

caring culture

DESIGNING THE FOOD PANTRY EXPERIENCE

Acknowledgements

A project of this magnitude is not successful without a supportive community. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to everyone who made this undertaking possible and who shared the vision to contribute meaningfully to our education and the community. The pantry staff and clients provided a welcoming and engaging environment for our learning. Thank you.

We hope this research and the resulting design solutions prove valuable to our community partners.



Clockwise from top left: Exterior of Old Bethel & Partners Food Pantry. Volunteers at Southeast Community Services pack food boxes. A volunteer directs traffic at God's Bounty drive-thru pantry. A volunteer unloads food items at Westminster Neighborhood Services (Photo courtesy Westminster). Staff at Hawthorne Community Center.

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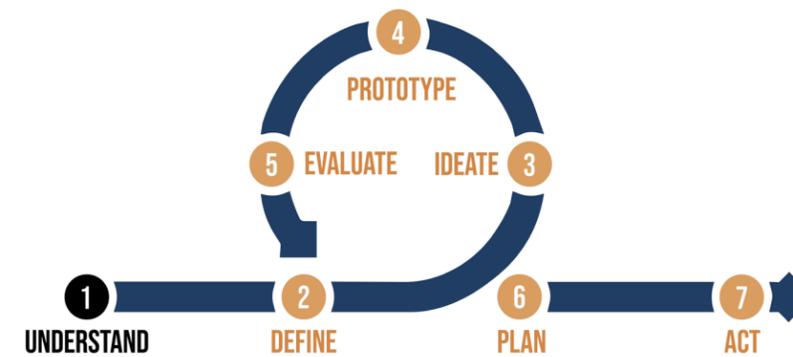
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This project was developed over one year by students of the Master of Design program at Herron School of Art + Design who participated on interdisciplinary research teams with students from Luddy School of Informatics, Computing, and Engineering, Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at IUPUI, and Kelley School of Business. It was sponsored by the Initiative for Electrified & Autonomous Mobility and the Toyota Mobility Foundation.

This report discusses the design solutions developed by the Herron graduate students, reflecting the design discipline's approach to the pantry experience. A full executive report, including the team-based solutions, follows in the sub sections attached to this summary.

Executive Summary



CARD RESEARCH FRAMEWORK (Fig. 1)

The Herron design students continued building on the research conducted during the fall 2023 semester, utilizing the Collaborative Action Research in Design (CARD) framework (see Fig. 1) developed and taught by the graduate program at Herron School of Art + Design. While the fall semester focused on the Understand phase, the spring's focus shifted to the Define, Ideate, Prototype, Evaluate, Plan, and Act phases.

Research Questions

The Understand phase focused on conducting deep user research via applied ethnographic methodology to address the following research questions:

- *What are the commonalities of the staff and volunteer experiences at food banks and food pantries?*
- *How might staff and volunteers create an environment of empowerment for end users?*

