

# THE ROUND TABLE

ALLIES FOR FOOD ACCESS



## Annual Report 2021

Prepared by  
KarenKarp&Partners

August 2022

## Roundtable Members



## Funders



## Strategic & Coordinating Partner

KarenKarp&Partners



West Side Campaign Against Hunger

## Letter from Chef Greg Silverman

The last two years have been hard. It's a simple fact. The global pandemic pushed more New Yorkers into food insecurity and tested even the strongest of teams. The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access has been on the front lines across NYC working together to make change and helping support organizations to achieve their missions.

It was four years ago that we started calling up other leaders in our sector to discuss an idea that to many seemed radical: that we could work together, as front line food providers, to make sure our organizations had better food at better prices. This was a simple idea that as a chef and restaurateur I learned years ago in my restaurants, that manifests in a few key reminders:

- Never trust a price
- Buy better food in bigger quantities
- Always work together

The Roundtable has been four years in the making. Four years of fundraising, engaging program partners, of data collection, of dialogue and of advocacy. But mostly it has been four years of working together so we can all achieve our missions even amidst a global pandemic. And four years of incredible support. Big thank yous to all of our funders who have supported our journey: Robin Hood, Sea Change Capital, New York Health

Foundation, UJA Federation of NY, and New York Community Trust.

**The Roundtable is a dedicated network of emergency food providers collaborating to bring more resources to communities, so none of our neighbors go hungry.** It truly is a communal table, focused on not simply disrupting an inefficient emergency feeding system, but reimagining and revamping our work and holding each other accountable in the process. It's been a bumpy ride for all the New Yorkers we serve over the last two years, but our collective impact has grown—and we could not have done it without each other. Four years ago we started out talking about the price of chickens and onions and apples, and now we are talking about warehouse space, advocating for changing food and funding systems at the city and state levels, and how to make our voice heard.

Thanks to everyone for all your support, collaboration, and engagement, and as always for taking a seat with us at The Roundtable.

Chef Greg Silverman  
CEO/Executive Director, West Side Campaign  
Against Hunger  
Founder/Director, The Roundtable

# The Roundtable: 2021 By the Numbers

**40  
million**

meals served to New Yorkers in need by Roundtable member organizations

**14.3  
million**

pounds of fresh produce distributed

*nearly*  
**\$28,000**

saved on just one truckload of oats, in the Roundtable's first collaborative bulk purchase order

