Manual of Best Practices for Food Pantries

July 2020
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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual was created by Indy Hunger Network (IHN), a collective impact organization that works with the major hunger relief providers in the Greater Indianapolis area to address hunger at a broad scale. Our mission is to create a system that ensures anyone who is hungry can access the nutritious food they need. We work to improve the hunger relief system so it works better for everyone. Our three focus areas are nutrition, access, and sustainability.

The Manual of Best Practices for Food Pantries is a collection of ideas and resources, some of which will be useful for your pantry, and some which won't be relevant in your context. This is not a mandate or a rulebook, but an attempt to make the hard work of running a pantry easier and more effective.

For the last several years, IHN has worked with food pantries in Indianapolis to increase capacity, foster collaboration, and share information and resources. This guide is an effort to consolidate what we have learned in order to make it easier for local pantries to access the information shared in our network. The Manual of Best Practices was created for use by the staff and volunteers who run Central Indiana’s food pantries. Each chapter focuses on a specific topic relevant to food pantry work and lists options food pantries can choose to implement to make improvements. The topics were identified by IHN, its partner organizations, and local hunger relief organizations. The resources and practices in this manual were informed by focus groups of food pantry staff, volunteers, and other local organizations and are complemented by research-based recommendations for improving the food system. This document is focused on the Indianapolis area and is not comprehensive.

In Indianapolis, as in cities across the county, Black and Latinx people experience hunger at disparate rates. Since this manual was written, the issue of systemic racism has come to the forefront. Food insecurity, poverty, and systemic racism are issues that go hand-in-hand, and we at Indy Hunger Network know we need to do more to work toward racial equity in the emergency food system. We are exploring available resources and practices in order to include specific, meaningful action items in the next version of this document that will identify and address racism in hunger relief. If you have ideas or feedback on how we can create a more equitable hunger relief system in Indianapolis, we welcome your ideas and input.

Additionally, please note that throughout this manual, we use the term “clients” to refer to people utilizing food pantries. We use this word for the sake of simplicity, but we realize that this term might not feel right to you. Many pantries have embraced warmer, less transactional language to describe the people they serve, including “neighbors,” “shoppers,” “members,” and “participants.” While we appreciate these words, we use the word “client” here in order to avoid confusion.

If you have comments, suggestions, or corrections for an updated version of this document, please reach out to us.

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Last Updated July 2020
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this document by providing photos and quotes, answering questions, offering advice, and sharing personal experiences. We want to give a special thanks to the following individuals and organizations that helped make this manual possible:

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Cindy Brown, Boulevard Place Food Pantry

Steve Claffey, Crooked Creek Food Pantry

Ty Davis, IUPUI’s Paw’s Pantry

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**FUNDING**

We are grateful to Corteva Agriscience for their generous support for the creation of this manual.

We also thank Printing Partners for their contribution to the printing of this manual.
Throughout this document, the following abbreviated terms are used:

ADA - American Disability Act

CDC - Centers for Disease Control

FRAC - Food Research & Action Center

FSSA - Family and Social Services Administration

HSE - High School Equivalency

IHN - Indy Hunger Network

IPS - Indianapolis Public Schools

ISDH - Indiana State Department of Health

MCPHD - Marion County Public Health Department

SNAP - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

TANF - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

TEFAP - The Emergency Food Assistance Program

USDA - United States Department of Agriculture

WIC - Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children
POVERTY IN CENTRAL INDIANA
Before discussing the operations of food pantries or looking at the primary culprit for the creation and persistence of hungry communities: poverty. Poverty has been on the rise in Central Indiana, as in several Midwestern cities. In 2017, 14 percent of Central Indiana residents lived below the poverty line, which is higher than the national rate.¹ Specific neighborhoods in Indianapolis have a much higher poverty rate. One-fifth of residents live in areas with poverty rates of 20-39 percent, and an additional 80,000 residents live in areas with poverty rates of over 40 percent.²

In the 11-county Indianapolis metropolitan area, the [poverty] rate grew from 9 percent in 1970 to 14 percent in 2017.³

Hunger is a problem with its own unique set of challenges and solutions, but it is not a problem that exists in isolation. We're looking at poverty in this manual because hunger is a symptom of poverty. Poverty, unemployment, and income are “key drivers of individual and household food insecurity across the country.”⁴ Generally speaking, families that can afford to purchase food will purchase food. While not all people facing food insecurity are technically below the federal poverty line due to the growing portion of working poor, there is a strong link between income and hunger.

HUNGER
In this manual, the term “hunger” is used interchangeably with “food insecurity.” Food insecurity “describes a household’s inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life.”⁵ It refers to a reduction in the amount or nutritional quality of food eaten in a household due to lack of money or resources.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HUNGER IN INDIANAPOLIS?
Hunger is a huge need that is not being fully met. Indiana is one of 11 states where food insecurity is higher than the national average,⁶ and Marion County has the highest rate of food insecurity in the state.⁷ As shown in the graphic below, 22 percent of Marion County residents have a food need, meaning they are food insecure. This represents over 209,000 people. Of this group, most were able to access enough food assistance to meet their needs. About one-third of Marion County residents experiencing food insecurity were not able to meet their food needs, even with assistance. This group with an unmet need (marked in dark orange on the graphic) makes up about 5 percent of Marion County’s total population and represents 47,000 people in any given week.⁸

People are working and still going hungry. Even with stable employment, food insecurity remains an issue because of insufficient wages and rising costs of living. According to IHN’s Survey of Food Assistance Need in Marion County, 58 percent of people reporting a need for food assistance are employed; however, employment alone is not always enough to get by.⁹ A full time job earning minimum wage in Indiana yields a gross annual salary of $15,080. Depending on company size and whether a person works one job or multiple jobs, benefits like health care may or may not be included. A full time job is not a step out of poverty if people are not making wages they can live on. United Way describes these working poor as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), meaning households with income higher than the federal poverty level but less than the basic cost of living for the area. In 2016, 29 percent of Marion County residents were reported to be in this category. Including residents who make less than the federal poverty level, 47 percent of people in Marion County are making too little money to make ends meet.¹⁰ For more information, see United Way’s ALICE project website, or view ALICE reports by county in Indiana.
Hungry people make compromises to try to meet needs. According to the *Hunger in America* report, food pantry and soup kitchen clients responded that they:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose between food and utilities.</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose between food and transportation.</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose between food and medical care.</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose between food and housing.</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to choose between food and education.</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an attempt to meet food needs, respondents in the same study reported using coping methods, including:

- Receiving help from friends (53 percent)
- Watering down food or drinks (40 percent)
- Purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food (79 percent)
- Selling or pawning personal property (35 percent)
- Growing food in a garden (23 percent)

More than half of respondents reported using three or more of these methods.

Fewer meals are being missed. Thanks to increased capacity at many hunger relief organizations throughout Indianapolis, the estimated number of meals missed annually has dropped from 9-10 million in 2014 to 4-5 million in 2017. We have made huge strides, yet there is still more work to be done.

**ROLE OF PANTRIES IN HUNGER RELIEF**

The emergency hunger relief system provides approximately 150 million meals annually to those in need in Marion County. This includes federal programs as well as private efforts. Households are eligible for assistance based on their income. As shown in the graphic below, even households earning 185% of the federal poverty line find themselves in need of food assistance but unable to access federal programs. Food pantries play a unique and important role in the food safety net because they are one of the only resources available to people on all levels of the poverty spectrum.

**A Piece of the Puzzle**

Food pantries play a vital role in the community. Beyond their ability to serve a larger range of income levels than any other hunger relief program, they also have the advantage of providing direct and immediate help, especially to those who are in crisis and those who do not receive enough benefits from other programs to make ends meet.
Pantries are crucial to the well-being of our community, but they are one piece of a larger puzzle. The charts below show how many meals were provided and distributed by various programs in Marion County in 2018. As you can see, public programs provide the majority of the meals for food insecure people, with SNAP, WIC, school meals, and summer meals providing over 80 percent of the total meals in our county’s emergency food system. All of the programs shown in the charts below need to be strengthened in order to eliminate the meal gap in Indianapolis.

While the charts below use either weight or dollars to measure the number of meals provided, we also have data on the number of people using different resources, from IHN’s Survey of Food Assistance Need in Marion County. In 2017, 31 percent of people with a food need in Marion County used food pantries. This represents about 65,000 people.

**PERCENT OF MEALS PROVIDED BY SOURCE**
**MARION COUNTY, 2018**

The above chart shows the percent of meals provided to Marion County’s emergency hunger relief system by various sources. These numbers show where the food is coming from. Note that the 4% provided by food pantries and soup kitchens refers to the number of meals these organizations sourced from food drives, purchases, grocery donations, and other sources excluding Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank, and Second Helpings.

**PERCENT OF MEALS DISTRIBUTED BY PROGRAM**
**MARION COUNTY, 2018**

The above chart shows the percent of meals distributed in Marion County’s emergency hunger relief system via different programs. These numbers show how food is getting into the hands of its recipients. Note that the percentage distributed through food pantries and soup kitchens is 18%, which includes food that comes from Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank, and Second Helpings.

**MARION COUNTY PANTRIES**

There are about 190 food pantries in Marion County. Of those pantries, 15 percent are school-based pantries, 82 percent are open to the public, and 82 percent of non-school-based pantries are run by a church. Marion County’s surrounding counties (Boone, Hamilton, Hancock, Hendricks, Johnson, Madison, Morgan, and Shelby) have a total of about 128 food pantries.
COMPLETING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT
Creating a Plan to Strengthen Your Pantry

The next few pages outline the topics in this manual, along with examples of action items for adopting best practices in those specific areas. We recommend you complete this assessment before reading the document. Every pantry is different, so this list is meant to be a guide to help you brainstorm your own steps towards improvement, not a one-size-fits-all assessment. This assessment is for internal use. IHN is not grading, ranking, or regulating food pantries in any way. This table is meant to be filled out by your pantry director for the benefit of your pantry. Once completed, it can serve as a helpful tool to identify the areas in which your pantry excels, the areas in which your pantry could improve, and it can give you some ideas about future goals for the pantry. It is unlikely that there are any local pantries that will check “yes” for every option listed, so use this tool as an opportunity to honestly evaluate the important work your pantry is already doing and find ways to make it even more effective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PANTRY ACCESSIBILITY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Determine whether your pantry hours overlap with nearby pantries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborate with nearby pantries to ensure that clients can access a food pantry any day of the week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Survey clients about pantry hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluate the addresses of out-of-area clients to see if there is a geographic area that is underserved by pantries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post pantry information on 211 &amp; Community Compass</td>
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<td>Post pantry information on a website or social media page</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post a sign outside with the pantry location and times</td>
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<td>Establish clear policies on when the pantry will close due to weather or other issues, and share these policies with clients regularly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruit volunteers to interpret languages commonly spoken in the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Translate pantry documents into languages commonly spoken in the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serve out-of-area clients once per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer free parking and bike racks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comply with ADA requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for accessibility in your pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTAKE PROCESS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask intake questions in a private space, and inform clients about how their information will be used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remove all unnecessary questions from the intake process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Require clients to show only one proof of address or identification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve the efficiency of intake by using digital tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make all religious activities or questions optional</td>
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### IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?