FALL 2023 RESEARCH FINDINGS

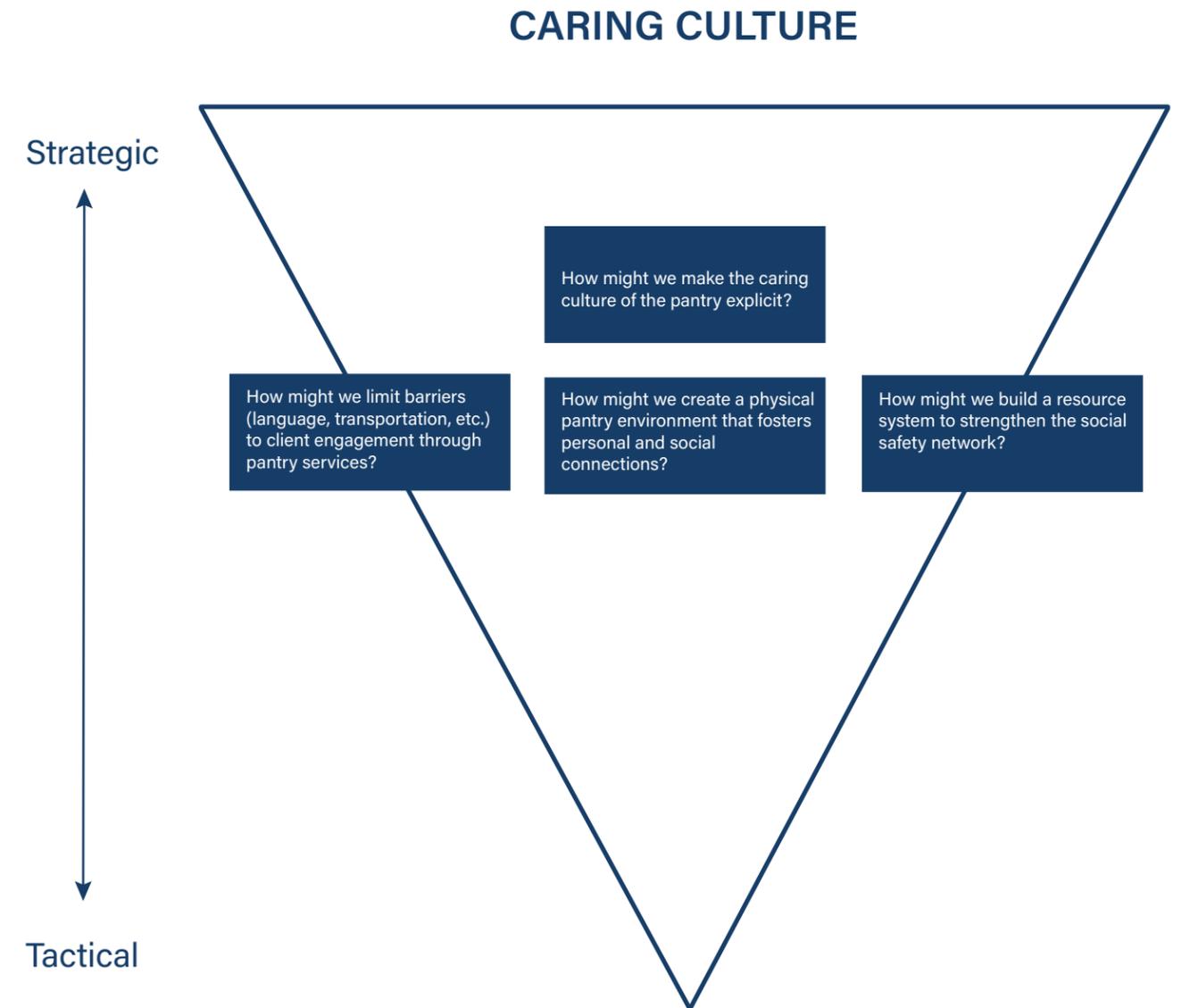
Research conducted in fall 2023 focused on the common elements of the volunteer experience and the food pantry system. The findings revealed more than just how the pantries delivered food. They showed that the pantries are unique cultural entities with varying, contextual factors that shape their approaches to food delivery and client engagement.

The fall's primary research outcome was the Pantry Experience Map (see VOL 1, Fig. 3). Developed from the volunteer's perspective, the map brings explicit understanding of the common actions across the parties for a 'pantry day,' which is a day when the organizations distribute food to clients.

The experience map was instrumental in identifying the following insights based on the group's research:

