



Best Practices

Innovations & solutions developed by hunger
relief agencies in Washington State



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Special thanks also to Lara Ashley Monroe, for contacting dozens of programs across the state to collect their best practice and to the Washington Food Coalition Board of Directors for their continued support.

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Our History

We not only strive to highlight the current innovations and solutions in hunger relief agencies, but we also honor those that have done the hard work of building a foundation for a strong emergency food system.

In the early 1970's, several factors, including the Boeing bust and a nationwide energy crisis, caused a hard-hitting recession throughout Washington. Families who had previously been self-sufficient were left without employment and without food on their shelves. In 1972, concerned neighbors in Washington began to grow discontent seeing others in their community face hunger. Slowly but surely, groups rallied together throughout the state to set up local food banks. Some had begun organizing before this, and some would soon come after, but 1972 marks a year of remarkable activity in the formation of early food bank networks around the state. Organizations that began in 1972 include Puyallup Food Bank, Thurston County Food Bank, Bellingham Food Bank, and 2nd Harvest Inland Northwest. The Washington State Legislature took a major step to fight hunger in 1985 when they formed the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) to provide funds to the developing food bank system. In 1992, this program expanded to also support the Tribal Voucher Food Program.

Incorporated in 1992, the Washington Food Coalition is the result of a merger between the Western Washington Food Coalition and Eastern Washington's Northwest Regional Food Network. Members of these independently incorporated organizations envisioned a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network. Their goal was to work cooperatively to alleviate hunger and provide a unified voice for hunger programs. Since then, our work has been anything but light or easy. Varying economic times provide fluctuation in the strain our members face, but there has never been a season when their services are not greatly needed. Our work is not confined to the traditional food bank, but we also represent all meal programs, distribution programs, and anyone fighting hunger in Washington.

Enough cannot be said about the grueling work that was done by those who formed a statewide emergency food system, when nothing of the sort existed a few short decades ago. The Washington Food Coalition is proud to continue the hard work of building on what they have accomplished. The situations, interests, and needs of our agencies are diverse. However, we find unity in the belief that no one in Washington State should go hungry and we share in the vision of a strong emergency food system.

For those of us who now carry the work of feeding our hungry neighbors, and those who will soon join our work, we press on with optimism and the fortitude to continue until no one in Washington goes hungry anymore.

Overview of Washington Food Coalition

Our Mission

The Washington Food Coalition actively educates and networks with organizations that strive to alleviate hunger throughout Washington.

Our Vision

The Washington Food Coalition is the unified voice for a strong emergency food system.

Overview

The Washington Food Coalition is a non-profit network of food banks, food pantries, food distribution centers, hot meal and food voucher programs throughout the state of Washington.

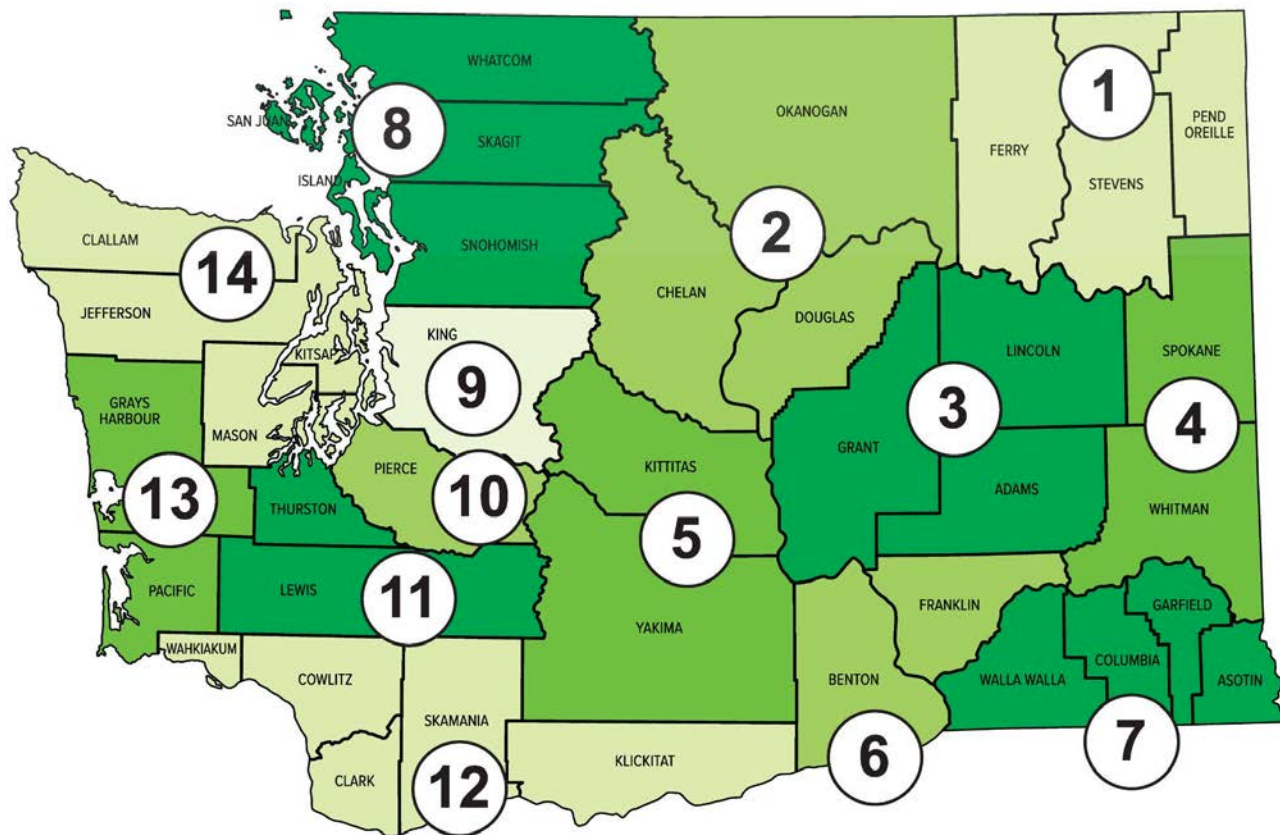


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Goals of this Catalog

We hope this catalog will:

- Inspire emergency food programs across the state to innovate and adopt effective strategies to better address hunger in their communities.
- Recognize and celebrate programs that have developed and are already using best practices.
- Encourage dialogue and networking among providers to solve common problems and share successes for the benefit of all our communities statewide.
- Provide community partners with ideas about the many ways they can get involved in fighting hunger.
- Educate funders and public officials about the issues emergency food programs face and some promising solutions that are worthy of investment.

How the Catalog is Organized

Best practice profiles are organized into the following major categories:

- Food Access and Innovation
- Nutrition Policies
- Farm to Table
- Customer Service
- Hospitality
- Going the Extra Mile For Kids
- Recruiting and Managing Volunteers
- Organizational Strength and Capacity
- Community Relations
- Public Engagement and Advocacy
- Fundraising: Everything from Individuals to Special Events

In each category, short summaries describe best practices related to that topic. We hope some of these short summaries will spark your interest in doing something differently in your program.

Look for These Symbols

To help you identify practices that may be particularly relevant to your type of program, we have coded each best practice using the following symbols:



Food Banks



Meal Programs



Distribution Centers



For All To Use



New Additions



Updated Entries

Food Access and Innovation

Emergency food programs strive to bring quality, nutritious food in sufficient quantities to hungry people in the community. These efforts vary from programs that source garden and farm produce to an emphasis on procuring whole grain, low salt and unprocessed food offerings. Efforts of emergency food programs are getting the attention of funders and policy makers as well. As awareness builds regarding the health disparities facing low-income people, such as elevated rates of obesity and diabetes, grantmakers and donors are expressing greater interest in ensuring that everyone in our community has equal access to fresh, healthy foods. The best practices below are organized into four categories: fresh and healthy options, responding to specific dietary needs, customer education, and increasing quantity, quality and variety. General best practices in the food area include:

- Adjusting offerings for people with special diets or limited access to cooking facilities
- Increased responsiveness to customers' cultural requirements, including offering culturally connected staples
- Declining or limiting non-nutritive food offerings
- Updated approaches to food drives to maximize effort and get the best results

Stretching the Produce Budget: How White Center Food Bank Delivers High-Quality Produce at Low Cost

White Center Food Bank - Seattle



Despite operating on a modest budget, the White Center Food Bank has consistently provided fresh, high-quality produce to its customers. In 2024, the organization achieved an average cost of under \$0.60 per pound for produce - an impressive feat that reflects both strategic partnerships and efficient procurement practices.

A primary factor in this success has been the effective use of hot sheets and weekly deal guides from trusted regional produce vendors. These tools allow the food bank to source affordable produce without compromising on quality. Below are the vendors whose collaboration has been instrumental:

- **Charlie's Produce**
As the largest wholesale produce distributor in King County, Charlie's Produce plays a significant role in the food bank's procurement strategy. They offer a daily deal sheet specifically for food security organizations, featuring high-quality items often comparable to standard wholesale-grade produce. Their team is also proactive in flagging any potential quality issues.
- **Pacific Coast Fresh Company**
With distribution centers in Seattle and Portland, Pacific Coast Fresh provides daily hot sheets and weekly pricing lists. Their hot sheet items are often deeply discounted and ideal for quick distribution, as they tend to be ripe upon delivery. They also offer bulk pricing on full pallet purchases and are responsive to special sourcing requests for unique items such as lemongrass, Yu Choy, and Thai basil.
- **Caruso Produce**
Another Pacific Northwest-based vendor, Caruso Produce is valued for its competitive pricing and regular deal sheets. They are a reliable source for Latin American produce such as dried peppers, fresh peppers, and tomatillos - often at the best rates available in King County.

By leveraging strategic vendor relationships and monitoring market opportunities through weekly communications and price sheets, the White Center Food Bank has built a resilient and cost-effective produce program. This approach not only maximizes budget impact but also ensures a consistent supply of nutritious food for the community.

Smart Shopping: Bulk Buying CommitteeSeattle Food Committee - Seattle



For the past 39 years, the Seattle Food Committee (SFC) has pooled funds to purchase foods in bulk for Seattle food banks.

The program is managed by an SFC committee supported by staff at Solid Ground's Food System Support. Food Lifeline (FLL) provides a staff person who attends the meetings and acts as a buying agent. SFC decides on a percentage of funds that are put into a common pot and used to purchase high-priority

items, which are then distributed to all eligible programs using an allocation formula. A special effort is being made to maintain the committee's geographic diversity. Every year, SFC surveys members regarding their top three priority needs to help set the committee's priorities. Protein items, including meats and eggs, milk, fresh produce and rice generally top the list. The committee then looks at funding available for the year and starts making buying decisions. After many years, they have agreement on certain regular purchases, such as purchasing eggs around Easter and peanut butter and/or tuna to carry families through the summer. The committee meets monthly, monitoring spending and making additional purchasing decisions while sticking to identified priorities.

The only drawback she can identify is that individual food banks can't tailor their purchases. The committee tries to choose foods that have broad appeal, such as vegetables used across many cultural groups," she notes. Through this program, food banks can receive first-rate products that are not dependent on the donation stream. The committee always purchases enough that each food bank has a sufficient supply of the item to last one week or two weeks for distribution. Once decisions are made, FLL staff research options and consult with committee leadership to get final approval on a purchase. The food is delivered to FLL's warehouse and is distributed from there (bulk purchasing info for Seattle food banks is even incorporated into FLL's online ordering system).

What It Takes:

If starting a program like this in your community, the place to start would be your local food distributor. Ask them if they have the capacity to do the pass-through, store, and distribute the purchased food. Also, expect to assist with overhead to help cover some of the lead agency's costs. Depending on capacity, choose appropriate purchases. For example, consider whether you can purchase perishables that require refrigeration. One place for a smaller community to start might be non-food items that all the programs need, such as plastic bags. Think about how you will organize yourselves and make decisions on behalf of the group.

Bag It Up: A New Approach To Getting Food Donations

Green Bag Project - Issaquah



The Green Bag Project is a simple, community-driven food donation program that empowers neighbors to support their local food bank with minimal commitment. Founded in Ashland, Oregon, the model has since expanded to roughly 50 similar programs across the U.S. Jim Berry partners with the Issaquah Food Bank. He helps coordinate volunteers to pick up the collections. Like other versions, his team operates on the principle of “Building Communities, Sharing Food.”

Donors receive reusable green bags and a shopping list (typically 11 nonperishable food items and five hygiene products, such as diapers).

Six times a year, they fill the bag and leave it on their porch for collection. Neighborhood coordinators pick up the donations and bring them to a central location, where volunteers sort the items before the food bank distributes them. The program provides about 80% of the food bank’s nonperishable needs (collecting 85,000 pounds last year alone) and has grown from 64 bags in its first 2019 collection to 1,300 bags every two months!

What It Takes:

- **Keep It Simple** – The program thrives on low barriers to participation. Donors only commit to filling a bag six times a year, and coordinators spend about 10 hours annually.
- **Leverage Community Networks** – Recruitment happens through neighbors, not distant connections. Coordinators distribute bags and brochures door-to-door, fostering local engagement. Social media can help spread the word, too!
- **Streamline Logistics** – Collections occur on set dates (e.g., the second Saturday of even-numbered months, avoiding holidays). Donors receive a new bag and list at pickup, creating a self-sustaining cycle.
- **Minimize Costs** – The only major expense is the reusable green bags (\$2.50 each, lasting 25 pickups). Premade websites and materials from the Medford, Oregon, hub reduce startup work.
- **Adapt to Community Culture** – The model works best in mid-sized towns or tight-knit neighborhoods where people already share resources. Flexibility in sorting (e.g., secondary sorting at the food bank’s convenience) ensures scalability.

Pro Tip: Partner with another volunteer to share coordination duties, and focus on convenience, both for donors (porch pickups) and volunteers (centralized sorting). As Jim notes, “Most donors won’t give cash, but they’ll happily give food all year.”

Raising the Bar: Setting Higher Standards

Operation Sack Lunch - Seattle



Operation Sack Lunch (OSL) espouses the ideal that nutritional excellence should not be tied to economic status. Founder and Executive Director Beverly Graham says, "Food has an immense amount of power in our lives from the moment we are born."

When you are given food that is not quality, a feeling of unworth surrounds that. When working with a population that already has issues of being treated as if they don't have worth, giving them food suitable for the trash sends the wrong message." OSL acts on their philosophy by buying organic whenever possible, doing a pesticide/herbicide wash on most foods, and prioritizing buying and serving fresh, quality produce at every meal. They offer a hot meal each day that includes fresh vegetables, fruit and salad greens. They don't use food containing artificial coloring, preservatives, additives, sugar, or trans fats. The OSL kitchen uses environmentally friendly cleaning supplies and a Thermal Accelerated Nano Crystal Sanitation (TANCS) steamer system for sanitizing the kitchen.

What It Takes:

According to Graham, programs seeking to move in the direction of healthy, quality foods need to be open to learning and shift their thinking to operate from a place of abundance rather than a scarcity mentality. "You need to be able to be gentle with your donors," says Graham, "and be able to say, 'I appreciate that you brought a pallet of Twinkies' but that's not what we serve our customers. Do you have lettuce instead?" It's a slow process of education, and it helps to be open to new learning yourself.

Honoring Tradition: Culturally Appropriate Foods

Asian Counseling and Referral Service - Seattle



ACRS promotes social justice, well-being and the empowerment of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other underserved communities – including immigrants, refugees, and American-born – by developing, providing and advocating for innovative, effective and efficient community-based multilingual and multicultural services. Their customers come from diverse backgrounds. Bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers speak

more than 40 different languages, so they can understand and provide appropriate assistance to their customers. The ACRS Food Bank distributes foods that meet APA's dietary needs including tofu, soy milk, noodles, canned proteins and produce as well as 5,250 pounds of rice each week. Because many of these items are not regularly available in the donation stream, ACRS purchases many of them. Culturally appropriate food is just one aspect of the ways in which ACRS works to meet the culturally specific needs of customers.

ACRS also has a convenient location in Seattle's International District with bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers to assist customers with language barriers. The organization also translates written materials into multiple languages. The majority of their staff are APA, so they are familiar with the food choices of their customers. They talked to their customers, learned that the items they were giving out were too heavy for some patrons to carry, and they were not being used. This information led to changes such as moving to a supermarket-like arrangement that allows for customer choice, as well as changes to the food offerings. Through these changes, people feel respected, and they get appropriate foods.

What It Takes:

Finding volunteers who are representative of the communities they serve helps dramatically with cultural competency. At ACRS, they have relationships with 27 different identity-based groups who send volunteers to help with food sorting and home delivery. Volunteers who are from the same culture or speak the same language as customers can help with collecting information from customers, as well as understanding their community's needs and preferences.

Nutrition Policies

A nutrition policy for a food program is a set of guidelines that ensures the foods provided by the program support the health and well-being of the community served. It helps establish standards for the types of food offered, prioritizing nutritious options such as whole grains, fresh produce, lean proteins, while limiting or avoiding foods high in added sugars, unhealthy fats, and artificial additives.

For sample policies and templates, please see [Example Nutrition Policies](#) section under resources.

Why Food Pantries Should Have a Nutrition Policy

Food pantries play a crucial role in addressing food and nutrition insecurity, and a nutrition policy helps ensure that the food distributed not only fills bellies but also nourishes people. Many pantry customers face diet-related health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, making access to healthy foods essential. By adopting a nutrition policy, food pantries can support better health outcomes, promote food equity, and empower individuals and families to make healthier choices.

Food pantries that implement nutrition policies demonstrate a strong commitment to community health and are often more competitive in securing funding. By formally prioritizing nutritious food, these programs align with funders' health focused scoring criteria, which can lead to higher review scores and enhance their chances of securing financial support. Thus, nutrition policies can lead to new donor partners with those who are looking to invest in programs that promote health and wellness.

Key Steps in Nutrition Policy Development

1. Convene the key stakeholders including customers, volunteers, staff and community partners. Discuss overarching program challenges and goals and ways that a nutrition policy could benefit your organization. Review other program policies as examples and for inspiration.
2. Gather community input about their food and nutrition needs through informal conversations, customer surveys, focus groups or other methods. Analyze and share the results of feedback.
3. Review community feedback and define policy goals and rationale as it relates to community needs. Draft policy incorporating food goals and benchmarks. Collaborate with stakeholders to ensure everyone who needs to be involved is involved. This helps ensure buy-in and long-term success.

4. Develop Donor Guidelines that highlight the foods needed most and those foods that are discouraged – be sure to include key goals where needed and in alignment with the policy.
5. Finalize nutrition policy and donor guide. Present to the board for approval.
6. Share your policy with your community! Promote your policy on social media, through a press release, a community event and on your website. Be sure to include your policy on your website and social media platforms.

Evaluate your policy's impact, successes and challenges; review and update it annually or more often as the community needs change, new partnerships are established, or whenever you need to make updates. Share your evaluation results in annual reports, online, and in partner meetings to highlight your accomplishments and allow other food programs to learn from you!

Smart Choices: Using the Healthy Eating Research Guidelines for Food Procurement and Distribution



Food insecurity is closely linked to higher rates of diet-related diseases, such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease. To help address this, food programs such as food pantries, can play a role by offering nutritious foods that meet the health needs and cultural needs of their customers. Distribution of nutrient-dense foods that support long-term health by food pantries increases access to and consumption of these foods, including fresh produce, whole grains, and lean proteins. The [Healthy Eating Research \(HER\) Guidelines](#) provide a science-based framework to help food distributors select and supply foods that promote better nutrition for individuals facing food insecurity.

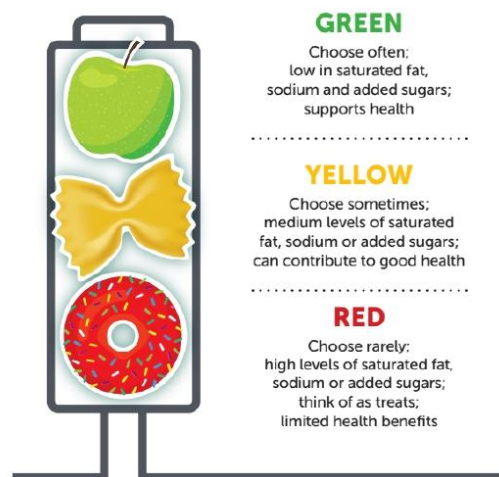
The HER Guidelines categorize foods based on their nutritional quality. The guidelines help food programs procure items rich in essential nutrients while limiting those high in added sugars, sodium, and saturated fats. By aligning procurement strategies with evidence-based guidelines, food programs can ensure that the food they provide is not only abundant but also nourishing. By adopting a formal, written nutrition policy that uses the HER standards helps create a food environment that supports healthier choices and reduces the risk of chronic disease among pantry customers.

In practice, food banks can use the HER Guidelines to assess current inventory, set procurement goals, adjust procurement policies, and work with donors and suppliers to prioritize healthier options. Strategies may include sourcing more fresh produce, whole grains, culturally appropriate lean proteins, and low-sodium canned goods while limiting foods high in sodium and added sugars.

Food programs can adopt clear, customer-facing labeling systems, such as the [Supporting Wellness at Pantries \(SWAP\)](#) stoplight system, to help clients make informed choices when selecting foods. The SWAP system provides factual information using a simple color coded stoplight system which shows the amount of sodium, added sugar and saturated fat in foods so customers can select the foods they need most, with this information at their fingertips in green, yellow and red shelf tags.

Adopting the HER Guidelines or SWAP are important steps toward shifting the focus of food assistance programs from simply providing calories to fostering health and wellness. By ensuring that food-insecure individuals receive the most nutrient-dense foods possible, food banks and pantries can play a vital role in reducing health disparities and supporting the overall well-being of the communities they serve.

SWAP: Using Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) to Educate Pantry Customers



The Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) program is a spotlight nutrition ranking system designed to increase nutritious food choices at food banks and food pantries. Developed by the Institute for Hunger Research and Solutions at Connecticut Food Bank | Foodshare, SWAP, aims to simplify the process of identifying nutritious foods by categorizing them into three color-coded groups: green (choose often), yellow (choose sometimes), and red (choose rarely). This easy-to-understand system is particularly important because many food pantry clients struggle with chronic conditions like high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes, diseases that can

often be managed or prevented through dietary choices.

SWAP works by analyzing three key nutrients of concern which are listed on food labels: saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars. These are identified in the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines as "nutrients to limit" due to their strong links to chronic illnesses. Foods low in all three nutrients are labeled green, those with moderate levels fall into the yellow category, and items high in any of the nutrients are marked red. This straightforward visual system allows pantry clients to quickly assess and choose healthier items while also guiding food pantry staff and donors in curating more nutritious offerings.

The SWAP program provides a range of benefits for food pantry customers, including better support for chronic disease management and the empowerment to make informed food choices. By adopting SWAP, food pantries can help shift the food environment to prioritize health and wellness. SWAP aligns with the Healthy Eating Research (HER) nutrition guidelines, which are often used as the reference for food pantry nutrition policies. When pantries use HER to encourage more thoughtful food donations, and SWAP to educate clients about food choices, this can lead to a more balanced inventory. Ultimately, implementing SWAP promotes equity and dignity in food access by making healthy options visible, accessible, and achievable for all pantry clients.

Making Healthy Choices Easier with SWAP

Tenino Community Service Center and Food Bank Plus - Tenino



At Tenino Food Bank Plus, providing food is just the beginning. Operated through the Tenino Community Service Center, this rural pantry is reimagining what it means to nourish a community by helping clients and donors alike understand how to choose healthier foods through the Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) system.

Using a stoplight-style approach, SWAP categorizes foods into green (choose often), yellow (choose sometimes), and red (choose rarely) based on sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar content. The goal isn't restriction, it's empowerment. Clients learn to navigate the shelves with confidence, and donors are encouraged to bring items that support long-term wellness, not just short-term hunger relief.

This work is powered by strong partnerships. With support from the Washington Food Coalition and the American Heart Association, Tenino Food Bank Plus received technical assistance and resources to train staff and volunteers, evaluate inventory, and communicate clearly with clients and donors. Local business Tenino Market Fresh has also joined the effort, promoting healthy food donations and helping spread awareness in the community.

What It Takes:

Launching a nutrition-forward approach like SWAP starts with community buy-in and education. At Tenino Food Bank Plus, staff and volunteers first learned how to assess foods using the SWAP guidelines. With guidance from the Washington Food Coalition and the American Heart Association, they built a clear understanding of how sodium, added sugar, and saturated fat impact long-term health and how those markers can guide smarter food choices.

Next, the pantry worked with partners like Tenino Market Fresh to share the vision with the public. Donors were introduced to the SWAP categories and encouraged to contribute more green and yellow ranked foods. The pantry also created clear signage and client-facing materials, helping shoppers understand how to use the system without feeling overwhelmed or judged.

The result is a healthier, more empowering food pantry experience and a model that other rural communities can learn from. It takes collaboration, consistency, and a commitment to health equity, but the impact is worth it: clients leave with meals that not only feed their families but support their well-being

How Nutrition Policies Strengthen Pantry Practices

American Heart Association and Washington Food Coalition



Across Washington State, food pantries are embracing a shift - not just toward feeding people but toward nourishing them with care. At the heart of this transformation is a growing movement to adopt written nutrition policies that clearly articulate an organization's commitment to health, dignity, and community values.

A nutrition policy is more than a document; it's a living guide that helps food banks and pantries align daily practices with long-term goals. It communicates to staff, donors, and volunteers what kinds of foods are prioritized, guides purchasing decisions, and provides consistency in how food is sourced, stocked, and shared. More than that, it empowers clients. Tools like SWAP make healthy choices easier and more accessible without being restrictive.

Nutrition policies also provide a structure for growth. They serve as a framework for goal setting, enabling organizations to track progress and demonstrate outcomes. They ensure mission alignment, helping staff and volunteers stay focused on the belief that food and health are inherently connected. And perhaps most importantly, they highlight a commitment to community health, reinforcing that the work of feeding people is fundamentally about supporting their well-being.

Whether it's improving donor communication, guiding responsible stewardship of resources, or encouraging culturally relevant, nutrient-dense food donations, a written policy offers clarity and impact. It's a tool that sustains programs, supports clients, and brings values to the forefront, making it easier to nourish communities with both purpose and pride.

