



**Community  
Service  
Society** | Fighting Poverty  
Strengthening  
New York

# UNHEARD THIRD 2008: FOOD BRIEFING

November 19, 2008

# Methodology

The Community Service Society (CSS) in collaboration with Lake Research Partners designed this survey, which Lake Research Partners administered by phone using professional interviewers. The survey reached a total of 1523 New York City residents. The survey is divided into two samples of 1015 low-income residents (up to 200% of federal poverty standards or approximately \$35,000 annually for a family of three) and 508 higher income residents of New York City (above 200% of federal poverty standards), age 18 or older. The survey was conducted from June 8 to July 3, 2008.

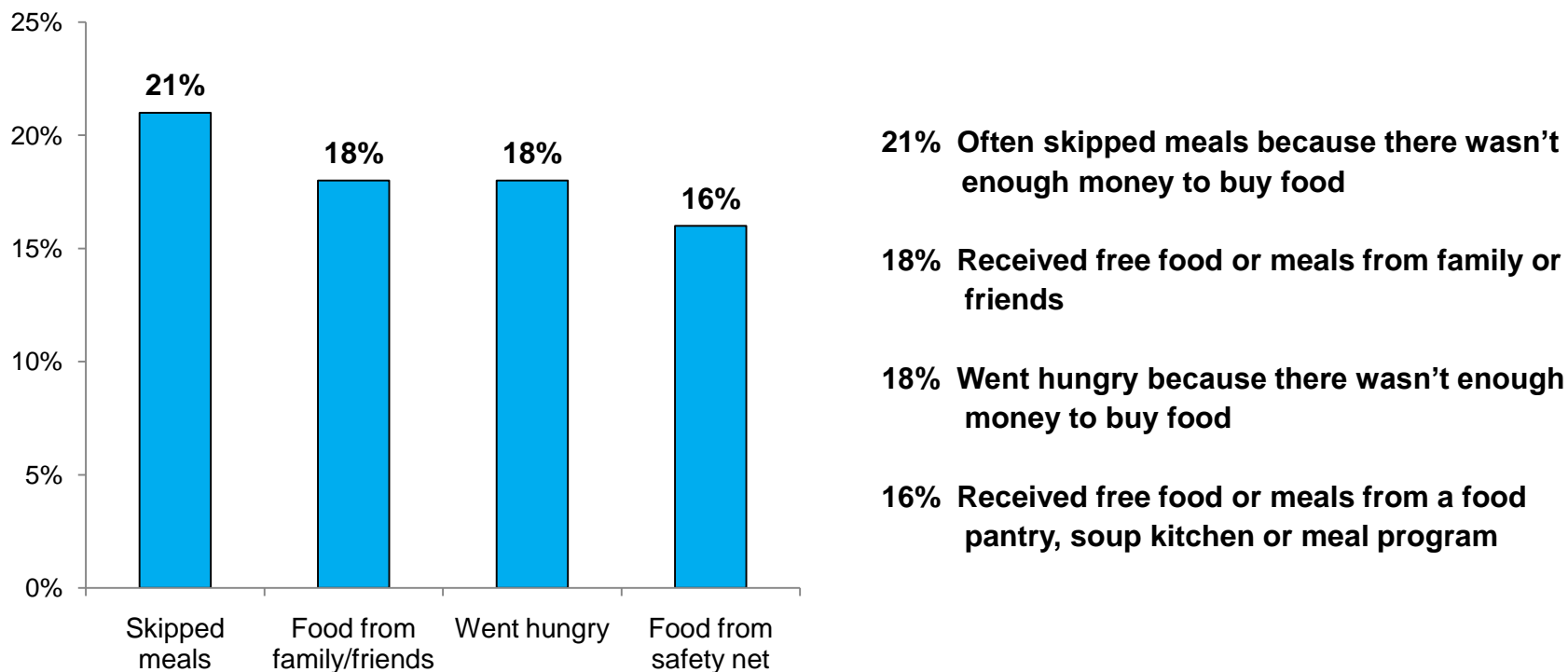
The low-income sample included two populations – **529 poor respondents** (earning at or below 100% of the federal poverty standard) and **486 “near poor” respondents** (earning between 101% and 200% of the federal poverty standard). We refer to these two groups collectively as “**low-income**”. The higher-income sample also included two populations – **203 “moderate-income” respondents** (earning between 201% and 400% of poverty) and **305 “higher-income” respondents** (earning above 400% of poverty).

