



SERVICE INSIGHTS

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Mission & Justification

Why is intake important if we are distributing food to everyone?

To achieve Foodlink's mission of ending hunger, we need to move beyond measuring our impact in pounds and number of food distributions. We need to begin measuring the outcomes of our work and better those we serve. By implementing Service Insights, Foodlink and our members will have access to new types of impactful data for the first time, at the regional and community levels. This client data will guide conversations with community leaders and funders, along with providing insights that can improve programs and services. This information gives us the opportunity to learn who we are serving, not serving, client preferences, and identify communities in need of additional resources. We cannot end hunger by simply pushing out more pounds each year; we need to get food into the hands of people who need it most and data is our most valuable tool to accomplish this mission.

Doesn't the idea of Service Insights go against Foodlink's desire to get food into the hands of those in need without barriers?

This is a very important question and one that we take very seriously. The Service Insights Initiative is about telling the stories of those we serve and improving the services, outreach, and availability across our network. Service Insights is not about eligibility and Foodlink advocates against any Member Agency using data or circumstances to deny a client food. While we do understand that this extra step can be seen as an inconvenience to your clients, we've been very intentional to take steps to lessen that at every possible opportunity. A few big examples of these efforts are having a single intake for the entire network, reducing the number of questions to only those that are actionable, making sure there are anonymous options, adding barcodes to streamline future visits, and creating Neighbor Experience Training to ensure that volunteers at Member Agencies are equipped with the knowledge to make neighbors feel welcome and not judged during this intake process.

What are “actionable questions?”

Foodlink defines “actionable questions” as a question that produces data that we or our Member Agencies can use to make a direct impact on the lives of those we serve. All questions have been removed that would simply provide interesting insights or questions that produce data that is already available. Foodlink believes that the data from every question should be directly linked to the core operating requirements of the system, meet compliance requirements, or can be used to make programmatic decisions.

What do you mean by “unduplicated numbers?”

Unduplicated numbers are a way to count unique individuals as opposed to counting the same individual multiple times. For example, we currently collect duplicated numbers for food provided to clients each month at member agencies. Members report the number of times food was distributed to individuals at their program. Service Insights will provide unduplicated numbers that provide data on the number of individuals served as well as the number of times they were served by a Foodlink member agency.

Is Service Insights required to be used by Foodlink Members?

Foodlink has decided that Service Insights will eventually be required for all members, and we will include that requirement in the future Member Agreement. This requirement could begin to be enforced at the start of FY28 on July 1, 2027. We believe this provides plenty of time for adoption and implementation by current Foodlink members. Foodlink considers Service Insights core to our mission and the work we do moving forward. We clearly see now that poundage is not enough, and that data is a key missing piece to ending hunger across our region. We need data to get food into the hands of those who are underserved and see gaps in food services across the network. This is an important shift in food banking across the United States, focusing on impact versus output.

This platform is not being developed to replace all software systems for all organizations, especially larger programs with a very large scope of services provided. The eventual case management module and other features can offer an electronic solution to a lot of smaller programs that match their size and scope. Opportunities exist with larger programs already using similar systems to share data between other platforms through exports or data integrations. Foodlink is not rushing into Service Insights, and we are very aware of the impact change has on our members. In addition to surveying members for feedback, our Agency Advisory Council will provide guidance along the way. Much of this project will be fluid to meet the needs of our Member Agencies and we will take every opportunity we can find to make this change as easy on our members as possible.

Technical Information

Do I have to download anything to use Service Insights?

You will not need to download any programs or applications onto your computer. The Service Insights intake platform is completely web browser based. That means that you will just need to go to a website and log in to access the platform.

Will I need a computer to use Service Insights?

No, a computer is not required. The Service Insights platform can be accessed through a web browser on a desktop, laptop, Chromebook, tablet, or smartphone.

Can Foodlink provide us with a hardware device to use Service Insights?

TBD

What if we do not have internet access where our program is located?

Service Insights has an offline mode that can be used to access the platform without consistent internet access during intake. That means your device would not need to be connected to the internet during intake at a food distribution but needs to connect to the internet later to upload the information obtained during intake.

System & Platform Information

How much does it cost to use Service Insights?

The Service Insights platform is completely free to use by Foodlink members.

How much personal information is being collected?

We are only asking for basic administrative and demographic information during the intake process. Foodlink has taken the stance of requiring the least number of questions possible. All questions have a clear justification for why they are being asked and we believe that any question being asked should have a clear purpose and provide actionable data.

Are clients required to answer the questions we are asking them?

No. Clients are not required to answer questions or participate in the intake process to receive food. Any client has the option to be anonymous during the process and nearly all the intake questions have a “Prefer not to answer” option.

If clients refuse to answer questions, will they be denied access to food?

No. Clients are not required to answer questions or participate in the intake process to receive food. The priority is always in feeding clients in need, even if that means no data goes into the system for a client who refuses the process.

What if the clients who come to our program do not speak English?