**644**

**distribution sites**  
across all five NYC boroughs

**3 million**

**visits by households**  
to Roundtable organizations' food pantries and soup kitchens

**\$17.7  
million**

in food purchasing power, combining government grants and private funds

**59%**

of food purchasing not covered by government grants

**\$3.4  
million**

in purchases of New York-grown product through the Nourish New York program

**7**

participating member organizations with an 8th added in early 2022

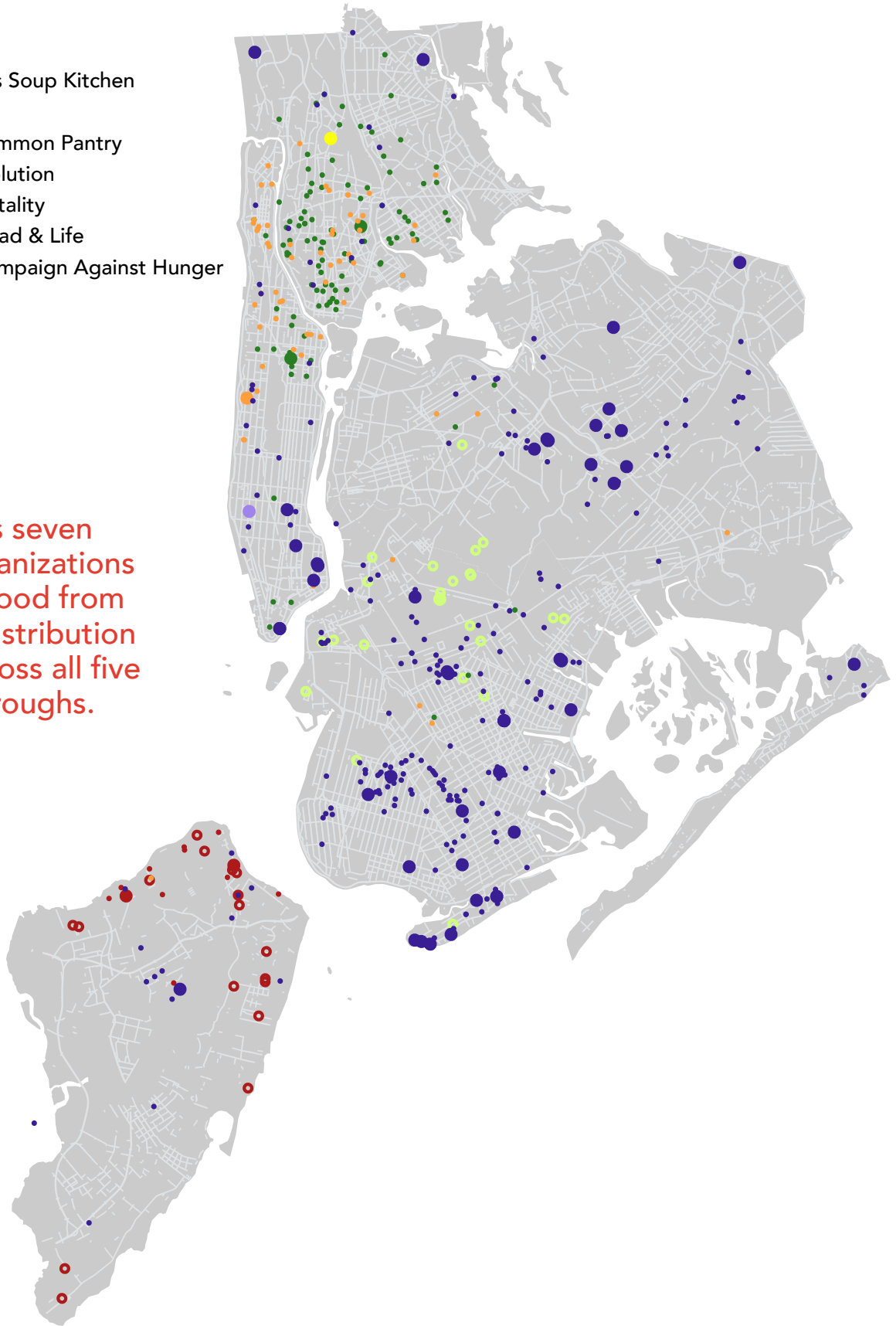
**502**

hours of in-kind staff time contributed by Roundtable member organizations

# The Roundtable: Our Reach in 2021

- Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen
  - Met Council
  - New York Common Pantry
  - Part of the Solution
  - Project Hospitality
  - St. John's Bread & Life
  - West Side Campaign Against Hunger
- 
- Anchor site
  - Mobile site
  - Partner site

In 2021, the Roundtable's seven member organizations distributed food from nearly 650 distribution locations across all five of NYC's boroughs.





West Side Campaign Against Hunger

## A Timeline of Roundtable Milestones

- 2018**
  - Roundtable launches as a collective purchasing project
- 2019**
  - Purchasing pilot achieves savings of nearly 20% across Roundtable organizations
- 2020**
  - Covid-19 state of emergency declared in NYS and NYC; Roundtable begins holding weekly pandemic response calls, including new members Met Council & Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen
  - Roundtable successfully advocates for vaccine eligibility for emergency food workers
- 2021**
  - The group officially adopts the name The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access
  - Part of the Solution (POTS) joins the Roundtable
- 2022**
  - The Campaign Against Hunger (TCAH) joins the Roundtable
  - Roundtable organizations make first bulk purchase: 37K pounds of oats

## Overview and Background

**The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access** was founded in 2018 to explore and pursue opportunities for collective purchasing by NYC’s largest emergency food providers. The four founding organizations—New York Common Pantry (NYCP), Project Hospitality (PH), and St. John’s Bread & Life (SJBL), led by West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH)—partnered with food systems consultancy Karen Karp & Partners (KK&P) to conduct research and coordinate the activities of the coalition. After an initial research phase, the group launched a purchasing pilot that ran for several months in 2019, testing new and expanded vendor relationships with six participating vendors, and documenting average savings of nearly 20% across the collective. The success of the pilot included not just the fiscal savings achieved by the organizations, but also the open communication and collaborative spirit among the participating organizations.