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<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Post a list of expectations for clients and volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keep track of shopping order without a physical line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer the option of making appointments for the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer activities and services while clients wait</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for intake in your pantry</td>
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### FOOD SOURCING

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tr>
<td>Source food from Midwest and/or Gleaners Food Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source 50% or more of food inventory from free sources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Source no more than 40% of your inventory from any one source (other than a food bank)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask for specific items in food drives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for food sourcing in your pantry</td>
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### FOOD DISTRIBUTION

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<th></th>
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<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Use a client choice model (shopping or list)</td>
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<tr>
<td>If using a traditional model, offer an element of choice (e.g. a trade table or free table)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give larger amounts of food to larger families</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for distribution in your pantry</td>
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### HEALTHY OPTIONS

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offer healthy food options every time the pantry is open</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide recipes or cooking and nutrition tips to clients</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer information on health-related wraparound services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide health screenings and services directly to clients</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Place healthy items at eye level</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pair meal-making items together</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place produce first in distribution line</td>
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<tr>
<td>Give clients multiple exposures to healthy items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post information or photos of healthy food in waiting areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use ‘shelf talker’ signs for healthy options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Display suggested amounts of unlimited items</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educate volunteers about healthy options</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer samples or taste tests in the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incentivize healthy options (e.g. free, no points, unlimited)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Host cooking or nutrition classes, or connect clients to programs offered nearby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for healthy foods in your pantry</td>
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### FOOD SAFETY

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<th></th>
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<th>SOMEWHAT</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain food safety certification for at least one pantry leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train volunteers in food safety, and post printed reminders of practices throughout the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?</strong></td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>SOMewhat</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distribute food safety information to clients</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for food safety in your pantry</td>
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### WRAPAROUND SERVICES

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WRAPAROUND SERVICES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMewhat</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promote 211 and Community Compass in the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Connect clients to other food pantries</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Post information on wraparound services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Co-locate with a wraparound service</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite organizations to visit the pantry to offer services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for wraparound services in your pantry</td>
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### VOLUNTEERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VOLUNTEERS</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMewhat</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Create defined volunteer roles and needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruit volunteers beyond your host organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use online sign-ups for volunteers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a volunteer training program or orientation plan</td>
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<td>Train regular volunteers in conflict de-escalation, cultural awareness, and interacting with vulnerable populations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train pantry leaders in emergency plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Host volunteer appreciation events at least once per year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recognize volunteer contributions throughout the year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Track volunteer time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicit volunteer feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for volunteer recruitment, training, and appreciation in your pantry</td>
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### CLIENT ENGAGEMENT

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CLIENT ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMewhat</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implement strategies to receive ongoing client feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solicit feedback from clients about a specific topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invite clients to fill other roles in the pantry (e.g. volunteers, board members, staff, committee members)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for client engagement in your pantry</td>
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### FUNDRAISING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FUNDRAISING</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMewhat</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a consistent fundraising message</td>
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<tr>
<td>Receive funds from diverse sources (e.g. individuals, corporations, in-kind, grants, and organizational support)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Train volunteers and board members to fundraise</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collect data and stories from the pantry</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create written policies for fundraising in your pantry</td>
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### PANTRY LEADERSHIP & SUSTAINABILITY

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PANTRY LEADERSHIP &amp; SUSTAINABILITY</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>SOMewhat</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have a pantry board or leadership group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish responsibilities, roles, and term limits for leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>SOMEWHAT</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<td>Develop contingency plans</td>
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<td>Conduct succession planning, including drafting a</td>
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<tr>
<td>written pantry plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create opportunities to develop volunteers into</td>
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<tr>
<td>pantry leaders</td>
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| HUNGER ADVOCACY                                     |    |          |     |
| Enroll in a hunger advocacy training                |    |          |     |
| Receive updates on important policies impacting    |    |          |     |
| hunger                                             |    |          |     |
| Send comments, letters, and other information to    |    |          |     |
| representatives                                     |    |          |     |
| Invite volunteers and clients to join advocacy      |    |          |     |
| efforts                                            |    |          |     |
| Offer voter registration in the pantry              |    |          |     |
| Create written policies for advocacy in your pantry |    |          |     |

**AFTER THE SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Now that you’ve completed the Self-Assessment, you can see the areas in which your pantry is strong as well the areas in which you have room for improvement. The practices outlined in this assessment are further detailed throughout the manual. To get the most out of this document, we encourage you and your pantry staff, board, or volunteers to read the entire manual. That said, if you’re interested in learning what steps your pantry can take to adopt a specific practice, or if you want to learn more about why a certain practice is recommended, you can skip to the section that includes that topic.
PANTRY ACCESSIBILITY

“I know there’s churches available that I could go [to] if I needed to once a month. I’ve never [gone to one] because of my double work schedule. I didn’t have a chance to when they were open.” - Central Indiana resident

Pantries, like any community resource, are only as useful as they are accessible. Of the many factors influencing pantry accessibility, the two most complex and important factors to consider are service areas and hours. These decisions are typically made when pantries first open, but they are worth revisiting occasionally in order to ensure your pantry is operating as effectively as possible.

DECIDING WHO TO SERVE AND WHEN

Questions to Ask about Area & Hours

- **How many clients can you serve, given your food supply, volunteer base, financial support, and physical space?** Some pantries like having an open service area because they don’t want to turn anyone away. Open service areas can also reduce the time spent on intake. However, serving the entire city could easily overwhelm a pantry of any size. For that reason, most pantries have defined service areas, which enable them to address needs in their neighborhoods while directing out-of-area clients to the pantries closest to them.

- **Are you over or under capacity?** If you are under capacity, you could increase your hours, expand your service area, or ramp up community outreach. If you are over capacity, you could limit the area you serve, refer clients to nearby pantries, or expand operations. Which would serve your community best?

- **Are you filling gaps or overlapping with other pantries?** How many other pantries share your service area? Are any nearby neighborhoods underserved by pantries? Are you open the same times as nearby pantries? Are there days when no pantries are open in your area? You can learn about nearby pantries from Community Compass, 211, or IHN’s pantry meetings.

- **Are your boundaries easy to understand?** Most pantries use zip codes, four streets as cardinal direction boundaries, or township location.

- **Are your hours convenient to the community?** Most pantries are open during business hours (M-F, 8am-5pm). Consider serving on evenings or weekends to accommodate working clients.

PANTRY LOCATION

The map below shows all the food pantries in Marion County, with dividing lines indicating township boundaries. Notice that some areas have several pantries grouped together, and other areas have no pantries. How do hungry people get food if they live in an area with no pantries? These blank spots on the map aren’t vacant places; they have many residents, including immigrant populations. Is your pantry filling a gap? If not, collaboration or consolidation could be good options for making your pantry as effective as possible.

This map was made with help from Connect2Help, Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food, local food pantry meetings, and IHN’s own research. The map was created and updated in 2018 and 2020 by Corteva Agriscience.

FREQUENCY OF VISITS

Another aspect of accessibility to consider is how frequently clients will be permitted to utilize the pantry. Depending on your partnerships, you might already have minimum requirements for serving clients. Otherwise, deciding how frequently clients can visit is a matter of what the community needs as well as what your pantry can handle.
SHIFT FROM EMERGENCY TO SUPPLEMENTAL ASSISTANCE
Food Pantries Are Now a Consistent Source of Food for Clients

Traditionally, food pantries have existed to provide emergency food to families experiencing temporary setbacks. In recent years, this paradigm has shifted; what was once emergency aid is now a source of food that families rely upon regularly.

In 2012, Feeding America published Food Banks: Hunger's New Staple, which used data from interviews with over 61,000 pantry clients and surveys of 37,000 feeding agencies throughout the country. Food pantry clients were asked, “Thinking about the past year, did you or anyone in your household use a pantry just this month, occasionally (2-5 months last year), frequently (6-11 months last year), or every month?” Results indicated that more than half of respondents visited a food pantry frequently or every month in the prior year, as shown in the graphic below.

For most pantry clients, the need for food is chronic and persistent, not a momentary crisis. The number of households receiving SNAP benefits has steadily declined in recent years due to narrowing eligibility. Even for households receiving SNAP benefits, the monthly allotment is often not enough to meet food needs; thus, regular pantry visits have become a supplementary method people use to feed their families. Ultimately, it’s up to each individual pantry to decide whether to view itself as an emergency resource or a supplemental food source. It’s not necessary to be open frequently in order to make an impact on the community. However, if your pantry is open once per month, remember that most clients will need more than a couple days’ worth of food in order to meet their needs.

In the past year, how often did you visit a food pantry?

- **Just this month**: 19%
- **Occasionally**: 27%
- **Frequently**: 18%
- **Every month**: 36%

**River of Life Food Pantry volunteers show the amount of food each household receives per visit. The pantry is open once per month, but they give each client an overflowing cart of food.**

**INCREASING PANTRY ACCESSIBILITY**

Location, service area, open hours, and visit frequency are the most important factors to consider in pantry accessibility. Once you feel confident about those decisions, there are other practices that can also help to increase accessibility, including establishing clear expectations, posting pantry information, communicating across barriers, and increasing physical accessibility.

“Most families are not visiting pantries to meet temporary, acute food needs – instead, for the majority of people seeking food assistance, pantries are a part of households’ longer-term strategies to supplement monthly shortfalls in food.” - Feeding America

**Establishing Clear Expectations**

Potential clients and returning clients need to know what to expect when they visit the pantry. Most importantly, they should know when the pantry is open, that they will be served (i.e. the pantry will not run out of food, that they meet the requirements to be served), and approximately how much food they will receive. Clients need to trust the pantry if they’re going to utilize it well. Most clients have at least one major barrier that keeps them from accessing a pantry easily—for example, transportation, childcare, work schedules, or physical disabilities. If a client puts the time and energy into getting to the pantry and is unable to be served because
SNAP BENEFITS
It’s a common misconception that pantries should be open toward the end of the month because that’s when the month’s SNAP dollars run out. While that used to be the case, SNAP benefits are now distributed throughout the month based on last name. As a result, the best way to ensure that food is available when families’ SNAP benefits run out is to make sure that pantries are open throughout the month in any given part of the city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st letter of SNAP recipient’s last name</th>
<th>Date of SNAP deposit each month</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A/B</td>
<td>5th</td>
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<tr>
<td>C/D</td>
<td>7th</td>
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<tr>
<td>E/F/G</td>
<td>9th</td>
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<tr>
<td>H/I</td>
<td>11th</td>
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<tr>
<td>J/K/L</td>
<td>13th</td>
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<tr>
<td>M/N</td>
<td>15th</td>
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<tr>
<td>O/P/Q/R</td>
<td>17th</td>
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<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>19th</td>
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<tr>
<td>T/U/V</td>
<td>21st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/X/Y/Z</td>
<td>23rd</td>
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</tbody>
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Posting Pantry Information
Pantries that are open to the public and willing to receive new clients should be listed with accurate information on 211. If your pantry is not listed, submit a 211 inclusion request. If your information changes, try to report the change as soon as possible using the Provider Search webpage.