The Service Insights platform is currently only available in English, but additional languages are scheduled to be released in the future. Spanish translation will be added first, and other languages will be added based on feedback from food banks.

Do clients need to give us information at every visit?

No. Clients will only need to go through the intake process and answer questions during their first visit to a food program. After that first visit, they just need to be looked up in the system and added to the “distribution event.” You will be able to find clients in the system to add visits, but you will not be able to see their visit history to other programs, only visits that they have made to your program.

Can we remove questions we do not want to ask?

No. We have limited the number of questions to only those that are required on the platform or for compliance requirements (e.g., TEFAP eligibility). If clients are not comfortable answering a required question, nearly all of them have an option for “prefer not to answer.” A client also has the option to be anonymous in the system.

What is the backup if the software malfunctions during our distribution?

Since the Service Insights platform is web browser-based, everything is saved once you progress to the next page. If there was an issue that prevented the system from functioning during a distribution, we have backup forms available, and visits can be entered at a later date.

Can we track other services we provide, even non-food programs?

Yes! We encourage member agencies to utilize this platform to maximize the impact for your organization and your clients. There are customization opportunities in the system to track additional products and services distributed by your organization. Additional services can be selected with a checkbox, with the opportunity to record pounds, pieces, or a dollar value to the product or service provided.\

TEFAP Information*

Do we need to complete and store paper TEFAP forms if using Service Insights?

No. Service Insights has been designed to be TEFAP compliant in New York State and usage of the system will eliminate the need to complete and store paper TEFAP forms.

What happens if someone starts filling out the electronic TEFAP option, but does not qualify to receive USDA food?

If the neighbor does not qualify for TEFAP, the system will mark them as ineligible at the time of the visit and then bring that information over to the standard food distribution form. This saves a bit of time, preventing you from asking questions multiple times. Please note: The NYS Office of General Services does not require distinction between TEFAP food and other food at your food pantry.

TEFAP does not allow discrimination based on race, gender, religion, etc. Does it allow us to ask clients for this information?

We have full approval from the USDA to use the Service Insights platform for TEFAP intake. Additional questions are allowed to be asked once the TEFAP form and process has been completed.

***TEFAP data collection does not apply to meal programs.**

Privacy & Security Information

Is Service Insights safe and secure for our clients?

The security of our clients' information is a top priority for Foodlink and Feeding America who developed this intake platform. Information that is collected by food banks and agencies in the

platform will be securely stored in Feeding America's private cloud server on Microsoft Azure, which is encrypted through 256-bit AES encryption and is FIPS 140-2 compliant. Feeding America has established administrative and technical safeguards to protect the confidentiality of clients' information and prevent unauthorized use. This includes obtaining informed consent from clients, executing confidentiality agreements with individuals who have access to the data, assigning user accounts with the minimum permissions needed to fulfill the role, anonymizing data used in analyses or dashboards, and enforcing best practices for strong and secure password generation at the application user level.

What privacy standards are in place to protect client data?

All client data is stored on encrypted servers at Feeding America and the intake platform can only be accessed with a username and password. There are levels of users with a different amount of access to system areas and information, so people only get the level of access needed to do their job. At Foodlink and Feeding America most users can only see reports or anonymized client information. At Feeding America, most staff do not get access to raw client data, only the Information Technology Team who must maintain the system and ensure data integrity.

What is encryption and what does encrypted data mean?

Encryption is when you change data with a special process so that the data becomes mixed up and unrecognizable (it's encrypted). You can then use a tool to reverse that special process, and you will get the original data back. By keeping the process a secret, nobody else can recover the original data from the encrypted data.

How is client information going to be used when it is collected?

Client information is going to be used to better provide services and address hunger across the United States. Member agencies (and Foodlink) can use the information to better understand what neighbors' needs are, who is not yet being served, what foods to order, what additional services neighbors need, and have data to show impact to funders. Foodlink would eventually like this information to be the foundation of all the decisions we make that impact those we serve together with our member agencies.

Who is Foodlink going to share this information with?

Service Insights information is shared with Feeding America, which developed the platform and securely holds the data on its encrypted servers. Foodlink may share anonymous data, summaries, or reports with other organizations across our service area that are fighting food insecurity, poverty, and social determinants of health. Client information is anonymized before it is used or shared by Feeding America or Foodlink.

Will clients be able to be anonymous in Service Insights?

Yes. It's important to always give clients the option to be anonymous should they desire, unless their information is required for participation in regulated programs like TEFAP. A unique ID, QR code, or barcode can still be provided to a client who prefers to remain anonymous, which will support the collection of unduplicated data.

What does anonymized data mean?

This means that all information that could directly identify a client has been removed and only general information is remaining. For example, name, phone number, email address, and full address will be removed, while demographics and zip code will remain.

Can other programs see the information from our program or for clients they do not serve?

No. Each Foodlink member agency will only be able to see visit history and notes on visits to their food program. You will be able to look up clients during intake, but you will only be able to see that they have been to another Foodlink member at least once and completed intake. You will not be able to see where they went, how many visits, or the services they were provided.