Telephone numbers for the low-income sample were drawn using random digit dial (RDD). The data were weighted slightly by gender, age, region, party identification, immigration status, education and race in order to ensure that it accurately reflects the demographic configuration of these populations. In the combined totals respondents in the low-income sample were weighted down to reflect their actual proportion among all residents.

In interpreting survey results, all sample surveys are subject to possible sampling error; that is, the results of a survey may differ from those which would be obtained if the entire population were interviewed. The size of the sampling error depends upon both the total number of respondents in the survey and the percentage distribution of responses to a particular question. The margin of error for the low-income component is +/- 3.1%. The margin of error for the higher income component is +/-4.3%.

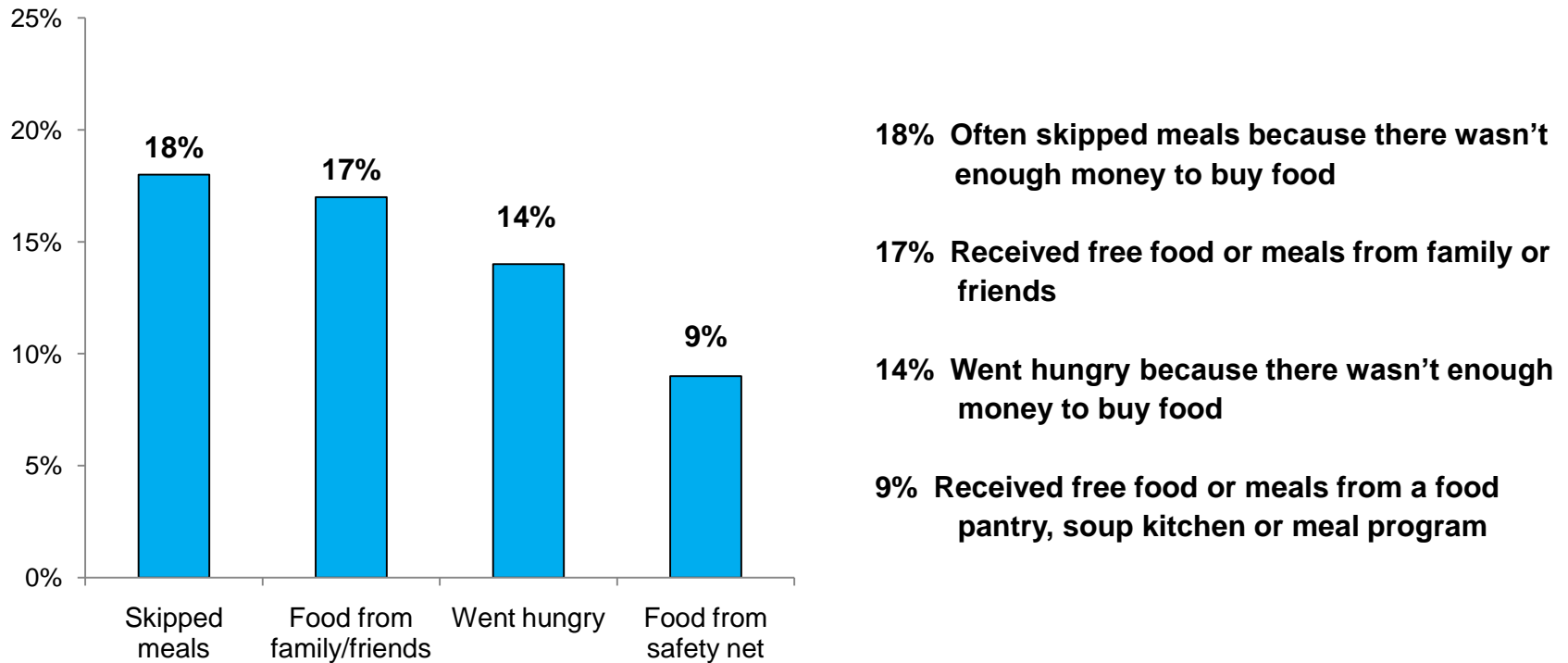
**Low-income respondents reported serious food hardships over the past year. More than 1 in 5 said they often skipped meals— and 18% reported going hungry— because there wasn't enough money to buy food.**