All four organizations wanted to continue the collaboration and expand the group with additional members. The coalition outlined a subsequent year-long phase of work, set to launch in early 2020, which would focus on expanding the group and identifying additional collaboration opportunities, while continuing the efforts focused on purchasing strategy. As the Covid-19 pandemic emerged, the group forged ahead with the collaboration, but re-oriented activities to respond to the rapidly shifting context and challenges brought on by the pandemic. Two new organizations joined the coalition by mid-2020: Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen and the Met Council.

In early 2021, the group adopted the name **The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access**, as well as the following mission statement: *The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access collaborates to bring more resources to communities, so none of our neighbors go hungry.* The group’s work has coalesced around three focus areas: strategic purchasing, advocacy, and mutual support. This report summarizes the Roundtable’s activities from early 2021 to early 2022.

***“While this group didn’t start as a pandemic response, it was so helpful to have this in place for Covid, and really helped to illuminate how important this type of collaboration is.***

***We were able to use our shared experiences to identify best practices, shared efficiencies, and also to help each other through this difficult time.”***

**- Judy Secon  
New York Common Pantry**

***“We’ve been better positioned to work toward reducing direct expenses through bulk purchasing efforts, our voices are heard more now and people are listening, we have credibility as a group and our advocacy efforts have made inroads.”***

**- Sr. Caroline Tweedy, RSM  
St. John’s Bread & Life**

## **Activities and Accomplishments**

The Roundtable’s activities in 2021 were characterized by adaptation to the “new normal” of elevated food insecurity amidst the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. After navigating the unpredictable challenges of 2020, the Roundtable was able to refocus its energy on its three core focus areas: advocacy, strategic purchasing, and mutual support, while also continuing to expand its membership by welcoming Part of the Solution (POTS) as a new member in late 2021, and The Campaign Against Hunger (TCAH) as a new member in early 2022, while also formalizing the organizational structure of the group. Key activities and accomplishments of 2021 are described in below.

### **Advocacy & Visibility**

The Roundtable has continued to embrace its growing voice for advocacy, speaking on behalf of its member organizations and arguing for stronger supports and funding streams for direct service emergency food organizations. Key highlights from 2021 include:

- Roundtable founder/director Greg Silverman was named co-chair of the Mayor’s Food Policy transition committee, which also included three additional Roundtable members. They were able to push for some of the core food system changes that the Roundtable has been advocating for, such as better citywide data review, and improvements to the city’s EFAP program.
- The Mayor’s Office of Food Policy convened an “innovative capacity working group” to explore ways of driving innovation within the city’s emergency food network. In addition to the organizations that are typically invited to participate in such endeavors (City Harvest, Food Bank for NYC, United Way), the group also included four members of the Roundtable.
- In late 2021, the Roundtable engaged Equity Advocates, a non-profit organization devoted to supporting food system organizations in their efforts to pursue policy and systems change. Throughout 2022, Equity Advocates will be working with the Roundtable to develop a clear advocacy agenda and action plan, which will guide the Roundtable’s advocacy work in the months and years ahead.

The Roundtable has also continued to expand its visibility and public voice by participating in public forums; examples include:

- In June 2021, Greg Silverman (WSCAH), Jessica Chait (Met Council), and Ben Kerrick (KK&P) spoke on a virtual panel titled “NYC Innovations in Client Choice and Collective Action” as part of the Food Pantries for the Capital District’s biannual Food Summit.