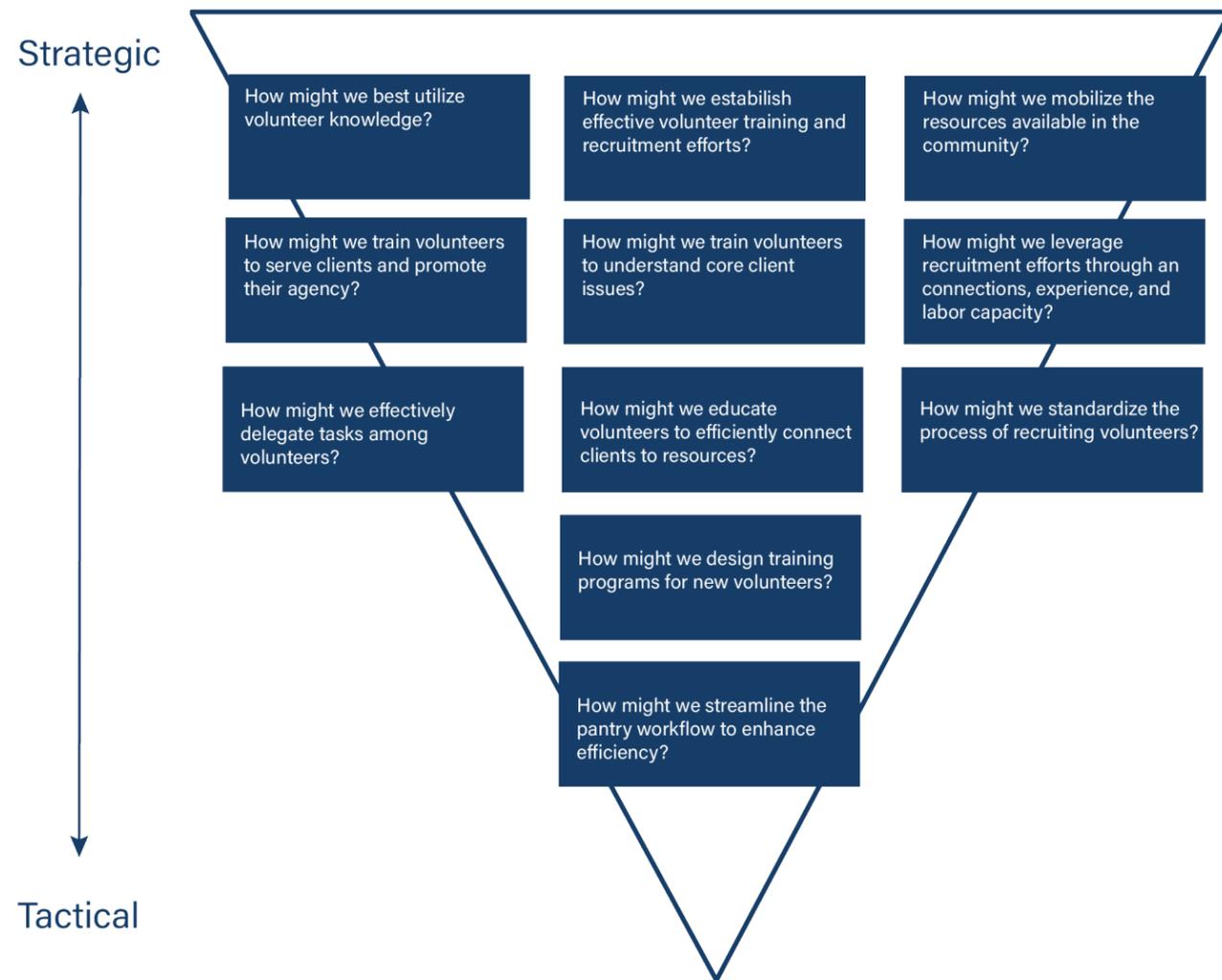
- Pantries exist as a community act of care which can be seen through distinct acts: reciprocity or exchange, facilitating personal and social connections, and creating social safety networks.
- Volunteers are critical enablers for pantries to deliver their services.
- Agency and choice create an environment of empowerment for clients.
- Pantries are a community services hub.
- Pantries operate independently and prioritize food delivery differently.
- Client choice constrains the efficient delivery of food.

Using the Pantry Experience Map and insights discussed above, the students diverged on multiple opportunity statements and plotted them onto a Challenge Map (see Fig. 2) Three themes emerged from the statements: Caring Culture, Mobilizing Resources, and Process Improvement. The statements were grouped accordingly and plotted vertically from strategic (high) to tactical (low). This map was the starting point for the work of spring 2024.