### Food Hardships for Low-Income Respondents

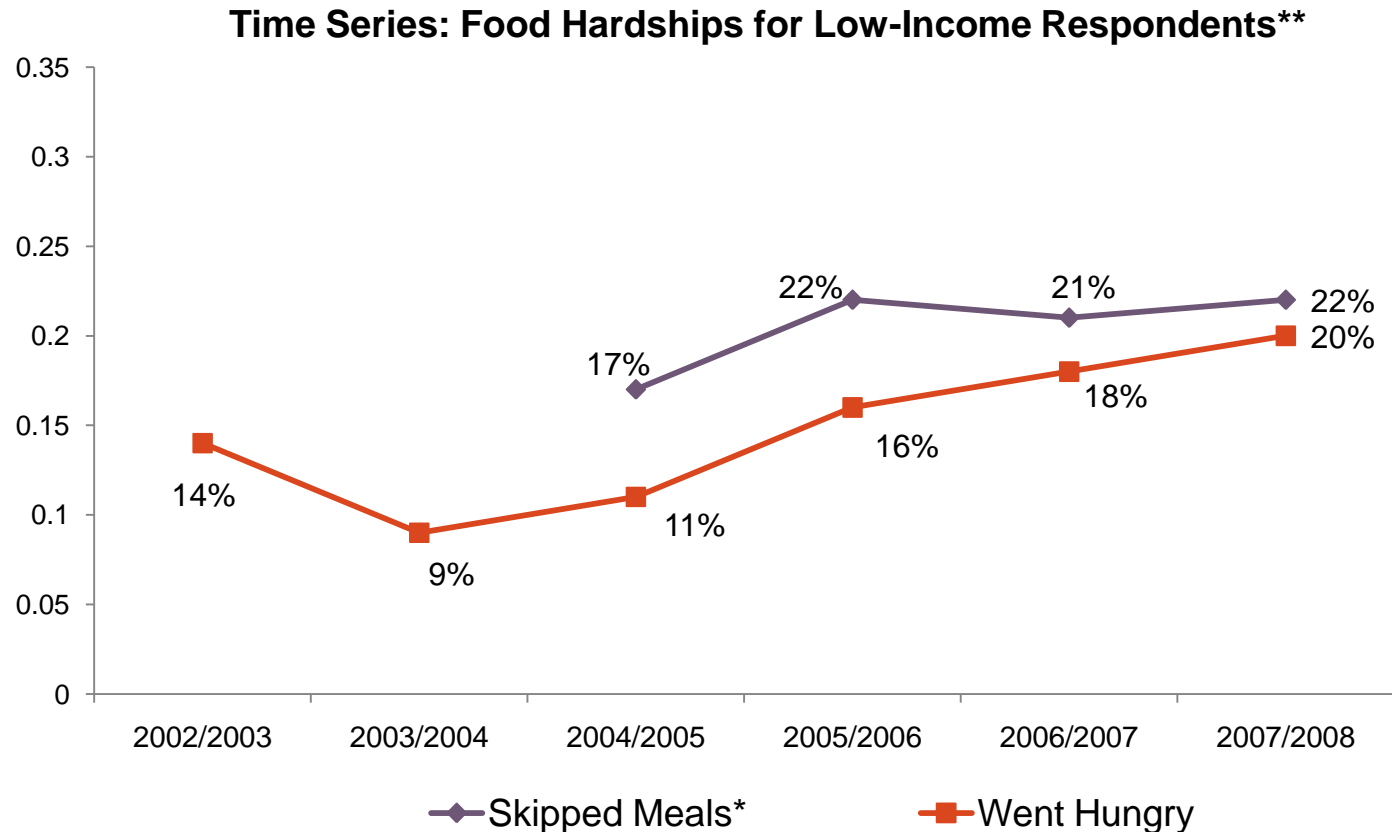


**Food insecurity is reduced among low-income respondents who are full-time workers. But even working full-time is not enough; 18% of this group reported that they often skipped meals because there wasn't enough money to buy food, while 17% relied on free food or meals from family or friends.**