What It Takes:

- Start with Community Input: Engage clients, staff, and volunteers in shaping a policy that reflects the real needs and values of your community.
- Use a Structured Framework: Build your policy around evidence-based tools like the HER Guidelines and SWAP to keep it actionable and consistent.
- Communicate Clearly: Use signage, handouts, and donor guides to share your nutrition priorities with stakeholders at every level.
- Set Measurable Goals: Track progress toward increasing access to healthier foods and share those results with partners and funders.
- Adapt as Needed: Revisit the policy annually to reflect new insights, partnerships, or community changes; it's a living document.

- Link to Mission: Make the policy part of your organizational culture, ensuring it supports long-term sustainability and unified vision.

A written nutrition policy doesn't just change what goes on pantry shelves, it changes how communities are fed, cared for, and empowered.

Nourishing with Intention: How One Pantry Put Nutrition at the Center

New Day Ministry - Bremerton



At New Day Ministry in Bremerton, Washington, the mission has always been clear: fight hunger with compassion and dignity, but over time, something deeper began to emerge. Through everyday conversations at the pantry and meal programs, clients voiced a recurring concern- how to make food choices that supported their health. Many lived with chronic conditions and felt overwhelmed by the options in front of them. These honest reflections became a turning point.

Recognizing that meeting immediate hunger needs wasn't enough, New Day Ministry embarked on a journey to embed nutrition into the core of every program they offer. With support from the Washington Food Coalition and the American Heart Association WA, the team received technical assistance, grant funding, and training to create a formal nutrition policy rooted in the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines. A commercial freezer allowed them to expand their produce offerings, while new tools, like a donor guide, visual aids, and client handouts, helped integrate the policy into every aspect of service, from food distribution to volunteer orientation.

Today, they use the SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries) stoplight labeling system to help clients easily identify foods lower in sodium, added sugar, and saturated fat. Their Individualized Senior Grocery Program is fully aligned with the HER Guidelines, and every prepared meal includes a fresh salad. Whether it's sourcing food through donations, planning weekly meals, or filling a grocery bag, the team is guided by one central idea: food should not only fill a stomach, it should fuel a life.

What It Takes:

- Client-Centered Listening: Let client voices shape program goals and inspire deeper nutrition commitments.
- Technical Assistance and Funding: Seek out training and financial support from public health partners to make policy adoption sustainable.
- Evidence-Based Framework: Use HER Guidelines and SWAP tools to bring clarity, structure, and consistency to nutrition decisions.
- Communication Tools: Develop donor guides, client handouts, and signage to promote informed food choices.

- Integrated Operations: Apply the nutrition policy across all programs, from pantry shelves to prepared meals and food rescue efforts.
- Ongoing Promotion: Share your policy publicly - on your website, in grant narratives, and across social media - to build awareness and accountability.

New Day Ministry's journey shows that with the right support and a values-driven approach, even a small organization can transform the way food is offered - serving not just to feed, but to truly nourish.

From Samples to Systems: SNAP-Ed Partnership in Action

Leah's Pantry Nutrition Pantry Program - Snohomish County



In Snohomish County, SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator Irina Korchemnaya is helping transform food banks from the inside out through engaging food demonstrations and long-term nutrition policy support.

In partnership with local food bank directors, Irina and SNAP-Ed also work behind the scenes to develop customized Nutrition Policies that reflect each pantry's values, clientele, and capacity. This process includes staff and volunteer training, culturally responsive food sourcing, and layout or signage updates. The policy creation process is highly

collaborative, informed by assessments, surveys, and cooking demo feedback which help create a realistic and actionable implementation plan.

On-site cooking demos and tasting tables bring healthy, budget-friendly recipes directly to food bank clients, using ingredients already available on pantry shelves. These tastings not only showcase new ways to prepare food, but also open space for conversation, learning, and connection. Clients regularly share how they've learned to use unfamiliar ingredients, introduced new vegetables to their children, and built a growing repertoire of nutritious meals.

Together, these efforts highlight the power of SNAP-Ed to support both immediate engagement and long-term change in food pantry environments.

What It Takes:

Launching this kind of partnership starts with a conversation. SNAP-Ed educators meet with food bank leaders to understand goals, operations, and challenges. For cooking demos, site visits help determine logistics and recipe planning. For policy development, the process includes assessments, client input, and collaborative drafting. Consistent communication and shared ownership are key to success, with SNAP-Ed offering support along the way through education, materials, and implementation guidance.

Color-Coded for Health: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

HopeSource at Upper County Food Bank - Cle Elum



At the Upper County Food Bank in Cle Elum, operated by HopeSource since 1977, the goal is simple but ambitious: make the healthy choice the easy choice. With a strong nutrition vision that prioritizes unlimited fresh produce and healthier grocery options, the team serves an average of 100 households per week and they're always looking for new ways to improve the experience for shoppers.

That's why the SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries) ranking system was a perfect fit. After learning about it at the 2023 Washington Food Coalition conference, the food bank team got to work. They began by applying SWAP rankings to TEFAP products, using this as a chance to train staff, volunteers, and clients to recognize the nutritional value of pantry items. Once that foundation was built, they expanded the process to include all community-donated items: no small feat, considering the ever-changing inventory. To keep it manageable, a specially trained volunteer team now oversees sorting and stocking, ensuring consistency and accuracy in how food is labeled and displayed.

The result is a visually intuitive, shopper-friendly environment. Using colored peel-and-stick wallpaper, the team lined their shelves according to SWAP categories: green for "choose often," yellow for "choose sometimes," and red for "choose rarely." They placed the green items at eye level to subtly guide shoppers toward the healthiest choices first. Additional signage reinforces the messaging and empowers clients to make informed decisions based on their dietary needs.

By integrating the SWAP system so seamlessly into their operations, HopeSource has not only improved the nutritional quality of its offerings, they've created a pantry space that educates, empowers, and uplifts every shopper who walks through the door.

What It Takes:

- Clear Vision: Start with a strong commitment to nutrition and a philosophy that prioritizes client health and dignity.
- Training and Familiarization: Introduce SWAP gradually, starting with TEFAP or shelf-stable items to build comfort among staff and volunteers.
- Dedicated Volunteer Team: Assign a consistent, trained group to sort and categorize community donations for accuracy and sustainability.

- Visual Cues: Use color-coded materials like wallpaper and signage to create an intuitive and uncluttered shopping experience.
Strategic Placement: Stock healthier items at eye level to gently guide clients toward the most nutritious options.
- Consistency: Apply SWAP rankings across your pantry to help clients build familiarity and confidence in their choices.

With a little creativity and a lot of care, HopeSource shows how small changes in layout and labeling can make a big difference in community health.

Farm to Table

Access to fresh, nutritious food is essential to the health and dignity of every community member. Yet for many food banks and meal programs, sourcing fresh produce and whole foods remains a logistical and financial challenge. Across Washington, food programs are finding innovative ways to connect people with real food by forming strategic partnerships with farmers markets, growers, donors, and volunteers.

In Seattle, food banks like University District Food Bank and its partners have created voucher programs that allow clients to shop directly at farmers markets, giving them choice, dignity, and access to culturally relevant, high-quality foods. The program also strengthens bonds between food banks and the local food economy by supporting vendors and encouraging reciprocal giving.

Campaigns are rethinking the types of food served and donated, educating both donors and meal providers on the value of fresh, whole ingredients. Meanwhile, in Thurston and Snohomish Counties, coalitions and community-driven initiatives are building direct bridges to local growers. Hunger-Free Thurston County coordinates seasonal crop planning with farmers to avoid overproduction of low-demand items, while Marysville Community Food Bank's "Giving Gardens" program taps into school groups, nurseries, and even local businesses to cultivate food with, and for, the community.

Rotary First Harvest's online gleaning and produce recovery guides offer a scalable way for organizations across the state to benefit from shared wisdom and successful models. Together, these efforts showcase how partnerships, planning, and creativity can transform access to fresh food from a constant challenge into a shared, community-driven opportunity.

Linking with Growers

Hunger-Free Thurston County - Olympia



Hunger-Free Thurston County is a focused coalition consisting of two local growers, Thurston County Food Bank, and the Gleaner's Coalition. The growers are Garden Raised Bounty (GRuB), a program that works with at-risk youth and promotes farming and gardening, and Left Food Organics, a program that employs people with disabilities in working a small farm. Both are well-connected with other local growers, including farmers, home gardeners and special projects such as the Kiwanis Food Bank Garden. A major benefit of Hunger Free Thurston County is that GRuB hosts a growers meeting each winter that brings growers together and provides a forum for TCFB to say, "Please don't grow zucchini, we can use corn, winter produce, and other items." At the growers' meeting, everyone is encouraged to fill out a one-page commitment form that states how much they plan to grow and what plants to donate to TCFB. This helps TCFB know what to expect and make sure they don't receive too much of the same thing.

What It Takes:

Hunger-Free Thurston County is a small, strategic coalition between growers, gleaners and emergency food providers. The best tip is to be clear regarding the strategic goal of your coalition, allow the goal to dictate membership, and stay focused.

From Field to Food Bank: Building Stronger Farms and Healthier Communities

Skagit Food Distribution Center - Sedro-Woolley

Bellingham Food Bank - Bellingham



Across Washington State, food banks are rethinking how food enters their buildings. Not just through donations or surplus, but through intentional partnerships with the people who grow it. One powerful example is the Food Bank Fresh initiative, which connects food banks directly with local farmers through prepaid contracts and coordinated purchasing systems.

Programs like those led by the Skagit Food Distribution Center and the Bellingham Food Bank go beyond seasonal gleaning or bulk buys. They establish prepaid agreements, paying farmers up front to grow specific crops such as lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, peppers, and winter squash. This approach not only provides a predictable income for growers but also ensures a reliable stream of fresh, high-quality, and culturally relevant produce for food bank clients.

Orders are placed via familiar channels like “fresh sheets,” and distribution is coordinated through regional hubs such as the Puget Sound Food Hub Cooperative (PSFHC). Food is packaged to specific standards, labeled clearly, and delivered on a weekly or seasonal schedule. This professional-level coordination ensures that the food arriving at the food bank is fresh, nutritionally valuable, and handled with care.

These partnerships also emphasize communication and flexibility. Weather changes, crop losses, or yield surprises are part of the deal. Farmers are encouraged to notify their food bank partners early and often, with some contracts allowing for substitutions or extended delivery timelines. It’s a relationship built not on charity, but on mutual respect and shared values: support local agriculture, reduce hunger, and nourish communities with intention.

What It Takes:

The success of a farm-to-food bank partnership like Food Bank Fresh doesn’t happen overnight. It begins with trust: both in the farmers’ ability to deliver and in the food banks’ commitment to paying fair prices for quality produce. Upfront contracts are crucial; they give farmers the security to plan their season and make investments in seeds, soil, and labor, knowing that there’s a guaranteed buyer on the other end.

It also takes coordination. Food banks work with food hubs to streamline logistics, ensure consistent packaging, and reduce transportation burdens for farmers. Internally, staff must align on crop preferences, delivery timelines, and storage capacity, often balancing this with fluctuating community demand.

Clear communication is key. When a farmer can't meet the agreed-upon quantity due to drought or pests, transparency opens the door for problem-solving, not penalties. Substitutions are often possible, but they require a shared understanding and mutual flexibility.

Finally, it takes vision. This model isn't just about sourcing local. It's about transforming the food bank supply chain into one that is just, sustainable, and rooted in community. Food Bank Fresh shows that when growers are supported and food access is treated as a shared responsibility, everyone benefits: farmers, food banks, and families alike.

From Field to Fork: Clark County's Community Farm Model

Clark County Food Bank - Vancouver



Clark County Food Bank operates a 12-acre farm that produces approximately 100,000 pounds of food each year. Managed by one coordinator and supported by nearly 1,000 volunteers annually, the farm grows staple crops like carrots, corn, and squash avoiding more delicate produce like tomatoes for ease of cultivation. This agricultural effort not only supplies fresh food

to the food bank but also serves as a community education hub, with local schools contributing plant starts and students learning about hunger, nutrition, and agriculture.

The food bank also gleans from local farmers markets, collecting about 30,000 pounds of high-quality produce per year. These contributions, which offer farmers tax incentives, supplement the food bank's offerings while reducing food waste. Additionally, the organization participates in the Farm to Food Pantry program, purchasing surplus produce from farmers at reduced rates, creating a win-win for local growers and food-insecure families.

With access to public or leased land and a strong volunteer base, other organizations can implement similar models. Clark County Food Bank's approach highlights the importance of collaboration with local governments, farmers, and schools to build sustainable, community-driven food systems.

What It Takes:

A successful farm-to-food bank model starts with access to land and a dedicated coordinator to lead operations. Clark County Food Bank relies on a strong volunteer network, partnerships with local schools for education and seedlings, and collaboration with farmers for gleaning and surplus purchasing. Programs like Farm to Food Pantry and tax incentives help make these efforts sustainable and mutually beneficial for growers and food access organizations alike.

Keeping it Fresh: Farmers Market Vouchers

University District Food Bank - Seattle

West Seattle Food Bank - Seattle

North Helpline - Seattle

El Centro de la Raza - Seattle



University District Food Bank (UDFB) is lucky to have the well-established University District Farmers Market as a neighbor. The two organizations have developed a program which allows the food bank to distribute farmers market vouchers to customers. Customers are offered three \$2 vouchers (for a total of \$6) once a month from May through October. The vouchers can be redeemed at any vendor for fruit,

vegetables, honey, fish or other foods. Vendors use the vouchers toward their stall fees. The Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance (the organizers of the market) requests reimbursement from UDFB once a month. The program ensures that people who use UDFB have greater access to fresh, high quality and nutritious foods. "This is a way for us to make sure that folks are getting produce that is most relevant to their needs -produce that means something to them," says Executive Director Joe Gruber. "It's also a way for us to give back to the market and the vendors that support us with donations."

UDFB sets a budget for voucher reimbursement each year and monitors the rate of reimbursements throughout the year to stay on target. One of the tricky things about budgeting is that only about one third of vouchers issued are actually redeemed. Also, some customers may save up vouchers for several months before shopping. UDFB's program has grown to \$8,500 in reimbursements per year, and about half the funds come from grants and targeted donations by organizations that love the program. Donations from Puget Consumers Co Op (PCC) and the Kiwanis Club helped start the program years ago.

What It Takes:

A program like this requires a strong commitment from the partnering farmers market. Talk to your local market's organizers to find out if they are interested and able to support a program. The Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance makes sure that its vendors are comfortable participating. Farmers and market organizers have to trust that they will be reimbursed quickly, and outreach will need to be done initially to establish that trust and willingness to accept vouchers. Also, make sure the people coming to your food bank want to participate. UDFB's customers find the University District Farmers Market accessible, but other food

banks have tried to replicate the program with lesser results, perhaps because their customers aren't able to travel to the market easily on market day or because the voucher amount offered isn't significant enough to warrant the trip. UDFB does make an effort to create a voucher that is hard to counterfeit (dark colored paper, changes color each season, and a special stamp on the back), although they haven't had any trouble in this area. Design and printing of the vouchers is a minimal cost. Consider how you will market the program to customers, especially if they speak multiple languages.

Cooking Up Community: Chef at the Market in Bremerton

Bremerton Community Farmers Market - Bremerton



Every third Thursday from May through October, something special sizzles at the Bremerton Community Farmers Market. Just as the air begins to cool in the early evening, neighbors gather to watch Chef at the Market, a monthly cooking demonstration celebrating local food, seasonal ingredients, and culinary creativity.

Led by Chef Robert Nash, a retired culinary professor from Olympic College and longtime community food advocate, the event is far more than a cooking class, it's a shared experience. With warmth and humor, Chef Nash guides attendees through accessible, budget-friendly recipes using ingredients sourced right from the market stalls. One week it might be a lesson in vinaigrettes for spring greens, another a sauté of summer squash. Whatever's in season becomes the inspiration.

Beyond technique, Chef Nash brings heart. A former board member of Bremerton Foodline, he believes food is a right, not a privilege. His presence at the market reflects that belief.

Chef at the Market is a collaborative effort, co-sponsored by Olympic College's Culinary Arts Program, which trains students for careers in food service industries, from bakeries to resorts. By showcasing chefs like Nash, the program underscores its commitment to real-world learning, community outreach, and accessible culinary education.

Running weekly from May 1st to October 9th (4–7pm), the Bremerton Community Farmers Market has become more than a place to buy produce. With Chef at the Market as its culinary centerpiece, it's a space where food becomes connected and where community is built, one bite at a time.

What It Takes:

Bringing a program like Chef at the Market to life takes vision, collaboration, and a deep connection to community values. It starts with strong local partnerships like the one between the farmers market and Olympic College's Culinary Arts Program, which brings talent, expertise, and credibility to the table.

Equally important is finding the right chef. Someone like Robert Nash, who can teach with humility, cook with heart, and connect with a crowd is imperative. Scheduling monthly events (on the third Thursday) keeps the commitment manageable while creating anticipation among regular market-goers.

The demos themselves require planning: curating recipes that reflect what's in season, coordinating ingredient sourcing from local vendors, and ensuring access to basic equipment and a public space for setup. But the payoff is enormous: free samples, hands-on learning, and a renewed sense of connection between shoppers, farmers, and food.

What ties it all together is a shared belief: that food can be a joyful, inclusive, and empowering part of life. When markets invest in programming that teaches, tastes, and builds trust, they become more than places to shop, they become places to belong.

Giving Gardens

Marysville Community Food Bank - Marysville



Giving Gardens has a wonderful partnership with a local nursery, Sunnyside Nursery. The nursery offers an award to Giving Gardens donors. Donors of garden grown fruits and veggies who donate 100 or more pounds to the Food Bank will receive a \$25 gift certificate for Sunnyside Nursery for 2026.

They have made wonderful connections with local high school horticulture programs as well as the local WSU Master Gardener Extension who donates plant starts to the Food Bank. Giving Gardens offer these starts to customers to kick-start their own gardens. Other clubs and groups have joined the Giving Gardens program and one of the customers even maintains a community garden at a local church and donates the proceeds to the food bank. These efforts provide customers with fresh, locally grown food options.

What It Takes:

The key to this partnership is strong community communication. Working with high school programs and other clubs has helped grow the program and yielded fantastic results!

Seeds to Go

Byrd Barr Place - Seattle



At Byrd Barr Place Food Bank in Seattle, food access meets food empowerment through a simple, seasonal giveaway. During three days in May, food bank visitors received free starter plants along with instructions to help them grow herbs and vegetables at home.

Clients choose from a variety of easy-to-grow plants like basil, mint, butter lettuce, kale, collard greens, and mustard greens. The goal is to give people more than groceries, it's to give them a sense of agency, self-reliance, and connection to fresh food that lasts beyond a single pantry visit.

Whether planted on a porch, balcony, or kitchen windowsill, these starter plants offer clients a way to supplement their meals, engage with gardening, and experience the joy of growing something nourishing with their own hands.

What It Takes:

Byrd Barr Place partnered with local community members and made a point to share over social media generating excitement for clients. This program is always a hit!

Plant a Row, Share a Row

Hopelink - Kirkland

All Saints Parish Garden - Seattle

Ballard Food Bank - Ballard

NEW Hunger Coalition - Colville



In Kirkland, a garden bed behind St. John Vianney Catholic Church tells a story of community, compassion, and fresh food. Volunteers Kathleen and Jeanne have cultivated this space for years, not for personal harvests, but to feed neighbors in need. Their efforts are part of Hopelink Harvest, a program that connects local gardeners, community gardens, and farms to Hopelink's five Food Markets, ensuring fresh, homegrown

produce reaches families experiencing food insecurity.

In just one season, Kathleen and Jeanne's garden produced over 200 pounds of vegetables (basil, carrots, kale, cucumbers, tomatoes, string beans, squash, and zucchini), all grown with the intention of sharing. The program's larger mission is rooted in simplicity and generosity: "Plant a Row, Share a Row." Local growers are invited to cultivate an extra row of vegetables or herbs specifically for donation, blending the personal joy of gardening with the powerful impact of community giving.

Hopelink Harvest doesn't just fill plates, it builds relationships. It invites neighbors to be part of the solution, reduces the environmental cost of transporting food, and introduces clients to seasonal, nutritious ingredients they might not otherwise access. Whether it's one basil plant or an entire backyard garden, every donation contributes to a healthier, more connected community.

In Seattle, volunteers of All Saints Parish Garden have been providing fresh produce to their foodbank guests since 2018. It's supported by a Catholic Relief Services Rice Bowl Grant from the Archdiocese of Seattle. In 10 beds, they are able to grow tomatoes, peas, green beans, squash, cucumbers, zucchini, and pumpkins for guests.

What It Takes:

- **Community Engagement:** Volunteers who are passionate about gardening and food access are essential to this program's success.

- Partnerships: Collaborations with faith groups, schools, and civic organizations help identify space, labor, and support.
- Education: Providing guidance on sustainable gardening and culturally relevant produce helps ensure meaningful contributions.
- Logistics: Clear systems for collecting and delivering fresh produce maintain quality and minimize waste.
- Promotion: Campaigns like “Plant a Row, Share a Row” spread the word and inspire more gardeners to get involved.

Grow Your Own Row: Gardening for Self-Reliance

NEW Hunger Coalition - Northeast Washington

GoodRoots Northwest - Colville



In Northeast Washington, the NEW Hunger Coalition has taken the “Plant a Row” concept to a new level with its Grow Your Own Row program. What began as a creative response to delayed produce availability evolved into a full-scale educational initiative that brings free gardening classes, and everything needed to grow a small vegetable garden, directly to food pantry clients.

The program has scaled quickly; in just two years, over 690 clients across 17 rural food pantries and senior housing sites have received plant starts, seeds, potting soil, grow bags, tools, and hands-on instruction to grow their own food. Classes are inclusive, practical, and relational, often held just before pantry hours and featuring group instruction, one-on-one coaching, and continued support throughout the growing season.

Partnering with local farmers, WSU SNAP-Ed, Master Gardeners, and community volunteers, NEW Hunger Coalition ensures that plant varieties are selected for regional success and that donations are distributed equitably. Volunteers sort and label seed packets, prepare growing kits, and even haul thousands of pounds of supplies across remote counties.

Clients respond with enthusiasm, sharing photos of their harvests and returning year after year. Whether they’re growing on apartment balconies or in backyard beds, participants report increased confidence, joy, and access to fresh, healthy food.

In Buckley, GoodRoots Northwest has developed a partnership with Take Root Farm to offer 100 tomato plants to members of the community along with advice on container gardening and care.

What It Takes:

To run Grow Your Own Row successfully, NEW Hunger Coalition relies on a combination of grant funding, in-kind donations, and strong partnerships. Support from SNAP-Ed, Avista, Innovia, and local farms provides the foundation for purchasing and sourcing supplies like grow bags, soil, trowels, and seeds. Classes are hosted in coordination with food pantries, typically held just before distribution hours to ensure accessibility. Volunteers are essential - at least three are needed per class to help with setup, instruction, and distribution of materials. Master Gardeners and local farm partners guide educational content, while centralized storage and detailed scheduling ensure smooth logistics across 17 rural sites.

Flexibility is also key; instructors are prepared for walk-ins, unexpected weather, and late planting seasons. With thoughtful coordination and deep community involvement, this program offers a replicable model of low-cost, high-impact food access and empowerment.

Growing Food, Growing Futures: Rooftop Roots and the Bloom Internship

University District Food Bank - Seattle



At the University District Food Bank in Seattle, nourishment comes from above - literally. Perched on the roof of the Food Bank is a flourishing garden that produces ultra-local fruits, vegetables, specialty herbs for the community just four floors below. The rooftop garden even includes three beehives to support pollination and provide honey. This is no ordinary patch of green; it's the beating heart of Rooftop Roots, a zero-footprint urban farm that does more than grow food, it grows futures.

Enter the Bloom Urban Farm Internship, a transformative paid program for youth ages 18-24 experiencing housing instability. These interns spend the growing season immersed in urban agriculture, learning everything from composting and pollination to foraging and food justice.

The curriculum also weaves in creative expression, using art as a tool for healing and reflection. With partnerships that include the Doorway Project, Tilth Alliance, local beekeepers, and foragers, the program reflects a holistic vision of wellness, sustainability, and community.

This innovative initiative doesn't just put food on tables, it places tools, knowledge, and hope in young hands. Interns leave with practical skills, a deeper understanding of food systems, and a sense of belonging rooted in purpose and care. And for Food Bank clients, the garden's harvest provides vibrant, fresh produce, grown with intention and shared with dignity.

What It Takes:

- Visionary Leadership: A team committed to creative, equity-centered solutions that support both food access and youth empowerment.
- Strategic Partnerships: Collaborations with organizations focused on urban farming, youth services, and sustainability.
- Accessible Design: A rooftop garden designed for efficient food production in an urban space.
- Engaging Curriculum: A blend of science, environmental education, and art that resonates with diverse learners.

- Youth Support: Paid internships with meals, bus passes to support transportation, necessary materials, and wraparound support to remove barriers to participation.
- Ongoing Investment: Consistent funding through grants and donations to maintain and expand the program's impact.
- Commitment to Relationship: Willingness to support interns after their program ends through ongoing connections and resources.

By planting seeds of knowledge and care, University District Food Bank is cultivating a new generation of food justice leaders: one rooftop harvest at a time.

The Garden Truck: Growing Food, Skills, and Community on the Go

Des Moines Area Food Bank - Des Moines



In 2014, the Des Moines Area Food Bank launched a Good to Grow Gardening Initiative which focused on increasing the consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income families in the area. With help from the Grainger Foundation, the food bank created an “On the Grow” Garden Truck, a mobile learning garden that grows fruits and vegetables in the back of a Ford pickup and teaches families about nutrition and how to grow fresh, affordable food at home.

The Garden Truck program is an example of Urban Agriculture, which creatively uses small spaces and sustainable methods in urban settings to equip people to grow their own food.

Urban Agriculture is efficient by design in its methods and practices, making it an effective tool for addressing food insecurity. Vertical gardening, container gardening, and square-foot gardening are some of the techniques taught in the program. Integrated pest management and composting are among the sustainable practices introduced to teach food growers how to care for the environment through their gardening efforts. These practices foster communities that are more environmentally conscious and encourage better stewardship of local natural resources. Using these methods, the Garden Truck has successfully grown a variety of fruits and vegetables, including garlic, tomatoes, chives, Swiss chard, potatoes, fennel, broccoli, strawberries, stevia, carrots, lavender, herbs, and more.

