

Exploring capacities for resilience in response to a pandemic: Impacts of COVID-19 on local food organizations in Nova Scotia

Maggie Morrison
Supervised by Laurel Schut



Introduction

In the months since the COVID-19 pandemic has started, **the need for food support has greatly increased**. The non-profit sector in Nova Scotia has been continuing to fill in the gap in food access in Nova Scotia, despite the additional **barriers to operation from the provincial restrictions for health and safety** (Petite, 2020). From this issue of rising rates of food insecurity emerges an opportunity to take a closer look at the responses to the pandemic from local food organizations across the province. My thesis aims to explore how local food organizations in Nova Scotia have had to change or modify their operating procedures to accommodate for COVID-19 safety guidelines and restrictions to continue to be able to provide their services. Looking deeper, my research aims to explore how these responses have developed the **resilience capacities** of local food organizations in Nova Scotia.

Background

Food Security in Nova Scotia

- High rates of food insecurity in can be attributed to limited industry and employment, the high cost of food, the lack of affordable and inadequate wages comparatively with the cost of living in the province (FeedNS, 2020).

The Value of the Non-Profit Sector in Nova Scotia

- Crucial to maintaining the provincial social and economic sectors.
- Volunteers are an imperative component of non-profit operations

Defining and Understanding Resilience Capacities

- General and specific forms of adaptations that organizations employ to react to shocks and stressors. Can be used as a tool to understand how organizations have expanded their capacities for resilience

Methods

Data Collection

Data collection for this study will be done by conducting on **online news media analysis**. This method will gather qualitative data on the changes experienced by local food organizations in Nova Scotia during the pandemic as represented in the municipal and provincial online newspapers in Nova Scotia.

Study population

This thesis focuses on local food organizations that can be classified under the HRM's definitions of Emergency and/or Alternative food programs. Emergency food programs include food banks, community kitchens, etc., while Alternative food programs include urban gardens, community gardens, etc. (Com. Food Security, 2020).

Research Questions

- How has COVID-19 impacted the ability of local food organizations to continue to operate in Nova Scotia?*
- What challenges and opportunities have emerged for local food organizations since being impacted by COVID-19?*
- How have local organizations that have remained in operation during COVID-19 developed their capacities for resilience to future shocks and stressors?*

Findings

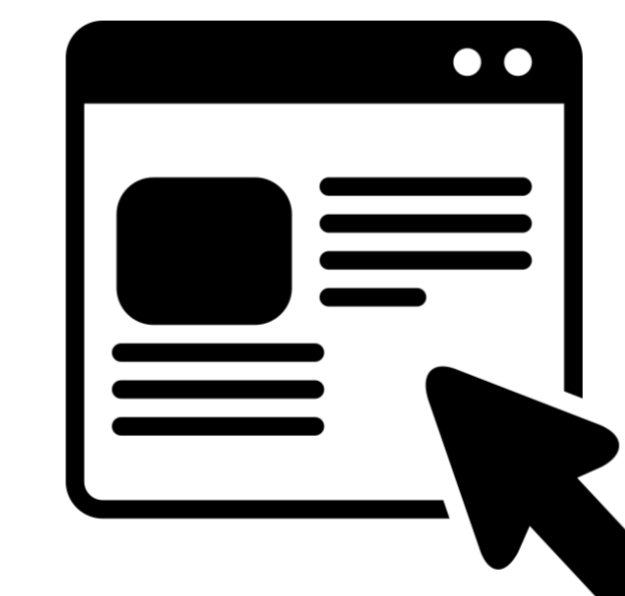
Changes in use of services / demographics

- Rise in the amount of new customers accessing services.
- Barriers to access include accessibility of online platforms and avoidance of high risk public spaces.



