

The Next Crisis: Critical Thinking Workshop — Key Takeaways

At our workshop, participants worked in table groups to reflect on crisis response through a shared lens — and some tables also dug into deeper follow-up questions. Here's what emerged across the room.



☑ We'd Do Again	⊖ We'd Never Do Again	💡 If Anything Were Possible
• Move fast and communicate clearly — calm, transparent messaging built trust and avoided panic • Lean on the agency/partner network instead of running distributions solo • Get full staff buy-in and rally volunteers early, with pre-planning before crisis hits • Use data to plan sites equitably and guide real-time decisions • Meet people where they are — mobile markets, pop-ups, home deliveries, direct-to-neighbor distributions	• Try to run everything internally instead of activating network partners • Deplete inventory for one mass distribution at the expense of ongoing partner support • Let response speed replace internal team communication or care for staff wellbeing • Depend on restricted or one-time funding • Skip naming an internal crisis lead or planning for when funding/attention fades	• Universal healthcare, childcare, and a fully funded, expanded SNAP • A connected, shared-data system linking food banks statewide • A distribution hub and expanded storage/agency capacity in every county • Flexible, dignity-centered models: real choice, cultural/dietary variety, more mobile & pop-up access • Zero hunger — no competition between large and small food banks for resources

Deeper Themes from the Follow-Up Questions

Note: tables were assigned different subsets of questions, so this reflects the themes that emerged, not a full response from every table.

Q1. Lessons from COVID & the government shutdown

- Worked: activating the agency network, investing in procurement/sourcing staff, proactive donor stewardship
- Didn't work: too many disconnected one-off relief funds; being short-staffed for a prepared, coordinated response

Q2. Most innovative, replicable emergency response

- Home delivery (including via DoorDash) for elderly/homebound neighbors during the shutdown
- Pre-packed disaster boxes ready for immediate deployment

Q3. Crisis change that became permanent, everyday practice

- Virtual meetings — both internally and across the network — are now standard
- Data is now integrated across departments to guide and scale crisis response

Q4. Most valuable partnerships, and how they were built

- Local government most often took the lead; retail donors, healthcare, and USDA/OGS/TEFAP also mattered
- Built through consistent presence and regular touchpoints — not just outreach during the crisis itself

Q5. The hardest lesson learned

- Unrestricted funding matters most when a crisis hits
- A designated internal crisis lead prevents scramble; keep variety (protein, produce) and safety stock on hand year-round