The Garden Truck program has been very popular in the community, with a full schedule of visits to schools, libraries, farmers markets, senior centers, and summer meal sites. Food bank clients have also benefited, as the Garden Truck coordinator has demonstrated how to re-root vegetables like celery from kitchen scraps or how to grow potatoes in a bag.

Every visit and lesson begins at the truck garden, engaging all ages through hands-on, sensory-driven learning experiences. Lessons include soil preparation, seed planting, growing sprouts, harvesting, parts of plants, identifying fruits and vegetables, plant life cycle, growing food from scraps, composting, Eat-the-Rainbow, food groups, balanced meals, and pest management.

The garden program offers two awards to participants – the Urban Farmer Award and the Rainbow Explorer Award. The Urban Farmer focuses on gardening skills for growing food and the Rainbow Explorer focuses on food education. Everyone who participates is eligible for an award, by checking off any of the five activities completed.

Urban Farmer Award

- Named 5 fruits and 5 vegetables
- Saved a seed or planted a seed
- Transplanted or harvested a plant
- Created a garden sign, farm map, my plate
- Grew a plant at home

Rainbow Explorer Award

- Named 5 fruits and 5 vegetables
- Knows the difference between a fruit /vegetable
- Tried 3 new foods
- Created a garden sign, farm map, my plate
- Tracked Eat the Rainbow

What It Takes:

Running a mobile garden program like the Garden Truck requires a dedicated coordinator with gardening and teaching skills, a reliable vehicle adapted for planting, and strong community partnerships. Basic supplies include soil, seeds, compost, and educational materials. Funding from grants or sponsors helps cover startup and operating costs, while volunteers and local partners expand reach. A flexible, hands-on curriculum focused on gardening, nutrition, and sustainability brings the program to life across schools, markets, and community sites.

Growing for Justice: Elk Run Farm's Community-Powered Food System

Elk Run Farm - Maple Valley



In 2015, the food banks of South King County were presented with an amazing opportunity. Owners of the Elk Run Golf Course in Maple Valley wanted to close the golf course and donate part of the property for food banks to farm. This spark ignited a set of partnerships that created Elk Run Farm, whose mission is to provide low-income families with access to healthy foods while also promoting sustainable urban agriculture and

developing new markets for local producers.

What It Takes:

Start up funds, particularly for infrastructure such as water, irrigation, electricity, composting, hoop houses/tunnels, and refrigeration. Elk Run Farm engaged with King County, Public Health, the local conservation district, Rotary International, Social Venture Partners and two local schools to get the farm up and running.

Partnerships and community engagement to assist not only with funding but also labor for planting, tending, harvesting and delivery. With only three staff members, Elk Run relies heavily on volunteer power. Community work parties, youth engagement, and private group sessions together total more than 4,400 volunteer hours annually, enabling the farm to grow nearly 10,000 pounds of produce each year. In particular, Elk Run Farm partners with Tahoma High School's Plant Sciences program, engaging 100 students weekly on-site. Students gain hands-on experience and education in agriculture and food systems, while the farm receives vital volunteer labor, greenhouse space, and district-funded materials. This collaboration continues in the summer through an internship program that blends farming with leadership and food justice education.

Farming know-how to build healthy soil out of a gravel pit, using low-till planting, drip irrigation, crop rotation, and hoop houses for season extension and growing heat-loving crops in the cooler local climate.

Long-term vision that sees beyond the cost of lbs for food. Over the next 30 years, the population in the Puget Sound region is expected to grow by another million people. With this kind of population growth, farmland is disappearing at an ever-increasing rate. To maintain the region's food sovereignty, finding innovative ways to preserve land and include food production is essential. Elk Run Farm is a rare opportunity to demonstrate how land can be repurposed in the middle of modern developments, promoting environmental sustainability through land stewardship and the promotion of local food systems. With cover cropping,

composting, pollinator habitat and bio-intensive production, Elk Run feeds the soil and fights climate change at the same time that it is feeding the hungry. By connecting food banks with farmers, Elk Run Farm is also empowering food banks to pivot towards becoming valued partners in the local economy, rather than simply approaching the business community with their hands out.

Washington Gleaning Network: Growing a Statewide Movement

Harvest Against Hunger / Washington Gleaning Network



The Washington Gleaning Network (WGN), led by Sarah Armbruster in partnership with Harvest Against Hunger and the Association of Gleaning Organizations, is building something much bigger than a seasonal harvest. It's growing a statewide community dedicated to rescuing surplus food and redistributing it where it's needed most.

Funded by a USDA Regional Food System Partnership (RFSP) grant, the WGN supports and connects gleaning groups across Washington, offering tools, training, and collaboration opportunities to strengthen and scale their efforts. From apples left on trees to overlooked farm surplus, gleaning efforts reduce food waste while improving access to fresh produce across communities.

Sarah began this work as an AmeriCorps VISTA member, and over two years, helped shape the network into a model for statewide food recovery. At its heart is a belief in the power of connection and that communities are stronger, more resilient, and more impactful when they work together.

Looking ahead, WGN is developing a replication toolkit to help others across the country launch and sustain gleaning networks of their own that are low-cost, high-impact, and rooted in collaboration.

The reports and best practices captured from the many Harvest Against Hunger sites can be accessed through an easy-to-use interactive online guide with downloadable sample files at rfhresourceguide.org.

What It Takes:

- A backbone organization (like Harvest Against Hunger) to coordinate and host the network
- Collaborative partnerships and shared leadership
- A USDA RFSP or similar grant to support network development
- Passionate individuals (AmeriCorps members or volunteers) to lead and build momentum
- A shared vision that connects food waste reduction, hunger relief, and community empowerment

Customer Service

Treating customers with dignity is a key best practice for emergency food providers. In speaking with food banks and meal programs around the state, many expressed the importance of having a strong customer service orientation. Others shared how their faith or values guide the way they do business. Many agencies have taken customer service beyond the basics as well, working to make their services more accessible and convenient, more personalized, and more culturally competent. Others are going beyond food to provide other needed services. General best practices in the area of customer service are:

- Ensuring that all staff and volunteers treat customers with respect
- Maximizing customer choice through a shopping or self-select format or other mechanisms
- Listening to customer input and adapting services and food available to meet the specific needs of your customer base
- Recruiting volunteers from key demographic groups so that your volunteer base is reflective of the customers served
- Having good signage and clear guidelines for customers, available in multiple languages if needed
- Establishing hours of operations based on customer rather than volunteer convenience, such as weekend and evening hours for working individuals and families

The customer service profiles below are divided into the following categories: meeting customers where they are, increasing access and convenience, hospitality, beyond food, going the extra mile for kids, and more.

Defining Service with Dignity

Many food banks share a commitment to service with dignity. But it can be a challenge to figure out what that truly means. Below are some “ingredients” to move us toward a shared definition, generated by participants in a conference session at the 2007 Food Lifeline Agency Conference.

- Removal of barriers
- Generous spirit
- Increased customer/customer choice
- Commitment to customer service
- Personalization
- Consideration and respect
- Understanding
- Valuing customers' time
- Respect for privacy

Oregon Food Bank has taken the concept of a shared definition further and developed the following statement of “Customer Rights and Responsibilities” which is posted in all their member food banks:

Rights And Responsibilities

We recognize the basic rights of individuals who seek food assistance. Concern for personal dignity is of great importance. At the same time, staff and volunteers expect responsible behavior from you.

You can expect from us:

- *Respect, consideration, cooperation, patience*
- *Opportunity to participate in surveys and evaluations*
- *Access to services for which you are eligible*
- *A safe environment*
- *Personal information kept Confidential*

Our expectations of you:

- *Respect, consideration, cooperation, patience*
- *Accurate information to establish eligibility for services*

The Grocery Store Model: Restoring Client Choice and Reducing Waste in Food Banks

Port Angeles Food Bank - Port Angeles

Ballard Food Bank - Seattle

Hopelink - Seattle

Ferndale Food Bank - Ferndale

Maple Valley Food Bank - Maple Valley



Across the state, food banks are moving beyond traditional pre-packed boxes and embracing a more empowering approach: the grocery store model, also known as the client-choice pantry. In this model, individuals experiencing food insecurity select their own food items from shelves, just as they would in a typical grocery store.

At the heart of this model is dignity through choice. By allowing people to pick what they need, food banks can better respect dietary needs, cultural preferences, and individual taste. This freedom helps reduce the stigma often associated with receiving food assistance, empowering clients to make decisions that support their household's unique needs.

The grocery store model also leads to significant reductions in food waste. When clients can select only what they will actually use, fewer items end up uneaten or discarded. At the same time, food banks benefit from clearer insight into which products are most in demand, allowing them to adjust purchasing and donations more effectively.

Nutrition is another major benefit. Rather than receiving a fixed mix of items, clients have the opportunity to choose fresh produce, lean proteins, and whole grains. Many food banks further enhance this by offering nutrition education, recipe cards, and cooking demonstrations, helping clients stretch their groceries and prepare healthy meals at home.

From a logistical perspective, this model also increases efficiency. Volunteers and staff can focus on keeping shelves stocked and supporting clients during their visit, while inventory systems reflect real-time usage and preferences.

What It Takes:

Food banks may need to reconfigure their physical space to allow for shelving, signage, and flow that mimics a retail experience. They'll also need clear protocols for restocking, item limits, and check-in systems that keep the process smooth and equitable.

Training volunteers and staff is critical to ensure a welcoming, nonjudgmental atmosphere. Many food banks invest in cultural competency and trauma-informed service training to reinforce the dignity-centered approach.

Technology and tracking tools help monitor which items move quickly and which don't, allowing for smarter procurement and better use of storage space. And for food banks looking to go a step further, offering health-focused initiatives like SWAP labeling, recipe cards, or guided shopping tours can deepen the nutritional impact of the model.

Open Always: A 24/7 Approach to Food Access

Helpline House - Bainbridge Island



Bainbridge Island's Helpline House (HH) offers a variety of community services, including a food bank, case management services, financial assistance, scholarships for local activities, and mental health counseling. One reception lobby serves all the programs. Everyone walks through the same door – clients, donors, community members, staff – because at different times, everyone plays different roles, and it takes all of them to be Helpline House.

Helpline House has a robust 'porch pantry' program. There are food safe and rodent-proof boxes outside of Helpline House (on the 'porch') that get stocked every day after shopping ends in the food bank. The idea is that the porch pantry is open when Helpline House is closed. A variety of foods are stocked in the porch pantry – both snacks and 'quick' foods (crackers, cans with pop-top lids so no can opener is needed, breads) and things that don't require refrigeration but can make a meal – onions, potatoes, pastas, sauces, etc. When drinks are available, staff prioritize putting those in the porch pantry so people have access to hydration, particularly during hotter weather.

The porch pantry works well for several different groups in the community – those who cannot come during the hours that Helpline House is open, those who need a little extra but who have already shopped, and those who, in a small community, won't ever shop in the food bank for fear of being recognized or seeing someone they know.

In addition to food, Helpline House makes sure there are bags for folks to use when shopping the porch, as well as plastic utensils bundled with a napkin, if folks are using the porch for their next meal.

The porch pantry is a heavily utilized and creative way to get food to those who are unable to access it during typical open hours.

What It Takes:

Helpline House partnered with a local woodworking/artisan organization to physically make and secure the food safe bins. Through trial and error, the current setup includes slow-closing hinges, boxes at shelf height for ease of reaching in, and easy-to-grasp handles. Volunteers are needed to stock the porch as the food bank is closing for the day. The rest of the supplies (food, bags, utensils) are likely already on hand.

Smart Access: Food Lockers

GoodRoots Northwest - Bonney Lake



At GoodRoots Northwest, the goal isn't just to distribute food but to remove the barriers that make food inaccessible in the first place. In rural East Pierce County, families often struggle with limited transportation, inconsistent food bank hours, and the stigma sometimes tied to traditional models of food assistance. To address these challenges, GoodRoots asked a bold question: What if accessing food was as easy and dignified as picking up a package?

The result is a network of WiFi-enabled, temperature-controlled food lockers placed at trusted community locations across the region. These multilingual, 24-hour-access lockers allow clients to order groceries online and pick them up at their convenience with no lines, no paperwork, no judgment.

Each locker unit contains 16 secure compartments, capable of storing an average of 60 pounds of food, including produce, proteins, pantry staples, and culturally meaningful items. Orders are placed through an online system available in multiple languages, and accessed via a secure, user-specific code.

Currently, GoodRoots operates nine active locker sites at high-traffic locations like libraries, fire stations, and colleges with three more on the way. Since their launch, the lockers have not only expanded reach and accessibility, but have also drastically reduced food waste by aligning supply with real-time demand.

What began as a pilot in Buckley, Bonney Lake, and Orting has grown into a multi-phase expansion across rural communities and college campuses. Locker installations are now addressing hunger in both remote towns and among college students, where food insecurity rates can reach 50%.

What It Takes:

GoodRoots strategically placed lockers in Buckley, Bonney Lake, and Orting, selecting public spaces people already trust like fire stations and libraries. As the model proved successful, they expanded into Congressional District 8's rural communities and then into colleges.

Pro Tip: Location is everything. Lockers must be placed where foot traffic, safety, and community buy-in are guaranteed. Just as important is language access. The entire digital ordering platform supports multilingual use, ensuring that no one is left behind due to technology or language barriers.

The program's real-time data tracking also changed the game. By monitoring inventory, pickup frequency, and user feedback, GoodRoots could reduce waste, restock efficiently, and tailor services to community needs.

Partnerships have been essential every step of the way. The lockers thrive in a shared-responsibility model, where local governments, libraries, colleges, and private sector partners each play a role, whether by hosting lockers, supporting logistics, or co-authoring grants.

Pedaling with Purpose: Bike-Powered Food Delivery

University District Food Bank - Seattle

Byrd Barr Place - Seattle



Across neighborhoods in Washington, food banks are teaming up with local bicycle clubs to deliver groceries. In models like University District Food Bank's partnership with Seattle's Pedaling Relief Project, volunteers use bikes to bring pre-packaged food directly to homebound neighbors, especially those who face mobility, transportation, or health challenges.

This take on home delivery is deeply rooted in community resilience. Riders form lasting bonds, create visible momentum for mutual aid, and embody sustainability in action. Group rides not only serve clients, but also support donation pick-ups from farmers markets and local businesses. Riders often describe the experience as joyful and empowering.

Routes are designed for safety and accessibility, typically within a 3-mile radius. Volunteer cyclists are trained in food handling, client privacy, and navigation. The food bank provides shared gear such as cargo trailers, bins, and safety equipment, so volunteers don't need to bring their own. This makes it easier to say "yes!" to joining the effort.

The program also emphasizes social connection and volunteer recognition. Cyclists are welcomed into the broader food bank community, and the impact is celebrated publicly with stats like "300 pounds delivered this month!" and shoutouts on social media.

By combining fitness, food justice, and environmental impact, this model offers a scalable and replicable blueprint for food banks seeking creative solutions.

What It Takes:

Launching a bike-based delivery program starts with a shared vision between a food bank and a local cycling club or mutual aid network. Begin small - pilot one weekly route with a handful of trained riders. Use cargo trailers, panniers, or other bike-friendly containers to carry food. Design delivery loops within three miles and provide helmets, safety gear, and basic training in client privacy and food handling. Support riders with shared equipment if needed, and create pathways for deeper engagement with the food bank's broader volunteer community. Celebrate milestones and track data to build the case for grants and community investment. This model is cost-effective, flexible, and easy to replicate with the right partnerships

Home Delivered Culturally Relevant Grocery Bags

Lifelong - Seattle



Lifelong offers a grocery program for clients who are healthy enough to cook for themselves. Groceries are thoughtfully tailored to reflect a variety of cultural and dietary preferences.

Current offerings include: Vegetarian, No Fish, Asian Pacific Islander, East African (Halal), Latin X, and Healthy Standard.

For clients who have limited access to cooking equipment or face challenges in preparing meals, the organization also provides a low-cook grocery option.

Each grocery bag contains 20 pounds or more of nutritious food, including whole grains, dairy, fresh proteins, a variety of produce, and shelf-stable items.

All grocery bags are carefully curated to support health and wellness by limiting saturated fats, added sugars, and sodium. Lifelong proudly sources culturally diverse produce from local farmers, helping ensure the freshness while supporting the community.

What It Takes:

Lifelong is committed to identifying and responding to the evolving needs of the community. Recently, there has been a significant increase in requests for Asian Pacific Islander grocery bags. This growth reflects the communal nature of meals in these cultures, as well as a strong preference for fresh produce and simple, wholesome proteins.

Medically Tailored Home Delivered Meals

Lifelong - Seattle



Lifelong provides medically tailored meal and grocery delivery to individuals living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses. All meals are prepared in-house using fresh ingredients. Lifelong's medically tailored meal standards are based on recommendations from the USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the American Heart Association, the American Diabetes Association, and the Food is Medicine

Coalition. Meals include a balance of nutrients, such as vegetables, grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. All meals contain six grams or less of saturated fat and less than 700 milligrams of sodium.

Lifelong offers eight specialized diet types, including Healthy Standard, Easy Digestion, No Gluten No Dairy, Dialysis Care, Vegetarian, No Beef No Pork, No Fish, and No Nuts. Any diet type can be made soft to accommodate individuals with chewing or swallowing difficulties. The Culinary Program Manager and Registered Dietitian Nutritionist review and approve all recipes before they are sent to clients. To ensure meals meet the mark, Lifelong regularly collects and reviews client feedback and makes revisions.

What it Takes:

To offer a special diet meal program, organizations must analyze the meals for their nutritional content. Computer software is the easiest method, and Lifelong uses Galley for this purpose. Lifelong hires skilled kitchen staff to ensure and maintain quality. Volunteers assist with various tasks, including packaging, labeling, and sorting meals. Developing a labeling system is crucial to prevent customers from receiving incorrect meals.

On the Road: Mobile Food Bank

Family Works Seattle - Seattle

Arlington Community Food Bank - Arlington

Second Harvest Inland Northwest - Spokane



In North Seattle, FamilyWorks has taken its food bank on the road. Their Mobile Food Pantry, a fully equipped food truck, makes regular stops at 15 locations in partnership with trusted organizations like schools, housing sites, and libraries. This mobile model allows FamilyWorks to meet people where they are, especially those who can't access the main pantry during regular hours. In addition to distributing nutritious groceries, the

truck often serves as a connection point to other vital resources like housing assistance and family services, creating a holistic support system on wheels.

What It Takes:

- A truck or food-safe mobile unit
- Good data about where emergency food is most needed
- Partners and trusted sites for consistent outreach (SLFC works with Centro Latino volunteers for translation; FamilyWorks collaborates with schools, libraries, and housing providers)
- Flexible volunteers and staff to adapt to weather, scheduling changes, and unique neighborhood needs
- Courage to start before it's perfect - success grows through doing, listening, and improving along the way
- A commitment to meeting people where they are, both literally and with respect and care.

The Traveling Farm Stand: Food, Education, and Connection

Community Action Agency - Whitman County



In the rural communities of Whitman County, the Mobile Farm Stand from Community Action Agency offered more than just fresh produce as it delivered connection, dignity, and education. Designed to address food insecurity in geographically isolated areas, the farm stand traveled to multiple rural towns each month, distributing over 30 pounds of fresh produce per person while also serving as a hub for outreach and engagement.

At each stop, residents could pick up recipe cards, food samples, hygiene items, and information on local services. Outreach was hyper-local: announcements went out in water bills, and trusted local ambassadors who were often affiliated with food pantries helped coordinate logistics and build trust.

A standout innovation was the integration of hydroponic gardening and greenhouse systems, allowing for year-round production of leafy greens and herbs. These efforts were supported by partnerships with Master Gardeners, who led educational classes on growing food at home.

The Mobile Farm Stand created a rotating, reliable presence that fostered connection, increased access, and helped rural residents build the skills and confidence to grow their own.

What It Takes:

- Weekly schedule coordination that included Monday farm pickups, Tuesday data entry and repackaging, and distribution Wednesday through Friday.
- Consistent routes and communication often through water bills and radio spots.
- Transition from van to refrigerated double-axle truck to handle weight and preserve freshness
- Staffing and volunteer support including more than one full time staff member.
- Educational components for the Hydroponics system and classes to encourage home gardening

Cooking Together Matters

Hunger Intervention Program - Seattle



In North King County, Washington, the Hunger Intervention Program (HIP) is transforming how families, children, and seniors approach food through its dynamic cooking and nutrition education classes. These learner-driven sessions go beyond traditional instruction, offering practical skills and knowledge that participants can immediately apply to their daily lives.

HIP's classes cover a broad spectrum of topics, including meal planning, grocery shopping, food safety, budgeting, knife techniques, reading ingredient labels, and strategies to reduce sugar intake. By tailoring content to various age groups and cultural or dietary needs, HIP ensures that each participant receives relevant and accessible education.

A cornerstone of HIP's approach is the collaboration with organizations like Solid Ground and Share Our Strength to bring the "Cooking Matters" program to the community. This free, six-week course empowers families with nutrition education, cooking skills, and budget-friendly tips. Participants engage in hands-on cooking, share meals, and receive ingredients to practice recipes at home. A group grocery shopping trip further reinforces skills, teaching participants how to make nutritious choices within their budgets.

What It Takes:

- **Community Collaboration:** Partner with local organizations to expand program reach and resources.
- **Tailored Curriculum:** Develop adaptable content that meets the diverse needs of different age groups and cultural backgrounds.
- **Hands-On Learning:** Incorporate interactive cooking sessions and real-life applications to reinforce skills.
- **Resource Provision:** Provide participants with ingredients and materials to practice skills at home.
- **Accessibility:** Design programs that accommodate varying mobility levels and dietary requirements, ensuring inclusivity.

By investing in practical education and community engagement, programs like HIP's cooking and nutrition classes empower individuals to take control of their health and well-being through informed food choices.

Getting Creative to Bridge the Gap on Customer Screening

The Vashon Maury Community Food Bank - Vashon



The mission of the Vashon Maury Community Food Bank is to work in partnership with the community to increase the island's food security and connect people to supporting resources that help them thrive. This mission is carried out by offering:

1. Weekly, free grocery services through in-person shopping, home delivery, or curb-side pickup;
2. Free summer meals to island youth in two public parks every summer when school is out;
3. Community resource connections, in partnership with Vashon Youth and Family Services, where two bilingual Community Resource Navigators help connect people to state, county, and federal social service programs that they might otherwise have difficulty navigating on their own.

More specifically, Vashon Island has no municipal government, no King County Public Health office, no DSHS office, and no Social Security Office. Because of this, any resident seeking to access state, county, or federal programs must travel off-island to offices in either Seattle or Tacoma. These trips are costly and can consume the better part of a day due to unreliable ferry service. To bridge this gap, the Vashon Food Bank partners with Vashon Youth and Family Services and other member agencies of the Vashon Social Services Network to connect people with digital or phone access to these services. Two bilingual Community Resource Navigators are onsite at the food bank every Wednesday during grocery shopping hours (10 a.m.–2 p.m. and 4 p.m.–7 p.m.) and at the Vashon United Methodist Church every Thursday from noon to 3 p.m. for drop-in hours and scheduled appointments. The food bank also hosts one of the DSHS Mobile Offices onsite once a month.

More broadly, the Vashon Food Bank acknowledges that while it can offer free food to thousands of islanders each year, it cannot provide all of the social services needed to support fulfilling lives. What it can do is collaborate with other local and regional providers to help make meaningful connections. To this end, as of May 2025, the Vashon Food Bank is nearing the end of a capital campaign to build a new facility and relocate to property owned by the Vashon United Methodist Church. This location is two blocks outside of Vashon “town,” on the island's only bus line, and near other amenities used by all residents, regardless of income, such as grocery stores, the post office, and banks. The property is evolving into a robust Community Resource Hub where people will find free groceries alongside easy access to a wide variety of other services.

What It Takes:

- Partnerships with trusted local agencies to provide staffing and infrastructure for onsite resource navigation.
- Consistent scheduling of bilingual navigators during high-traffic hours and at multiple community locations.
- Access to digital tools and private space for clients to complete applications or conduct phone calls.
- Monthly visits from mobile state agencies (e.g., DSHS Mobile Office) to offer direct services without travel.
- Strategic site location planning, ensuring the food bank and partner services are accessible via public transportation and co-located with other essential community amenities.

Rolling Access: DSHS Mobile Offices Bring Services to Every Corner

Sky Valley Food Bank - Monroe



In Washington State, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has taken an innovative approach to reach underserved communities by deploying Mobile Community Services Offices (Mobile CSOs). These mobile units are fully equipped to provide the same services as stationary offices, ensuring that individuals in remote or underserved areas have access to vital assistance programs. Partnering with food banks

like Sky Valley Food Bank in Monroe is one of the ways to reach communities!

Each Mobile CSO is staffed by specialists who can determine eligibility for state and federal medical, cash, and food assistance programs. They process new applications, case reviews, changes, EBT card requests, and required documents. Additionally, they accept applications for the Child Care Subsidy Program, forwarding them to the Department of Children, Youth and Families for processing.

The mobile units are designed with accessibility in mind, featuring wheelchair lifts, hearing devices, semi-private interview areas, and sunshades for outdoor protection. They can accommodate both indoor and outdoor events, providing same-day eligibility determinations and offering services such as ID vouchers and language interpretation.

By partnering with community organizations, DSHS schedules Mobile CSO events at locations like senior centers, job fairs, health fairs, and migrant worker camps. This collaborative approach ensures that services are brought directly to those who need them most, especially in areas lacking permanent DSHS offices.

What It Takes:

- Strategic Planning: Identify communities with limited access to DSHS services and schedule regular Mobile CSO visits to these areas.
- Community Partnerships: Collaborate with local organizations to host Mobile CSO events, leveraging their connections to reach target populations.
- Resource Allocation: Ensure that mobile units are fully equipped with necessary technology, accessibility features, and trained staff to provide comprehensive services.
- Outreach and Promotion: Advertise upcoming Mobile CSO events through various channels to maximize community awareness and participation.

- Continuous Evaluation: Gather feedback from clients and partners to assess the effectiveness of Mobile CSO services and make improvements as needed.

By bringing services directly to the community, DSHS's Mobile CSOs play a crucial role in reducing barriers to access and ensuring that all Washington residents can receive the assistance they need.