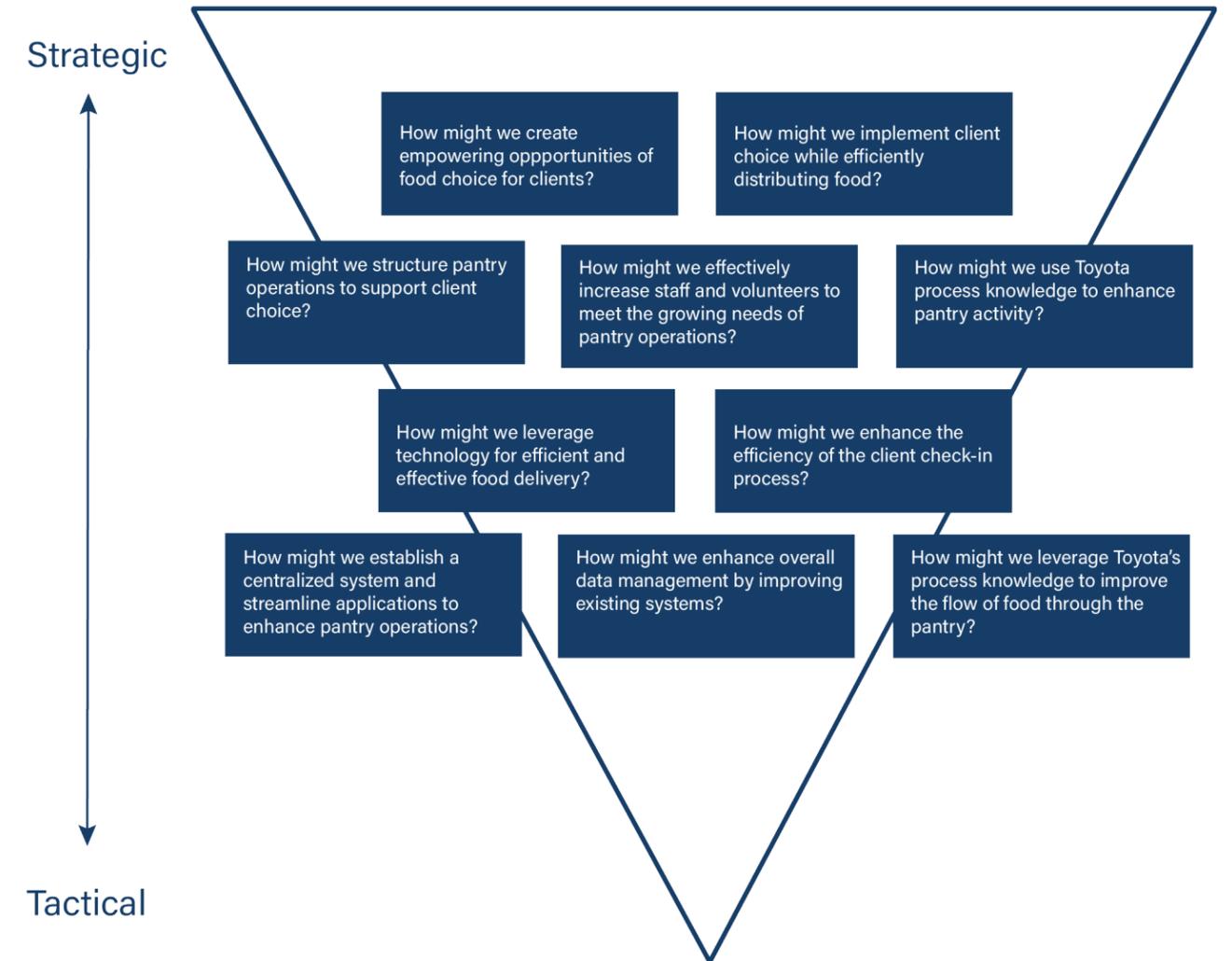
CHALLENGE MAP, Part 1 (Fig. 2A)

MOBILIZING RESOURCES



CHALLENGE MAP, Part 2 (Fig. 2B)

PROCESS IMPROVEMENT



CHALLENGE MAP, Part 3 (Fig. 2B)

INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Fall 2023 research and outcomes were a culmination of the work of graduate design students from the Herron School of Art + Design. While the students conducted field work at different food pantries, they brought their findings together looking for commonalities.

The approach to the work conducted during spring 2024 differed from the fall in two important ways. First, the groups would become interdisciplinary. In addition to Herron students, the teams now consisted of students from the Luddy School of Informatics Computing and Engineering, the Kelley School of Business, and the Purdue School of Engineering and Technology at IUPUI. Second, the teams would each focus on developing design solutions for the following individual pantries: God’s Bounty, Hawthorne Community Center, Old Bethel & Partners Food Pantry, Southeast Community Services, and Westminster Neighborhood Services.

This pantry-specific approach and an interdisciplinary team brought together diverse skills and points of view and provided the students with multiple opportunities to learn from each specific context and their peers.

SPRING 2024 DESIGN SOLUTIONS

Throughout the semester, each interdisciplinary team followed the CARD design process model and developed design solutions that were specific to the pantries they had been assigned. Due to the contextual nature of the work, the capacity of the pantry, and the skillsets of the various team members, there was considerable variety among the opportunities selected at each pantry and among the design solutions that were generated.

Each team worked with their pantry director to examine the Challenge Map (Fig. 3) and select one or more opportunity statements to use as the focus of their work for the semester. Then, following the CARD framework, they proceeded to ideate potential design solutions with their pantry partners, prototype and test those solutions, and then help their partners plan for action to implement the design solution(s).

