

211 San Diego

Summary of the Innovation:

211 San Diego developed a real-time Food Need and Resource Analysis Dashboard that utilizes live 211 San Diego and Community Information Exchange (CIE) data to map shifting food needs at a granular, neighborhood level. This innovation enabled the Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank to proactively deploy resources and establish pop-up distribution sites in high-need areas by reinforcing the data they had but also signalling to watch other areas that weren't on their initial radar.

The Challenge that the Innovation Addressed:

In October 2025, a federal government shutdown caused an immediate disruption to SNAP (CalFresh) benefits, creating a crisis for thousands of San Diegans, and people across the country. Traditional indicators, such as monthly CalFresh enrolment rates, were too slow to reflect the rapid 20% surge in food-related needs that occurred within just a few weeks. Furthermore, many residents impacted by the shutdown—such as those facing temporary work stoppages—did not qualify for standard benefits but still required emergency food assistance. Without real-time data, local providers could not accurately identify which neighborhoods were experiencing the most acute spikes in demand or where "food deserts" were being most heavily strained by the sudden loss of federal support.

The Decision-Making and Implementation Process:

The implementation was highly strategic, moving beyond static reporting to a dynamic, daily monitoring system via an interactive dashboard. Strategic Baseline: 211 San Diego established a clear "baseline" using September 2025 data—a month unaffected by seasonal variables or economic anomalies—to ensure that any observed spikes were accurately attributed to the shutdown. Collaborative Design: The dashboard was built to specifically support the operational needs of the San Diego Food Bank, ensuring the data was actionable

for field distribution. Granular Focus: Rather than looking at county-wide trends, the dashboard focused on zip-code level data to identify specific neighborhoods, such as City Heights (which saw a 319% increase in need early in the shutdown) and El Cajon (345% increase), that required immediate intervention.

The Outcome/Impact of the Innovation:

The dashboard provided a critical "snapshot" of regional food insecurity, leading to measurable tactical successes: Rapid Response: As food-related needs jumped from a weekly average of 230 clients to over 900 by the third week of the announcement, the dashboard allowed food banks to respond quickly with additional resources in the hardest-hit areas. Resource Optimization: The San Diego Food Bank was able to proactively send additional supplies to individual distribution centers that the dashboard identified as being heavily tapped, preventing local shortages. Measurable Data: In October 2025 alone, 211 San Diego saw a surge of 5,400 clients with food needs (up from 4,600 the previous month), ensuring that nearly all needs—specifically for food pantries and distribution sites—were supported until the delayed benefits were returned.

Potential Applicability to Other Members:

This model is highly adaptable for any 211 provider or Community Information Exchange (CIE). 211 San Diego and 211 California are piloting a process to utilize similar datasets for the California Association of Food Banks at the state level for more communities. The core framework— linking real-time referral trends to geographic mapping—can be replicated by other 211s or CIE leads to monitor various crises beyond food insecurity, such as housing or utility needs. By establishing a stable baseline and utilizing visualization tools like Tableau, other organizations can transform their call volume and referral data into a proactive crisis management tool that informs community planning and emergency response..