In addition to 211, there are other ways to ensure that pantry information is easy for the community to find. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Signs outside the pantry allow people to learn about the pantry while walking or driving. These signs direct clients to the correct place and create a welcoming atmosphere.
- Information on a website or social media page with open times, requirements, and service area make it easier for clients to find accurate answers to their questions. Since most people have smartphones, including at least 71 percent of low-income individuals, an online presence is helpful.

WEATHER-RELATED CLOSING POLICIES
Clients should know before arriving at the pantry whether or not it will be closed due to weather. It makes life easiest for your volunteers and your clients if you have an established policy in place that is posted in your pantry and on your website at all times. This can be as simple as saying, for example, “If IPS is closed, the pantry is closed. If IPS has a delay, the pantry will remain open as usual.” Other pantries make a point of updating their Facebook pages or sending out a text or email alert to clients that have opted into being notified.
Relating Across Communication Barriers

Communication barriers can arise with clients who have difficulty reading, visual impairments, difficulty with verbal communication, or who are English language learners. Pantries have used the following strategies to communicate across these divides:

- Recruiting volunteers to be interpreters throughout the intake and distribution processes
- Adopting a distribution model that uses less verbal or written communication, such as a shopping model
- Training volunteers to communicate with people who have limited English
- Translating the pantry list into other languages or using pictures

Out-of-Area Clients

As shown in the graphic below, there are several options for serving clients who live outside of your service area, ranging from no service to full service once per year. Notice in this scale of practices, the red is generally not recommended, and the green is considered a best practice. Regardless of which method your pantry uses, referring out-of-area clients to another pantry is always a good idea. To do this, you can show your clients how to use the Community Compass app, provide information on pantries in their area, or refer them to 211. Free cards for 211 are available using 211’s Materials Request webpage.

When Andrew’s Harvest Food Pantry noticed more Chin clients, they worked with a Burmese missionary from the Church of Latter Day Saints to translate their pantry list into Burmese.

Physical Accessibility

Often, the most accessible pantries are located on bus routes and have free parking available for clients. Bicycles are also a common form of transportation, so providing bike racks at the pantry is helpful. Since physical accessibility is connected to physical safety, pantry leaders should be trained in conflict de-escalation. Additionally, many pantries are finding it wise to post visual reminders of their policies on weapons in the pantry. Finally, make sure your pantry is ADA compliant; people with all different ability and mobility levels need to access food assistance, and pantries have an opportunity to help break down the physical barriers that prevent people from getting the help they need.
FIRST POINTS OF CONTACT
Creating a Welcoming Environment
The pantry environment is largely shaped by how clients are treated when they arrive at the pantry, including the way they are welcomed and the safety of the atmosphere they wait in. Walking through the door and starting the intake process should help clients feel they are being taken care of, not prompt them to become defensive.

CLIENT & VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS
Some pantries have found it useful to create a written document of the pantry’s expectations for both clients and volunteers. This list of expectations can be posted in a common area and also presented and signed during volunteer orientations.

COLLECTING CLIENT INFORMATION
While many pantries use pen and paper for intake, digitizing this process can make it faster and easier to look up clients, update information, pull data for reports, and keep information confidential. Below are the most commonly used options for intake:

- **Spreadsheets** - Microsoft Excel is inexpensive and does not require internet, while Google Sheets is free and requires internet. For free classes in Excel, check the Indianapolis Public Library’s event calendar.

- **Intake software** - The most widely used intake software for pantries in Indianapolis is Food Bank Manager. Other options include Food Pantry Manager, Link2Feed, and PantryWorx. These options range in price from $15-$35 per month and are entirely web-based. PantrySOFT is available in a desktop version.

TECHSOUP
If your pantry is in need of computer software, such as Excel, you can use your 501(c)(3) status to benefit from discounts through TechSoup. While this resource won’t help you access pantry-specific programs like Food Bank Manager, it can help provide free or discounted rates for numerous other software options to help with data entry, fundraising, and bookkeeping.

KEEP INTAKE AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE
Good Intake Practices

**Protect clients’ privacy.** As much as possible, try to ensure that your clients can share their personal information during intake without other clients hearing or seeing it. Additionally, be direct with your clients about how their information will be used. For example, will their names be reported to another organization?

**Limit unnecessary questions.** Not only does streamlining the intake process save time, but it also makes the process better for clients. Many pantries find it necessary to ask the following questions:

- What is your name?
- What is your address?
- How many people are in your family/household?
- What age brackets do your family members fall into?

Some pantries also find it helpful to ask:

- Are you a veteran?
- How will you be getting home today (bike, bus, car, walk)?
Many pantries, including TEFAP pantries, ask their clients to sign a simple statement indicating that they are in need and meet the income requirements for assistance. We recommend you avoid asking about the following topics during intake:

- Religious beliefs or affiliation
- SNAP participation or other government benefits
- Salary or wages

**Simplify required documents.** TEFAP regulations indicate that TEFAP pantries may only require one piece of identification for intake, which shows proof of address. While this requirement only applies to pantries receiving TEFAP food, this practice has been adopted by the largest pantries in Indianapolis without much downside. We recommend other pantries follow suit, by requiring clients to provide one document of their choice to show name and address. Most clients will choose to show a utility bill, photo ID, or lease agreement. Some clients might have documents with outdated addresses, such as a copy of a passport or green card, but since these documents show name and photo, they should be at least temporarily accepted. Avoid asking for more documents beyond this, including proof of income, Social Security card, birth certificate, or proof of household members.

**Avoid requiring religious participation.** Religious activities, such as prayer, Bible studies, and baptisms should be voluntary and take place after food is received so that clients don’t assume their participation is a prerequisite for receiving food. Many pantry staff and volunteers are involved in feeding hungry people because their faith compels them to do so, and there is no reason why pantries shouldn’t share that motivation with the people around them. While people and pantries are free to express their faith openly, requiring clients to participate in religious activities can inadvertently discourage use of the pantry by people who need it. In the long run, religious requirements can reduce the number of people you are able to impact through your ministry. Below are some good examples of expressing faith in the pantry:

- Host a Bible study or service before the pantry opens and/or in a different part of the building
- Make printed information available in waiting areas
- After food is received, ask clients if they have prayer requests
- After food is received, invite clients to attend future church services or activities

**Avoiding Embarrassment**

These suggestions not only streamline the intake process, but they help to ensure people who need food aren’t discouraged from using the pantry. In IHN’s 2017 *Survey of Food Assistance Need in Marion County*, participants were asked, “If you have not had all the food you needed, what is the primary reason why you or someone in your household has not gone to a food pantry?” One of the most common responses (16 percent) was that people are embarrassed to ask for assistance. Additional questions and required documents during the intake process add to that feeling of embarrassment. Additionally, as shown in the infographic below, research suggests that as many as 40 percent of those in need will go hungry rather than submit to an invasive screening process. The need for food in Indianapolis is so great that we cannot risk turning people away due to intake practices.

**Updating Client Information**

If your pantry only requires clients to show one piece of identification, verifying this information at each visit is quick and simple. If your pantry has a more extensive intake process, many local pantries find it sufficient to ask clients to verify their information once per year, or whenever there is a change either to address or household members.

**Barriers to Providing Documents**

Here are some reasons why clients might have difficulty providing specific documents for intake:

- **Clients who are homeless, sleeping on a friend’s couch, or living in a hotel** might not have mail, utility bills, or lease agreements. Below are a few tips that might help your pantry navigate these barriers, but even with these tips, providing documents can be difficult for this group. Homeless clients could be listed within your system as “No Permanent Address,” which would allow your pantry to waive some of the typical intake requirements. If the client...
is staying with someone in your service area and needs mail for proof of address, the pantry could ask permission to send a piece of mail from the pantry to the address where they’re staying and ask the client to bring it in next time. They would, ideally, be served in the pantry at the time of their visit and then have their information verified on their next visit. Be aware that this is not an option for everyone in this situation; sometimes the person your client is staying with might not want your client to receive any mail in their name if their stay could be a violation of the lease. If the client is staying in a hotel, you could encourage them to bring in their hotel registration form as proof of residence.

- **Clients who are documented immigrants** might fear risking their citizenship status by using assistance programs. A recent rule, the Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds, has set penalties for legal immigrants who use or are expected to use public benefits for which they are eligible, including SNAP. Legal, documented residents might be wary of applying for these programs because of a fear that receiving public assistance could prevent them from attaining full citizenship. While pantries are not affiliated with programs like SNAP, there is reason to believe that some immigrants are wary about using any assistance for fear their information could be shared and their families’ citizenship status put in jeopardy. One of the best ways to deal with this barrier is to educate your clients about how their information will be used. Let them know directly that their names will not be shared with other agencies, that your food pantry does not report names of participants to the government, and that private assistance programs are available to everyone.

- **Clients who are undocumented immigrants** will likely not be able to provide state-issued photo ID cards, Social Security cards, birth certificates, or other identifying documents besides mail. While immigration is a divisive topic, hunger shouldn’t be. Regardless of personal views on immigration policy, undocumented families need to put food on the table just like anyone else. Families without documents might not volunteer their immigrant status to you for fear of being targeted, but remember to consider that some families might need flexibility in the intake process for this reason.

- **Clients who do not currently have possession of their documents** won’t be able to show them. Anyone can temporarily misplace a document, or store it at a relative’s house or in a storage unit they can’t access. Moreover, people who are using food assistance are almost always either low-income or in crisis. In either case, people who find themselves in these situations are likely experiencing turbulence, instability, and stress. The important but not urgent details of life like Social Security cards or birth certificates can easily get lost in the shuffle of evictions, health crises, fleeing abusive relationships, or any number of other concerns facing the family.

- **Clients who have recently moved** might not have an updated proof of address. It might seem like clients should simply wait until they’ve received utility statements or a signed copy of their lease, but households that have recently moved might be in very precarious financial situations after paying rent, security deposits, and potentially dealing with evictions.

- **Clients who work irregular hours or off-the-books jobs** will struggle to show proof of income. Additionally, there can be fees associated with providing records from banks and other institutions. Because of the hassle for both clients and pantry workers, requiring proof of income seems to be more trouble than it’s worth.

**BEFORE AND AFTER INTAKE: WAITING**

**Improving Wait Times**

Wait times are different for each pantry, and they can vary greatly based on day or time. One strategy to reduce wait times is to encourage clients to visit the pantry during off-peak times. Additionally, it is beneficial to measure the average amount of time a client spends at the pantry per visit. This is a metric worth capturing because reducing wait time can have a significant impact on the lives of your clients, not to mention the overall feel of your pantry. Below are a few reasons why reducing wait times is important:

- **Reducing wait times gives clients time to address other aspects of their lives.** People in poverty or crisis tend to juggle an overwhelming number of tasks and concerns. While a portion of your clients might be retired, unemployed, or have time on their hands, the majority of low-income, food insecure people do not have much extra time. By reducing the amount of time they spend waiting at the food pantry, you free them up to do other things—for example, visit the doctor, complete WIC classes, study for a drivers test, fill out a SNAP application, meet with a social worker, attend an HSE class, finish a car repair, or spend time with their kids.
• **Reducing wait times helps prevent missed meals.** If the pantry experience is reliably quick, clients will be more likely to visit when they need food, as opposed to putting off their pantry visit until they have extra time to go to the pantry. By encouraging clients to visit the pantry as soon as they start running low on food, the risk of missed meals is reduced.