### Food Hardships for Low-Income Full-Time Workers

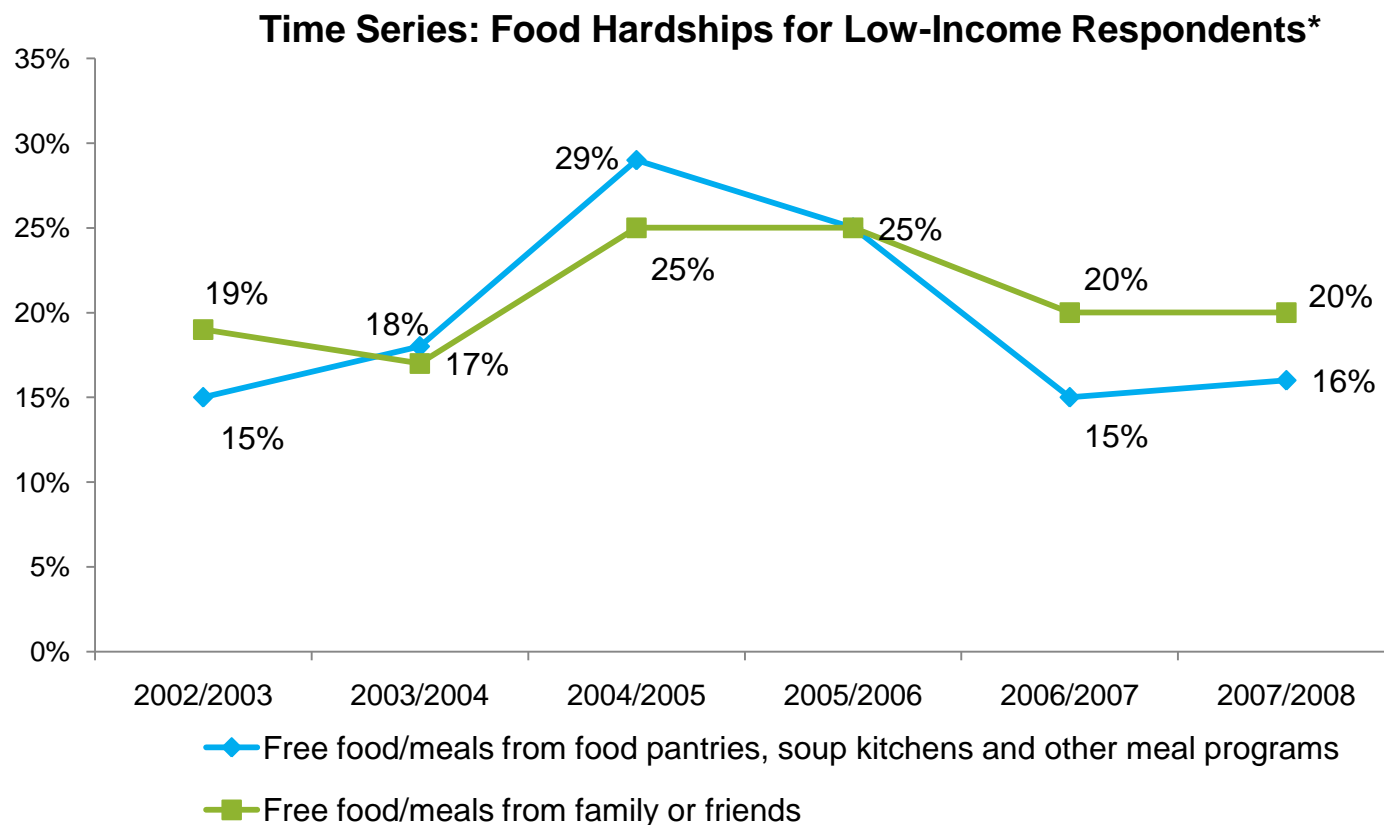


Since 2004, low-income respondents have increasingly gone hungry or skipped meals\* because they did not have enough money to buy food.



\* Question on skipping meals added in 2004. \*\*Graph reports two-year averages

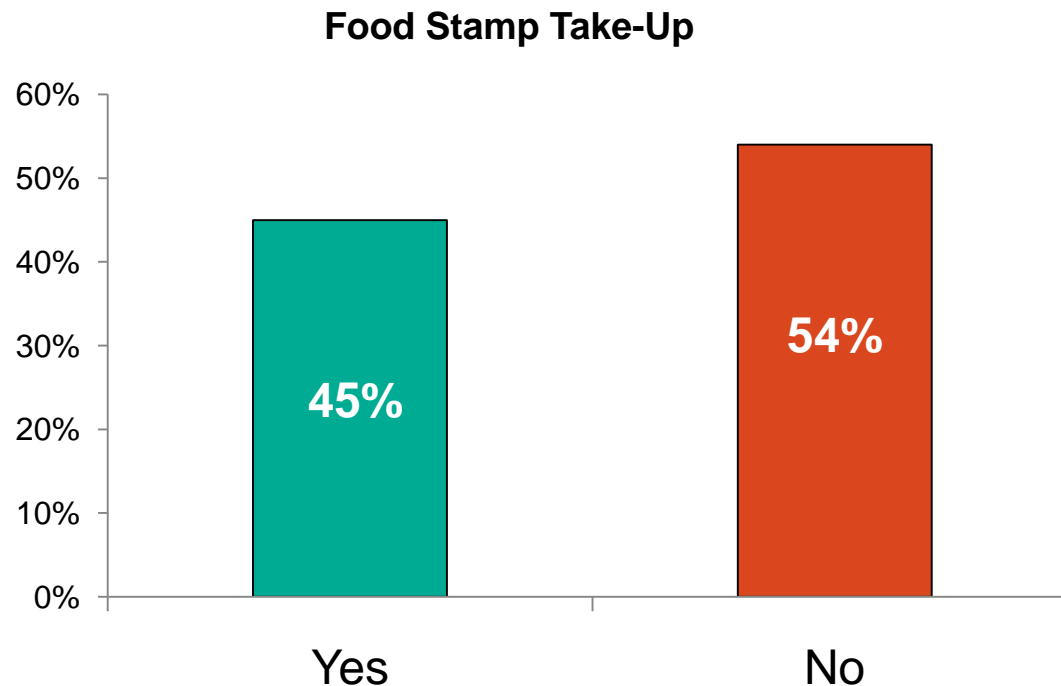
**Despite these indications of increasing food insecurity, over the same time period, low-income respondents grew less likely to receive free food/meals from food pantries, soup kitchens, or other meal programs, or to receive free food/meals from family or friends.**