Urgent Need: Menstrual Items

North Helpline - Seattle

Bellingham Food Bank - Whatcom



At North Helpline, hunger relief is only part of the story. Through the Client Services team, provides essential non-food items like diapers, wipes, formula, incontinence supplies and menstrual products.

North Helpline uses their monthly email list to occasionally make a special request for feminine hygiene products. In a recent email, they let neighbors and supporters know they urgently need pads. These are among the most requested but least donated items in pantries, and they're essential to the dignity, health, and comfort of neighbors. Menstrual products are not a luxury. They are a basic necessity, and access to them should be as normalized and supported as access to food.

To make donating easy, North Helpline created an Amazon Wishlist where community members can purchase items and have them shipped directly to the food bank. Every box of pads helps someone face their day with confidence and dignity.

What It Takes:

- A willingness to name the need clearly and unapologetically
- Consistent messaging through email, social media, and on-site materials
- Easy donation options like Amazon Wishlists
- Staff and volunteers who treat menstrual items as essential, not optional
- A commitment to reducing stigma and centering dignity in every aspect of service

Composting with Community at Clark County Food Bank

Clark County Food Bank - Vancouver



At Clark County Food Bank, they believe that fighting hunger goes hand-in-hand with caring for the environment. That's why they are proud to be part of the We Compost initiative at Heritage Farm which is a community composting program that transforms food waste into rich, healthy soil to support local food production.

Right on-site at Heritage Farm, where they grow much of their fresh produce for families in need, a food waste collection station offers community members a simple way to dispose of compostable scraps. Instead of heading to the landfill, food waste is transformed into "black gold," enriching the very fields that feed neighbors.

Composting helps grow nutrient-dense, high-quality fruits and vegetables, while reducing methane emissions and landfill waste. It's a full-circle solution: community food waste becomes healthy crops, which become nourishing meals for people across Clark County.

Through this partnership, they are not just growing food, they are building a more resilient, sustainable food system rooted in local collaboration.

What It Takes:

- **Access to a Composting Site:** Work with local partners or municipalities to identify a drop-off location or compost facility. In this case, Heritage Farm serves as a shared hub for food production and waste recovery.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with organizations like Clark County Green Neighbors to align composting with local sustainability goals.
- **On-Site Infrastructure:** Ensure the collection station is easy to access, clearly marked, and maintained regularly to avoid contamination.
- **Staff and Volunteer Education:** Train team members on what can and cannot be composted to ensure waste is sorted properly before disposal.
- **Client and Community Outreach:** Spread the word through signage, flyers, and conversations. Encourage volunteers, donors, and neighbors to contribute food scraps.
- **Integration with Food Production:** Use the compost directly in your food bank garden or community farm to enhance soil health and crop yield.

Composting isn't just about waste, it's about regeneration. At Clark County Food Bank, it's one more way we're growing hope from the ground up.

Hospitality

Food banks and pantries do more than distribute groceries. They have the power to transform a basic need into an act of kindness, dignity, and connection. Hospitality turns a meal into a moment of warmth, a grocery visit into an experience of respect, and a food distribution into a space where people feel seen and valued.

In this section, you'll discover programs that go beyond the transactional to create meaningful, welcoming encounters. From a pantry that serves restaurant-style meals on real dishes to a free restaurant offering take-home "farmers market" selections, these initiatives prove that how we serve is just as important as what we provide. You'll read about food banks that partner with healthcare systems to nourish recovery, programs that blend play and community resources with food access, and models that use shared meals to build belonging.

These programs remind us that hospitality isn't a luxury. Instead, it's a vital ingredient in addressing hunger. When we prioritize dignity alongside nutrition, we don't just feed bodies; we nurture hope.

Reducing Wait Times with Smart Scheduling Systems

Ballard Food Bank - Seattle

University District Food Bank - Seattle



To create a more comfortable and efficient shopping experience, both Ballard Food Bank and University District Food Bank have implemented appointment-based systems that minimize long lines and reduce stress for food bank visitors.

At Ballard Food Bank, shoppers can now make shopping appointments up to eight days in advance using SignUpGenius. This reservation system complements, rather than replaces, the traditional walk-in number system, offering flexibility for those who prefer or need same-day service. Numbers for walk-in clients are distributed daily at 10:00 AM, and guests can wait inside the Kindness Café or in nearby community spaces until called. All shoppers, whether scheduled or walk-in, register at the front desk and then move freely through the space to select groceries, hygiene items, and pet food.

Similarly, University District Food Bank has adopted Waitwhile, a digital waitlist and appointment platform. Clients can pre-schedule a shopping appointment online or join the waitlist on-site. Instead of standing in long lines, especially difficult during hot or cold weather, customers receive a notification when it's their turn, allowing them to wait somewhere safe and comfortable.

These systems provide a more dignified and predictable experience, ensuring that food access is not compromised by discomfort, physical strain, or inflexible schedules.

From Boxes to Choice: A Food Pantry Transformation Powered by Partnership

St Vincent De Paul Food Bank - Bremerton



At the St. Vincent de Paul Food Bank in Bremerton, a dramatic shift took place. What was once a traditional food-in-a-box model is now a vibrant, self-shopping, farmers market-style food pantry, offering guests not just groceries, but dignity, autonomy, and a more welcoming experience.

This transformation was made possible through a strong partnership with WSU Kitsap County SNAP-Ed, led by Coordinator Julie Evenson. The collaboration began with a shared goal: align the food bank environment more closely with nutrition and client choice. With the help of the Washington Food Coalition consulting dietitian, the team developed a comprehensive nutrition policy, created donation guidelines, and introduced the SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries) ranking system to better guide food selection.

But the work didn't stop there. SNAP-Ed played a hands-on role in redesigning the pantry's layout, providing signage and volunteer training, and even conducting food demonstrations in the newly redesigned space. With each step, the focus remained on client dignity and making healthy choices easier and more visible.

The impact? A more inviting and intuitive shopping environment, better alignment with health goals, and strengthened relationships across staff, volunteers, and community members. As Director Felicia Kolhage Peterson shared, "SNAP-Ed prioritized creating a welcoming and dignified client experience... We are grateful for SNAP-Ed's continued partnership."

What It Takes:

Transforming a food bank from traditional distribution to a choice-based model takes more than rearranging shelves. It takes trust, collaboration, and a shared commitment to community wellness. It starts with a conversation: food banks can reach out to their local SNAP-Ed provider, invite them into the space, and discuss their goals. A Healthy Pantry Assessment can help identify specific areas for improvement and inform next steps.

From there, the work is deeply relational. Open communication and regular check-ins are essential. SNAP-Ed partners must come with an open mind and be ready to learn about the food bank's culture, understand the workload and stress of food bank staff, and center the priorities of the pantry, not just their own program goals.

Flexibility, empathy, and follow-through are key. Food banks need partners who show up consistently, who understand when to step back, and who deliver on their promises. When

that foundation is in place, SNAP-Ed can bring a wealth of resources including everything from signage to volunteer training, from cooking demos to custom materials like the Stretching Your Food Dollar brochure co-developed with the food bank, state staff, and a local advisory group.

In the end, it's not just about healthy food, it's about building a healthier, more responsive, and more respectful system together.

Pictures That Speak: Visual Aids for Language-Inclusive Service

St. Vincent de Paul - Bremerton



Food banks can serve as a vital and diverse part of the community. However, a challenge can arise with gaps in language. At St. Vincent de Paul in Bremerton, a small stack of laminated photos is making a big difference. By placing images of common fruits and vegetables on the service counter, the food bank helps overcome language barriers in a simple, respectful, and effective way.

This practice emerged from the recognition that not all clients read or speak English and that interpreters or translated materials aren't always available. The photos allow clients to point to what they need, removing confusion and empowering them to participate fully in their own food selection. For staff and volunteers, the images serve as a tool for clearer communication and smoother service.

The beauty of this system lies in its accessibility: it's affordable, quick to implement, and adaptable to any setting. With just a printer, some laminated pages, and a little intentionality, any food pantry can take a meaningful step toward equity, inclusion, and dignity.

What It Takes:

This best practice requires only basic supplies: printable images (from online sources), laminating sheets or plastic sleeves, and a designated counter or wall space. Volunteers or staff can select the most commonly distributed items and use the images as communication aids. No tech, translation services, or specialized staff are required, just a commitment to meeting people where they are.

A Corner for Connection: Senior-Centered Food Distribution

St. Vincent de Paul - Bremerton



At St. Vincent de Paul in Bremerton, senior food assistance is more than nutrition, it's dignity, choice, and connection. By enhancing the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) with a client-choice model and a welcoming "Senior Corner," the organization has created an experience that empowers older adults and reduces isolation.

Instead of receiving pre-packed boxes, seniors choose their preferred items within each category, reducing food waste and honoring personal tastes and dietary needs. Nearby, the Senior Corner provides a space to meet with a peer volunteer, access recipes, receive nutrition education, and find support resources. It's a simple yet powerful shift turning a routine food pickup into an opportunity for engagement and community.

This model not only improves the food experience for seniors, but also builds trust and wellness through respectful, senior-specific service.

What It Takes:

This approach requires minimal resources: a designated space within the distribution area, a friendly and trained volunteer, and access to simple materials like recipe cards or nutrition flyers. By working with local partners like Kitsap Aging and Long-term Care, and being intentional about creating a warm, personalized environment, food banks can replicate this model with little cost and a big return in client satisfaction and health outcomes.

Comfort Café: Buy One, Give One Meals with Heart

Port Angeles Food Bank - Port Angeles



At the Port Angeles Food Bank, mealtime is being reimagined through joy, generosity, and a touch of culinary magic. Through its innovative Comfort Café Home Style Meals program, the food bank is now offering chef-crafted, ready-to-heat meals that are as delicious as they are meaningful.

The model is simple and powerful: Buy One, Give One (B1G1). For every Comfort Café meal purchased, an identical meal is donated directly to The Market, the food bank's client-choice shopping space, where it's made available to a local family facing food insecurity. These aren't just meals. They're thoughtfully prepared, nourishing dishes designed to bring warmth and dignity to every plate, whether it's paid for or given.

The meals are designed with flavor, comfort, and nutrition in mind. They rotate regularly, keeping things fresh for both customers and clients. Whether it's a hearty stew, savory pasta, or a veggie-packed curry, every bite reflects the food bank's commitment to treating everyone with care.

Check out some of their menu selection.

- Mexican Unstuffed Peppers
- Fiesta Enchilada Bowl
- Garden Bolognese Pasta

What It Takes:

The Port Angeles Food Bank team built the program around a Buy One, Give One structure. They worked with skilled chefs to create nutritious, homestyle meals that would appeal to a wide audience and feel as comforting as they were filling.

To deliver on the promise of quality, they developed a system for rotating menus, safe packaging, and cold storage that ensured every meal would arrive fresh and ready to enjoy. Integration with their client-choice model, The Market, was key. Donated meals had to be easy for clients to find, choose, and take home without stigma or special procedures.

Finally, the program needed visibility. The food bank used social media, community partners, and local word-of-mouth to share the story and build momentum. The result is a joyful, accessible way for neighbors to support each other.

Breaking Bread and Barriers: The Kindness Café Model

Ballard Food Bank - Seattle

University District Food Bank



At Ballard Food Bank, a simple meal becomes the catalyst for genuine connection through a new standout initiative. Every weekday, the Kindness Café welcomes clients, volunteers, and staff for home-cooked meals, sandwiches, and steaming cups of coffee which are always provided free of charge. On its busiest days, staff and volunteers serve well over 1,000 people. Named in honor of longtime board member David O’Neal, whose belief

in the “ripple effect” of kindness inspired its creation, the Café is more than a place to eat or to rest while waiting to shop in the grocery-store style free Community Market.

Inside the warm, communal space, stories are shared and friendships formed. The aromatic smell of simmering broths and dishes from around the world underscores the Café’s ethos: nourishment of both body and spirit. Some guests have commented that it’s the only place where people make eye contact with them or greet them with their name and a smile. Clients can choose their own pastries from a pastry case of donated items, leading one guest to comment that it made him “feel like a regular human”. Many who start coming in to visit the food bank and café become volunteers and continue to build community with staff and guests.

Across the lobby from the Café is the Community Resource Hub, where guests can learn about housing support, health partnerships, job assistance, and the broader wraparound services Ballard Food Bank offers. In addition to connecting with partner agencies and onsite staff, clients can access computers, collect their mail, and charge phones.

By breaking down silos between food distribution and other social supports, Ballard Food Bank ensures that no one leaves simply fed, they leave seen, heard, and empowered.

What It Takes:

The food bank’s custom-built space which opened in 2021 included their grocery-store style free community market, the Community Resource Hub, and the Kindness Café. The Kindness Café includes an inviting seating area where folks can eat, drink, charge their phones, and connect with others.

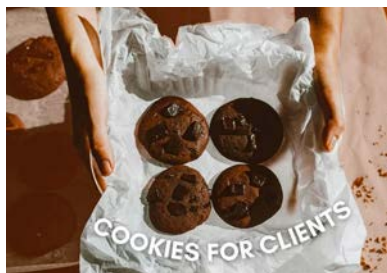
Café staff operate with a designated food budget and stretch those funds by cooking from scratch, making the most of donated items, and participating in the Meals Partnership

Coalition to share resources and tips. Through a Guest Chef program, local restaurants and chefs prepare and donate specialty dishes, sometimes also coming in to serve onsite.

The Ballard Food Bank's mission and strategic plan are focused on increasing access to healthy food and self-sufficiency. The organization has strengthened its capacity and infrastructure to become a multi-service agency with a focus on food access and critical services. Their core food access programs include their community market, home delivery, and Weekend Food For Kids Programs. In addition, the Community Resource Hub includes Ballard Food Bank staff led services, as well as partner organizations. Staff provide case management, financial assistance, and they help clients navigate and connect to resources onsite and offsite. The Community Resource Hub invites partner organizations – including healthcare providers, housing services, and employment organizations -- to offer services on site. This Ballard Food Bank is a one-stop shop for community members to receive hot meals, nutritious foods, and connect to critical supports.

Cookies for Clients: Sweet Moments of Connection

Ferndale Food Bank - Ferndale



Not everyone can commit to a regular volunteer shift, but that doesn't mean there aren't meaningful ways to make a difference. At this pantry, a warm and whimsical program called Cookies for Clients offers a simple but powerful way to connect with the community: by baking (or buying) cookies.

Volunteers sign up to bring four dozen cookies (homemade or store-bought) during Saturday food distribution. Each visit is just an hour long, but the impact lasts much longer. As cookies are shared with clients, conversations bloom, smiles spark, and for a moment, food becomes more than sustenance. It becomes a gesture of kindness and care.

The program is intentionally low-barrier: no refrigeration needed, no nuts or raw eggs, and ideally, an ingredient list to help clients with allergies feel safe. It's a way to include folks who want to give back but can't commit weekly, while still fostering the pantry's deeper mission: food as love, dignity, and connection.

What It Takes:

Launching a program like Cookies for Clients starts with a simple idea: small gestures can create meaningful moments. To get it going, the team created clear, accessible guidelines, welcoming both home bakers and store-bought cookie fans, and providing allergy-friendly tips to keep clients safe.

Promotions through email, social media, and in-person conversations helped spread the word, especially to those who couldn't do regular shifts but wanted to give back.

Step by Step: Meal Kits with a Recipe

Thurston County Food Bank - Olympia



At Thurston County Food Bank, donations come in many forms, but few are as impactful and ready-to-use as prepacked meal kits. Designed to offer more than just ingredients, these kits include everything a client needs to make a complete meal, often accompanied by easy-to-follow recipes.

These thoughtfully assembled kits are especially helpful for students, youth, and busy families, offering convenience, nutrition, and a sense of empowerment in the kitchen. Whether it's chili with cornbread mix or pasta with sauce and veggies, the kits help clients go from bag to table with minimal planning or prep.

Donors are encouraged to contribute shelf-stable, high-protein items such as canned chili, peanut butter, beans, and meat, along with pasta, cereal, canned fruits and vegetables, and baby food. Options that are gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, or vegan are also welcomed to meet diverse dietary needs. All items must be commercially packaged; no homemade meals or pre-cooked food can be accepted.

Best of all, the recipe cards included in these meal kits promote simple, accessible cooking, helping to build food literacy and reduce food waste. These kits are a practical way to nourish families while giving them a little inspiration, too.

What It Takes:

- Shelf-stable, clearly labeled ingredients
- Commercially packaged, unopened food items
- A simple, printed recipe that matches the ingredients
- Thoughtful assembly into one bag or box for easy distribution
- Optional consideration for dietary restrictions (gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, vegan)

Responsive Solutions to Improve Food Access

Women's and Children's Free Restaurant - Spokane



Women's and Children's Free Restaurant and Community Kitchen (WCFR) has filled nutritional gaps for Spokane women and children since 1988. Their recipe for excellence is offering high-quality, chef-prepared meals and fresh and dry groceries in a judgment-free environment that conveys respect and dignity.

In 2020, the WCFR annual meal count soared from 95,000 to over one million, topping 1.2 million in 2024. Fresh protein, produce, and dairy products are included at every food distribution, with quality dry goods and delicious meals. The increased need required a pivot from in-house dining to curbside delivery. In 2025, WCFR has pivoted again by installing climate-controlled food lockers. This will make it possible to serve more families, especially working women unavailable during curbside food distribution events. Additional benefits of receiving food through the locker system are no longer waiting in long car lines and accessing services more discreetly.

The prepared meals reach women and children through partnerships with 20 local nonprofits. WCFR delivers ready meals to community partners for distribution to their clients – free to the partner and the client. “Every day of the year, hundreds of our neighbors enjoy a meal from our kitchen. Our goal is to broaden our services further by reopening our welcoming dining room when the time is right,” said Lisa Diffley, WCFR’s executive director since 2014.

What It Takes:

In 2024, WCFR was honored as one of the county's forty Bank of America Neighborhood Champions. The award included funding to launch the food locker program. “Learning about the lockers at the 2022 WFC conference put my wheels in motion to make this a reality for Spokane. I immediately pitched the idea to my Board of Directors and sought funding for the project. Bank of America’s enthusiasm for our plan to offer women a safe, discreet way to receive food assistance at times convenient for them was the turning point,” said Diffley. Other funders have come aboard to support this innovative response to hunger relief.

Nourishing Recovery: The Welcome Home Food Program

Sequim Food Bank - Sequim

Lifelong - Seattle



At Sequim Food Bank, staff recognizes that healing doesn't end at the hospital doors. The Welcome Home Food program bridges the gap between medical care and home recovery by delivering chef-prepared, dietitian-approved meals to clients transitioning from hospitals or medical facilities. Each week for four weeks, participants receive six nutrient-dense, low-sodium ready-to-eat meals, along with fresh ingredients and snacks, directly to their homes. Designed to support optimal recovery, these meals eliminate the stress of grocery shopping and meal prep during vulnerable periods, ensuring patients can focus on getting better.

Key Features:

- Medical Partnership Model: Doctors and healthcare providers refer patients, creating a seamless continuum of care.
- No Barriers to Access: Serving all Sequim and Port Angeles residents regardless of income, with 100% grant-funded support.
- Beyond Four Weeks: After the initial month, Sequim residents can transition to regular weekly food box deliveries for sustained support.

What It Takes:

- Clinical Collaboration: Build trust with local hospitals and clinics to establish referral pipelines.
- Nutrition Expertise: Partner with registered dietitians to design recovery-focused menus (e.g., low-sodium, high-protein options).
- Delivery Infrastructure: Leverage existing food bank logistics or volunteer networks for home deliveries.
- Grant Funding: Secure sustainable funding to maintain a no-cost model for recipients.

Pro Tip: Start small by piloting with one healthcare partner and a 10-meal trial. Track outcomes like reduced readmission rates to demonstrate impact to future funders.

More Than Food: Holistic Support Services

Agape Service Project / Agape Food Bank - Whatcom County



Agape Food Bank's innovative "More Than Food" model transforms food distribution into a one-stop-shop for holistic care, combining nourishment with hospitality, family support, and community resources. By meeting families where they are, Agape reduces barriers to access, builds trust, and strengthens community ties. As one organizer notes, "A taco isn't just a meal - it's a way to say, 'You belong here.'" Recognizing that hunger rarely exists in isolation, the program addresses immediate and

adjacent needs through:

- Weekly Taco Stand: 1,050 hot meals served by a Latina-owned food truck, fostering dignity and connection.
- Kids' Play Area: An indoor climbing structure, arts and crafts, and sports equipment to engage children while parents shop.
- Community Partner Hub: 3-7 local agencies weekly (e.g., health, housing) offering on-site services.
- Essential Extras: Clothing, books, and toys distributed regularly.

What It Takes:

1. Equipment and Space
 - a. Taco Stand: Canopies, serving tables, and chairs (funded via grants).
 - b. Play Area: Borrowed preschool equipment (e.g., gymnastics mats) and donated art supplies.
 - c. Clothing/Toys: Repurposed clothing racks and tables.
2. Volunteers
 - a. Food Service: Serve meals and clean up.
 - b. Childcare: Supervise play areas ("embrace the chaos!").
 - c. Donations Management: Sort and display clothing/toys.
3. Funding and Partnerships
 - a. Taco Stand: \$2,000/week (10-week season) covered by project-specific donors.
 - b. Grants: Seed funding for initial equipment.
 - c. In-Kind Drives: Annual collections for books, toys, and clothing.
4. Community Collaboration
 - a. Agency Network: A curated database of partners, scheduled yearly based on guest requests.

- b. Guest Feedback: Regular surveys to identify unmet needs (e.g., “What services would help you most?”)

Going The Extra Mile For Kids

At food banks and pantries, we know that hunger doesn't take a break. For kids facing food insecurity, a missed meal can mean more than an empty stomach. It can mean struggling to focus in school, feeling isolated from peers, or missing out on the simple joys of childhood. But when food banks go beyond the basics we don't just fill gaps. We create opportunities, build confidence, and show kids they're valued.

This section highlights programs that do exactly that. From weekend backpack meals ensuring kids don't go hungry when school cafeterias close, to birthday bags that let families celebrate without financial strain, these initiatives recognize that children's needs extend beyond food alone. You'll read about summer meal programs that turn lunch into a chance for connection, partnerships that bring cakes and school supplies to kids who might otherwise go without, and outreach for teens experiencing homelessness that combines nourishment with dignity and hope.

Let these programs inspire your next step. Because for kids in need, a little extra effort can make all the difference.

Bringing it Home: Backpack Meals

Des Moines Area Food Bank - Des Moines



The Des Moines Area Food Bank (DMAFB) started their Backpack Program in 2005 to meet the needs of low-income children and their families. They had heard from a school "lunch lady" how some kids were "ravenously hungry" on Monday mornings, and then were less hungry at breakfast time as the week went on. Realizing that these kids were not getting enough food on the weekend, the food bank started working with several area schools to send backpacks of food home with children who

had been identified by school staff/administrators as "at risk of hunger for the weekend." They began a partnership with Midway Elementary in Des Moines and have served as many as 11 different local schools over the years, sometimes distributing over 500 backpacks each week. Each school is a little different, depending on staffing and space constraints for distribution of the food. Basically, kids take home full backpacks of food from school on Thursday or Friday and return them on Monday (or, being kids, Tuesday). DMAFB volunteers pick up the backpacks from schools, refill them and deliver them back to the schools on Thursday. Schools sometimes prefer to receive their food in plastic grocery bags instead of backpacks. While some schools have the capacity to serve only a small number of children (e.g. homeless kids), others can handle hundreds of children, including siblings. Every school is different.

Backpacks contain two days' worth of kid-friendly foods. Breakfast might include instant oatmeal or a breakfast bar with fruit cup and juice or milk. Microwavable mac n cheese, cup-o-soup, or tuna and crackers, fruit cup, a cookie and juice/milk are provided for lunch, along with something similar for dinner, plus one or two snack items per day. Nutrition is considered as much as possible and occasionally food for the entire family is included, like a bag of rice or beans; it can be a challenge to balance the amount of food given with the weight of the bag.

DMAFB has found feeding children to be an extremely popular cause in their community. Many local churches, businesses and civic organizations have provided both backpacks and food through targeted food drives and fundraising. In order to fill the gaps, DMAFB does purchase some items, primarily single serve main meals, juice, fruit and oatmeal packets.

What It Takes:

- Backpacks, preferably ones that won't make the kids noticeable (or new plastic grocery bag if preferred by the school)

- Volunteers to sort food and fill backpacks with appropriate food items, and to pick up and deliver bags to schools
- Funds to purchase items that are needed that may not be available regularly through the donation stream
- Ability to handle unique challenges that can arise (like bus drivers complaining about too many backpacks on the bus on one day)
- Finding the right person in the school to champion the program (could be a secretary, nurse, counselor, teacher, etc.)
- Know your limits. Set a number of kids to be served with each school that you can sustain through the entire school year. Start small and add to the list if you find that you have capacity to do more.

Beyond the Box, Take 2: Mobile Summer Meals Program

Des Moines Area Food Bank - Des Moines



The Des Moines Area Food Bank is proud to showcase how their community came together around the food bank's mobile summer meals program. As a result of this collaboration, as many as 61,000 nutritious summer lunches and snacks have been provided for children in the heart of low-income neighborhoods, together with activities and special events. Community collaborators have included state and city

government, United Way, Food Lifeline and other emergency food programs, the school district, local churches, the YMCA, the local farmer's market, and Lions Club International. Each of these partners played a unique role in serving children at risk of hunger.

It takes initial capital investment to begin a new program, and the food bank received this start-up support from United Way to fund the purchase of necessary equipment such as tables, signs, coolers, tents, etc. The state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) sometimes provides start-up grants, as well. On-going funding is critical to pay for summer meals, staff, food, and transportation. The state OSPI summer meals program provides reimbursement for each meal or snack served while also providing invaluable training, meal planning expertise and oversight of the program.

State support is not sufficient to cover all program costs, so the food bank relied on increased food donations to supplement its own spending. Food Lifeline support included single-serving food items such as yogurt, fruits, and vegetables. Neighboring food banks and the school district also shared extra milk. This allowed the food bank to support its summer meals program with in-kind food without reducing its regular food distribution.

Statewide experience with summer meals programs has shown that more children participate in summer meals when activities are also offered. While food bank staff considered providing activities, they determined that their forte was food service and it was more efficient to involve experts in children's programming. Consequently, the food bank partnered with the city's Parks and Recreation department to host summer meals in conjunction with its summer camp program at one city park and to provide staffing for activities at another park. The local YMCA, United Way, community volunteers, and the food bank's own summer staff also provided age-appropriate activities.