• **Reducing wait times makes the pantry a calmer environment.** Nobody is their best self when they’re waiting in a long line, whether it’s for the grocery store, airport security, or food pantry. People get bored and agitated when they have to wait, and those frustrated feelings are compounded with the added stress of struggling to put food on the table. Pantry waiting areas can easily become high-stress environments where conflicts break out quickly. By reducing the time clients spend waiting, it makes the pantry experience better for clients and easier for volunteers and staff to manage.

**Managing the Line**
Pantries use a variety of systems to keep track of the order in which clients are served. While many pantries have self-regulated lines, other ideas include tickets with numbers, restaurant buzzers, sign-in sheets, and appointments. To discourage clients from arriving hours before the pantry opens, some pantries use bingo balls or other lottery-style options to randomly determine the order of everyone who arrives, for example, within the first 15 minutes of the pantry’s open time.

**PANTRY APPOINTMENTS**
Have you considered offering appointments? A few local pantries operate exclusively with appointments, but others use a hybrid system. For example, clients with appointments get fast-track service, while clients without appointments have to wait for service.

**Activities & Services While Waiting**
Most pantries will still have some element of waiting, even with streamlined intake processes and reduced wait times. There are many ways to make this time useful, productive, and interesting for clients. For example:

• **Offer cooking demonstrations and taste tests.** Purdue Extension (SNAP-Ed) offers recipe demonstrations (See more in “Healthy Options”). Taste tests could offer raw food pantry items (e.g. almond butter, bread, juice) or simple, prepared recipes using food pantry ingredients (e.g. lentil soup, salsa).

• **Promote wraparound services while clients wait through printed information and/or direct service** (See more in “Wraparound Services”).

• **Make meals or snacks available to clients.** Some pantries provide snacks in the waiting room. Items that work well for this are sliced fruits and vegetables from school food rescue, drinks, baked goods, and granola bars. Second Helpings provides prepared meals to some area pantries. For information on partnering with Second Helpings for their Hunger Relief Program, contact patty@secondhelpings.org.

• **Create a comfortable waiting space.** Clients would probably be most comfortable waiting if they had a place to sit indoors, a simple play area for kids, and restrooms with changing tables. If you’re interested in offering books in your waiting area, some local organizations provide free books to pantries. For more information, visit the Indy Book Project website or the Book Fairy Pantry Project website.
DEVELOPING A DIVERSE SOURCING PLAN
Indianapolis's largest pantries operate by stocking food from multiple sources. Generally speaking, the more diverse your sourcing plan is, the more sustainable your food supply will be. A good guideline to aim for is to receive no more than 40 percent of your pantry’s food supply from any one source (other than the food bank). Below is a non-exhaustive list of local sources of food.

Gleaners Food Bank
https://www.gleaners.org
Gleaners is part of the national network of Feeding America food banks. Perishable and nonperishable food is available both for free and for purchase (at significantly reduced prices). Most pantries are required to pick up food at set times, as opposed to having it delivered. To apply to become an agency partner, contact Agency Services at 317-925-0191.

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) https://www.in.gov/isdh/24779.htm
TEFAP is a federal program that distributes USDA commodity crops to pantries via Feeding America food banks (e.g. Gleaners Food Bank). Pantries receive large quantities of staple foods at no cost and must adhere to specific operational and administrative requirements. If your pantry is a Gleaners agency and has the capacity to store and distribute larger quantities of food, contact dwolf@gleaners.org for information.

Midwest Food Bank
https://www.midwestfoodbank.org
Midwest is an independent, faith-based food bank that distributes perishable and nonperishable food at no cost. Food choice is variable, and pantries cannot order products in advance. Pantries pick up food on scheduled distribution days. To apply to become an agency partner, call 317-786-8980 or fill out the online Agency Interest Form.

Society of St. Andrew
https://endhunger.org/indiana
Society of St. Andrew gleans fruits and vegetables from farms and donates the produce to pantries free of charge. Most gleaning happens seasonally, from May to November. Donations typically consist of a large amount of one type of produce. No application is necessary to receive food. Contact in-glean@endhunger.org for more information.

Second Helpings
https://www.secondhelpings.org
Second Helpings is a food rescue organization that provides food to pantries in two ways: prepared meals and “redirects.” Prepared meals are served on-site at pantries. Redirects are food items that are distributed to pantries when Second Helpings has extra ingredients to share. Available food varies. To apply to become a Second Helpings agency, contact patty@secondhelpings.org.

K-12 Food Rescue
http://www.foodrescue.net
K-12 Food Rescue connects pantries with schools. Each pantry picks up excess food from a specific school at a set time every week. Donations typically include individual servings of milk, fruit, vegetables, and yogurt. To connect with a nearby school, contact jw@foodrescue.net.

HATCH for Hunger
https://hatchforhunger.com
HATCH for Hunger provides eggs to food pantries for $0.50/dozen, including delivery (prices subject to change). Small pantries can make group orders with other pantries since minimum quantities are required. Eggs are typically delivered once per month. For more information, contact KRice@hatchforhunger.com.

Move for Hunger
https://www.moveforhunger.org
Move for Hunger works with moving companies and their customers to donate food items to pantries when food is left behind as people move out of their homes. To learn more and to add your pantry to Move for Hunger’s list of pantries that can receive donations, call 732-774-0521 or email info@moveforhunger.org.

A group of food pantries in Perry and Franklin townships receives a group order of eggs through HATCH. Each pantry is invoiced individually, and the load of eggs is delivered to one pantry. Pantries meet and load the eggs into their cars.
Wholesale Orders
To stock large quantities of specific items, especially items that are not frequently found at local food banks, some pantries make wholesale purchases. There are many companies to order from, but the three below have been recommended by Marion County pantries:

- CIS LLC sells a variety of wholesale grocery items. The company is based in Minnesota, but they supply wholesale products to pantries in Indianapolis. Orders are generally required to be at least one pallet (can be mixed cases). For information, call 763-488-6900 or visit the CIS website.
- McFarling Foods is a locally-based wholesale company. For information, email jrp@mcfarling.com.
- Cash & Carry is a company with local branches that offers some affordable items and delivers to the pantry. For information, call 317-632-2651.

Retail Purchases
For consistency in stocking or for last-minute needs, some pantries purchase food from retail stores. Note that some stores have item limits or other policies that make it cumbersome to order large quantities. Online ordering and delivery are available from many stores, including Kroger, Aldi, Walmart, Dollar Tree, and Meijer.

Food Donation Connection
https://www.foodtodonate.com
Food Donation Connection connects pantries to restaurants and other sources of prepared surplus food. To register, visit https://www.harvestelog.com/register.

Farmers Markets
A few local pantries glean extra produce from farmers markets by sending a volunteer to ask vendors if they have anything to donate at the end of the market. Many markets in Indianapolis already have a pantry gleaning the extra food, but there are still untapped markets on the outskirts of the city.

Grocery Programs for Pantries
Some retail stores, like Meijer and Kroger, have programs that make it more affordable for pantries to purchase retail food. In Meijer’s SimplyGive program, individual Meijer stores partner with pantries. This is a fundraising partnership that provides Meijer gift cards to participating pantries. For information, contact your local Meijer store. Through Kroger’s Community Rewards program, shoppers can choose to support your pantry. Every time they swipe their Kroger card, your pantry receives money to be spent in the store.

Imperfect Produce
https://www.imperfectproduce.com
Imperfect Produce sells otherwise unsaleable produce (e.g. unusual shapes and sizes). Occasionally this company also donates excess produce to pantries. For information, see Imperfect Produce’s donations page.

Community, School, and Pantry Gardens
Indy Urban Acres, St. Alban’s Episcopal Church’s Peace Garden, Bethany Community Garden, Lawrence Community Garden, and other initiatives donate fresh produce to pantries. Many pantries also have their own garden
plots. These do not by themselves meet the demand for produce, but they can supplement the pantry's food supply or provide specific vegetables that clients want. For more information on this topic, see https://tinyurl.com/GrowingConnections.

**Food Drives**

Most pantries already organize at least one food drive. Beyond the obvious benefit of procuring food, food drives can benefit your pantry by raising community awareness of your work, which can bring in donations, volunteers, and other support; inviting people to participate in the pantry; and educating the community about the needs of the people you serve. Here are some tips for organizing effective food drives:

1. **Focus on specific items.** Give donors a [list of wanted items](#), or ask donors to focus on one or two specific items (e.g. toilet paper drive, toiletries drive, or pasta and sauce drive).

2. **Set expectations for donation amounts.** Challenge each participant to donate, for example, 10 pounds of food, 15 items, all items needed for two meals, or one full bag of items.

3. **Advertise the drive** before, during, and after it happens. Provide posters and promotional materials. Encourage the donor to host a kickoff event to start the drive. At the end, be sure to thank the donor on social media and/or send a photo with information on the number of pounds donated.

**Try new audiences**, including events, businesses, schools, and other churches. Here are some ideas for expanding your network:

- **Churches**: Even if your pantry is run by a church, invite other churches to partner in supporting your pantry. Your most likely supporters will be churches in your neighborhood and in your denomination.
- **Schools**: If your pantry is not in a school and your local school does not have a pantry, your local school might be interested in hosting a food drive.
- **Local businesses**: Companies could create incentives for their staff to participate in the food drive, or they could collect donations from their customers.
- **Events**: Some event organizers will arrange to offer reduced ticket prices for people who bring canned goods or other donations.

When reaching out, have a plan for what a standard food drive looks like (duration, logistics, and goals), and show proof of your nonprofit status.

**Make it fun and rewarding for participants.** Here are some ideas we’ve seen:

- **Schools or businesses** allow their staff to wear jeans for a day for every 10 cans they donate

- **Teams, classes, or departments** participate in a “canstruction” competition, which challenges groups to create the most impressive structure from their collected items

- **Classes** compete for the most items or pounds collected to win a prize

**Partner with others for big drives.** If you find a company or event that wants to host a drive but it would require more work than your pantry can handle, consider collaborating with neighboring pantries to share both the work and the donations.
FUND DRIVES
Fund drives can bring in more food than even the most effective food drive. People tend to be excited about donating actual food items rather than donating money, but if you can garner enough support to host a fund drive, it will likely be worth the effort. Funds allow your pantry to buy the pre-sorted products it needs. As shown in the photo below, the same amount of money yields much more food at a food bank than it can at a store. Some local pantries are distributing large amounts of high quality food without any money in the budget for food purchases. While specific items sometimes need to be purchased, it does not need to be the primary way a pantry sources food.