GOD’S BOUNTY

Opportunity: “How might we achieve cost effective & timely transportation from food banks to God’s Bounty?”

Design Solution: “Transportation, Tradeoffs, & Partnerships”



Two design students working with Debra Burke (right) at God’s Bounty using the Challenge Map to help select a direction for the semester’s work.

At God’s Bounty, our team worked with Debra Burke, the Volunteer Food Pantry Coordinator to make connections to community partners who could ease the burden she experiences of trying to transport food from various sources to the pantry every week. We helped Debra identify resources she could allocate in different ways at the pantry to find money to pay for transportation and consider ways to source food differently, buying in larger quantities at cheaper cost.

HAWTHORNE

Opportunity: “How might we create a pantry experience that enables client choice while alleviating pressures of staff & clients?”

Design Solution: “Creating a Shopping Experience”



A design student works to outline client experience with two Hawthorne staff (right).

At Hawthorne, our team worked with Dawn Dunderdale, Senior Director of Adult & Family Programs, & Mary Stevenson, Adult Services Manager to help configure a new space and experience for their pantry shoppers. Previously, their pantry had operated with a no-choice, drive-thru model that was labor intensive for staff to operate. Our team helped Hawthorne design a new, client-focused experience that offers in-person shopping with client choice and saves staff time.

OLD BETHEL

Opportunities: Volunteer training/onboarding experience, check-in/client verification process, language barriers, and the cart system

Design Solution: "Volunteer Onboarding and Training Experiences"



Herron students meet with an Old Bethel volunteer (left) to discuss pantry safety & training.

At Old Bethel, our team worked with Arin Schellenberg, the Food Pantry Coordinator, and pantry volunteers to identify opportunities at the pantry. The Old Bethel team was the largest one, so they identified four different areas to work on and ultimately produced design solutions for three of the four. The Herron students and the HCI student on the team worked together to focus on volunteer training and onboarding, helping the pantry use that opportunity to develop its culture.

SOUTHEAST

Opportunity: "How might we improve the flow of food through the pantry while preserving client choice?"

Design Solution: "Restructuring the Pantry"



The Southeast team meets with Shelva Floyd (left) inside the pantry.

At Southeast, our team worked with Shelva Floyd, Food Pantry Coordinator, to design and implement solutions that would increase the pantry's capacity. We made changes to the pantry's workflow that allowed Southeast to serve 50% more neighbors weekly, reduced the number of volunteer hours needed, and increased the staff's face to face engagement with clients. We also worked toward finding new food, transportation, & storage resources for the pantry.

WESTMINSTER

Opportunities: "How might we streamline the pantry workflow to enhance efficiency?" & "How might we limit barriers (language, transportation, etc.) to client engagement to pantry services?"

Design Solution: "Improving the Referral Service Experience"



Westminster team meets with an Olivia Stewart (left) to test the referral cards created by the design student.

At Westminster, our team worked with Olivia Stewart, Family & Adult Services Manager, primarily concentrating on clients' experience while they are waiting to shop at the pantry. Various team members addressed different aspects of this issue, like the language barrier and workflow, with the designer on the team concentrating on referrals the pantry makes to other services during the waiting period. The team created and tested dual language referral cards that were highly visual as well as a language translation system to embed in pantry protocol.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As we close out our research and work at the pantries for the year, we remain grateful for the opportunity to learn about the food pantry system and culture in Indianapolis. The "Caring Culture" it represents is truly a social safety net in our community; it has been an honor to study it and contribute to its flourishing.

Our teams have spent a lot of time and resources understanding some of the common drivers and challenges among the pantries, and we have focused on designing solutions for the particular needs of individual pantries. As this project moves forward in future semesters, we see opportunities to:

- Move the research up to the system level to examine what changes could be made with food transportation, cooperative resourcing, or other endeavors like volunteer recruitment, training, and scheduling at a large scale. Macro level solutions, when deployed well, have the potential for exponential positive effect by reducing repeated small scale effort at the individual pantry level.
- Deploy the design solutions our teams created on a larger scale by engaging with entities like Indy Hunger Network who can facilitate training and implementation to a broader number of pantries.

We hope that the students who come after us in this project benefit from our work and can use it to make further progress for the food pantry system. We also hope that they enjoy learning about the social fabric of our community as much as we did.

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