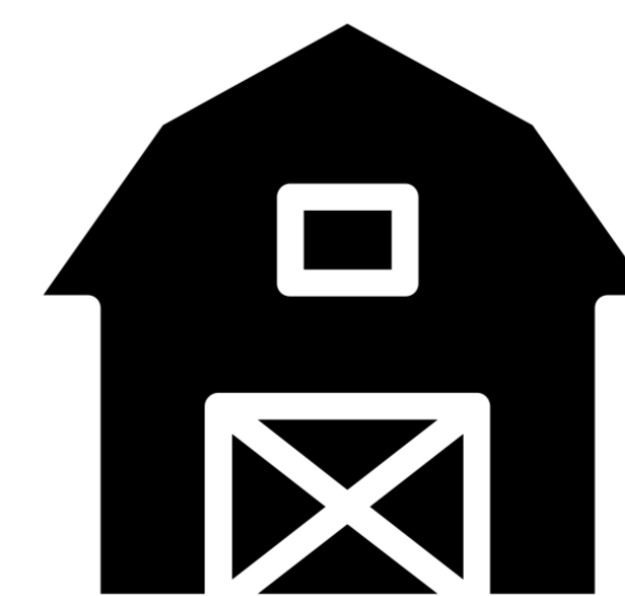
Transition to Online platforms

- Farmer's markets reported an increase in online ordering.
- Feed NS supported a home delivery service for non-perishables for member food banks.



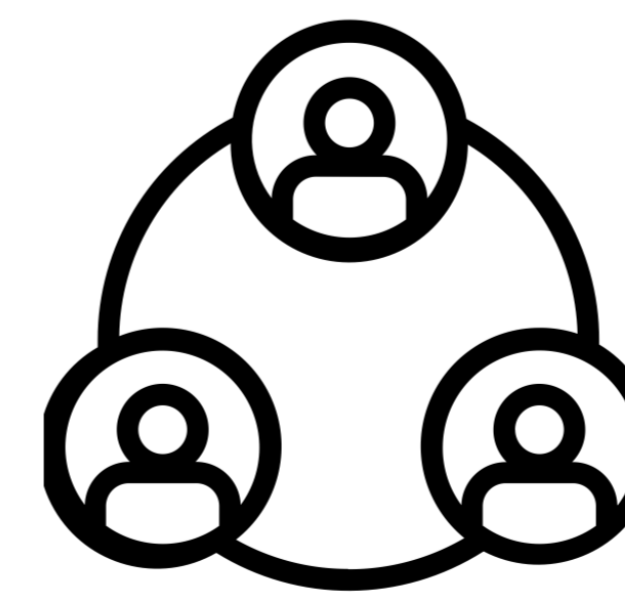
Changes in volunteer capacities

- More volunteers were needed to support increase in demand and the transition to online platforms.
- Consistent group of volunteers preferable over the usual rotating reservoir of volunteers.



Community resilience

- Majority of the 38 member markets of FMNS are still in operation.
- All 141 member organizations of Feed NS are continuing to operate with varying levels of capacity and demand.



Discussion

Resilience Capacities

- mobilize volunteers**
- source funding**
- transition to online platforms**
- connect communities**
- Opportunities for new programming**

This highlights how these adaptations have the potential to **continue into the future**, thus expanding resilience capacity for future shocks and stressors.

Challenges

- Additional resources needed for deliveries
- Cost of takeout containers and utensils a
- Overwhelmingly the lack of social contact

Opportunities

- Food coupon program for FMNS
- Temporary pandemic food box program for member food banks of FeedNS

Conclusions

Looking at how organizations adapt during times of stress is useful for building resilience capacities to prepare for future shocks. This could include anything from policy changes in the province, to climate change. Local food organizations are always going to be filling a gap as long as food insecurity continues to exist in Nova Scotia.

This area of study is novel and still under-researched. This study contributes to a foundation of knowledge that explores the resilience capacities of local food organizations in Nova Scotia. Expanding this foundation of knowledge will have long lasting, sustainable impacts on the food security of thousands of Nova Scotians.

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