Providing summer meals outdoors requires sheltered space. The food bank connected with local elementary schools, city parks and recreation programs, the farmers market, two YMCA's, low-income apartment complexes, and libraries, all of whom provided free space. Of course, space and manpower are also needed to make hundreds of meals daily. Des Moines

United Methodist Church provided its kitchen five days per week while many community volunteers provided the labor to make meals.

The Farmer's Market is the center of the community on Saturday mornings in the summer. In support of the summer meals program, the market gave the food bank free booth space to provide fun activities focusing on nutritional education for children while summer meals were offered. To provide additional access to nutritious foods, market tokens were offered to low-income families, allowing them to leverage every \$5 used from their Basic Food EBT cards with an additional \$5.

It was a special day when the Lions Club hosted their "Giving Library" at two summer meal sites. Each child received two books (in either English or Spanish) to take home for their permanent collection. According to a recent study, "home library size has a very substantial effect on education attainment (and) having books in the home has a greater impact on children from least educated families. It is at the bottom, where books are rare, that each additional book matters most." Katie Brewell of the Lions Club was excited about the partnership, saying enthusiastically, "Kids walk away with a lunch and something to feed their minds!"

The food bank's summer meals program is at the center of a successful, community-wide effort to see that the most vulnerable children have increased access to highly nutritious, culturally relevant food and activities, providing them with a better chance to succeed. (Please note that agencies do not need to work with this many partners in order to have a great meal program. Also, if capacity to make meals is limited due to space or staffing constraints, it is also possible to find a vendor and to distribute purchased food.)

What It Takes:

- Plan early to secure funding, equipment, staffing and food
- Consider potential meal sites, including parks, schools, churches, YMCA's, apartments, etc. (Locations in which over 50% of students qualify for the federal meals program are ideal because participants in these areas do not need to be prequalified on the basis of their family income.)
- Apply to use chosen sites (school district, Parks and Recreation permits, farmers market, churches)
- Apply to Food Lifeline (or local distribution center) to become a qualified meal program
- Start OSPI application at least three months in advance (requires site visits and trainings)
- Seek partners to help provide activities
- Hire Staff (program coordinator, site supervisors, and site assistants)

- Survey families regarding potential sites, meals and activities
- Advertise your sites (flyer to go out with school report cards, local blog, social media, banners)
- Attend peer-based trainings (DMAFB will gladly assist any food program who wants to serve hungry kids with summer meals)

Taking Care of Teens

Teen Feed - Seattle



Since 1984, Teen Feed has walked alongside young people ages 13–25 in Seattle’s University District and beyond, offering not only food and support, but a safe and consistent presence in the lives of youth navigating homelessness. Through a combination of nightly meals, street outreach, and case management, Teen Feed offers a flexible, youth-centered approach rooted in trust, dignity, and trauma-informed care.

Teen Feed operates with the lowest barrier to entry in the area: no ID, no intake, no judgment. Youth can show up just to eat, just to talk, or just to be left alone. But over time, these small moments of connection evolve into trusted relationships. And that’s where transformation begins.

Take Enrico, for example, a Spanish-speaking, nonbinary youth who first came for a meal and a game of UNO with an advocate. Over time, that same advocate helped them enroll in trauma counseling and prepare for a job interview. As Enrico put it, “Teen Feed takes me as I am, and that means I don’t have to defend myself.”

Through partnerships with over 30 service agencies, Teen Feed acts as both a provider and a navigator filling the cracks without duplicating efforts. That they serve over 23,000 meals annually, is just the starting point. The true impact lies in the 21,000+ youth contacts, the 1,100 volunteers, and the individualized care pathways created through long-term trust.

What It Takes:

- A low-barrier, judgment-free space where youth can simply show up
- Consistent, trauma-informed staff and trained volunteers
- Strong partnerships with public health, housing, and social service providers
- Flexible systems navigation and case management support
- A culture of youth voice, cultural humility, and relationship over rules

Teen Feed’s model is a powerful reminder: sometimes, the most important thing you can offer is a warm meal and someone who shows up every day.

Bags of Joy: Celebrating Birthdays at the Pantry

FISH Community Food Bank - Ellensburg

Maltby Food Bank - Snohomish

Sequim Food Bank - Sequim



The Birthday Bags program at FISH Food Pantry ensures that no child served by the pantry goes without a birthday celebration. Each bag includes a boxed cake mix, frosting, candles, sprinkles, a small container of oil, party supplies, and a toy valued at \$10-\$15. Optional items like a \$5 grocery gift card and a note of encouragement add a thoughtful touch. Volunteers package and decorate the kits, which are distributed through the pantry.

This program goes beyond food assistance by creating moments of joy and normalcy for children in need. It highlights the importance of dignity and celebration, even during difficult times.

The best part is, this program is easy to replicate at low cost. Most items can be sourced affordably, and local groups can assemble and deliver kits to any food shelf with minimal coordination. It's a small effort with a big impact.

What It Takes:

Strong community support, clear donation guidelines, and dedicated volunteers make the program successful. Donations are accepted at the FISH warehouse, with flexible drop-off times and receipts available.

Sweet Celebrations: How Cake4Kids Brings Joy to Food Pantry Families

Sequim Food Bank - Sequim

Port Angeles Food Bank - Port Angeles



In the midst of hardship, every child deserves to feel celebrated, which is why the partnership with Cake4Kids has become one of the most heartwarming programs at the food pantry. This national initiative connects volunteer bakers with youth experiencing food insecurity who are celebrating birthdays, adoptions, graduations, and academic milestones. When the Community Coordinator identifies an upcoming celebration, whether through casual conversations in the pantry line or flyers posted onsite, they submit a request to Cake4Kids' online platform. Local bakers then claim these orders, crafting custom treats (from chocolate explosion cakes to alligator-themed cakes) based on each child's dream dessert.

The magic lies in the details: a 10-year-old requesting a chocolate cake with unicorns, a teen celebrating graduation with gold-dusted cupcakes, or a foster child receiving their first-ever birthday dessert. These aren't just sweets, they're edible affirmations that every child matters. Remarkably, every single request has been fulfilled since the program launched, with bakers often going above and beyond. When bakers see a request, they can claim it online and then deliver the cake to the food bank, where it is picked up by the family.

What It Takes:

Partnering with Cake4Kids starts with a simple signup through their national organization, followed by identifying a staff or volunteer to identify celebrations and submit requests. These requests do need to be submitted two weeks in advance.

Recruiting and Managing Volunteers

Volunteers are the backbone of food programs across Washington, powering day-to-day operations, building relationships, and sustaining the compassion that defines this work. From teens leading entire distribution shifts to community members preparing monthly appreciation lunches, these stories reflect the innovation and dedication that drive volunteer engagement in food banks. This section highlights creative approaches to recruiting, supporting, and celebrating volunteers. Whether it's building a youth-led pipeline, ensuring health and safety through practical training tools, or fostering connection through shared meals, these practices offer tangible ideas to strengthen and sustain your volunteer program.

One Call: Centralizing Volunteer Coordination

Hopelink - Redmond



Hopelink has six food bank locations, and centralizes their volunteer coordination. The volunteer coordinator, located in their central office, processes all new volunteer applications. This provides a consistent system in terms of who gets approved as a volunteer, keeps applications in one place, and takes some of the work of volunteer management away from food bank staff. For example, the volunteer coordinator handles background checks on new volunteers, and schedules volunteer orientations.

What it Takes:

This system works best for a larger organization with multiple sites and enough volunteers justify a coordinator position.

Safety First: Safety and Health Tools to Protect Staff and Volunteers



Creating a safe and healthy environment protects everyone, customers, volunteers, and staff. Yet for many food banks, finding simple, practical tools can be a challenge. The Nonprofit Safety Hero website (www.nonprofitsafetyhero.com) was built to make it easy for food programs to build strong safety practices for staff and volunteers.

What It Takes:

Here are three free tools you can start using right away.

- Flip cards for volunteers: These quick-reference cards cover basic safety tips for food bank volunteers from lifting safely to avoiding slips and trips. They're designed to be printed double-sided and laminated, and they fit easily on a hook near a workstation. Use them during volunteer orientation or assign a specific topic to an individual volunteer. Notice that the QR code goes to a shorter explainer video.
- APPapp: Accident Prevention Document Generator: Every food bank in Washington is required to have an Accident Prevention Program (APP). The APPapp helps you build a customized APP in under an hour. Answer a series of questions, and the tool will email you a document you can download, edit if needed, and put into action.
- Anytime learning: Short, practical videos and tip sheets make it easy for staff and volunteers to learn about topics like food handling safety, ergonomics, and creating a culture of safety. Everything is free and designed for small teams with limited time.

Food banks play a vital role in their communities and safe operations are essential to that role. These tools are built to help you meet your requirements, train your team, and create a safer, healthier environment for everyone. Visit www.nonprofitsafetyhero.com to get started. Funding and support for this project has been provided by the State of Washington, Department of Labor and Industries, Safety and Health Investment Projects.

Special Spotlight: Community Services of Moses Lake

The team at Community Services of Moses Lake takes safety seriously. They send out regular reminders to the volunteers about wearing safety vests. This is especially important while there is loading and unloading of products.

When at CSML if a team member has forgotten theirs, the organization has some available to check in/check out. There are many moving pieces that involve heavy equipment and it is important to have a bright visual safety vest to prevent accidents.

Teen Takeover: How Youth Volunteers Power Saturday Food Distributions

Sequim Food Bank - Sequim



Fifteen years ago, the food pantry faced a critical gap: families who couldn't access services during weekday hours. With Saturday openings stymied by volunteer shortages, the organization turned to an untapped resource - local teenagers. What began as a pragmatic solution blossomed into one of their most dynamic programs, where high schoolers now fully operate Saturday distributions with minimal adult oversight. This has an added benefit that as high school students age out, their

younger siblings are keen to jump in!

Program Model

- **Teen-Led Operations:** One staff member and two adult volunteers supervise, while teens manage:
 - **Setup/Teardown:** Unloading trucks, arranging tables, and breaking down boxes.
 - **Distribution:** Greeting guests, packing carts, restocking shelves.
 - **Leadership:** Assigning roles via pre-shift "huddles" and peer accountability.
- **Flexible Participation:** No rigid scheduling, siblings and friends often join sequentially, creating organic mentorship.
- **Incentives:** Teens can earn a Varsity Letter in Community Service! This is done through a partnership with United Way which works with local school districts to recognize high school students who have made an exceptional commitment to community service (145 volunteer hours in a calendar year).

What It Takes:

A single dedicated staffer to coordinate, a willingness to embrace teen-led chaos, and partnerships with schools or United Way for recruitment. The payoff? A self-replenishing volunteer pipeline and a generation learning compassion through action.

RSVP for Success

Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council - Wenatchee



In Chelan and Douglas Counties, volunteers over 55 are not just giving back, they're driving change. Through the RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program), administered nationally by AmeriCorps Seniors and regionally by organizations like Solid Ground, older adults are matched with opportunities that fit their skills, passions, and community needs.

One standout effort is the Green Bags program led by Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council, where RSVP volunteers play a key role in expanding food access across the region. Every other month, volunteers collect reusable grocery bags filled with donated food directly from registered donors' homes as a low-barrier, high-trust way for community members to contribute. Once collected, the items are sorted, boxed into variety packs, and delivered to food pantries for distribution to clients.

The program is both efficient and relationship-driven. Volunteers form connections with recurring donors while ensuring a steady, predictable stream of shelf-stable foods for pantries. By tapping into RSVP's experienced, reliable volunteer base, the Chelan-Douglas Community Action Council has built a sustainable model that meets ongoing hunger needs with dignity and care.

What It Takes:

- RSVP volunteers age 55+ are the key team members
- Coordination of donor registration and route scheduling
- Green Bags (reusable grocery bags) for consistent branding and ease
- A reliable system for collecting, sorting, and redistributing donated items
- Strong partnerships with local pantries and food distribution centers

For more information on the Green Bag Project, jump to the section: [Bag It Up: A New Approach To Getting Food Donations.](#)

Volunteer Coordinators Call: Building Community Through Consistent Communication

Seattle Area Food Banks - Seattle



In 2020, food banks across the country were forced to rapidly adapt operations to protect guests, staff, and volunteers. Amid evolving safety protocols and widespread uncertainty, volunteer management became especially challenging. To meet these demands, two Volunteer Managers in the Seattle area launched the Volunteer Coordinators Call: a monthly gathering designed to connect local volunteer coordinators and managers to share updates, resources, and best practices.

What began as a practical solution during a crisis has evolved into a trusted, ongoing forum for collaboration, problem-solving, and peer support. The monthly calls provide space to discuss common challenges and share strategies on topics such as job openings, safety protocols, volunteer recruitment and retention, and building a more diverse volunteer base. Perhaps most importantly, the calls have helped foster meaningful relationships between food banks that might not otherwise connect, ultimately strengthening the broader network.

As founder Lara-Ashley Monroe reflects, “One of the most remarkable aspects was hearing revolutionary new approaches. This space offered fresh perspectives on how we host events and structure our volunteer programs. Being surrounded by like-minded, committed peers encouraged bold ideas, like creating a region-wide on-call volunteer pool. What once sounded impossible quickly became something volunteers were excited to try, and that could help meet real needs across the city’s food banks.”

The meetings also encourage professional growth. Some of the most impactful sessions have included sharing personal development plans and helping one another stay accountable to individual goals. The calls provide a supportive environment where participants can exchange honest feedback and celebrate progress.

What It Takes:

To make the Volunteer Coordinators Call successful, consistency is key. Set a recurring meeting time and stick with it. Over time, it proved beneficial to have more than one facilitator. This helps ensure continuity when one person is unavailable due to illness or scheduling conflicts.

Additional best practices include:

- Plan Ahead: Conclude each call by selecting topics for the next session.

- Communicate Clearly: Include a brief agenda in reminder emails to keep participants informed and engaged.
- Build the Circle: Actively invite new volunteer coordinators and managers to join. A ready-made peer network can be a vital resource for someone new to the role.

This simple yet powerful initiative has become a cornerstone of support for volunteer leaders in the region. By sharing challenges and successes, food banks have been able to adopt new ideas, launch innovative programs, and strengthen their capacity to serve.

For more information on this practice, contact Heather Crandall at White Center Food Bank.

Organizational Strength and Capacity

Organizational strength and capacity building has a number of aspects. This section highlights effective operations, nonprofit infrastructure, and management of people.

Nonprofit organizations need to develop appropriate policies and procedures to run their programs smoothly. The size and complexity of the organization should reflect the scope of programs, and an outside reviewer should express confidence that the organization is stewarding and using community resources effectively. General best practices in the operations arena include:

- Having written policies and procedures that are up-to-date and accessible.
- Sound financial management, including accurate and complete record keeping, annual budgeting and oversight of finances by the board of directors.
- Accurate tracking and reporting of program statistics.
- Records of all donations made to the organization and donor contact information to cultivate future support and provide acknowledgement.
- Choosing an organizational structure and nonprofit status appropriate to meet the mission.
- Engaging in strategic planning to set goals for the organization, including adapting to a changing operating environment and preparing for disaster.

Pro Tip: From time to time site visits may be necessary. These can be tricky to schedule and require lots of time to drive. One tip from Angela Moore is to have pantries take measurements prior to the Review/Inspection to save time. She encourages them to draw a map, it doesn't need to be to scale, but something to show their measurements for the facility, freezers, and cooler space. WSDA wants to know how much storage capacity the pantry has. This helps her to not have to fight with a tape measure during reviews which can add a lot of time if she is seeing three to five sites in a single day.

Infrastructure: Facilities, Equipment and Technology

Recognition is growing that emergency food providers need infrastructure in order to consistently provide effective programs. Well-designed facilities, appropriate equipment, and adequate hardware and software to meet information technology needs are all critical success factors for nonprofits. At the same time, nonprofits are usually under-resourced and have trouble raising capital to invest in adequate infrastructure. The best practices in this section illustrate the power of investing in these areas. General best practices in the area of facilities, equipment and technology include:

- Designing or laying out food bank space in a way that maintains customer and worker dignity, inside waiting areas, space to allow for customer choice, and a pleasant work environment for volunteers and staff.
- Safe working conditions, with appropriate equipment to perform key tasks without strain.
- Computers and software that allow for accurate, secure management of customer data and easy reporting to funding partners and donors.
- Telephone and internet access to support information and referral for customers.

Refrigeration, sanitary areas for repacking food, and any other necessary facilities to ensure food safety and freshness.

Bar None: A Food Bank's Bold Move into a Former Pub

North Mason Food Bank - Belfair



The North Mason Food Bank turned a former tavern into a vibrant, client-choice food pantry, demonstrating how creativity, funding, and a strong mission can transform not just buildings, but entire communities.

After more than 20 years operating out of a small, converted house with no indoor waiting area and limited parking, the food bank moved into a spacious, repurposed building that now serves as a welcoming hub for food access and community connection. The client-choice model allows shoppers to select their own groceries, fostering dignity and encouraging conversation, recipe sharing, and mutual support.

This new space enables the food bank to serve around 120 families weekly and distribute over 30,000 pounds of food each month. Beyond efficiency, the building reflects a renewed commitment to hospitality, safety, and community. What was once a bar is now a beacon of nourishment for those in need.

What It Takes:

Success hinged on persistent leadership, a bold vision, and a mix of public and community support. The project was made possible in part by \$47,000 in state funding secured by local legislators, which helped cover acquisition and renovation costs. Clear communication with clients and stakeholders ensured a smooth transition. With strong community buy-in and strategic reuse of an underutilized building, this model can be replicated in other towns using similar spaces such as bars, restaurants, or retail units, combined with grant support and local volunteerism.

From Sunlight to Service: Solar Energy at FISH

FISH Community Food Bank - Ellensburg



FISH Ellensburg Food Bank successfully implemented a solar energy system through Washington State's solar incentive program designed for low-income communities. This initiative reduces the food bank's utility costs while modeling environmental responsibility and sustainability for the community it serves. By participating in the program, FISH now generates clean energy on-site, reinvesting savings into direct

services for clients.

To improve financial accessibility, low-interest loans and installer flexibility helped overcome the hurdle of upfront costs, while the incentive structure ensures reimbursement after completion.

By installing solar, FISH Ellensburg not only cut costs but also became part of a growing network of food banks driving energy equity. The model is sustainable, accessible, and scalable - offering an inspiring path forward for others across Washington.

Interested food banks can begin by visiting energy.wsu.edu, reviewing the Community Solar Expansion Program one-pager, and connecting with the WFC for support.

What It Takes:

- Strategic Partnerships: Working closely with the project administrator, and the local utility provider helped navigate the technical and logistical aspects.
- Accessible Program Structure: The reimbursement-based incentive model, paired with available low-interest financing and occasional balance-carrying by solar installers, reduced financial barriers.
- Technical Support: Guidance through the pre-certification and final certification processes simplified what could otherwise be a complex system for a small nonprofit team.

Using Technology to Improve Safety and Operations

Clark County Food Bank - Vancouver



Clark County Food Bank has implemented temperature monitoring systems across all of its warehouse and refrigeration spaces. These monitors provide real-time data summaries of each room's temperature, enabling the management team to proactively address issues before they affect food quality. The system, Sensorpush, allows for continuous oversight across multiple facilities, ensuring safe storage conditions at all times.

Additionally, the food bank tracks its entire fleet of passenger and food transport vehicles, which are driven by volunteers and AmeriCorps team members. These GPS systems help monitor location, speed, and driving behavior such as harsh stops or aggressive acceleration enhancing both safety and accountability. This monitoring, provided by Linxup, has proven especially useful during off site operations and time-sensitive deliveries.

The technology behind these practices is both accessible and relatively low-cost, relying on small, easy-to-install devices. The success of this system is attributed to a well-coordinated facilities team, a solid infrastructure, and thoughtful implementation led by internal logistics experts. For organizations with limited budgets, similar technology can be adopted in stages, and potential partnerships or grants could help offset initial costs.

What It Takes:

Getting started with temperature and GPS monitoring requires selecting affordable, easy-to-install devices and identifying your highest-risk areas first, like walk-in coolers or delivery vehicles. Success depends on having a team in place to monitor the data and respond quickly to alerts. For food banks with limited budgets, the technology can be introduced gradually, and support may be available through grants, partnerships, or vendor discounts. A phased rollout and internal coordination are key to making the most of these tools.

Draw it Up: The Importance of Maps

Community Services of Moses Lake - Moses Lake



When conducting food pantry reviews or inspections, scheduling and travel already demand significant time so anything that speeds up the on-site process is a win. Angela Moore recommends a simple but effective strategy: ask pantries to measure and map their space before the visit.

Rather than spending time wrangling a tape measure during inspections, pantries can provide a rough sketch. It doesn't have to be to scale but including dimensions of their facility, walk-ins, coolers, and freezer space. This allows reviewers to quickly assess storage capacity, as required by WSDA, and move through multiple site visits more efficiently.

This small step can streamline reviews, reduce on-site time, and help both parties stay focused on what matters most: ensuring safe, effective food storage and distribution.

What It Takes:

- Ask pantries to measure their storage areas before the visit
- Provide a simple example or template for a basic site map
- Include dimensions for coolers, freezers, and dry storage
- Collect maps via email ahead of time to review before arrival.

Labels That Lead: Simplifying TEFAP/CSFP Distribution

Community Services of Moses Lake - Moses Lake



Angela Moore of Community Services of Moses Lake has developed a label system for TEFAP/CSFP! This clear, compliant labeling system distinguishes between donated foods and federally funded program foods (TEFAP/CSFP) at food pantries. This method simplifies compliance with Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) requirements while reducing confusion during distribution.

The system uses visual cues - such as color-coded stickers, laminated signs, or labeled carts - to separate TEFAP/CSFP foods from other donations. For example, one wall of the pantry might be designated for TEFAP items, while grocery carts signal how many products come from each source. Simple tools like name-tag stickers or tape with handwritten labels can also work. This practice ensures clarity during Sub-Agency Reviews and streamlines operations for pantries distributing to multiple partners.

What It Takes:

- **Start Small and Simple:** No pantry overhaul is needed. Use existing materials like palette wrap stickers, tape, or signs to label items. The goal is visibility, not reorganization.
- **Demonstrate with Examples:** Photos or physical samples (e.g., pre-made labels) help overcome resistance by showing how easy implementation can be. Community Services of Moses Lake's team brings stickers to pantries to jumpstart the process.
- **Standardize Visual Cues:** Designate zones (e.g., one wall for TEFAP) or carts for each program. Consistency prevents mix-ups, especially when products (like chili) come from multiple sources.
- **Align with Compliance Needs:** Train staff and volunteers to recognize labels as part of WSDA requirements. Emphasize that this protects funding and reduces audit stress.
- **Offer Hands-On Support:** Address pushback by providing templates, labels, or onsite help. Moses Lake's team reassures partners: "It's not as hard as it sounds."

Pro Tip: As Angela Moore notes, "The hardest part was convincing people they didn't need to rearrange everything, just label it. A roll of tape and a marker can meet compliance goals just as effectively as printed stickers."

Color-Coded Clarity: Streamlining Inventory with Visual Cues

Helping Hands Food Bank - Skagit County



At Helping Hands Food Bank keeping track of inventory from multiple funding sources doesn't require high-tech systems. It just takes a little color and a lot of coordination.

Their color-coded inventory and restocking system is a low-cost, high-impact way to maintain compliance with various program requirements (like TEFAP or CHOW), while keeping operations clear and efficient. For example, colored Saran Wrap is used to wrap pallets: red for TEFAP and green for CHOW. Orange cones placed on top of pallets indicate which stock is up next when it is time to restock. This visual approach minimizes errors, simplifies training, and keeps food flowing where it's needed.

The system works because it's intuitive. Staff, volunteers, and program coordinators work from shared guidelines and visual references posted throughout the facility. Volunteers appreciate the simplicity, and the food bank gains consistency, compliance, and efficiency.

What It Takes:

This system requires a shared understanding among staff and volunteers, clearly defined color assignments for each funding source, and visual signage in inventory areas. Initial training is minimal. A brief orientation or handout is sufficient to teach new folks the ropes. Supplies like color-coded wrap, cones, or reusable pallet covers are inexpensive and easy to source. Most importantly, the system thrives on consistency and buy-in from all team members.

Serving Safely: Protocols for Pop-Ups and Markets

ACT (A Common Thread) - Seattle



A comprehensive set of food safety and hygiene standards implemented by ACT for self-serve markets and pop-up giveaway sites. These protocols ensure safe food handling while maintaining accessibility and efficiency in distribution. The system addresses everything from patron hygiene to proper food storage and disposal.

Key Components:

- **Mandatory Hand Sanitization:** All patrons must sanitize hands immediately after sign-in to prevent cross-contamination.
- **Volunteer Safety Standards:** Volunteers assisting patrons are required to wear gloves at all times.
- **Clean Display Practices:** Tables must be wiped down before food is displayed.
- **Elevated Storage Requirements:** All produce and boxed foods must be stored at least four inches off the ground; bread and produce displays must meet the same standard.
- **Dropped Food Policy:** Any food that touches the ground must be discarded immediately.
- **Efficient Distribution System:** Sites receive predetermined allotments based on need, with leftovers transported to other sites for same-day distribution (no storage holdovers).
- **Multilingual Signage:** Clear instructions displayed in multiple languages ensure accessibility for all participants.

What It Takes:

- **Consistent Enforcement:** Train volunteers to uphold protocols without exception (e.g., glove use, sanitization).
- **Prep and Maintenance:** Build time into setup for cleaning tables and arranging elevated displays (e.g., use pallets, tables, or shelves).
- **Waste Management Plan:** Designate bins for discarded food and educate volunteers on the "no redistribution" rule.
- **Logistical Coordination:** Partner with nearby sites to facilitate same-day redistribution of leftovers.

- Community Communication: Use pictograms or simple translations on signage to bridge language gaps.

Pro Tip: "Elevation doesn't require fancy equipment; stacked pallets or repurposed tables work. The goal is to keep food safe, not perfect."