COST PER HOUSEHOLD
A useful metric for pantries to use in seeking out funding, scaling up distribution, and streamlining operations is the cost of each family's pantry visit. To calculate, total the pantry's food expenses and divide by the number of households served. In Indianapolis, we've seen this number range from $5 to over $40 per visit. Reducing the amount your pantry spends per visit will enable you to serve more clients, and one of the most reliable methods of reducing costs is sourcing free food. If you have the opportunity to get free (or nearly free) food, take some, offer it to your clients, and see how it works. Chances are, it will reduce costs, improve clients' experiences, and add excitement to the pantry.

PREDICTABILITY VS. QUANTITY
Some pantries have a list of items they always stock, based on budget and perceived client preferences. Typically, this list includes items like peanut butter, tuna, and macaroni and cheese. While these are useful items, adhering to a stocking list is not the most cost-effective way to fill a pantry. Instead, pantries that stock their shelves with free, but good quality, items are able to operate cheaply while still meeting client needs.

Clients are generally using pantry food to supplement existing food resources. No one knows which ingredients a family has in their cupboards or how those foods could be combined with pantry options to create a meal. All we know is the more usable items a household receives, the more resources the family has to meet their needs—food and otherwise.

While stocking a pantry based entirely on a pre-planned list is not cost-effective, some pantries have more general lists of items they prioritize sourcing. For example, at many of the larger pantries in Indianapolis, clients know that they can always receive at least one loaf of bread, one package of meat, one carton of eggs or milk, and one type of fresh produce. This not only gives a lot of freedom to the pantries in terms of stocking, but also assures clients that they can rely on pantries to provide them with a few staple items in addition to the unpredictable items that will be provided.

TRACKING FOOD RECEIVED
Tracking donations and keeping a record of how much food came from each source is helpful in making reports, thanking donors, and identifying your biggest donors. If you don't already, consider logging your donations as shown below. The categories can be changed to make sense in your pantry. Additionally, you can determine the value of donations using Feeding America's Product Valuation Study, which found in 2018 that the average wholesale value of food donations is $1.52 per pound.
FOOD DISTRIBUTION

FOOD DISTRIBUTION OPTIONS
There are two primary models pantries use to distribute food—traditional models and client choice models—and within each of these are variations. Models that give clients the ability to select what they do or don’t want seem to be the best options in most contexts. Above all, pantries should aim to distribute food in the way that is most helpful to the clients and makes the most sense for the specific pantry. There is not one perfect way, and there are always ways to improve upon the model you currently use.

Traditional Models
In traditional models (also called pre-packed), pantries distribute standardized bags of food for clients. This model allows pantries to easily distribute food based on their supply, and the distribution itself has the potential to be faster. However, this model does not take into consideration the unique preferences and needs of individual clients, and it does not encourage interaction between clients and volunteers. Below are some ideas to improve upon traditional models:

- Create a place for clients to return unwanted items. This could also be a “trade table,” where clients leave an unwanted item and take someone else’s unwanted item in exchange.
- Incorporate an element of choice into the pantry by offering a table of items from which clients can choose in addition to their prepacked bag. This could consist of produce, bread, miscellaneous items, expired goods, or items of which the pantry has an abundance.
- Provide a larger amount of food to larger households.
- Solicit client feedback about items the pantry should prioritize stocking (more in “Client Engagement”).

Client Choice Models
Client choice models, as the name suggests, prioritize giving clients a choice about the food they take home from the pantry. Some pantries have clients choose their food using a list, and others have clients shop for their food in a similar way that they would at a grocery store.

List Model
Using a list model, pantries create a list of available items, clients indicate which items on the list they do or don’t want, and bags are filled accordingly by staff or volunteers. This is a good option for pantries that don’t have sufficient space available for their clients to shop.

There are also some disadvantages with this model. For example, clients aren’t able to see the food or its labels to make decisions, clients who can’t read or have language barriers struggle to indicate their preferences, and lists need to be frequently updated to keep up with changes in inventory (or inventory has to be made more predictable through retail purchases, which can be very expensive). Below are some ideas for improving upon this model:

- Create a “free table” where clients can choose items for free, in addition to their bagged selections. This table could include items the pantry has in abundance or items the pantry wants to encourage (e.g. fresh produce).
- Use a digital or blackboard list to make it easier to update the list when inventory changes.

Shopping Model
Using a shopping model, clients choose their own items from pantry shelves, similar to how they would at a grocery store. While some pantries allow clients to take as much food as they believe they need, the majority of pantries set limits on how much food each household can choose. There are several different methods used to determine how much food each client can choose.

Points: Each item or shelf is marked with a point value, and each client is given a total point limit. Generally, larger households will be given higher point limits. Pantries can label specific items as 4-for-1 point, two points, etc., based on inventory. Fresh produce or items available in abundance can be marked as zero points to encourage their selection. St. Vincent de Paul Client

Peanut butter is 4 points and jelly is 2 points at the HVAF of Indiana pantry.
Choice Pantry, Westminster Neighborhood Services, and Old Bethel & Partners use the point system.

**Item Limits:** Each shelf is marked with the number of items clients can choose from that shelf. This number is typically based on supply and household size. Mid-North Food Pantry, Crooked Creek Food Pantry, and Northside Food Pantry use this system.

**Weight, volume, and other measures:** Some pantries distribute food using weight or volume limits. For example, Popsie’s Pantry (Jewish Family Services) allows each client to fill up one large, reusable grocery bag per visit. Clients can choose any items in any quantity as long as they fit inside the bag.

**Monitoring Options:** Whether your pantry uses points, item limits, or another measure, client choice pantries typically have volunteers check clients’ selections in order to ensure the pantry guidelines are followed. The most common ways for pantries to do this are:
- Volunteers as shopping assistants
- Volunteers stationed throughout the pantry
- Volunteers counting in the check-out area

**BENEFITS OF CLIENT CHOICE MODELS**

**Client Choice Prevents Waste**

Clients who do not select their own food are likely to leave the food pantry with items they won’t use. There are several reasons why a client might not eat the items given to them, including allergies, health restrictions, religious traditions, dental issues, lack of kitchen tools to prepare, and preference. A study from *Waste Not Want Not* found that “if clients are given selections of food without regard to their needs, tastes, habits, traditions, abilities and circumstances, up to 50 percent of the food given will not ultimately be consumed by those intended beneficiaries.”

Allowing clients to choose their own food decreases expenses associated with waste and maximizes the impact of pantry resources.

**KEEPING CLIENT CHOICE FOODS COLD**

While glass-front refrigerators might be the gold standard for shopping model food pantries, there are inexpensive alternatives that allow you to offer fresh or frozen food without buying new appliances or making clients hold the doors of standard refrigerators open. The image on the left shows Crooked Creek Food Pantry’s method: cold foods are taken out of refrigerators and freezers in small batches and displayed on top of ice packs in serving trays. As clients choose items, volunteers restock the trays. The image on the right shows HVAF of Indiana’s method: on the front of the refrigerator and freezer, there is a list of what’s inside. Clients can read the list and decide what, if anything, they want before opening the doors.
Client Choice Affirms Clients’ Dignity
When clients actively participate in the pantry by making
their own decisions, they are given the opportunity to
receive assistance in a way that preserves their dignity.
When people have enough money to buy food, they
select their own food from the store. Food pantry clients
will likely feel most respected when they are able to make
food selections in a similar way.

Client Choice Helps Collect Information
Clients let you know what kinds of foods they want and
don’t want simply by their choices. In monitoring which
items leave the shelves first and which items never run
out, your pantry can collect information about how to
effectively stock your shelves without needing to survey
clients as extensively about food preferences. This allows
you to make more strategic purchases or organize more
effective food drives in the future.

Client Choice Can be Relational
Client choice gives volunteers and clients a chance to
interact, which can make the pantry more gratifying
for both parties. Additionally, this client-volunteer
interaction can be an opportunity for volunteers to
share information directly with clients about nutritious
options, how to use specific ingredients, wraparound
services in the community, and other relevant topics.

WHAT IS A HOUSEHOLD?
Identifying households can be tricky. Generally, a
household is a group of people that live together,
support one another financially, and share resources,
including food. Since poverty can create complicated
living situations, it’s common among pantry clients
for multiple households to live in one house. These
separate households may or may not be biologically
related, and the list of people living together at any
given time will likely change. Broadly speaking,
the reason social service programs create complex
policies for determining and verifying household
size is to avoid allowing people to take advantage of
the system. The downside of focusing on this is the
risk that hungry people won’t get the food they need.
Federal programs like SNAP and TANF already have
extensive processes for determining and verifying
household size. Food pantries might find this process
to be more trouble than it’s worth. Many of the
larger pantries in Indianapolis have simply made
it their policy to believe their clients—if clients say
they share food and resources or if they identify as a
family, take their word for it.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT
CLIENT CHOICE MODELS
Myth #1: Clients Will Take Too Much Food
The primary way pantries ensure clients don’t take
more food than the pantry can give is by setting limits.
By knowing how many days’ worth of food you want
to provide to each client and how large your inventory
is, you can conservatively estimate what the limits
should be. Having these guidelines protects the pantry
from running out of food, and it also helps ensure that
clients select enough food. Anecdotal reports indicate
that when clients do not have guidelines on how much
to take, many will take too little, either because they
undercalculate their need or they want to make sure to
leave enough food for others.
If your pantry is planning to distribute different amounts
of food based on household size, it isn’t recommended
to create more than two “breaks.” That is, pantries could
give different amounts of food to small, medium, and
large families, but if more than three groups are created,
it can become overly complicated.

Myth #2: Client Choice is Expensive
Client choice models have the potential to be less
expensive than traditional models. Since client choice
prevents wasted food and resources, it stretches a
pantry’s budget further. Additionally, these models are
an ideal outlet for donated food, because you can operate
with a less predictable food inventory. While traditional
models focus on ensuring each client leaves with specific
items that might need to be purchased, client choice
models can offer clients any donated products the pantry
receives.

Myth #3: Client Choice Requires Extra Volunteers
There are several ways to use volunteers in client choice
models without needing more people than you would
to pre-pack bags of food. Plus, if volunteers find that
they enjoy the experience of engaging one-on-one
with clients, volunteer recruitment and retention could
become easier.

Myth #4: Clients Will Make Poor Food Choices
Clients will choose the foods that they will eat. Like
anyone else, pantry clients make a combination of
healthy and unhealthy choices. Sometimes the unhealthy
choices are made for good reasons—for example, a family
might have a birthday coming up and select a cake. Healthy choices can be encouraged by offering nutritious options and educating clients on these foods (see more in “Healthy Options”), but not by withholding the items that are less healthy. Ultimately, clients will make their own choices about what to eat. It does little for a client's health, nutrition, or stability in life to receive a can of green beans if they never eat it.