New York Common Pantry / Rathkopf Photography

- In August 2021, the Roundtable held a virtual town hall event marking the release of its last annual report (covering activities of 2020); the event included a panel discussion with all members of the Roundtable included.

*“The Roundtable is a great opportunity to share ideas with peers in the same industry. We can learn from each other to build a stronger emergency food system in NYC.”*

*- Christina Hanson  
Part of the Solution*

## Roundtable Governance & Identity

Although the Roundtable has existed as a coalition since 2018, it had never adopted a formal governance structure or asked its members to agree to memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to codify their participation as members. As the Roundtable’s work moved beyond the one-off purchasing pilot that drove its launch, it became increasingly clear that the group should explicitly outline the roles, benefits, and responsibilities of membership, as well as the decision-making processes that underlie the Roundtable’s collaboration. The Roundtable enlisted the support of attorney Adam Spilka, a partner and supporter of WSCAH, to help create a simple MOU to outline Roundtable membership and governance. All current Roundtable members signed the MOU by early 2022.

The Roundtable has also continued to develop its public-facing identity. As was announced in the last Roundtable annual report, the group adopted its new name (The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access) and mission statement in 2021. Since then, the group has continued to work with the Viney Group on its brand identity, and has adopted a logo and launched a website at [theroundtablenyc.org](https://theroundtablenyc.org).





The Campaign Against Hunger

***“To Holy Apostles, the biggest success of the Roundtable has been our collective buying and bargaining abilities. Being able to purchase food in bulk for a lower price has significantly impacted our organization.”***

***- Michael Ottley  
Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen***

## Strategic Purchasing

### Ongoing Purchasing Work

Over the past year, the Roundtable and its member organizations have been working to expand the scope of their internal purchasing work and data sharing program while also creating systems that meaningfully and efficiently help member organizations find the best products possible at the best prices available. In pursuit of these goals, the group has worked to identify and refine a new market basket of priority and bellwether items upon which price tracking efforts now focus—including canned and fresh proteins, eggs, and shelf stable milk. The tracking system also enables emphasis on NYS-sourced items, such as produce, legumes, and fresh milk, which can be paid for using the now-permanent NourishNY grant.

The full implementation of this new price tracking system will allow Roundtable members to access regular, bi-monthly analyses reporting on the current, comparative pricing landscape for market basket items across the full range of vendors from which group members purchase, as well as current analyses on specific items of interest to individual group members as requested. In addition to allowing individual member organizations enhanced insight into the ecosystem of vendors available to them—commensurately increasing each organization’s ability to find the best pricing available and hold individual vendors accountable—sharing data amongst members in this way helps to bolster trust and further the Roundtable’s goals of developing transparency and community across the group’s membership.



NYCP at Met Council

The Roundtable’s first bulk purchase order of a trailer of oats **saved 50%, or nearly \$28,000**, compared to what Roundtable organizations would have paid to a traditional distributor.

### Bulk Purchasing

At the same time that the Roundtable has been working to revamp and update its price tracking systems, the coalition has also been working toward a longstanding yet elusive goal: working collectively to purchase products directly from manufacturers at bulk pricing and discounts. While doing something like this might seem straightforward, there were multiple operational and logistical obstacles that needed to be overcome, including identifying a single product which member organizations could absorb and distribute in sufficient quantities to warrant the purchase of a full trailer load; soliciting bids from manufacturers and choosing a vendor to fulfill the order; receiving the trailer at a central location, organizing each organization’s desired allotment, and coordinating last mile pick up and delivery logistics for each participating organization; and devising and agreeing to a common memorandum of understanding to codify the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties involved.

In the end, six of the Roundtable members agreed to go in together to purchase a full trailer load of quick oats from Unipak Foods in New Jersey in March 2022—securing cost savings of more than 50 percent when compared with the traditional distributors from which members had been ordering comparable products—and were able to receive the load at the Met Council’s warehouse in Brooklyn, with the Met Council’s operations team masterfully coordinating last mile distribution and pick up to and from participating member organizations’ facilities across the city.