\* Graph reports two-year averages

**Charity is not closing the gap—but neither is the public portion of the food safety net. Despite nearly all being eligible\*, only 45% of respondents below 100% of the federal poverty line live in a household that receives food stamps.**

Please listen carefully to the following programs offering assistance to New Yorkers; for each one tell me if you or anyone in your household are current receiving this assistance. Food Stamps:



\*Immigrants were not included in this analysis to ensure nearly everyone was eligible for food stamps.

**Among low-income respondents, the most common use for a tax rebate or refund earlier this year was to pay for food. Approximately 1 in 3 low-income respondents– as well as 1 in 5 middle-income respondents– said they used their tax rebate or refund to pay for food.**

I'll read you a list and please tell me how you used the money you got back. You can say more than one.

**Almost 4 in 10 poor respondents ( $\leq 100\%$  FPL) say they used their tax refund or rebate to pay for food.**

	$\leq 200\%$ FPL	201-400% FPL	$> 400\%$ FPL
To pay for food	34%	21%	10%
To pay off debts	31%	36%	33%
To pay for utility bills	30%	24%	14%
To make house or rent payments	28%	13%	17%
Put in savings	25%	23%	45%
To buy clothes	18%	16%	9%
To pay for gasoline and energy	15%	11%	10%
To pay off back rent or back utilities	15%	7%	-
To buy things like appliances and furniture	13%	16%	9%
To pay for education	11%	11%	9%
To pay for medical expenses, medical bills, or medical debt	13%	9%	6%
For a vacation	5%	9%	9%
Help pay for purchasing a house or apartment	5%	7%	3%
To purchase a car/make car payments/car repairs	6%	2%	6%
Other	3%	4%	8%

**The food crisis extends beyond families struggling to make ends meet in expensive cities such as New York. In a national election-eve poll of 1,200 likely voters, CSS found that Americans across income are feeling the economic downturn in their households. In the past six months, over 1 in 5 voters with household income below \$40,000 had trouble paying for food.**

Thinking about the impact of the current economy and the financial crisis on your family, which of the following have you experienced in the past six months? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]

	UNDER \$40,000	OVER \$40,000
Had trouble paying for gas	31%	15%
Lost substantial savings or investments	23%	43%
Had trouble paying for food	21%	7%
Went into credit card debt	19%	12%
Had trouble getting or paying for health care	18%	9%
Lost a job	17%	9%
Had wages or hours reduced	17%	11%
Had trouble getting or paying for prescription drugs	16%	6%
Fell behind on mortgage or rent payments	11%	6%
Been threatened with or subject to foreclosure	6%	4%

# Community Service Society

## [www.cssny.org](http://www.cssny.org)

- ❖ The Community Service Society draws on a 160-year history of excellence in addressing the root causes of economic disparity. CSS is an informed, independent and unwavering voice for positive action that serves the needs of our constituents: low- and moderate-income New Yorkers who are too often left out of the policy conversation.
  
- ❖ *Special Thanks to our funders:*
  - ❖ Independence Community Foundation
  - ❖ The New York Community Trust
  - ❖ The New York Times Company Foundation
  - ❖ The Rockefeller Foundation
  
- ❖ CSS 2008 Unheard Third team is led by Jeremy Reiss and includes Chris Molnar, Elisabeth Benjamin, and Krista Pietrangelo.
  
- ❖ For more information about this Food Briefing, please contact Krista Pietrangelo, [kpietrangelo@cssny.org](mailto:kpietrangelo@cssny.org) or (212) 614.5468.