Emergency Buckets: Building Rural Resilience Through Preparedness

Sequim Food Bank - Sequim



When the pandemic hit, the food pantry discovered an unexpected opportunity, forging a new partnership with county emergency services. As they worked together to address urgent needs, they realized many rural neighbors faced a vulnerability: the inability to prepare for emergencies. Geographic isolation, limited resources, and unpredictable weather events left families dangerously exposed. From this challenge, the Emergency Buckets program was born; an innovative approach that blends

food security with disaster readiness while strengthening community ties.

The concept is simple but powerful. Participants receive a 5-gallon sealed bucket, then gradually transform it into a comprehensive emergency kit over 7-8 months through monthly additions of food supplies and critical tools. What began as an idea from a rural leadership class became a popular idea within their team. The Sequim Sunrise Rotary provided a grant for 250 buckets, while Home Depot contributed non-food essentials through their community grant program. Local emergency teams and the Red Cross joined as partners, offering expertise and resources like free smoke detector vouchers, creating a true network of care.

What makes this initiative special is its dual focus on tangible supplies and relationship building. Each bucket becomes a conversation starter during monthly distribution events, where emergency responders share tailored advice for regional threats like windstorms or power outages. The phased approach, starting with basic provisions and building toward more comprehensive preparedness, makes the process manageable for both families and organizers. After the initial 8-month period, the program transitions to a maintenance phase, ensuring supplies stay current through regular check-ins.

What It Takes:

Strong partnerships with emergency services and local businesses provide critical resources and credibility. A phased, 7-8 month rollout makes preparedness manageable for families and organizers alike. Creative funding, like grants for buckets and donated supplies, keeps costs low while maximizing impact. Most importantly, leveraging your pantry's trusted role in the community turns distribution events into opportunities for connection and education.

Evaluation: Working for You

Rotary First Harvest - Greater King County



Rotary First Harvest (RFH) acts as a conduit between farmers and the programs that serve hungry individuals and families in the region, collecting produce and other nutritious food and getting it into the existing emergency food distribution channels. Since their focus is on transporting food, they solicited funding to conduct research on ways to improve transportation for the hunger response network. The research was conducted by a

professional research firm, and included key person interviews with diverse stakeholders such as commercial trucking groups who were donating services or offering reduced rates, as well as distribution centers and EFAP lead agencies receiving high volume donations. The resulting report provided fresh insights for RFH and their partners. To David Bobanick, Executive Director, important learnings included gaining insight into businesses motivations for donating and increased clarity about key transportation corridors and trucking hubs statewide. They also learned that "it's a deal breaker if the truck and driver has to sit and wait at either end" of a donated trucking run, so they are working to reduce waiting times at both donation locations, such as cold storage facilities and distribution centers. These insights will enable RFH to be more strategic in deciding what donations to accept and to advocate for changes that will improve the experience of donors and their willingness to continue to provide pro bono trucking services.

What It Takes:

Research can be an invaluable aid to meeting your mission and goals more strategically. In particular, listening to donors and other community partners can reveal new opportunities to leverage resources and talent for community benefit. Formal research such as the study RFH commissioned requires expertise to design effective and scientifically valid research methods. For this type of research, you may want to seek outside funding and/or join together with other organizations that would also benefit from the research in order to support consulting costs. The project will also require active involvement from your organization's leadership to help define research questions and identify relevant stakeholders.

Leadership and Human Resources: Boards and Volunteers

Nonprofit organizations are nothing without people who care, and this is particularly true for anti-hunger organizations. Food programs are heavily reliant on volunteers to perform most tasks, from food sorting to fundraising, governance to taking out the trash. In the nonprofit sector as a whole, there is a trend toward increasing reliance on paid professional staff, but the emergency food industry remains primarily volunteer-driven, making it particularly important for them to effectively manage volunteers and establish working governance structures. General best practices in the area of leadership and volunteer management include:

- Establish an active board of directors who understand the range of nonprofit board responsibilities
- Draw volunteers from different sectors of the community, including groups and individuals, people of all ages and professions, and people who reflect the cultural and language groups represented in your customer base.
- Mentor and encourage the development of the next generation of leaders. Develop a leadership succession plan to reduce reliance on a single founder or a small group of volunteer leaders and ensure that the organization can continue after these individuals retire from active service.
- Supervise staff effectively: set clear expectations, evaluate performance annually, and offer support and opportunities for professional growth.

Pathways to Employment: Building Skills Through Service

Othello Food Bank - Othello



Othello Food Bank offers local students crucial hands-on experience in preparation for future employment opportunities through a state-funded initiative through Economy Security for All (ECSA) and Skills Source. The program combines GED preparation with hands-on food bank training, preparing students for careers in food service, logistics, and retail. Host organizations (like food banks) provide work experience hours required for the students' GED programs, while Skills Source offers coursework and certificates.

Students gain practical skills, such as client intake, stocking, gleaning, truck loading/unloading, and senior food distribution, while building communication and people skills. After completing the program, many secure jobs at grocery stores, as drivers, or in similar roles. Having the students take the WFC's Food Bank Certification Course adds credibility, giving students a tangible credential to bolster their resumes.

What It Takes:

- Become a Host Site: Any nonprofit or business can partner.
 - *Pro Tip:* Invite a Skills Source representative to join your board to strengthen collaboration.
- Align Tasks with Career Goals: Tailor tasks to students' interests (e.g., logistics for future drivers, client intake for customer service roles). Flexibility ensures relevance.
- Leverage State Funding: Skills Source manages ECSA funds, covering costs like training materials or staff time. Host sites focus on providing real-world experience.
- Emphasize Soft Skills: Use food bank roles (e.g., intake interviews) to teach communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, critical for future employment.
- Build a Pipeline to Jobs: Partner with local employers (e.g., grocery stores) to create pathways for graduates. Highlight their food bank certification as proof of competency.

Pro Tip: Start small. Even hosting one student can demonstrate the program's value. As one organizer notes, "The certificate program gives them a strong foundation but the real magic happens when they apply those skills in your daily operations."

Community Relations

Emergency food programs need to be in constant dialogue with their community. As is evident throughout this catalog, strong relationships with all sectors of the community -low-income adults and families, business leaders, philanthropists, service clubs, faith communities -inform decision-making, reveal new sources of support and partnership, give your program greater visibility and reach, and enhance your reputation and your ability to fight hunger. The best practices below are organized into three categories: collaboration, public engagement and advocacy, and fundraising.

In addition, we offer the following general best practices for strong community relations:

- Network and participate in coalitions that connect you with other emergency food providers. Food banks, meal programs and other anti-hunger programs have a lot in common, and staying in touch, attending statewide conferences, and joining local coalitions is likely to pay off for your organization in multiple ways. The successes of coalitions based in King, Kitsap, Spokane and Whatcom counties are sprinkled throughout this catalog, illustrating the old adage that there is strength in numbers.
- Increase your connectivity in the local community. Participate in civic organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and service clubs such as Rotary and Kiwanis. These forums will give you a big picture perspective on your community and how your efforts fit into the larger scheme of community building and economic development. They are also a goldmine of potential supporters, board leaders and partners.
- Educate the broader community. Engage in discussions with people of all ages in your community about hunger and solutions to end hunger. People who are informed about the problem of hunger in their community and the best ways to combat it are likely to become strong supporters of your efforts. However, they may need you to connect the dots. For example, it may not be obvious to casual food drive donors that your need for cash is greater than your need for cans.

Community Connectors

City of Seattle, Human Services Department - Seattle



In Seattle, food banks do more than provide meals as they connect people to life-changing resources. Through the Community Connector program, food banks employ trained staff to help clients navigate housing, healthcare, employment, childcare, transportation, education, and more. These navigators don't just hand out flyers, they walk alongside neighbors to ensure they receive the support they need to

thrive.

Each Community Connector meets clients where they are. Located onsite during food bank hours, they build relationships, assess needs through a resource inventory, and provide tailored support ranging from referrals and application assistance to follow-up and strong hand-offs to partner agencies. This personal connection helps break down barriers, reduce stress, and empower individuals on their path toward stability.

The program is structured to reflect the community it serves. Services and referrals are tailored to local needs, and data is tracked using the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database to inform future strategies and performance outcomes. Clients may also be invited to community resource fairs or group sessions on topics like job readiness, ORCA LIFT, DSHS benefits, and more.

This model is particularly effective because it recognizes that food insecurity is rarely the only issue families face. By embedding support within the trusted setting of a food bank, the Community Connector model brings dignity, access, and hope directly to the people who need it most.

What It Takes:

- **Dedicated Staff:** At least one full-time staff person assigned as a Community Connector during food bank hours.
- **Training and Collaboration:** Staff should be trained to engage clients, identify needs, assist with applications, and build relationships with local service providers.
- **Onsite Accessibility:** Services are most effective when Community Connectors are available during regular food distribution hours and have private space for client interaction.

- Data Collection: Use a system like Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) to track applications, enrollments, hand-offs, and client demographics.
- Community Partnerships: Success depends on strong relationships with service providers across sectors (housing, education, mental health, transportation).
- Flexible Funding: Programs like this have been funded through city budgets, such as Seattle's General Sub Fund allocation, or through contracts with local government and nonprofit agencies.

Neighbors at the Table: Building a Community Advisory Committee

North Helpline - Seattle



Working in community one learns that service design isn't something done for the community- it's done with them. In June 2025, North Helpline relaunched its Neighbor Advisory Committee, composed of clients who currently use or have recently used food bank services. This group meets monthly to offer feedback on everything from food selection and operating hours to accessibility and policies.

This initiative reflects North Helpline's commitment to centering lived experience in program development. Client feedback has already shaped the organization's offerings in areas such as expanding culturally relevant food. The new committee format allows for ongoing, structured engagement. Advisory meetings are held at a convenient, familiar location and are supported with translation, childcare, and snacks to remove common participation barriers.

The goal is a more responsive, inclusive, and community-powered food bank that honors its neighbors as experts in their own needs.

What It Takes:

Launching a Neighbor Advisory Committee requires authentic commitment, not extensive resources. Key ingredients include inviting regular clients who reflect community diversity, choosing a consistent and accessible meeting time and space, and providing support like translation and childcare. Facilitating staff prepare 2-4 discussion topics each month. Flyers in multiple languages and personal outreach help build trust and participation.

Pro Tip: It can be easy to select outgoing visitors who come regularly to participate in these meetings, but making a concerted effort to invite a wide variety of participants and yield more nuanced sessions with invaluable feedback!

Who We Serve, Who We Are: A DEI Toolkit

Lynnwood Food Bank - Lynnwood

Wa Na Wari - Seattle

YWCA Central Area Food Pantry - Seattle

United Way of King County - Seattle

Black-led Urban Food Systems Pact - Skyway

East African Community Services - Seattle

El Centro De La Raza - Seattle



The Lynnwood Food Bank initiated its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in 2020 after recognizing that its customer base, volunteer team, and board of directors did not reflect the diversity of the broader community. At that time, the organization was primarily white, despite the fact that many people in need of food assistance were BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), immigrants, and refugees. Through intentional outreach, listening sessions, and building relationships with trusted

community leaders, the food bank shifted its approach. Today, nearly 70% of the food bank's customers identify as BIPOC, immigrants, or refugees. Executive Director Alissa Jones emphasized her guiding principle, "Relationships, support, and show up!", a simple but powerful foundation for their DEI and community engagement work. Alissa is clear that she does not see herself as an expert in DEI, race, or culture, but as someone who is always willing to listen, learn, improve, and fight for equity alongside the community.

It was vital for them to have board members and volunteers who reflect the community they serve as well. Having volunteers who can speak the customers' languages and share their food experiences is important for their customers to feel represented. The Lynnwood Food Bank also employs immigrant and refugee interns who are funded by DSHS to work 20 hours per week at the food bank while attending school. These interns come from Syria, Afghanistan, and Nigeria.

How can you find out who is in your community? According to Alissa, it just takes a little research to find out who is living in your community. However, building relationships requires "consistency and follow-through. Being busy or in a hurry is not an excuse." Learning about a community begins with authentic engagement, meeting with local leaders, listening, and following up with action.

Each week, the food bank hosts two volunteer meetings that center on social justice topics such as deaf culture, domestic violence, and more. Guests from diverse backgrounds are invited to share insights about their cultures, enriching the learning experience. For a dedicated 3.5-month period, the discussions focused specifically on structural racism, emphasizing the importance of embedding these conversations into the food bank's volunteer culture. The guiding message is clear: "No politics, but yes to social justice."

The costs associated with this practice include staff time and purchasing cultural foods, which they fund using a portion of their Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) funds and private grants. They source food from the Weigelt Company, Charlie's Produce, and many other local suppliers to serve distinct populations, including Hispanic, Asian, Middle Eastern, and African communities. Actively engaging with the community and sharing their needs on their website helps guide donors about what items are needed.

Examples of Culturally Familiar Foods:

- Sesame Oil
- Fish Sauce
- Chili Paste
- Pinto and Black beans
- Honey
- Sunflower Oil
- Evaporated or Condensed Milk
- Barley
- Palm Oil
- Couscous

Additionally, the food bank conducts cooking demonstrations featuring these foods. Publishing a list and sharing it throughout the community has resulted in increased donations for the program. Alissa has also utilized the services of and collaborated with Immigrant and Refugee Services NW at Everett Community College.

These efforts continue to deepen trust and connection with the community. By honoring cultural food traditions, inviting collaboration, and centering equity in their programming, the Lynnwood Food Bank is creating a space where all individuals feel seen, valued, and nourished, not just with food, but with dignity and belonging.

There are also several Seattle organizations offering culturally appropriate food to individuals and families, including options for African diets:

Wa Na Wari provides free "African diasporic and Native American-inspired cuisine" prepared by Black and Indigenous chefs. They work with local farmers to source ingredients that are "well-balanced, nutritious, and culturally relevant". This program offers prepared meals instead of food boxes, but it is a good resource for those seeking African-influenced food options.

YWCA Central Area Food Pantry aims to provide culturally responsive food options, including Halal and Kosher selections, which can cater to diverse dietary needs. They also offer a 24/7 walk-up pantry for shelf-stable foods.

United Way of King County partners with the Black-led Urban Food Systems Pact in Skyway to offer Black/African American grocery box menus through their home grocery delivery program. These boxes include items like black-eyed peas, cornmeal, collard greens, and cheese.

East African Community Services has a program focused on providing culturally appropriate food help. Direct contact can provide more information.

El Centro De La Raza in Beacon Hill prepares bags with specific ingredients for various cultural groups, including East African clients. They are known for providing healthy and diverse food options.

Additional Resources:

Seattle Food Committee has a directory of food banks in Seattle where specific services or catering to particular communities can be searched.

2-1-1 can connect you with a network of food resources and help in finding organizations that provide culturally appropriate food in the area.

Food Lifeline also offers a tool to help locate food banks near you.

What It Takes:

A commitment to listen, build relationships, and show up consistently is required to make this initiative happen. Success came from partnering with community leaders, hiring staff and interns who reflect the community, sourcing culturally familiar foods, and embedding DEI learning into regular volunteer meetings. Funding came from EFAP and private grants, with cultural food vendors playing a key role.

Centering Community Voices: Culturally Relevant Food Systems

Orcas Island Food Bank - Orcas Island



At the Orcas Island Food Bank, meaningful change began with humility, listening, and collaboration. When Director Amanda Sparks stepped into her role, she recognized both the need for culturally relevant services and her own limitations in serving the local Hispanic community. Rather than making assumptions, she partnered with Alimentando al Pueblo, an organization rooted in culturally responsive food justice.

Together, they launched a multi-pronged approach focused on safety, joy, and belonging. They conducted an incentivized community survey, audited grocery store shelves to understand availability better, and created food lists that reflected community preferences. Amanda also ensured the food bank had Spanish-speaking volunteers and hosted a celebratory fiesta with music and culturally relevant meals.

In addition to relationship-building, Amanda advocated for sustainable systems change. She joined the WSDA commodities workgroup to push for more responsive ordering options and regularly speaks out against food items that do not serve her community's needs. She strengthens local grower and retailer relationships by engaging directly, offering logistical support such as refrigeration, and consistently showing up, especially during gleaning or culling opportunities.

Amanda encourages other food leaders to hire experts from the communities they serve, track data to demonstrate impact, and remain open to learning. She also emphasizes that while commodity foods have value, they should not be the only option.

What It Takes:

This work starts with humility and a willingness to listen. Orcas Island Food Bank partnered with Alimentando al Pueblo to guide their efforts, using community surveys and food audits to shape culturally relevant practices. Success depended on strong relationships with staff, board members, farmers, and local retailers and a commitment to celebrating culture through events and food. Amanda's advocacy work within WSDA, combined with practical actions like showing up for culling days and offering refrigeration, demonstrates how rural food banks can lead sustainable, community-centered change with intention, consistency, and collaboration.

Telling the Story, Growing the Mission

Sequim Food Bank - Sequim



In Sequim, Washington, the Sequim Food Bank has found a powerful way to connect with the community: a monthly column in the Sequim Gazette. Authored by Executive Director Andra Smith, these columns offer more than updates, they provide a heartfelt narrative that brings readers into the daily life and mission of the food bank.

Through this regular feature, Smith shares stories of resilience and gratitude, highlights the challenges of food insecurity, and celebrates the community's generosity. She discusses programs like the Full Pantry Project and the Mobile Food Pantry, illustrating how local initiatives make a tangible difference. By addressing topics such as funding uncertainties and rising demand, the column fosters transparency and trust.

This consistent communication not only informs but also invites community members to participate, whether by volunteering, donating, or simply spreading the word. It's a testament to how storytelling and open dialogue can strengthen community bonds and support.

What It Takes:

- **Consistent Communication:** Establish a regular schedule for contributions to maintain engagement and build anticipation among readers.
- **Authentic Storytelling:** Share real stories and experiences to humanize the organization's work and resonate with the community.
- **Transparent Updates:** Discuss challenges and successes openly to build trust and demonstrate accountability.
- **Community Involvement:** Encourage readers to take action by highlighting opportunities for volunteering, donating, or participating in programs.
- **Collaborative Relationships:** Work closely with local media outlets to ensure the organization's voice is represented accurately and effectively.

By embracing this approach, organizations can foster a deeper connection with their communities, turning readers into active supporters and advocates.

Prepared to Save a Life: North Kitsap Fishline's Narcan Program

North Kitsap Fishline - Poulsbo



At North Kitsap Fishline, food assistance isn't the only life-saving service offered. Through a comprehensive Narcan (naloxone) program, Fishline is equipping its staff, volunteers, and the larger community with the tools to prevent fatal opioid overdoses and to respond with confidence and compassion in crisis moments.

The program includes regular training for staff and volunteers on how to recognize an overdose, administer Narcan nasal spray, and provide follow-up care. Kits are strategically placed throughout the facility in reception areas, common spaces, first aid stations, and even company vehicles, with clear, easy-to-follow instructions.

Beyond the walls of the organization, Fishline partners with local health departments, emergency responders, and community groups to stay informed and connected to broader public health efforts. Community feedback is gathered regularly to refine practices, and resources are shared with those struggling with opioid use, including referrals to treatment programs, counseling, and support groups.

This model is both life-saving and accessible. It is easy to replicate at little or no cost, and urgently needed as opioid-related deaths rise in many communities.

What It Takes:

Getting started didn't require a big budget, just a strong sense of responsibility and a commitment to safety. At North Kitsap Fishline, staff began by connecting with local public health departments and accessing free online training to ensure everyone on site could confidently recognize and respond to an overdose.

Next, they sourced Narcan kits and wall-mounted cabinets through a combination of grants and donations. Clear signage and instructions made the kits user-friendly for anyone, not just trained staff.

Partnerships played a huge role in implementation. Collaborating with community health agencies and emergency responders ensured the team had access to up-to-date best practices and referral options. Meanwhile, community members with lived experience helped shape the approach to ensure it was respectful and trauma-informed.

The organization also built in a system for ongoing improvement, gathering feedback from both staff and the broader community to refine placement, training, and outreach. Perhaps most importantly, they made overdose preparedness part of the organization's culture of care.

Public Engagement And Advocacy

Across Washington State, food banks and hunger relief organizations are finding creative, community-specific ways to raise awareness about hunger, increase support for their programs, and advocate for meaningful change. From adapting national campaigns and organizing impactful lobby days, to building strong local brands, facilitating peer learning, and collecting powerful data on unmet needs, these initiatives demonstrate how local innovation can drive broader impact. The following examples showcase the diverse strategies used by organizations to connect with their communities, grow their visibility, influence public policy, and ultimately, strengthen the hunger relief system statewide.

All Aboard! Hunger/Emergency Food Provider Tours

Seattle Food Committee - Seattle



Every August, members of the Seattle Food Committee (SFC) forego their regular monthly meeting to visit local hunger relief organizations. Each year, a new tour is organized around a specific theme or area of interest, such as new equipment, remodeled programs, or neighboring communities. The tour usually lasts most of the day and includes visits to five or six programs, with each stop lasting between 30 to 45 minutes. At each organization, representatives share information about their programs or provide a guided tour of their facility. Lunch is offered at one of the sites, typically for a small fee. The group gathers at a central location where they can park their cars before boarding a bus to begin the tour.

This tour is particularly beneficial for distribution center staff, administrative personnel, and board members who may not have the opportunity to see multiple programs otherwise. As a result, the tour attracts a diverse audience compared to those who attend SFC coalition meetings. Food bank staff often comment that they gain new insights and learn about best practices during these visits.

What It Takes:

An organizer is needed to coordinate the tour. In this case, Food System Support at Solid Ground contacts the programs to be visited and manages all the arrangements. They even hire a tour bus to transport everyone together to each site. Although this incurs some costs, it significantly promotes information sharing and networking during the journey. The SFC also charges attendees a portion of their lunch expenses, which helps reduce last-minute cancellations. Programs that lack funds can drive their cars from location to location and bring their lunch.

Washington's Own Advocacy Event: Hunger Action Day

Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition - Statewide



During each legislative session, the statewide Anti-Hunger and Nutrition Coalition hosts Hunger Action Day to make a difference in the issues facing hungry families in Washington. This lobby day is designed to build advocacy skills among anti-hunger program staff, boards and volunteers; to highlight the legislative priorities of the anti-hunger community during session; and, to bring hungry people's stories to legislators so they can make positive changes.

This event began more than 20 years ago and has grown to a successful event with over 150 people attending in Olympia. Attendees spend the morning networking, learning more about the legislative priorities that affect hunger and nutrition programs, and developing skills to advocate effectively for these priorities. The afternoon is spent meeting with staff and legislators to share customer stories and the importance of the Coalition's priorities.

What It Takes:

To organize a lobby day, organizations need public policy expertise to develop and promote timely and effective legislative priorities and to track them accurately throughout the legislative process so lobby day information is timely and presented in context. A planning committee is also needed, with skills related to communications, event planning, promotions, and outreach to partners, to work with the policy experts to help ensure that a wide diversity of advocates come to Olympia well prepared to talk to their legislators.

Fundraising: Everything From Individuals to Special Events

Capital campaigns are big undertakings and with big challenges come big rewards. These focused fundraising drives are designed to secure major support for one-time costs like constructing new buildings, renovating facilities, or purchasing expensive equipment. While the scale of a capital campaign may seem daunting, many food banks and community organizations have achieved remarkable success by planning thoughtfully, engaging their communities, and staying flexible as costs and timelines evolve. In this section, you'll learn from the experiences of the Toppenish Community Chest and the West Seattle Food Bank (among other) organizations who turned ambitious dreams into real, concrete outcomes. Whether you're building from scratch or expanding to better serve your neighbors, these practical lessons can help pave your path forward.

Special Spotlight: Lake Stevens Community Food Bank

For a fun and different approach to fundraising, take a look at this idea from Lake Stevens Community Food Bank. Every year they have a group of supporters who do a "swear jar" fundraiser! They go door to door or ask friends and family to donate if they swear!

Bricks and Mortar: Running a Successful Capital Campaign

As mentioned previously a capital campaign is a concentrated fundraising effort by a nonprofit organization to raise a significant amount of money for a specific, high-cost project. But, unlike annual fundraising, which supports ongoing operations, a capital campaign is time-limited, goal-driven, and usually happens in phases:

- Quiet phase – The organization secures a large portion of the goal from major donors before going public.
- Public phase – The campaign is opened to the broader community to raise the remaining funds.

The campaign pays for a one-time cost, usually "bricks and mortar." The following tips come from Toppenish Community Chest, and West Seattle Food Bank, two organizations that have run successful capital campaigns to build new facilities.

- Strengthen your board of directors. Your board should be connected with different segments of the local community, and be united in their support for the project.
- Complete a feasibility study, an assessment of community support for your project and whether you can meet your fundraising goal. You need to look at your internal capacity to carry out a capital campaign, and understand your donor base and whether they will support your project. The feasibility study helps you understand what resources are in your community that you can tap for support and increases visibility for the project.
- Determine the nature of your project, and set a realistic campaign goal. Are you building a simple, warehouse style structure or community showplace? Will you build alone or co-locate with other community services? Multi-use projects can be wonderful, but they are also more complex and can be more expensive ventures.
- Anticipate increasing costs. WSFB's project costs skyrocketed from \$1.2 million to \$3.3 million from initial design concept to finished construction.
- Map out your community to identify potential supporters. TCC looked at "everyone" in their community -churches, businesses and individuals. They would request an appointment and go and make their presentation and request support. Most were able to help, though you need to be prepared to have a few doors slammed in your face.
- Be aware that fundraising consultants don't do the fundraising for you. Staff and volunteer leadership is required from within your organization to strategize and ask for gifts.
- Cultivate legislators so they will assist you in accessing public funding at the city, county or state levels.

Show Me the Money: Generating Revenues through a Thrift Store

Inter-Faith Treasure House - Camas



Inter-Faith Treasure House (IFTH) runs a thrift store in the same building as their food bank. IFTH has 200-300 shoppers per day, and the thrift store revenues are an important source of funds to purchase food. Their thrift store generates income of \$150,000-\$160,000 per year. Nancy Wilson, Director, notes that a thrift store requires community support, and that it takes a while for donors to learn about what types of donations are acceptable. Having the thrift store is complementary to the food bank in that IFTH can offer food bank customers clothing vouchers for use at the thrift store.

What It Takes:

A thrift store is labor intensive, and requires a reliable corps of volunteers. IFTH is open six days a week, with four clerks on duty each day (two in the morning and two in the afternoon), plus a paid store manager (known as the Person in Charge) and four to five sorters to sort through new donations. IFTH has a volunteer manual and teams new volunteers up with experienced mentors for training. Wilson stresses the importance of reporting back to the community regarding what you are doing with the money, so they are committed to giving more. Finally, operating a thrift store requires finding a good location, and maintaining a bright, uncluttered store with quality merchandise.

