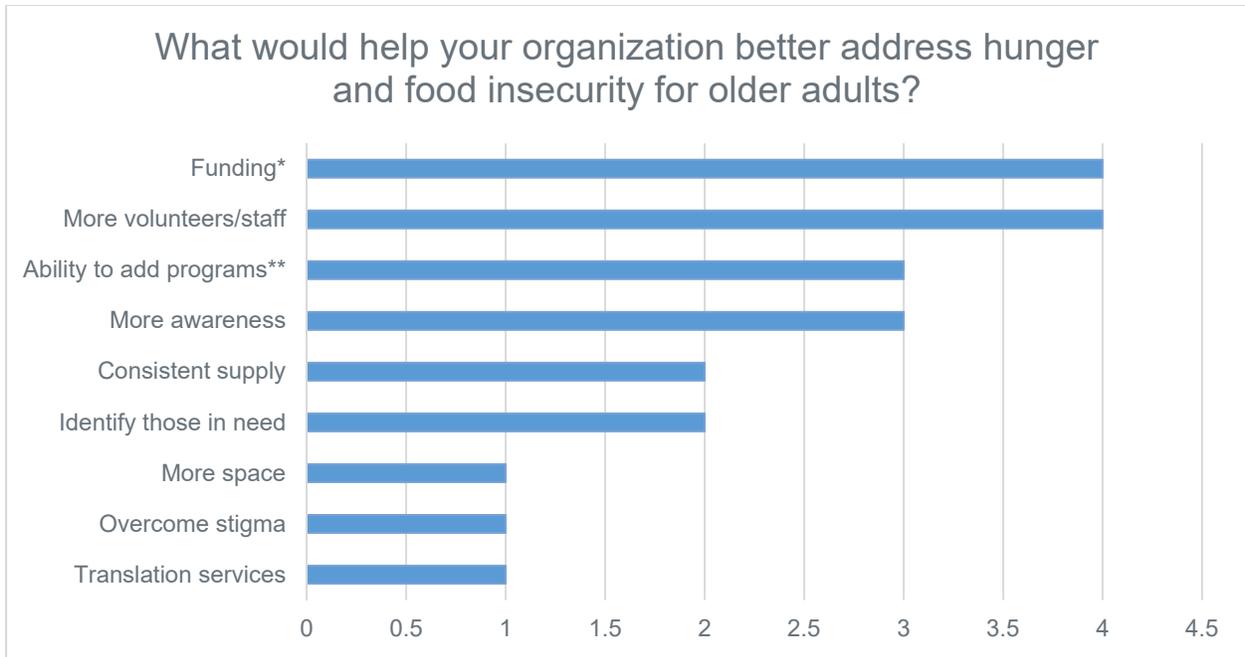


\*Making connections to facilitate partnerships and collaborations

The answers to the question what would you like to see the Foundation do to address hunger and food insecurity for older adults largely mirrored the responses to the previous question. Awareness and education was the salient theme. Information and training on grant opportunities, funding, and helping organizations collaborate and work together were also discussed.

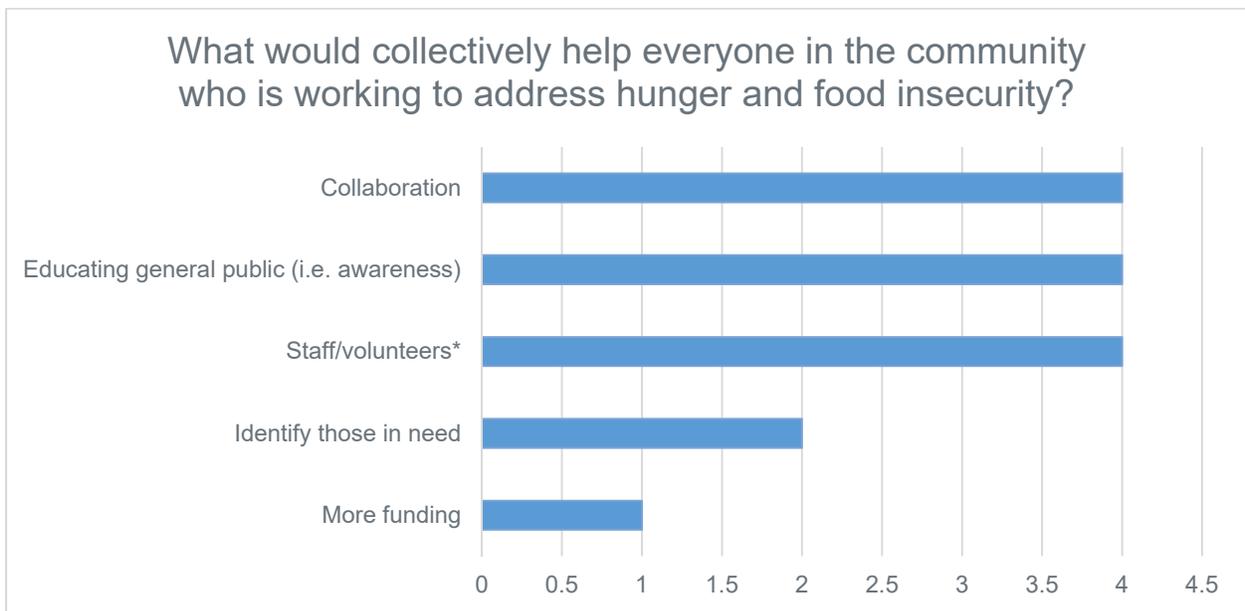


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*\*Funding especially for disabled clients under the age of 60 and home delivered clients that do not meet the program funding requirements. The Healthy Senior Grant Program of the Bivins Foundation was fantastic.*

*\*\*A congregate meal provider wished to add home delivered meals and a home delivered meal provider wished to add congregate meals.*



*\*Especially younger volunteers*