As the Roundtable looks ahead to continued strategic purchasing efforts, members are in agreement that they are ready to begin setting up standing orders for additional staple goods, such as shelf-stable milk, peanut butter, cooking oil, and diapers, and are excitedly setting themselves on the path to more fully capitalizing on their shared experiences of cooperation.



WSCAH at Met Council



SJBL at Met Council



***“Although WSCAH initially imagined The Roundtable for information sharing and cost savings, this initiative has rapidly grown and evolved into a driver for collective and innovative practices among some of the largest emergency food providers in the city.”***

**- Greg Silverman  
West Side Campaign  
Against Hunger**

## Other Collaborations & Mutual Support

As has been the case since the launch of the Roundtable’s work in 2018, the group’s regular monthly calls and ancillary conversations provide an invaluable platform for ongoing information sharing, peer support, and problem solving. Roundtable organizations compare notes on operational best practices, troubleshoot emerging challenges in grant streams and procurement, and share successes and accomplishments. One example of an offshoot collaboration in 2021 was a shared state grant for \$70K that WSCAH secured on behalf of the Roundtable, specifically to support additional Covid-related transportation expenses; this funding was disbursed to four Roundtable organizations who were able to make use of it.

The Roundtable has also begun to explore how it can support smaller or less-established emergency food organizations outside of the core Roundtable membership. Beginning in the fall of 2021, the Roundtable engaged two such partner organizations in these efforts: Episcopal Charities, based on the Upper West side of Manhattan and with a pantry network extending into the Hudson Valley, and RiseBoro, serving communities in Bushwick, Brooklyn, both of which are in the process of developing increasingly robust food pantry operations. The Roundtable’s engagement with these organizations quickly expanded into a mentorship-style relationship, wherein KK&P and Roundtable member organizations helped participants with issues including bid solicitation and assessment, navigation of NYC emergency food bureaucracy, data and client management, and technology use. In the year ahead, the Roundtable will continue to explore ways to meet additional partner organizations where they are in terms of needs, and to sustainably deploy the breadth of their experience in service of strengthening NYC’s networks of emergency food providers.



Part of the Solution (L), Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen (R)

***“Besides the monetary benefit of the savings, the Roundtable has really helped shine a light on the value that emergency food providers bring to local communities.”***

***- Alex Hughes  
Project Hospitality***

## Next Steps

The Roundtable and its members are more committed than ever to continuing and expanding our important work together.

In the months ahead, we will be finalizing and adopting a clear advocacy plan with the support of Equity Advocates. Our advocacy priorities include increased autonomy and investment in emergency food programs across NYC; funding increases and streamlining of state grant programs Nourish NY and HPNAP; the successful rollout of NYC’s new Community Food Connections program; and a stronger voice for direct service emergency food organizations on all fronts.

At the same time, we’ll continue to expand and refine our strategic purchasing, including with regular standing bulk orders, after the success of our bulk purchase pilot early this year.

Through it all, we will continue to share information, creatively navigate new opportunities and challenges, and explore ways to engage and support the city’s broader emergency food network.

The Roundtable’s central innovation is our collaboration: the simple idea that by working together, we can bring more impact to our communities. We look forward to deepening our collaboration as well as our impact in the months and years ahead.

*“The Roundtable reminds us we are part of a system, each working to alleviate the burdens of poverty. The Roundtable brings us together to learn, to collaborate, to reflect—and maybe even commiserate. Through this space and the relationships we’ve cultivated, we help each other achieve our individual and shared missions of feeding our neighbors in need.”*

*- Jessica Chait  
The Met Council*



Learn more at  
[theroundtablenyc.org](http://theroundtablenyc.org)

**PHOTOS**

**COVER (from top left):**

- New York Common Pantry / Rathkopf Photography
- Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen
- Part of the Solution
- New York Common Pantry / Rathkopf Photography

**THIS PAGE (from top):**

- Project Hospitality with Met Council
- Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen
- New York Common Pantry / Rathkopf Photography
- Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen
- The Campaign Against Hunger
- St. John's Bread & Life