Myth #5: Client Choice Requires Extra Space
Client choice models don't necessarily require any more space than traditional models. Below are two ideas for utilizing a small pantry area:

- If your church, school, or host organization has space that could be used during pantry hours but is also used for non-pantry activities at other times, you could create a moveable pantry using rolling shelving units. Clients shop from the shelves, and when the pantry is closed, all the shelves are rolled to storage.
- Small rooms or closets can be used for client choice by allowing just one or two clients to shop at a time. Several local pantries are successfully using this strategy.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
- Making the Switch: A Guide for Converting to a Client Choice Food Pantry
- Charity Food Programs that can End Hunger in America, John Arnold
HUNGER AND DISEASE ARE CONNECTED
Food insecurity leads to poor health, and poor health increases the risk of food insecurity. Lack of food and resources makes it nearly impossible to maintain healthy habits, eat nutritious meals, or manage chronic illnesses. Poor health, in turn, makes it even more difficult to climb out of poverty and food insecurity. Additionally, people who face poverty and food insecurity tend to also be facing other challenges, such as housing instability, that can exacerbate health and hunger issues.¹

The reason why poor health and food insecurity are connected is largely due to a lack of money and resources to meet needs without compromise. Health is jeopardized when a family lacks the money to fill their prescriptions and visit the doctor; when a person can’t afford to buy nutritious food and instead has to purchase unhealthy, less expensive food; and when the stress of poverty, hunger, and unmet needs builds up too often or for too long. This inability to afford meeting basic needs causes health problems. According to the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), “A considerable amount of research demonstrates that people living in or near poverty have disproportionately worse health outcomes and less access to health care than those who do not.”² The graphic below explains the reasons for this disparity in more detail, and specifically shows how food insecurity is linked to disease.³

As shown in the graphic, the relationship between health and food insecurity is cyclical and stressful. People cope with food insecurity in various ways, including buying calorically dense and nutritionally inadequate food, skipping meals, eating smaller meals, and watering down food. These coping strategies can cause chronic disease or exacerbate existing health issues. As health issues worsen, health care expenses increase, while the person’s ability to work decreases. Because employability decreases while expenses increase, available income also decreases and with it, the ability to buy nutritious food. As a result, people become further entrapped in the stressful cycle of hunger and disease.

Food insecurity can cause new health problems and worsen existing illnesses. Health issues caused and exacerbated by a lack of nutritious food include chronic illnesses, life-threatening conditions, and mental health issues. Children, adults, and seniors are affected by hunger in different ways:
- The health consequences of food insecurity for children include low birth weight, iron deficiency

![A Conceptual Framework: Cycle of Food Insecurity & Chronic Disease](image-url)
anemia, birth defects, asthma, mental health issues, and academic problems.

- The health consequences of food insecurity for **adults** include diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, pregnancy complications, stroke, obesity, depression, disability, poor oral health, and premature death.

- The health consequences of food insecurity for **seniors** include diabetes, depression, congestive heart failure, hypertension, and lower cognitive function.\(^4\)

Additionally, high levels of stress, anxiety, or depression faced by food insecure individuals can contribute to or worsen other health problems and life conditions.\(^5\) Access to enough food to provide good nutrition is required throughout all stages of life.

### PANTRY CLIENTS’ HEALTH NEEDS

As shown in the graphic to the right, a study by Feeding America in 2014 found that two-thirds of food pantry clients report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care.\(^6\) With this statistic in mind, it is easy to see how food pantry clients’ health is at risk, especially considering that 33 percent of households using food pantries have a household member with diabetes, and 58 percent have a household member with high blood pressure.\(^7\) The statistics are clear: food pantry clients have important, hunger-related health needs that can either be exacerbated or managed based on the help they receive from the pantry.

### BARRIERS TO HEALTHY EATING

While food insecurity worsens chronic disease, the good news is that chronic disease and other health issues can be prevented, managed, and sometimes even reversed by eating enough food and nutritious food. So why do people not eat nutritious foods? In IHN’s 2017 *Survey of Food Assistance Need in Marion County*, food insecure families in Marion County were asked why they don’t always eat nutritious meals. Their answers are shown below.\(^8\) Very few respondents indicated they choose not to eat nutritious food out of preference. Rather, while preparation time and access to food are significant barriers, the biggest barrier to eating nutritious meals is

### EXPENSE, ACCESS, AND TIME ARE BARRIERS TO HEALTHY EATING

In response to the question, “**Why don’t you or your household members always eat nutritious meals?**” food insecure individuals answered:
Nutritious foods tend to be more expensive, while more affordable options tend to be processed foods that are high in sodium, sugar, and saturated fats.

Marion County residents who are food insecure reported that the nutritious foods they most frequently lacked were fruits (78%), vegetables (70%), protein (42%), dairy (25%), and whole grains (21%). These are foods that are expensive to purchase but vital to our health.

“If you look at what has happened to the relative price of fresh fruits and vegetables, it’s gone up by 40% since 1980 when the obesity epidemic began. In contrast, the relative price of processed foods has gone down by about 40%. So, if you only have a limited amount of money to spend, you’re going to spend it on the cheapest calories you can get, and that’s going to be processed foods.”

-Marion Nestle, A Place at the Table

**PANTRY INTERVENTIONS**

**Breaking Barriers To Healthy Eating**

By stocking the pantry with healthy items, providing clients with health resources, and implementing healthy nudges, pantries can help clients make healthy food choices and prevent or manage chronic disease.

**WHAT IS HEALTHY?**

The main principles to keep in mind when trying to increase the healthy food in your pantry are:

- Reducing sodium, added sugar, and saturated fat
- Encouraging balanced meals, as shown in MyPlate resources. MyPlate is designed to help Americans consume a nutritious, calorie-appropriate, balanced diet. For more information, see the [Start Simple with MyPlate Toolkit](https://www.choosemyplate.gov).

**Stock the Pantry with Healthy Items**

There are a variety of ways to increase the amount of healthy food in your pantry’s inventory, including:

- **Organize healthier food drives** by requesting specific items or distributing donation guidelines, such as the [donation guideline example](#) created by Jump-IN for Healthy Kids.
- **Set guidelines for purchased foods** to ensure that your pantry’s monetary donations are used for nutritious items.
- **Make new partnerships.** If your pantry is looking to increase its healthy food inventory, consider sourcing donated food from Society of St. Andrew, Second Helpings, K-12 Food Rescue, and farmers markets. Additionally, both Midwest Food Bank and Gleaners Food Bank have nutritious options for their agencies. Your pantry could also purchase eggs through HATCH for Hunger or purchase wholesale products. For more ideas, see “[Food Sourcing](#)”.

**Provide Clients with Health Resources**

**Offer Health Screenings**

Organizations like Marion County Public Health Department, the YMCA, the Minority Health Coalition, and local hospital or health networks might be willing to visit your pantry to give blood pressure tests or perform other types of preventative health services while clients wait for the pantry. Staff and volunteers can also be trained to administer some screenings.

**Promote Wraparound Services**

Share information on resources available for uninsured or underinsured clients, including government-provided or subsidized health insurance options, sliding scale clinics, and free community health fairs. For more ideas, see the “[Wraparound Services](#)” section.

**Distribute Health And Nutrition Information**

Offer printed information to clients, especially about foods to select or avoid based on specific health needs. For examples, see:

- “[Eating Well with Diabetes](#),” Gleaners Food Bank
- “[Navigating the Food Pantry with Diabetes](#),” Michigan State University
- “[Salt & Sodium](#),” MyPlate
- Resources from the [American Heart Association](https://www.americanheart.org), [American Diabetes Association](https://www.diabetes.org), and the [USDA/MyPlate](https://www.choosemyplate.gov)
Implement Healthy Nudges

Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

“Healthy nudges” refer to strategies that encourage healthy choices. In this context, they are subtle changes in the pantry environment that promote healthy food selections. While data indicate that pantry clients want and need healthier foods, clients still need to be encouraged to select these items. The next pages outline a variety of options for implementing healthy nudges.

Place Healthy Items in Convenient Places

- **Create an attractive and abundant display** for items you want to promote. For example, apples stacked neatly in a basket look more appealing than apples in a half-empty cardboard box, and positioning boxes at an upward angle can help clients see the items inside.

- **Place healthy items at eye-level** on shelves, with less healthy choices placed at the bottom or top of shelves. If your pantry frequently has children shopping with their parents, try to place unhealthy items outside of a child’s eye-level as well.

- **Pair items together** for meal-making ideas. Help clients visualize what they could cook with specific ingredients by placing items on shelves together. Consider pairing items that are commonly eaten together on one shelf, like brown rice and beans or oatmeal and dried cranberries. This method can also be used to promote items for a recipe that clients wouldn’t always think to pair, like tuna and celery for tuna salad or chickpeas and lemons for hummus.

- **Position fresh produce first** in the distribution line. Clients are more likely to take items when their carts are relatively empty. Also, a visually appealing display of produce can “prime” clients to make healthy choices later on in their shopping experience.

- **Offer multiple exposures** to healthy options. Giving your clients more than one chance in the distribution line to select a specific healthy item can increase their chances of choosing it. For example, apples could be offered in the produce area and also next to the peanut butter for a healthy snack idea. In a Feeding America report, one pantry found that giving multiple exposures to whole wheat bread in the distribution line increased the chances of a client choosing whole wheat bread by 90 percent.

Use Signs to Promote Healthy Choices

- **Prime clients** to think about healthy options before shopping. Some pantries post a list in the waiting room of fresh produce or other healthy options that will be available that day. Pantries could also include photos of healthy options on a TV or posters of nutritious food hanging in the waiting and intake areas. Volunteers at intake could mention some specific healthy options when interacting with clients. These subtle changes can make an impact. In Feeding America’s report, hanging pictures of oranges in the waiting area brought the rate at which clients chose oranges to nearly 100 percent.

- **Use ‘shelf talker’ signs** to draw attention to items on shelves. These signs can highlight a variety of benefits, such as low sodium, heart-healthy, healthy snack, no added sugar, high in Vitamin C, or protein-packed. For a longer list of ideas about these signs, see Food Gatherers’ Suggested Shelf Tag Lines.

- **Label uncommon items**, especially fresh produce and staple foods, with names and cooking tips. For example, root vegetables could be labeled, “Cook like a potato,” and dry beans could have simple cooking instructions. Food Gatherers has created food identification cards, and FoodLink provides similar

“Stay full longer” signs increased the chances of a client choosing oatmeal at this pantry by 202 percent.

Westminster Neighborhood Services displays healthy tips in English and Spanish on their point limit signs.

HVAF of Indiana has a separate shelf of canned vegetables that are low-sodium, available at 4-for-1 point.
Display suggested amounts to take in order to encourage clients to take enough. For healthy items that are unlimited or zero points, consider creating a sign that says, for example, “A family of 4 usually takes 8 of apples.”

Incentivize Healthy Options
Adjust the way healthy items are counted in order to incentivize selecting them. If you use a point system, consider making produce zero points or marking other healthy items as 2-for-1 point. If you use item limits by shelf, consider increasing the number of items clients can take from specific healthy shelves. If you use a different type of client choice model (e.g. measuring by pounds, volume, etc.), consider creating a bonus table of healthy items that don’t count toward the set limit.

“...I see items I’m not familiar with, I taste them, and I ask my volunteers to take it home and try it. Sometimes I put out samples when the pantry is open. People are more likely to take it if they can try it first.”
- Food pantry director, Indianapolis

Boulevard Place Food Pantry’s dry erase board shows the items on special in their points system pantry. Zero point items include eggs and produce, and 2-for-1 items include healthy options like canned fruit, vegetables, and beans.