Bloom and Give: Ocean Shores Food Bank's Annual Plant Sale

Ocean Shores Food Bank - Ocean Shores



On the Western Coast of Washington, a new idea for fundraising is popping up in Ocean Shores Food Bank's Annual Plant Sale, a beloved community tradition held just before Mother's Day. Now in its sixth year, this vibrant fundraiser brings together beauty, generosity, and community spirit, all in support of hunger relief.

Held on a highly visible, easily accessible Saturday with ample parking, the event features a wide variety of offerings: lush hanging baskets, colorful potted arrangements, vegetable and flower starts, deer-resistant plants, houseplants, and even yard art. Local volunteers and community members donate nearly everything, while a generous local merchant contributes stunning hanging baskets and show-stopping color pots. Every plant is clearly labeled and priced, and friendly volunteers are on hand to help shoppers choose the perfect addition to their garden or porch.

Adding to the day's value, the WSU Extension Master Gardeners of Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties host a plant clinic on-site, offering expert advice and answering gardening questions for attendees.

Promotion is wide-reaching and effective, with outreach via social media, local radio, and posters placed around town. A raffle drawing adds fun and helps collect names, phone numbers, and email addresses, building the food bank's outreach list for future events and updates.

This plant sale is a joyful, welcoming event that invites neighbors to support a critical local resource while taking home something beautiful.

What It Takes:

Pulling off a successful event like the Ocean Shores Food Bank's plant sale starts with community connections. Long standing relationships with local merchants, volunteers, and master gardeners are the foundation of the event's success. Generous donations of plants, baskets, yard art, and supplies keep costs low and enthusiasm high.

Make it Your Own: Tailoring Events to Meet Specific Needs

Walk for Rice, Asian Counseling and Referral Service - Seattle



Walk for Rice is a major annual fundraising event for Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) Food Bank and Nutrition Programs. Due to the strength and dedication of volunteers, the Walk for Rice has grown from a small grassroots effort into an annual event that gathers over 1,000 participants. Some proceeds come from corporate sponsorships, but the bulk of funding comes from individuals who make donations as well

as collect donations from others. Local businesses and community organizations form teams to fundraise and display solidarity against hunger in the community. In addition to raising money, the event raises public awareness of hunger and in particular, the needs of low-income members of the Asian Pacific American community. For example, ACRS is committed to keeping rice, a staple of most Asian diets, available at its food bank on a regular basis. Walkers are motivated to raise funds to meet this culturally specific need. "We need a message that resonates," comments Gary Tang, ACRS Aging and Adult Services Director. "Walk for Rice -our message about Asians needing rice is really simple. People get it and they understand that all they need to do is walk for rice so people won't go hungry."

What It Takes:

Advisory Committee, six month timeframe for planning and handling of all event logistics, including: reserve date and location, line up sponsors, develop publicity materials, conduct outreach to recruit walkers, register participants, line up volunteers and entertainment. Over time, as the event becomes more established, your effort to secure sponsors and your learning curve will lessen. Learn more at walkforrice.kintera.org "We send out a newsletter twice a year thanking our community for their support and telling them the needs of our customers."

Steps Toward Change: Hunger Walks and Runs

Thurston County Food Bank- Olympia

White Center Food Bank - Seattle

Ballard Food Bank - Seattle

Emergency Food Network - Lakewood

University District Food Bank - Seattle



Every May, the Thurston County Hunger Walk transforms Huntamer Park into a celebration of community, compassion, and action. This annual event raises critical funds for two local hunger relief powerhouses: Thurston County Food Bank and The Community Kitchen. But more than that, it brings people together in support of the shared belief that no one should go hungry.

The 2025 event brought out families, volunteers, board members, kids, and even leashed dogs for a fun-filled afternoon of giving and gathering. With live music, games for kids, and hot drinks provided by Dutch Bros Coffee, the atmosphere was joyful and welcoming. Some walked, others donated, and everyone contributed to the cause.

What makes this event stand out is its accessibility with the motto “Give what you can. Walk if you want.” Whether participants showed up to move, mingle, or simply support, their presence helped sustain essential hunger relief services in the region. It’s grassroots organizing at its best: neighbor helping neighbor, one step at a time.

What It Takes:

Pulling off a successful community fundraiser like the Hunger Walk starts with a dedicated planning committee of people who know how to tap into local energy, rally volunteers, and keep things fun and meaningful. This should include board members, long-time volunteers, and local businesses who each played a role in logistics, promotion, and day-of support.

Securing local partnerships is key as these connections make the event feel personal and rooted in the community. Using a variety of platforms for promotion, from pledge sites like 99Pledges to word of mouth, social media, and signage, help spread the word and make it easy for people to donate or form teams.

When the day of the event comes, simplicity is key.

Pro Tip: One of the most hectic parts of a walk or run is packet pickup. If possible, having an option to let participants pick up the week before, can make a big difference. If that won't work, staff this well and have one person behind the table to keep things clean and organized. Since these volunteers will be done early, some may be willing to help at the finish line as well!

The Item of the Month Club: A Modern Twist on Sustained Giving

CTK Food Share and Farm - Whatcom County

Arlington Community Food Bank - Arlington



In today's fast-paced digital world, CTK Food Share and Farm developed an innovative program that turns small, consistent acts of generosity into a steady stream of community support. The Item of the Month Club transforms passive goodwill into active impact by leveraging technology and thoughtful planning.

At the core of this program is a simple but powerful idea: making giving as easy as online shopping. CTK Food Share and Farm collaborates with local nonprofits to generate a list of needed items. These curated selections populate an Amazon Wishlist with various price points, forming the foundation of the program.

On the first of every month, committed donors receive a personalized text message. These donors pledge to purchase two items monthly from the list. The message includes which partner agency the donation will support that month, the specific need being addressed, and a direct link to purchase the items. Donors don't need to remember addresses or coordinate drop-offs, one click sends exactly what's needed directly to CTK Food Share and Farm. The team then unpacks the Amazon shipments and delivers the items to partners, helping meet their clients' needs.

What makes the program stand out is how it establishes a rhythm of giving. Regular donors describe looking forward to their monthly "giving text" like others anticipate a morning coffee. For partner agencies, this means reliable, predictable support. For CTK staff, unpacking those Amazon boxes each week is a tangible reminder of the virtual community's care turned into real-world help.

Meanwhile, the Arlington Community Food Bank's Pantry Pals program has launched strongly, with over 480 items donated last month thanks to local generosity. Supporters purchase much-needed food and household items from a monthly gift list that ships directly to the food bank, simplifying the process of filling shelves. With dedicated volunteers ready to sort and stock incoming donations, Pantry Pals offers a straightforward but effective way to ensure no one in Arlington goes to bed hungry.

What It Takes:

Building this program required three key elements: trust in donors' generosity, investment in simple technology, and, most importantly, compelling storytelling that connects supporters to the real people behind each month's request. By removing all friction from the giving process,

CTK Food Share and Farm has created something remarkable: a self-sustaining program that also sustains the community.

For organizations considering a similar approach, the recipe is straightforward: start with one compelling need, a small group of committed donors, and a commitment to making giving effortless. The rest, like those monthly Amazon deliveries, will follow naturally.

Tips for Grant Writing

Preparing a grant can be daunting. Here are a few tips to help you get through!

- One person doesn't write a grant, it takes a team to write a good grant. Make sure you have a team.
- Look at other people's grants that have been successful.
- Make sure there is a match between the funder's mission and yours.
- Follow their guidelines and wording.
- Remember that grants are usually either small or very competitive. It's not as easy as it used to be. According to Sue, a veteran grant writer, partnerships and local relationships are the best way to go.

A great resource that we found in our travels through our friends at WHY Hunger is www.npguides.org. The "np" stands for non-profit and it's a website entirely about grant writing! Templates are included.

More Fundraising Ideas

- The Maltby Food Bank had an event at Ruby's Diner, which donated the cost of the meals purchased by food bank supporters who went to the diner that night and turned in the official event year, netting \$300. Why it's a good idea: Restaurants events are a win/win for your program and the local restaurant. The restaurant gets the chance to be a good corporate citizen, which creates some good publicity and new customers. The food bank gets needed funding and increased community visibility. An event like this makes giving easy and fun.
- When the Loon Lake Food Pantry and Resource Center bought their new building, they started a monthly giving club. Members pledge \$25 per month, and know the money is going to pay off the food bank's mortgage. Why it's a good idea: Donors willing to commit ongoing support over time provide stable revenues and reduce the cost of fundraising. Donors like giving for a specific purpose, such as paying the mortgage. Offering a chance to give monthly makes giving larger amounts more affordable for donors.
- Foodball is an annual fundraiser and food drive that plays on the traditional rivalry between Aberdeen and Hoquiam High Schools. They compete for the most funds and most pounds of food collected during a 10-day period. This has grown within each school district as elementary and middle schools also participate.

Once the food is collected. It's taken to Coastal Harvest. High school students from both Aberdeen and Hoquiam spend volunteer time by sorting and packing boxes with the food collected. The food is then distributed to food pantries and meal programs within each school district. "The school districts take this event very seriously," said Brent Hunter, Executive Director of Coastal Harvest. "And they have fun at the same time. They understand the need in their communities."

- North Helpline hosts a multi-location Empty Bowls fundraiser where community members purchase handcrafted pottery bowls (typically for \$30 each), which are then filled with soup and served as part of a communal meal. Involving local pottery studios, schools, artisans, and soup providers and pairing the event with an online auction helped this creative campaign raise nearly \$40,000 to support their food banks and homelessness prevention programs.

Resources

Below are some of our favorite tools. Categories include: advocacy: state and federal, board development, desktop tools, emergency food provision, food safety and nutrition, fundraising, information on hunger, marketing, organizational strength and capacity, other service providers, technology, and volunteer management.

These resources, along with new ones that are added on a regular basis, can be found on the Washington Food Coalition website.

Food Safety and Nutrition

Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservation (FDPIR): federal commodity food program home page features lots of resources including commodity fact sheets and recipes. www.fns.usda.gov/fdpir/factsheet#:~:text=The%20Food%20Distribution%20Program%20on,near%20reservations%20and%20in%20Oklahoma.

Food Service Rule: guide to food safety standards from the Washington Department of Health. doh.wa.gov/ehp/food/rule.html

Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System: a wealth of information provided by experts in the field to offer recommended nutrition guidelines. healthyeatingresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/her-food-bank_FINAL.pdf

Nutrition Policy Template: A full template to be used by food banks and food pantries to begin crafting a Food and Nutrition Policy. https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IBgSFfLTLXrZJVAbFQ6rqdMjz7s5z_8/edit?usp=sharing&oid=117932121915671808636&rtpof=true&sd=true

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-ED) Program's Resource Link page: provides a comprehensive list of resources in diverse categories. doh.wa.gov/cfh/snap-ed/Resources/default.htm

TEFAP Commodity Fact Sheets and Recipes: [fns.usda.gov/resources?f\[0\]=resources_langcode:en&f\[1\]=resource_type:155&f\[2\]=program:27](http://fns.usda.gov/resources?f[0]=resources_langcode:en&f[1]=resource_type:155&f[2]=program:27)

SensorPush Temperature Checking: SensorPush offers a line of smart wireless sensors designed to monitor environmental conditions such as temperature, humidity, and barometric pressure. sensorpush.com

USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline, Food Safety Questions: They have answers. 1-888-674-6854, fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/usda-meat-and-poultry-hotline

Vehicle Tracking: software that will allow for vehicle tracking with live updates through GPS. linxup.com

WSU Extension Nutrition Education: programs offered to help Washington residents make healthier food choices, extend their food resources, manage their diabetes to live a healthier life and handle food safely to keep their families well. nutrition.wsu.edu

Emergency Food Provision How-To's

Washington Food Coalition: offers technical assistance to emergency food providers in Washington State. 1-877-729-0501 or 206-729-0501. wafoodcoalition.org

Charity Food Programs That Can End Hunger In America: by John Arnold, Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan, 2004
endhungerinamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/wnwnelca.pdf

Planning for Summer Meals: A Resource Toolkit for Communities Across Washington by Parent Help 123 (a program of Within Reach).
[google.com/url?q=https://withinreachwa.org/need-support-with-food-this-summer-withinreach-can-help&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1745959041423246&usg=AOvVaw21T-Y8wyRWhzCbs3WlyMP](https://www.google.com/url?q=https://withinreachwa.org/need-support-with-food-this-summer-withinreach-can-help&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1745959041423246&usg=AOvVaw21T-Y8wyRWhzCbs3WlyMP)

Resources on For Meal Programs: A number of helpful tools from the Meals Partnership Coalition. mealspartnership.org/

Serving Up Justice: How to Design an Emergency Feeding Program and Build Community Food Security, by Caroline Fanning and Lani M'cleod, available from WhyHunger, 212-629-8850. whyhunger.org/

Volunteer Management

Congressional Hunger Center: non-profit anti-hunger leadership training organization located in Washington , DC . The Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows Program places participants with local hunger-fighting organizations around the country for six months. hungercenter.org

Idealist: a comprehensive networking site for nonprofit organizations and volunteers. idealist.org

National Volunteer Week: typically in April, is a great time to recognize and show appreciation for volunteers. pointsoflight.org

Nonprofit Safety Hero: Learn about free resources to keep your volunteers safe and download the Guide to Volunteer Safety. nonprofitsafetyhero.com/volunteer

Safety Videos: Watch a 2-minute volunteer safety video in English (youtube.com/watch?v=5RZ1Ce-35yc&list=PLoay9QZjhwF3y7pIWqKok-imvtzDRlr63) or Spanish (youtube.com/watch?v=SILYme6GqFA&list=PLoay9QZjhwF2h0oVdY91GLzuiNFxzV_wl)

Volunteer Coordinators Call: A regularly scheduled call for volunteer coordinators in the greater Puget Sound Area. Contact Heather Crandall at White Center Food Bank for additional information and times.

Volunteer Match: a leading website for connecting volunteers and nonprofit volunteer opportunities. volunteermatch.org Craig's List is also a good place to list, geo.craigslist.org/iso/us/wa, and your local United Way may also assist with volunteer recruitment.

Volunteer Resource: library of resources and effective practices on volunteering and volunteer management. pointsoflight.org

Volunteer Safety Course: Take the Volunteer Safety Course and get a certificate. nonprofitsafetyhero.com/courses/volunteer-safety

Organizational Strength and Capacity

CompassPoint Nonprofit Services: includes a resources directory, featuring the Nonprofit Genie FAQ section with everything from board development to federal form 990 to volunteer management. compasspoint.org

IKNOW, Interactive Knowledge for Nonprofit Organizations Worldwide: a clearinghouse for links to websites containing nonprofit information. iknow.org

Innovation Network: national organization offering web-based tools and program planning, with some resources available for free to those who register. innonet.org

Kellogg Foundation: offers toolkits on communication, evaluation, and policy, and a host of other free publications. wkkf.org

Nonprofit Facilities Financing, program of the Washington State Housing Finance Commission (WSHFC): helps organizations access below-market rate interest loans -through bonds -to fund a wide variety of projects. 1-800-767-4663. wshfc.org/

Nonprofit Learning Center: Nonprofit Labor and Industries Navigator, Find your way through the worker-related rules to ensure the people delivering your mission are safe, healthy, and secure. nonprofitlearning.center/lni/

Third Sector New England: provides support, training and management resources to strengthen individual nonprofit organizations and to build the capacity of the nonprofit community. Visit the Articles page in the Resources section. tsne.org

Risk Management and Disaster Preparedness

Alliance of Nonprofits for Insurance: Risk Retention Group, publishes a number of free guides to risk management and understanding your insurance needs, for example, developing a vehicle safety program and appropriate policies. ani-rrg.org

Disaster Planning for Nonprofits: makes it easy to create a customized disaster plan. Features a 36-page booklet, step-by-step explainer videos, and all the tools and templates you need to create a Continuity of Operations Plan, or COOP. nonprofitlearning.center

Ready.gov: public motivation campaign to help individuals, families, and communities prepare for emergencies and disasters. Ready.gov

Safety Committee Resources: On the safety committee? Short highlight reels are perfect for safety meetings! (nonprofitsafetyhero.com/highlights-reels) We have free courses and resources you can use for your Safety Bulletin Board. nonprofitsafetyhero.com/safety-bulletin-board

Washington Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. WAVOAD: works within the state to improve responses to disaster situations through collaboration among its members. (360) 479-5176. wavoad.org

Technology

Del.icio.us: social bookmarks manager which allows you to save and access bookmarked websites from any web connection. del.icio.us

Ebase: free database program, designed specifically for non-profits by nonprofits. ebase.org

Idealware: free candid Consumer-Reports-style reviews and articles about software of interest to nonprofits. idealware.org

NPower: technology-related technical assistance for nonprofits, including classes and online technology assessment and planning tools. npower.org

Survey Monkey: create professional online surveys quickly and easily, free for small surveys. surveymonkey.com

Tech Soup: a nonprofit technical support organization that offers nearly free software by some of the biggest companies and provides a monthly update with tips. techsoup.org

Board Development

Board Cafe: a monthly enewsletter that offers tips for board members, compasspoint.org/board-caf%C3%A9-archives

Boards in Gear – Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA): This comprehensive toolkit offers actionable guidance on board roles, recruitment, fundraising, legal responsibilities, and equity practices. It's designed to elevate your board's effectiveness and is available for free online. nonprofitwa.org

Board Resources for Safety and Health: nonprofitsafetyhero.com/board-resources

BoardSource: offers tools to help build an effective nonprofit board. boardsource.org

Nonprofit Learning Center: Nonprofit Board Certificate Course. You'll learn the role, so you and your colleagues can be the most effective. Use the 24-page workbook to keep track of your ideas and plans. Also available in Spanish. nonprofitlearning.center

Risk Bow Tie: Learn about the Risk Bow Tie worksheet and watch a 3-minute video that explains it. nonprofitsafetyhero.com/bowtie

United Way of King County: nonprofit resources page featuring downloadable forms for board assessment, board composition analysis and more. uwkc.org/tag/nonprofit-boards/

Marketing

Canva: a free website that allows individuals and organizations to create posters, business cards, and newsletters using free templates. A paid account allows you to keep your brand colors and logo easily available. canva.com

Later: a social media scheduling and management platform that can help food banks plan, automate, and optimize posts across platforms like Instagram and Facebook. This enables consistent outreach to donors, volunteers, and the community, saving time while boosting visibility and engagement. later.com

Smart Chart: a planning tool which helps nonprofits develop high-impact communications strategies. smartchart.org

Sprout: Sprout Social is a robust social media management tool that helps food banks schedule posts, track engagement, and analyze performance across multiple platforms. It streamlines communication with the public and stakeholders, making it easier to raise awareness, coordinate volunteer efforts, and promote donation campaigns. sproutsocial.com

Stock.XCHNG: one of the leading free stock photography sites on the web with over 200,000 photos by more than 15,000 photographers. sxc.hu

Information on Hunger and Food Security Initiatives

Feeding America: The Nation's Food Bank Network, the largest charitable domestic hunger-relief organization in the country. Works through a nationwide network of distribution centers. Provides information and statistics about hunger and foodbanking.

feedingamerica.org

Food Research and Action Center: a national nonprofit organization working to eradicate poverty-related hunger and undernutrition in the United States through advocacy, research, and policy change. frac.org

No Kid Hungry: a national campaign by Share Our Strength dedicated to ending childhood hunger in the United States by ensuring that all children get the food they need every day through programs like school meals and summer feeding initiatives. NoKidHungry.org

WhyHunger: is a national and international leader in the fight against hunger and poverty, with an emphasis on supporting grassroots organizations. whyhunger.org

Fundraising

AFP / Advancement Northwest: provides comprehensive training opportunities and support for nonprofit fundraisers. afpadvancementnw.org

Candid (formerly Foundation Center): features information and resources on grants, catalogue of nonprofit literature, and search for funders in your area. candid.org

The Center for Effective Philanthropy (CEP): Covers: Strategy, impact measurement, feedback loops, and trust-based philanthropy. cep.org

Instrumentl: Streamlining grant discovery, deadline tracking, and application workflow. instrumentl.com

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, national nonprofit agency that allocates funding to prevent and alleviate hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds. mazon.org

Nonprofit Association of Washington (NAWA): Offers educational workshops, grant readiness training, advocacy tools, learning library, and member discounts—an essential hub for organizational development. nonprofitwa.org

Nonprofit Learning Center: Nonprofit fundraising involves more than asking your friends and hosting events. How to Raise Money for Your Organization includes a workbook and 4 videos that will jumpstart your fundraising and help you engage with the right supporters for your cause. nonprofitlearning.center

Nonprofit Quarterly (NPQ): Movement-building, philanthropy reform, governance, community-led strategies. nonprofitquarterly.org

Philanthropy Northwest: an association that promotes effectiveness in philanthropy. Their [Thriving Communities Grants](http://philanthropy.org/grants) page features tips and resources for grant-seekers. philanthropynw.org

Potlatch Foundation: a Native-led grant-making foundation and leadership development organization offering culturally appropriate training and technical assistance to build the capacity of grantmakers, Tribes, Native groups, and other Native grant seekers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Western Montana. potlatchfund.org/grants

Puget Sound Grantwriters Association: A network of professional grant writers offering peer support, educational events, and improved grant seeking skills. grantwriters.org

Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR): Philanthropy, nonprofit leadership, social entrepreneurship, equity, and systems change. ssir.org

Washington Gives (501 Commons): A comprehensive giving platform hosting campaigns like GiveBIG and Giving Tuesday, plus consulting, coaching, and tools for peer-to-peer fundraising. wagives.org

Washington Grant Resources (The Grantsmanship Center): Provides a curated directory of Washington-based foundations, a grant writing training program, free webinars, and tools for identifying grant opportunities. tgci.com

Federal

Bread for the World: nationwide Christian movement that seeks justice for hungry people in the U.S. and across the world by lobbying our nation's decision-makers. bread.org

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: national organization working at the federal and state levels on fiscal policy and public programs that affect low- and moderate-income families and individuals, including SNAP and TANF. cbpp.org

Coalition on Human Needs: alliance of national organizations working to promote public policies that address the needs of low-income and other vulnerable people. chn.org

Feeding America: nationwide network of food banks that provides policy analysis and research related to hunger in order to strengthen policy advocacy at the federal level. feedingamerica.org/

Food Research and Action Center: leading national organization working to strengthen public policies to end poverty-related hunger in the United States and provide trainings and technical assistance on advocacy and the federal nutrition programs. frac.org

State

Children's Alliance: Washington's statewide child advocacy organization.

childrensalliance.org

Knowledge As Power: A small but mighty non-profit, KAP is a 501c3 organization based in Seattle. Their primary objective is to empower politically engaged citizens. If you care about an issue or a bill, they want to help you influence it. knowledgeaspower.org

Policy Watch: bulletin about issues and events in Olympia during the state legislative session. Provides information but does not take positions. washingtonpolicywatch.org

Statewide Poverty Action Network: works to eliminate the root causes of poverty in Washington, organizing social action and influencing decisions in the state capitol. povertyaction.org

Washington Law Accident Prevention Program: Does your nonprofit have an Accident Prevention Program? Watch a short video that explains what's required by law in Washington State (nonprofitsafetyhero.com/accident-prevention-program). Use our colorful worksheet to plan your APP (nonprofitsafetyhero.com/app). Go to our free document generator, the APPapp, to create your custom APP in Word (planning.nonprofitsafetyhero.com).

Washington Connection: A portal for accessing various food assistance services, including SNAP benefits, WIC, and local food bank information. washingtonconnection.org

WA.gov – Get Help Finding Food: Offers guidance on locating food resources, including the USDA National Hunger Hotline and local assistance programs. wa.gov

Washington State Budget and Policy Center: provides credible, independent and accessible information and analyses of state fiscal issues with particular attention to the impacts on low and moderate-income persons. budgetandpolicy.org

Washington State Department of Agriculture: Provides funding and support to local food banks and pantries through programs like the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and Farm to Food Pantry initiatives. agr.wa.gov

Other Services and Providers

Citrine Health: Citrine Health is a non-profit agency in Snohomish County that helps individuals and families apply for food assistance and state health insurance programs over the phone and in person. citrinehealth.org

Columbia Legal Services: nonprofit organization employing lawyers and legal workers who provide legal assistance to low-income and special needs people and organizations in Washington. columbialegal.org

Washington 211: Offers a comprehensive resources map to find local food banks and other assistance programs. Users can also dial 2-1-1 for personalized help. wa211.org

Washington Attorneys Assisting Community Organizations: connects nonprofit organizations statewide with free business legal counsel through volunteer attorneys.
contact@wayfindlegal.org

WithinReach: statewide organization providing resources for maternal, child, and family health. Operates several toll-free information and referral lines. withinreachwa.org

Desktop Tools

ChatGPT: a free website using AI that can easily generate text for newsletters and emails, mock up posters, or assist with scheduling. chatgpt.com

Google Translate: a website that can translate in real time from between 100+ languages. Also available on mobile phones. translate.google.com

Meet-O-Matic: propose and schedule meetings online and invite participants using your own email system, then monitor responses. meetomatic.com

Merriam-Webster: dictionary and thesaurus with audio pronunciation. m-w.com

Washington Connection: excellent online service to screen customers for eligibility in multiple programs-save this link to screen all customers! washingtonconnection.org

Zoom: a free video conferencing application. zoom.com

SWAP - Supporting Wellness at Pantries Resources

SWAP Guide



SWAP™ Guide

Supporting Wellness At Pantries

	Choose Often			Choose Sometimes			Choose Rarely		
Food Category	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*	Saturated Fat	Sodium	Added Sugars*
Fruits and Vegetables	≤2g	≤230mg	0g (≤12g for Total Sugars)	100% juice and plain dried fruit are yellow.			≥2.5g	≥480mg	≥12g (≥24g for Total Sugars)
				≥2.5g	231-479mg	1-11g (13-23g for Total Sugars)			
Grains	First ingredient must be whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5g	231-479mg	7-11g	≥2.5g	≥480mg	≥12g
	≤2g	≤230mg	≤6g						
Protein	≤2g	≤230mg	≤6g	2.5-4.5g	231-479mg	7-11g	≥5g	≥480mg	≥12g
Dairy	≤3g	≤230mg	0g (≤12g for Total Sugars)	3.5-6g	231-479mg	1-11g (13-23g for Total Sugars)	≥6.5g	≥480mg	≥12g (≥24g for Total Sugars)
Non-Dairy Alternatives	≤2g	≤230mg	≤6g	≥2.5g	231-479mg	7-11g	≥2.5g	≥480mg	≥12g
Beverages	0g	0mg	0g	0g	1-140mg	1-11g	≥1g	≥141mg	≥12g
Mixed Dishes	≤3g	≤480mg	≤6g	3.5-6g	481-599mg	7-11g	≥6.5g	≥600mg	≥12g
Processed and Packaged Snacks	None			If a grain is the first ingredient, it must be a whole grain AND meet following thresholds:			≥2.5g	≥141mg	≥7g
				0-2g	0-140mg	0-6g			
Desserts	None			None			All desserts are red		
Condiments and Cooking Staples	Unranked. Examples include salad dressing, sauces (except tomato sauce), jelly, syrup, oils, flour, sugars.								
Misc. Products	Unranked. Examples include baby food, nutritional supplements, protein powders.								

