

The Impact of COVID-19 on Food & Nutrition Education Organizations



- The communities that food and nutrition education organizations serve are suffering from income loss, increased food insecurity, and increased anxiety and stress.
- The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly impaired the financial health of these organizations, with anticipated losses over \$1 million for some.
- Food and nutrition education organizations continue to support the most vulnerable communities in New York City, providing meals, delivering groceries, communicating about food assistance, and offering virtual education.
- Ensuring these organizations are financially viable is essential to protect New York's most susceptible communities against the threat of food insecurity and underlying diet-related disease.

Food and Nutrition Education Organizations Continue Working to Ensure ALL NYC Students Can Access Quality Food and Nutrition Education

The Food Ed Hub, housed in the Tisch Food Center, collaborates with school-based food and nutrition education (FNE) organizations to align resources, increase efficiency, and identify best practices that can be brought to scale. The Food Ed Hub works to ensure that all NYC students have quality food and nutrition education and sustainably-produced, culturally-responsive, healthy school food.

To assess the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on NYC-based FNE organizations and their communities, the Food Ed Hub conducted a survey. We collected data from March 31 through April 9, 2020; 42 organizations responded. These organizations serve all five boroughs of New York and consist primarily of non-profit organizations.

“Low-income communities of color, metaphorically speaking, get pneumonia when more affluent, predominantly white communities catch cold. The pandemic has exacerbated differences related to race, ethnicity, class, and income, for low-income people of color are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and face a greater likelihood of negative outcomes that stem from it... For many people who have historically been marginalized or neglected, the COVID-19 experience has further rendered them invisible.” — Survey Respondent

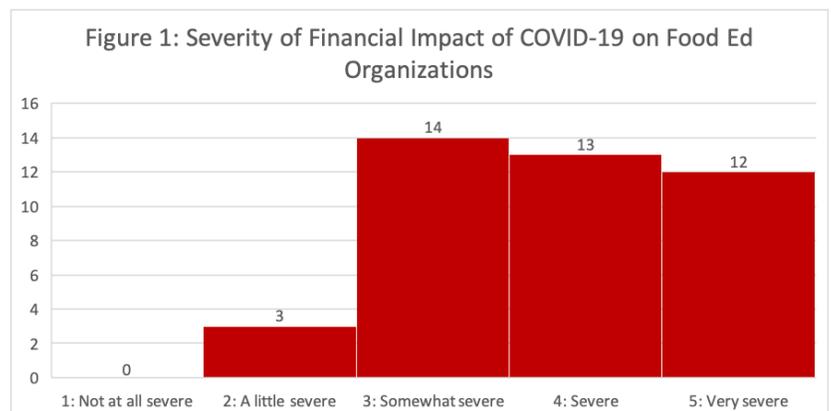
The COVID-19 Epidemic Has Severely Impacted Communities Across the Five Boroughs

Over 90% of organizations reported that their communities have faced losses in income, increased food insecurity, and increased anxiety and stress. FNE organizations continue to support the most vulnerable communities in NYC by offering virtual education sessions, communicating food access information, providing meals, and delivering produce and other groceries.

The COVID-19 Epidemic Has Financial Consequences for Food and Nutrition Education Organizations

Survey results indicate that the COVID-19 epidemic has significantly impaired the current financial health of FNE organizations. Responding to community needs in this moment has increased their cost of operation. Additional costs include:

- **Food and food distribution** - organizations are paying for more food, packaging materials, and transportation;



- **Staff salaries** - organizations have had to hire additional staff to replace existing staff as they get sick or are unable to work and pay overtime for frontline, IT, and program staff;
- **Personal protective equipment** - organizations are buying more masks, gloves, and cleaning materials, as well as paying for sanitation of sites; and
- **Investments in digital learning** - organizations are paying for internet for staff working from home, new laptops and software, curriculum development for remote learning, and graphic design for lessons, as learning moves online.

“I hope we are able to survive the impact of this virus, both physically, as we are out in the front lines directly feeding our community during this crisis, and fiscally. The communities we serve and champion for are the most affected by the disproportionate lack of access to the most fundamental social determinants of health: healthcare, education, fresh food, economic stability, a safe neighborhood/environment. The arrival of COVID-19 is no different and exacerbates all of those factors.”

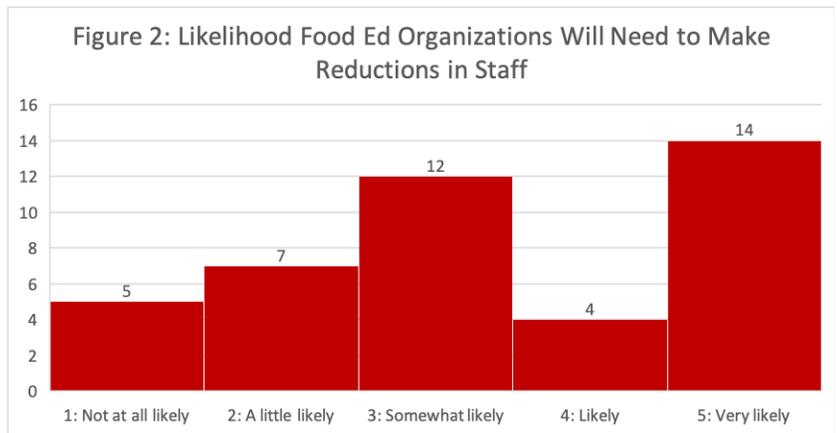
—Survey Respondent

Not only are FNE organizations currently incurring additional costs, but they anticipate longer-term financial consequences of COVID-19 will be severe or very severe; see Figure 1. Some report future losses of more than one million dollars. Many organizations report that it is very likely that they will temporarily or permanently reduce the number of overall staff; see Figure 2. Key areas of lost revenue include:

- **Government Contracts** - including those with the New York City Departments of Education, Youth & Community Development, and Health and Mental Hygiene;
- **Major Fundraising Events** - annual galas and days of service;
- **Fees** - loss of fees for programming, training, licensing, admission, and private rentals;
- **Donations** - fewer and smaller contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations; and
- **Meal Service** - loss of payment for meals provided through the National School Lunch Program, Children and Adult Care Food Program, catering, and corporate cafeterias.

Despite facing significant financial consequences, many organizations want to continue serving their communities. If funding were available, staff could offer or increase benefits outreach, food distribution, and meal assistance or delivery.

Ensuring these organizations are financially viable is essential to protect New York's most susceptible communities against the threat of food insecurity and underlying diet-related disease.



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The Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy is part of the Program in Nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University. We conduct research on food and nutrition education practice and policy. We translate our research into resources for educators, policy makers, and advocates, to give people power to demand healthy, just, sustainable food. *Contact: Claire Raffel, Deputy Director, Tisch Food Center at cu2155@tc.columbia.edu.*