Educate Volunteers about Healthy Options
Volunteers can encourage clients to make healthy choices if shopping assistants are trained in what the healthy options are, what benefits those items have, and tips for preparing those items. If your volunteers aren’t familiar with the items you want to promote, give them the opportunity to sample the foods so they can speak from their personal experience. Volunteers in all different pantry roles are able to contribute to creating a healthy food environment. Volunteers stocking shelves and sorting donations can help identify and sort out items to promote, volunteers welcoming clients and doing intake can help “prime” healthy choices by mentioning some of the healthy options that are available that day in the pantry, and volunteers helping clients carry their bags to the car can spread the word about upcoming classes or events related to nutrition.

Help Clients Try New Foods
Offer samples, recipe demonstrations, and taste tests of healthy items, either straight out of the packaging or prepared using a healthy recipe. Taste tests are a great way to keep people entertained while they wait in the pantry, and they can help clients get excited about items that haven’t been popular in the pantry previously. For more information on hosting a taste test, see Jump IN for Healthy Kids’ document “How to Host a Taste Test” and the Gleaners Food Bank document “How to Plan a Healthy Food Pantry".

Million Meal Movement has developed recipes using their Rice/Soy Mix. Contact shane@millionmealmovement.org to invite a representative to offer recipe samples in your pantry.
- **Offer cooking and nutrition classes** in partnership with Cooking Matters and/or Purdue Extension (SNAP-Ed). Other local health care partners might be willing to lead classes as well.

- **Make meal kits** for healthy recipes by including all the ingredients needed for a recipe.

- **Display information about specific foods** in the pantry that day, especially fresh produce, staple dry goods, and uncommon foods. Clients won’t take something if they don’t know what it is or how to use it. Tell clients what a food tastes like and offer simple tips for preparing it. Information pages and cooking tips can be found using FoodLink or Food Hero.

**Make it Easier to Cook with Healthy Items**

- **Distribute simple, healthy recipes** that use ingredients found in the pantry. Recipes can be made available on the shelf next to an item featured in the recipe, in the waiting area, or at the taste test station. These resources are good starting points to find appropriate recipes:
  - Gleaners Food Bank’s Nutrition Hub
  - Feeding America’s Hunger & Health
  - MyPlate
  - Pulses
  - Purdue Extension
  - Iowa State Extension
  - FoodLink
  - Food Hero

**Healthy Nudges for List Model Pantries**

This section’s list of healthy nudges was compiled mostly with shopping model pantries in mind. However, all pantries can modify these strategies to make them useful in a different context. Pantries that use lists or menus for client choice could, for example:

- Place healthy options at the top of the lists
- Mark healthy options with symbols or labels
- Create meal bags with ingredients for healthy recipes
- Make fresh produce or other healthy foods free or bonus items
- Add “recipe available” next to uncommon items
COOKING MATTERS

Cooking Matters is a cooking and nutrition education program that equips parents, caregivers, children, families, and adults who have limited budgets with the skills to shop for and cook healthy meals. This program is offered by Indy Hunger Network through Share Our Strength and is available in Marion County. Typically, Cooking Matters is a weekly class that meets for six weeks. Each class, participants cook a meal together, learn about a specific aspect of nutrition, and leave with the ingredients to cook that same meal at home. Upon course completion, participants receive a cooking-related graduation gift. Cooking Matters is free to participants and to host sites; all that’s required is a sink, table, and volunteers. For more information or to inquire about offering Cooking Matters at your pantry, contact msonger@indyhunger.org.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Nutrition Hub, Gleaners Food Bank
- Hunger & Health, Feeding America
- MyPlate, USDA
- The Power of Nudges, Feeding America
- Jump IN for Healthy Kids
- “More Than Food,” Foodshare Food Bank
Food safety is a big topic with an abundance of online information. Pantries that are working with a food bank or hold a license from the health department likely already have a specific set of procedures they follow in order to avoid food safety issues in the pantry. Because of the riskiness of sourcing salvaged or donated food, this section is here to serve as a reminder about the broad, big picture guidelines as well as the resources available to help develop or implement your pantry’s food safety policy.

**BASIC PRINCIPLES OF FOOD SAFETY**

**Keep A Clean Pantry**
This includes sanitizing the areas where food is stored and handled as well as the equipment that comes into contact with food, pest control, proper handwashing stations, and keeping the pantry tidy.

**Receive Safe Food Items**
Avoid cans that are rusty, bulging, have a dent on the seam or rim, or dents that come to a point. Dispose of any food items that have been opened or punctured, are missing labeling, are moldy, or show signs of pest damage.

**Record And Maintain Safe Temperatures**
Record temperatures (freezers, refrigerators, and dry storage) at the start and end of each day. Refrigerated food should be below 41 degrees, and frozen foods should be below 0 degrees. Dry storage should be between 50-70 degrees. For information, see University of Nebraska Extension’s food storage chart.

**Follow First In First Out Procedures**
Keep track of your inventory and distribute the items in the order that they are received.

**Train Volunteers**
Incorporate information on food safety into volunteer orientations and trainings, as relevant to the different volunteer positions in the pantry.

**RESOURCES FOR FOOD PANTRIES**
- The Marion County Public Health Department is available to answer questions, from general pantry procedures to inquiries about specific activities, like hosting cooking demonstrations or taste tests. To contact a representative in your district, email foodsafe@marionhealth.org or call 317-221-2222.
- MCPHD also offers free classes on food safety throughout the year. These classes do not earn a certification, but they provide helpful information. Visit MCPHD’s Eventbrite page to register.
- ServSafe offers certifications for food handlers and managers online and in person. While it is not necessary for every person in your pantry to be certified, it’s a good idea for at least one person to have a formal certification, either through ServSafe or another curriculum. (ServSafe is mentioned here only because it seems to be the most common, but there are also other agencies qualified to certify people in food safety. See MCPHD’s Food Handler Certification Requirements for more information.)
- Gleaners Food Bank can help its agencies with all kinds of food safety questions. Contact your local service manager with questions. The document on the next two pages is a resource from Gleaners.
- Informational posters for your pantry are available from Indiana’s Emergency Food Resource Network.

**FOOD SAFETY FOR CLIENTS**
Food pantries have the opportunity to educate clients about food safety. Clients can benefit from food safety resources for two reasons:

1. Information on cooking temperatures, cross-contamination, and storage practices can keep families from getting sick. For a simple overview of the basic household food safety principles, see the USDA’s Be Food Safe brochure.

2. Information on product dating and quality can help clients make the most of the food they receive from your pantry. It’s one thing for a pantry to know that many food items are safe and edible after their “best by” date, but if your clients don’t know that, you run the risk of having that food thrown away or having your clients think you gave them bad food.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**
- “Food Safety Fact Sheets”, USDA
- “Be Food Safe,” Feeding America
"IS THIS FOOD STILL GOOD?"

Helpful information for agencies and staff when deciding how long foods can safely be stored and distributed

- Most foods are good past the date printed on the package ("use by", "sell by", "pack" date, etc.). Exceptions include baby food, infant formula, medications, and recalled items - do NOT distribute these products after the date printed on the package.
- You can make foods last longer by storing them at the proper temperature, protecting them from pests and chemical exposure, and discarding spoiled items. Also be sure to follow the FIFO (first-in, first-out) or FEFO (first-expired, first-out) system to keep a close eye on your inventory.
- *When in doubt, throw it out!* Below are some signs of unsafe foods:
  - Cans that are swollen, bulging, or have significant dents, especially in the seam
  - Rust that cannot be wiped off
  - Holes, torn packages, broken seals, signs of leaking or pests
  - Discoloration, mold, texture changes, foul odors
  - Homemade containers, missing or unreadable labels
  - Produce with severe decay or skin not intact

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Food</th>
<th>General Storage Guidelines**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shelf-stable</strong></td>
<td>Store at 50-70°F, many foods are good for several months or more past the container date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Refrigerated</strong></td>
<td>Store at or below 40°F, freeze most meats and breads on or before the &quot;use by&quot; date or within 2-5 days of the &quot;sell by&quot; date for longer storage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frozen</strong></td>
<td>Store at or below 0°F, fresh foods that are properly packaged and frozen (see guidelines above) are safe indefinitely but may have flavor and/or quality changes over time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unless otherwise noted by Gleaners in reference to Feeding America Donor Requirements or USDA Guidelines

See backside for specific guidelines on a variety of common food products
### Shelf-Stable Foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Item</th>
<th>Safe for up to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beans/lentils, dried</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biscuit or pancake mix</td>
<td>9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brownie or cake mix</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned foods, high-acid (e.g. tomatoes, fruit, pickles)</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canned foods, low-acid (e.g. meat, soup, veggies)</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cereal and oatmeal</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookies, crispy</td>
<td>4-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookies, soft</td>
<td>2-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crackers, pretzels</td>
<td>4-9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried fruit</td>
<td>6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravy (jars, cans, packets)</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour, white</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flour, whole wheat</td>
<td>3-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honey</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Icing/frosting</td>
<td>10-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jams, jellies, preserves</td>
<td>6-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerky</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ketchup, BBQ sauce</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macaroni &amp; cheese, dry mix</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayonnaise</td>
<td>3-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk, powderied</td>
<td>3-5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-dairy milk (almond, soy, shelf stable)</td>
<td>3-4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, unshelled, bagged/bulk</td>
<td>2-4 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts, jarred/canned/bottled</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oils, olive or vegetable</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Onions, fresh</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasta, dry</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut butter</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popcorn, microwave</td>
<td>6-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Popcorn, popped in bags</td>
<td>2-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes, fresh</td>
<td>1-2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potatoes, instant</td>
<td>10-15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pudding mix</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice, brown</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rice, white or wild</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salad dressing</td>
<td>10-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauce, spaghetti and salsa</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spices, dried</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet potatoes</td>
<td>2-3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syrup, pancake</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea bags</td>
<td>2-3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vinegar</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Refrigerated Foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Item</th>
<th>Safe for up to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apples, fresh</td>
<td>4-6 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breads</td>
<td>2-3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>1-2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cakes, muffins, pastries</td>
<td>5-10 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots, fresh</td>
<td>2-3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, hard or string</td>
<td>5-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, soft or cream</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, Parmesan</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, shredded</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee creamer, liquid</td>
<td>3 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottage cheese</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deli/luncheon meat</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eggs, in shell</td>
<td>3-5 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk, fresh</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-dairy milk (almond, soy)</td>
<td>1 week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-cut fruits or vegetables</td>
<td>2-5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared pasta/potato salad</td>
<td>3-5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortillas</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped topping</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter squash</td>
<td>1-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt</td>
<td>1-2 weeks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Frozen Foods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Item</th>
<th>Best quality for up to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bacon, hot dogs, sausage</td>
<td>1-2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cakes, muffins, pastries</td>
<td>3-6 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheese, shredded</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken tenders, nuggets</td>
<td>6-9 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookie dough</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deli/luncheon meat</td>
<td>1-2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg substitute</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrees, meals, pizza</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish, lean, raw</td>
<td>6-10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish, fatty, raw</td>
<td>2-3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>8-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice cream</td>
<td>2-4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juice concentrate</td>
<td>1-2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, ground</td>
<td>3-4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat, whole cuts</td>
<td>4-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pancakes, waffles</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>8-12 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whipped topping</td>
<td>14 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unless otherwise noted by Gleaners in reference to Feeding America Donor Requirements or USDA Guidelines**

Sources: [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov), [stilltasty.com](http://stilltasty.com) - 3/2019
PANTRIES CAN GO BEYOND FOOD
Wraparound services are the community resources and social services available to address needs beyond emergency food. By connecting clients to these resources, pantries can address the multi-faceted needs of their clients more effectively. Since food insecurity is a symptom of poverty or crisis rather than an isolated need, almost all pantry clients have needs beyond their immediate food needs.