*Use the added sugars value when available on the Nutrition Facts Label. If it is not available, use the total sugars value. The thresholds are the same for all categories except fruits and vegetables and dairy.

Simple Rules of Thumb for SWAP

Food that is Green

- All fresh fruits and vegetables
- Whole eggs
- Whole grain bread, pasta, tortillas
- Brown rice
- Skim, 1% and 2% milk
- Plain water, coffee, tea

Food that is Yellow

- 100% fruit juice
- Regular “white” bread, pasta, tortillas
- White rice
- Whole milk
- Most peanut butter
- Plain dried fruit such as raisins

Food that is Red

- Desserts such as ice cream, cookies, cake
- Candy
- Most processed / packaged snacks
- Regular soda and juice drinks

Food that is NOT ranked with SWAP

- Condiments like salad dressings and sauces
- Cooking Staples such as flour, sugar, oil, spices
- Baby food
- Nutrient supplements such as Ensure or protein powders

SWAP™ Supporting Wellness
At Pantries



GREEN

Choose often;
low in saturated fat,
sodium and added sugars;
supports health

YELLOW

Choose sometimes;
medium levels of saturated
fat, sodium or added sugars;
can contribute to good health

RED

Choose rarely;
high levels of saturated fat,
sodium or added sugars;
think of as treats;
limited health benefits

Supporting Wellness at Pantries



What is SWAP?

- Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) is a Stoplight Nutrition Ranking System designed to help promote healthy food choices at food banks and food pantries.

What is the goal of SWAP?

- To create an easy to implement, easy to understand nutrition ranking system to categorize the food offered in a food pantry.

Why is this important?

- More than half of the families who visit food pantries have a household member with high blood pressure and one-third have a member with type II diabetes.
- These chronic diseases can often be prevented, managed, and reversed through the foods we eat.
- This system will help patrons make healthy choices and influence the types of food donated to the pantry.

How does SWAP work?

To rank foods, SWAP uses this information from the nutrition facts label:

- Saturated fat
- Sodium
- Sugars

Why only these nutrients?

- These nutrients are the most dangerous ones for chronic diseases
- These are listed as “nutrients to limit” in the United States Dietary Guidelines for 2015.



Green = choose often; low in saturated fat, sodium and sugars; supports health



Yellow = choose sometimes; medium levels of fat, sodium or sugars; can contribute to good health



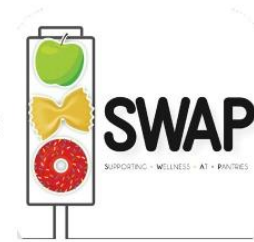
Red = choose rarely; high levels of fat, sodium or sugars; think of as treats; limited health benefits



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SWAP is a program of the Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions at Connecticut Food Bank | Foodshare. For more information about SWAP, contact swap@foodshare.org.

Apoyando el Bienestar en las Despensas



¿Qué es SWAP?

- Apoyando el Bienestar en las Despensas (SWAP) es un sistema de clasificación de nutrición en semáforo diseñado para ayudar a promover opciones de alimentos saludables en los bancos y despensa de alimentos.

¿Cuál es la meta de SWAP?

- Crear un sistema de clasificación de nutrición para categorizar los alimentos que se ofrecen en una despensa de alimentos.

¿Por qué es importante?

- Mas de la mitad de las familias que visitan despensas de alimentos tienen un miembro del hogar con presión arterial alta y un tercio tienen un miembro con diabetes tipo II.
- Estas enfermedades crónicas a menudo se pueden prevenir, manejar o revertir a través de los alimentos que comemos.
- Este sistema ayudará a los clientes a tomar decisiones saludables y influirá en los tipos de alimentos donados a la despensa.

¿Cómo funciona SWAP?

Para clasificar los alimentos, SWAP utiliza esta información de la etiqueta nutrimental:

- Grasa saturada
- Sodio
- Azúcar



Verde = elegir con frecuencia; bajo en grasas saturadas, sodio y azúcar; apoya a la salud

Amarillo = elegir a veces; niveles medios de grasa, sodio o azúcar; puede contribuir a una buena salud

Rojo = escoger con poca frecuencia; altos niveles de grasa, sodio o azúcar; piense en ellos como caprichos; limitados beneficios para la salud

¿Por qué sólo estos nutrientes?

- Estos nutrientes son los más peligrosos para las enfermedades crónicas
- Estos están enlistados como "nutrientes a limitar" en las Guías de Alimentación de los Estados Unidos.



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SWAP es una programa de Institute for Hunger Research & Solutions a Connecticut Food Bank | Foodshare. Para mas información de SWAP, contactar swap@foodshare.org.

SWAP AND FOOD PANTRIES

WHAT IS SWAP?



SWAP stands for **S**upporting **W**ellness **A**t **P**antries. It is a simple stoplight system that gives you easy to understand nutrition information about the foods on the shelf. The foods on the shelf will either have a green, yellow or red sign next to them. Below is what the colors mean.



Foods with this Green apple label are **low** in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar. Choose Green foods **often** because they help to support your health.



Foods with this Yellow (non-whole grain) pasta label have **medium** amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar. Choose Yellow foods **sometimes**, they can contribute to good health.



Foods with this Red donut label have **high** amounts of saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar. Choose Red foods **rarely** as they don't have many healthy benefits.

HOW SWAP CAN HELP YOUR HEALTH

SWAP helps you learn how much saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars are in a food. These three nutrients are known to be the most dangerous to your health. They can increase your risk for chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. If you already have a chronic disease these nutrients can make it worse.



WHOLE GRAINS AND SWAP



You might have noticed that the yellow label has a picture of bowtie pasta on it. It's important to know not all pasta is a yellow food. Pasta and other grains like bread that list **whole grains as the first ingredient** are green foods. Whole grains have fiber in them, and fiber is important for things like our heart health.

SIMPLE RULES OF THUMB



Food that is Green

- All fresh fruits and vegetables
- Whole eggs
- Whole grain bread, pasta, tortillas Brown rice
- Skim, 1% and 2% milk
- Plain water, coffee, tea



Food that is Yellow

- 100% fruit juice
- Refined (white) bread, pasta, tortillas
- White rice
- Whole milk
- Most peanut butter Plain, dried fruit like raisins



Food that is Red

- Desserts such as ice cream,
- cookies, cake
- Candy
- Most processed or packaged snacks
- Regular soda and juice drinks

Now that you know what each colored label means, you can pick the food from each shelf that best fits your needs and health goals. If you have any questions or need help ask a staff member or volunteer.



Example Nutrition Policies

Use this section as a resource to find sample policies and best practices to start crafting your own nutrition policy.



Nutrition Policies in Food Access Organizations

At the American Heart Association, our work centers on the pursuit of health equity, including identifying and addressing barriers to optimal health, such as access to nutritious foods.

People living in food insecure households face a number of barriers to eating healthy that make them vulnerable to diet-related chronic diseases, including obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease. Food distribution organizations can help prevent perpetuating this inequity by having a policy in place that outlines a commitment to offer nutritious foods to people experiencing food insecurity.

What is a Nutrition Policy?

A nutrition policy is a formalized, written commitment outlining the kind of food and services you want to provide. A nutrition policy is also:

- 1 A way for your organization to acknowledge the role of nutrition in health and pledge to offering food that supports the well-being of your community. Defines the kind of foods you prioritize, limit or even reject.
- 2 An overview of the principles that guide your organization's purchasing and distribution decisions. Alignment with established nutrition guidelines can help you acquire more nutritious food.
- 3 A nudge to encourage donations of healthy, culturally relevant foods that honor your community's needs and dietary preferences.

A nutrition policy is a living document that can (and should) be revised regularly, taking into account the changing food landscape and needs of the people you serve.

Want to know more? We teamed up with Northwest Harvest to offer an informational video. Check it out here: <https://vimeo.com/586891392> or by QR Code.



Benefits of a Nutrition Policy

- 1** Cultivates an Equitable Food Ecosystem
Ensures that available options reflect the health and cultural food needs of the community. Underscores that clients, and their food and health needs, are at the center of your work.
- 2** Aligns Communication & Mission
Establishes consistency, aligning your board, staff, and volunteers to the same, unified vision and ensuring they maintain this commitment to community health - regardless of staffing or organizational changes.
- 3** Reinforces Responsible Stewardship
Ensures that limited resources are prioritized for procuring foods that are needed and valued by the community you serve.
- 4** Aids In Advocacy
Shares your organization's values and commitments with external partners, vendors and grant makers. Can be a helpful tool for pursuing additional funding.
- 5** Encourages Accountability (and Growth!)
Creates a foundation from which your program can monitor and track progress towards nutrition goals. Also allows for reporting when policy achievements are met.

Not sure where to start?

Our team is here to help you create a nutrition policy individualized to the needs of your organization and the community you serve.

We offer:

- Customizable templates, donor guides, surveys and other tools to communicate the policy
- Multi-lingual, science-driven nutrition materials and resources
- Experience building language around your values and commitments
- Assistance with integration of evidence-based nutrition guidelines
- Support for implementation, such as orientation of staff & volunteers and *possibly* funding
- Brand recognition and access to our extensive network of local partners

Contact us at puget.sound@heart.org if you're ready to get started!

Adopted: 05/19/2023



Purpose and Guidelines

At the Community Cupboard, we recognize the important role that food and nutrition play in our shoppers' health. In addition to breaking down barriers to food access, we are committed to offering our shoppers choices that enable positive health outcomes, help prevent diet-related chronic illnesses, and respect the cultural needs and dietary preferences of the communities we serve.

Our Food and Nutrition policy will demonstrate our commitment to the quality of food we offer our shoppers and serve as our guiding principles. We will utilize the [Healthy Eating Research \(HER\) Nutrition Guidelines](#) as a tool to guide our nutritional priorities.

Overall Nutrition Commitments

The Community Cupboard is a grocery store-model food pantry. This model allows shoppers the dignity of choice. Depending on the size of the household, they are given a certain number of points to use each month. Our first step to prioritizing nutrition is through this point system: more nutritious food has fewer points and lower limits on the amount that can be taken, less nutritious food has more points and more limits.

To prioritize the health of our shoppers we commit to offering items from the HER choose-often category. We will increase fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, protein and low-sodium options. We will strive to distribute items that meet the cultural and dietary needs of the diverse and growing population that we serve.

Examples of foods we will prioritize include fresh fruits and vegetables, masa flour, rice, quality dried beans, no sugar-added canned fruits and low sodium canned vegetables (especially when fresh options are limited), eggs, meat, vegetarian (non-meat) options and food that homeless populations can use, such as ready-to-go meals and healthier versions of ramen.

During the gleaning season we will emphasize fresh produce over canned fruits and vegetables. While we will always have canned options available for those that have limited or no kitchen access, they will be offered at a higher point value and with more limits on the number that can be taken at any one time. Fresh produce will be offered at reduced point values and have no limits.

Adopted: 05/19/2023

Food Purchases

When funding is available, we commit to purchasing items that are aligned with our commitment to nutrition and reflect the cultural diversity of our community. We will prioritize fresh vegetables and fruit, cooking staples such as eggs, masa flour, milk, tortillas, butter, and items on the “choose often” list of the HER guidelines. We will monitor the quality of staple food items offered through programs such as TEFAP, to make sure they meet the needs of shoppers. For example, dried beans are a common staple for many of the households that use the Community Cupboard. TEFAP beans are often cracked and old. To address this issue, we have made a commitment to purchase high-quality beans from a local source.

We will strive to bring more culturally relevant and nutrient dense foods to the Cupboard that our shoppers express a need for via annual surveys of shoppers and conversation. Instead of online surveys, we will strive to capture information from shoppers through more accessible survey strategies, such as tallies on whiteboards or placing a sticker on a poster board. We will pay attention to shoppers’ dietary needs and preferences through survey data. This data will be used to better label food so shoppers can determine if they can eat it and used when we purchase foods. We will work to find foods that are financially feasible for us to purchase and meet the needs of our shoppers.

Food Donations

Rather than turn away donations of food that we cannot use we will encourage donors to make more appropriate food donations. To that end, we have adopted infographics that can be sent to donors, posted at the Cupboard, and used to answer questions donors have about the food we wish to have at the Cupboard. These infographics highlight popular items that we use in our programs or that shoppers request and prioritize low-sodium and low-sugar options.

We will use the outside chalkboard to list items we need. We will use social media platforms to share the donor guidelines and have them posted at the Community Cupboard for staff to share with donors. We will also use the Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) Healthy Food Donation guide to communicate with donors.

Special Programs

-The Upper Valley MEND Gleaning Program: We harvest fresh produce from local farms, backyard gardens, orchards and farmers markets. In the growing season of May-November the Community Cupboard is full of a variety of produce available to shoppers at reduced point amounts and with no limits. We will share recipes for available produce, especially if it is something unfamiliar to shoppers.

-Farm to Food Pantry: Through this program with WSDA and Harvest Against Hunger, we will purchase produce directly from local farmers. We will focus on purchasing produce that is not

Adopted: 05/19/2023

available through gleaning to increase the variety of produce available to shoppers. We will purchase produce that is culturally important to our shoppers, such as tomatoes, peppers, corn, fruits, and tomatillos.

As we expand our programs, we are committed to meeting the specific cultural produce needs of shoppers.

-Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP): We will implement SWAP at the Community Cupboard. This program is designed to highlight foods based on nutritional value. We will start with a focus on categorizing foods that we regularly have at the Cupboard and organize the shelves in a way to have choose-often foods on higher, eye-level shelves and choose-rarely foods on lower, harder to reach shelves. Once this is done, we will move into categorizing the foods that are donated to us through grocery rescue and the community.

-Students Sprouting Seedlings for Community Groups: This is a partnership with Cascade High School and Cascadia Conservation District. Students at the high school are growing vegetables, edible flowers, and fruit starts for those in our community who need food assistance and want to grow their own food. These are given out to shoppers at a no-point value.

-Food box delivery program: During COVID we implemented a food box delivery program. At present, this program is being used by community members that are stuck at home during the winter or folks that have a hard time traveling to town for a multitude of reasons. We developed a system where we give them a smattering of items from the Cupboard, focusing on nutrition and their personal needs. We make sure to ask if they need something specific.

-Community fridge: This is a fridge located outside the Community Cupboard. It is available to anyone 24/7. At the end of each day, we are open, staff and volunteers put food in the community fridge that needs to be eaten soon. This often includes ready-to-go meals from grocery rescue and produce that is nearing the end of its life. Sometimes we have an abundance of one item, and we will use the community fridge to move it quickly. A goal is to implement SWAP within the community fridge with labels for the different categories. When we put food in the fridge, we will make sure to place it within the correct category so community members can decide what they wish to take.

-Mobile farmers market program: Using our refrigerated van we will travel with the Chelan Douglas Community Action Council mobile food pantry, attend events, set up outside other food pantries, and target specific towns and neighbors to give out our gleaned produce to increase the reach of the fresh veggies and fruits.

Broader Commitments

We will engage in participant-guided activities that meet the needs of our shoppers, which may include recipe creations, taste tests, or cooking demonstrations. We will connect shoppers to

Adopted: 05/19/2023

other food resources to fit their needs as appropriate, such as SNAP and WIC programs.

Currently we have English and Spanish bilingual and bicultural staff at the Community Cupboard. We will strive to maintain this through staff turnover. Bilingual and bicultural staff allow us to engage with shoppers in their preferred language to better understand their cultural, nutritional and health needs. Staff can represent the needs of Cupboard shoppers and can share from experience what food is important to have available. We work hard to create a safe space with staff and volunteers, so shoppers are comfortable sharing their preferences with our staff.

A growth area for our pantry is to partner more with our WSU extension who offer recipes, cooking demonstrations and taste-testing of healthy food items.

Administration and Implementation

This policy was approved by our Staff and reviewed by the Board on 05/19/2023 and is a part of our organizational policies and procedures and will be used when onboarding new staff and volunteers at the Community Cupboard.

Staff will review this policy at least once annually. This policy will be posted on our website, shared via social media channels, communicated to our community partners via email, and shared with shoppers via our bulletin board at the time of implementation stated above.



Nutrition Policy

Purpose and Guidelines

At New Day Ministry, we recognize the important role that food and nutrition play in our clients' health. In addition to breaking down barriers to food access, we are committed to offering our clients choices that enable positive health outcomes, help prevent diet-related chronic illnesses, and respect the cultural needs and dietary preferences of individuals and families in Kitsap County.

This Nutrition Policy demonstrates our commitment to the quality of food we offer our clients. We utilize the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines as a framework to guide purchasing and distribution of food at New Day Ministry.

Overall Nutrition Commitments

Our nutrition commitments are rooted in the belief that local, sustainable foods will provide our community with the best nutrition possible while supporting the local food ecosystem and reducing our carbon footprint. We commit to sourcing foods from local farms whenever possible. We will also seek out partnerships with growers and distributors of local foods for donations or reduced-cost items.

New Day Ministry is dedicated to prioritizing the health of our clients through its various food initiatives. In line with our mission, we commit to increasing the distribution of "choose often" food products set forth by HER to enhance the nutritional value of our offerings. These increases will be implemented and met by the end of 2024. To determine the increases for each food category beyond 2024, New Day Ministry will adjust the target distribution accordingly each year based on the previous year's distribution.

- Fruits and Vegetables: Increase "Choose Often" by 43.18%, with a target of 962.3 pounds.
- Grains: Increase "Choose Often" by 500%, with a target of 12 pounds.
- Dairy: Increase "Choose Often" by 10-20%, with a target of 25-30 pounds.
- Beverages: We will only serve water with our weekly meals and we will increase "Choose Often" beverages by 1-3 choices in our food pantry.
- Mixed Dishes: Increase "Choose Often" by 156.58%, with a target of 40 lbs.

We also strive to distribute items that are reduced sodium, lower fat, and higher fiber to meet the cultural and dietary needs and preferences of those living with chronic illness and preventable, diet-related diseases.

Food Selection and Procurement

When making decisions regarding food procurement, New Day Ministry will prioritize whole, unprocessed foods over highly processed and sugary items whenever possible in addition to following the guidelines below:

Food Safety

New Day Ministry will adhere to food safety regulations and guidelines to ensure the safety of all food items (See Food Safety Manual for more details.)

Food Donations

As a guideline for donated food items, New Day Ministry's leaders will clearly communicate acceptable "choose often" category food items to donors by sharing a Donor Guide to ensure the pantry receives items that are nutrient-dense, popular in our programs or that participants request and prioritize, such as low-sodium and low-sugar options. New Day Ministry will follow all state and federal regulations for donated food items.

Food Purchases

In alignment with our nutrition commitments, New Day Ministry will prioritize the use of agency funds to purchase foods that fall under the green "choose often" or yellow "choose sometimes" categories. This allows us to make the best use of our organizational resources by only purchasing the foods that are most nutrient dense.

We will only use funds to purchase beverages with "0 grams" of added sugars on the nutrition facts panel. We will not use funds to purchase dessert foods including candy, cakes, pies, or sweets other than during special holidays. We will not use funds to purchase pre-made frozen meals.

Special Programs

Meal Program

New Day Ministry will plan well-balanced meals that include a variety of food groups, aiming to meet daily nutritional requirements set forth by U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS). We will offer vegetarian and vegan options to accommodate diverse dietary choices and we will serve appropriate portion sizes in response to the client's choice to prevent food waste.

Food Pantry

New Day Ministry will use signage to guide and encourage pantry shoppers to make food selections from each food group so they are able to create balanced meals at home.

Broader Commitments

Nutritional Education

New Day Ministry works with the Washington Food Coalition and the American Heart Association's nutrition experts to review our nutrition guidelines on a regular basis and evaluate the nutritional offerings through our meal program and pantry. New Day

Ministry will review client feedback and provide relevant nutrition education and resources to educate clients about healthy food choices and portion control as needed.

Social Engagement

New Day Ministry's meals are offered as a dine-in service to create a supportive and social environment during dinner to combat senior isolation. This environment will also be geared towards encouraging social engagement for people with disabilities, individuals, and families with children. We have speakers from other organizations and host a talk every two months. These speakers are from a variety of organizations including mental health, housing and others that help low-income people with services we do not provide.

Mobility and Accessibility

New Day Ministry offers a home delivery service for seniors and disabled individuals with mobility and transportation limitations to ensure they have food.

Administration and Implementation

This policy, approved by our Board of Directors on 3/20/2024, will take effect on 4/01/2024 at which time it will become part of the organizational policies and procedures. Our Board of Directors is responsible for an annual review of the guidelines with food pantry staff in order to keep it up to date with community needs. Our executive director will share our progress with stakeholders including donors and clients and evaluate our success in meeting our nutrition policy goals as part of our annual impact report. All new volunteers will be provided an orientation to our nutrition guidelines by the Food Safety Manager within one week of volunteering. New Day Ministry will assess the community impact of our food programs yearly and will modify our nutrition commitments as written in this policy.

Food and Nutrition Policy

Purpose and Guidelines

Why do you care? What are your guiding principles? Consider health equity, choice, unique needs of your participants or program. Also note basic guidelines you use as a reference. We recommend those from Healthy Eating Research: [her-food-bank_FINAL.pdf](https://www.healthyeatingresearch.org/files/2018/06/her-food-bank_FINAL.pdf) ([healthyeatingresearch.org](https://www.healthyeatingresearch.org))

Example:

At xxx, we recognize the important role that food and nutrition play in our participants' health. In addition to breaking down barriers to food access, we are committed to offering our participants choices that enable positive health outcomes, help prevent diet-related chronic illnesses, and respect the cultural needs and dietary preferences of the communities we serve.

Our Food and Nutrition policy will demonstrate our commitment to the quality of food we offer our participants and serve as our guiding principles. We will utilize the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Nutrition Guidelines as a tool to guide our nutritional priorities.

Overall Nutrition Commitments

Note any foods you'd like to emphasize or any that you'd like to exclude, based on your principles and the guidelines you choose.

Example:

In order to prioritize the health of our participants we commit to offering xx% of our items from the choose often categories. In particular we will aim to increase fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-sodium options. We also strive to distribute items that meet the cultural and dietary needs of the diverse and changing population that we serve.

Food Purchases

Outline parameters and goals for any purchases that are made by the organization and how you will prioritize them.

Example:

When funding is available, we commit to purchase items that are aligned with our commitment to nutrition and reflect the cultural diversity of our community. We will prioritize fresh

vegetables and fruit, cooking staples, and items on the “choose often” list of the HER guidelines.

Food Donations

Differentiation of guidelines may be appropriate for donations received. If there are items that you will not accept, include that here. You can also state how you will communicate your preferences to donors.

Example:

Rather than turn away donations we aim to guide donors toward our needs. To that end, we have created graphics that can be sent to donors. These highlight popular items that we use in our programs or that participants request and prioritize low-sodium and low-sugar options.

Special Programs

If you have specialized programs that you want to call out you may want to include those in a separate space. For example, if you have a mobile program, backpack program or home delivery that needs specialized guidance.

Example:

In our weekend backpack program, we are committed to prioritizing snack and meal options for students that are nutrient dense and low in sugar and sodium. As we expand our programs we are committed to meeting the specific dietary needs of different sites and providing fresh produce, nutrient-dense items, and cooking staples.

Broader Commitments

Include other information here related to health or nutrition goals that you are striving for, as applicable.

Example:

We will aim to engage in participant-guided activities that meet the needs of our participants which may include recipe provision, taste tests, or cooking demonstrations. We also will connect participants to other food resources to fit their needs as appropriate, such as SNAP and WIC programs.

Administration and Implementation

This policy, approved by our Board on xx/xx/xxxx will take effect on xx/xx/xxxx at which time it will become part of our organizational policies and procedures. Our Executive Team will review this policy on an annual basis with all food bank staff and volunteers. All staff and volunteers will be given a copy of the policy and provide an orientation including an overview of its purpose and intention.

Glossary

Commodities: foods provided by the United States government at no charge to qualifying citizens.

Distribution Center: an agency that collects, warehouses, and distributes food to emergency food programs and other charities on a regional, county, or statewide basis.

Emergency Food: food that is given to individuals who do not have the means to acquire that food themselves, typically from either a food bank or meal program.

Emergency Food Provider: an individual who works or volunteers at a food bank, food pantry, meal program, or distribution center. EFAP Lead agency: A Contractor that may subcontract with one or more local food banks to provide emergency food assistance to individuals, and with distribution centers to provide emergency food to food banks.

Food Bank: An emergency food assistance program that distributes unprepared food without charge to its customers, is open a fixed number of hours and days each week or month, and such hours and days are publicly posted.

Food Pantry: In Washington, this term is synonymous with "food bank."

Gleaning: the practice of gathering the extra crops that are left in the fields after a harvest. Food Rescue refers to the collection of perishable or prepared foods from wholesale and/or retail sources, such as supermarkets and restaurants. These two methods of collection put food to use that would otherwise be wasted. (WHY Hunger).

Meal Program: those programs which serve meals to the general public at no charge as a means of ensuring that they are not hungry.

Got a Good Idea?

Washington Food Coalition would welcome the opportunity to hear from you!

Just call or write.

Washington Food Coalition is a member-based statewide coalition of emergency food providers.

To learn more about membership, visit us online at www.wafoodcoalition.org or call us at 1-877-729-0501.

Contact information for all WFC members is available at our online member community portal at wafoodcoalition.org