There are many government programs and nonprofit organizations designed to address the needs of families in poverty or crisis, but people need exposure and education in order to utilize those services. If there are so many existing services, why do needs go unmet? The primary reasons are:

- People don’t know these services exist.
- People assume they wouldn’t qualify for the services.
- People have barriers to applying or learning more.

Food pantries have a unique opportunity to connect with diverse groups of people in need of assistance. Using this opportunity to promote other resources can help clients gain stability in their lives and even address the root causes of their food insecurity. The following includes strategies for promoting wraparound services in the pantry, as well as a list of resources that might be of use to your clients. Implementing these strategies can have a huge return on investment. If your pantry is not ready to promote wraparound services, consider at least referring clients to 211. As a 24/7, free, confidential referral service, 211 can connect your clients to the services they need.

PROMOTING WRAPAROUND SERVICES
There are a few ways for pantries to promote wraparound services. Consider implementing one or more of these strategies:

1. **Co-locate services** so that another social service is always available in the same location as the food pantry. For example, the Gleaners Community Cupboard has a St. Vincent health clinic, the St. Vincent de Paul Client Choice Pantry has a legal services area, and the Noblesville Community Cupboard shares a building with the Goodwill Excel Center, which offers HSE classes.

2. **Organize visits from service providers** to offer services or information during pantry times. Services could include blood pressure screenings, mobile dental clinics, free tax preparations, or SNAP enrollment. Organizations could also provide brochures about off-site services.

PROVIDING NON-FOOD ITEMS
The concept of wraparound services is centered on the idea that pantry clients often need help with more than food, and helping clients find the support they need will help stabilize clients and ideally, help them move toward self-sufficiency. One easy way pantries can help meet other needs in clients’ lives is by providing non-food items in the pantry. SNAP doesn’t cover toilet paper, dish soap, or other necessary non-food items. Some pantries offer hygiene items, clothing, furniture, and pet food. It could benefit your clients to provide a list of some of the pantries that provide these items, if you don’t stock them onsite.

Hunger Inc. Food Pantry offers diapers and toilet paper to clients. The Community Cupboard of Lawrence offers personal hygiene and household cleaning products.
3. **Offer person-to-person assistance** to connect clients with relevant services. Some pantries have volunteers, staff members, or social workers who are trained to talk about available resources.

4. **Make printed information available** for clients about a variety of different local resources. These resources could be on a table, brochure rack, bulletin board, or digital display.

**HOW TO FIND OUT ABOUT SERVICES**
The following are good sources of information on available wraparound services:

- Community Compass
- Indiana 211
- CHIP Handbook of Help
- Vineyard Care Center Google drive
- Community meetings

**WHERE TO START**

**Deciding Which Services to Promote**
The next few pages outline commonly needed resources. A list like this can be overwhelming, but remember that it’s not necessary to connect your clients to every resource listed. Instead, find ways to promote the resources that are most relevant to your clients and that your pantry is capable of promoting. Here are some questions to consider:

- Have you surveyed your clients to learn which services they’re interested in?
- What connections do you have within your congregation or neighborhood?

**COMMONLY NEEDED RESOURCES**

**Food**

- **Community Compass.** Community Compass connects people to food resources using a mobile app, chatbot, texting, and Facebook Messenger. This resource also screens people for SNAP and WIC eligibility and refers them to the closest place to apply. For more information and marketing materials, see [IHN’s Community Compass webpage](#).

- **Free cooking and nutrition classes.** Cooking Matters is a cooking and nutrition education program offered by Indy Hunger Network through Share Our Strength that equips people who have limited budgets with the skills to shop for and cook healthy meals. For information about classes, contact [msonger@indyhunger.org](mailto:msonger@indyhunger.org).

- **Referrals to other food pantries.** Many clients would benefit from knowing about pantries that are more conveniently located for them, or additional pantries they can visit to increase their food supply. Generally, clients will need the location, hours, required documents, eligibility requirements, and a phone number for the pantry. Information about pantries can be found through Community Compass, 211, or IHN’s Food Pantry Network meetings.

- **Information and enrollment assistance for federal nutrition programs.** Helping an eligible client enroll in SNAP or WIC is one of the fastest and most effective ways to address ongoing food needs. Clients would benefit from receiving information on what these programs are, who is eligible, and how to apply. See the [FSSA website](#) for more information on SNAP, and your clients can learn more about WIC through [Marion County WIC’s informational brochure](#). Screening clients for SNAP and WIC eligibility can be done using Community Compass.

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Vineyard Care Center posts information on community events, resources, and jobs in their waiting room.

Community Compass is available through the App Store and Google Play. You can also talk to the chatbot by texting “hi” to 317-434-3758.
Compass. Because the application forms for SNAP are complicated and some clients have language or comprehension barriers, it can be a huge help to assist clients in filling out these applications. Volunteers can be trained and given permission to do this. See Hunger Free America’s SNAP Outreach Toolkit for information on recruiting and training volunteers for SNAP outreach. You can also invite a representative from the SNAP Outreach Program at Gleaners to your pantry by emailing rigordon@gleaners.org or visiting Gleaners Food Bank’s SNAP Outreach webpage.

- Information on free summer meals. Summer Servings provides free meals and snacks during the summer to anyone under 18 at nearly 100 sites across Indianapolis. For information, see the Department of Education’s Summer Food Service Program webpage.

- Referrals to hot meal sites. There are many organizations that offer free meals to the public. Clients could benefit from information about the sites nearest your pantry. If you don’t know where the nearest sites are, use 211 or Community Compass.

- Information on nutrition incentive programs. Many farmers markets offer matching programs for SNAP and WIC as well as Senior Shopping Days. Visit the Fresh Bucks website to learn about local incentive programs and CICOA’s Farmers Market Vouchers webpage for information on senior markets.

Health

- Insurance information and enrollment assistance with government health insurance options, including Medicaid, Hoosier Healthwise, the Healthy Indiana Plan. For more information, see the overview of medical options for the uninsured compiled by Indiana Legal Services.

- Information on sliding scale or low-cost clinics. Find information on specific centers using this list of Federally Qualified Health Centers in Indianapolis.

- Mental health and addiction resources, including treatment programs, support groups, and naloxone training. Specific sites and resources can be found using the CHIP Handbook of Help or 211.

- Health screenings onsite, for example, blood pressure checks and pre-diabetes screenings.

- Information on free STI and HIV testing.

- Community health fairs. Specific events can be found using 211 or in community meetings.

Legal & Financial Guidance

- **Indiana Legal Services** offers free civil legal assistance to low-income people in Indiana. ILS helps clients who have legal problems that decrease their ability to meet basic needs; ILS does not handle any criminal cases. Your clients might be particularly interested in the SNAP appeals program. For information on this program, see ILS’s brochure on appeals. For general information on ILS, see the ILS website.

- **Indianapolis Legal Aid Society** offers free legal assistance to low-income people in Indiana. Legal issues are frequently related to housing, guardianship, adoption, and family law. For information, contact Legal Aid at 317-635-9538 or visit Legal Aid’s website.

- **Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic** offers criminal record expungement, license reinstatement, and immigration law assistance. For information, see the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic’s website.

- **The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA)** offers free income tax preparation to qualified individuals. For information, see the information compiled by the IRS on free tax preparation.

- **Budgeting and personal finance classes** organized by the pantry or other community organizations. Local community centers (e.g. the John H. Boner Community Center) frequently offer financial classes or programs.

TOWNSHIP TRUSTEES

Township trustees can distribute aid and connect residents to resources. To learn about the requirements for receiving assistance, contact your local trustee.

- Center - 863 Massachusetts Ave. | 317-633-3610
- Decatur - 5410 S. High School Rd. | 317-856-6600
- Franklin - 6231 S. Arlington Ave. | 317-780-1700
- Lawrence - 4455 McCoy St. | 317-890-0011
- Perry - 4925 Shelby St. | 317-788-4815
- Pike - 5665 Lafayette Rd. | 317-291-5801
- Washington - 5302 Keystone Ave. | 317-327-8800
- Warren - 501 N. Post Rd. | 317-327-8947
- Wayne - 5401 W. Washington St. | 317-241-4191
Housing, Utility, & Furniture Assistance

- **Subsidized housing programs.** For an overview of these resources, see ILS’s brochure on subsidized housing.

- **List of nearby pantries with household items.** Pantries can be found through 211 and IHN’s pantry meetings.

- **Information on applying for household items** through St. Vincent de Paul. Clients can use SVdP’s online form to apply.

- **Information on the Energy Assistance Plan,** which can help low-income residents keep their utilities on and paid for during the winter.

- **Free smoke detectors** through the Indianapolis Fire Department. Clients can use the online Smoke Alarm Request Form to apply.

- **For clients experiencing homelessness,** offer CHIP’s Handbook of Help and information on local homeless shelters. Connect homeless veterans to HVAF of Indiana.

- **List of organizations offering rent and financial assistance,** including referrals to the Township Trustee office.

CICOA offers delivered and congregate meals. Learn more on CICOA’s website.

- **Meals on Wheels,** a program of Partners in Nutrition, offers delivered meals and a pantry to seniors. Learn more on the Meals on Wheels website.

- **Senior shopping days** are pantry hours specifically for seniors. Several pantries offer these opportunities. Use Community Compass or 211 for more information.

- **The State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP)** is a free program that connects clients to resources that can help them pay for Medicare costs. For information, visit the SHIP website.

- **Informational brochures** on topics relevant to seniors, including healthcare options and housing, are available on the Senior Informational Brochures page of the ILS website.

Clothing & Personal Care

- **List of pantries with clothing and hygiene items.** Nearby pantries can be found through 211 and IHN’s pantry meetings.

- **Changing Footprints** supplies free shoes to food pantries. For information, see the Changing Footprints website.

Seasonal Assistance

- **Holiday programs,** including hot meals, meal ingredient boxes, and gift programs are provided by many organizations. If your pantry does not offer these programs, connect clients to organizations that do. Find details through 211.

- **Back-to-school assistance.** Indianapolis hosts several back-to-school events to equip students with school supplies. Some food pantries and community centers also offer additional assistance during this time. Use 211 for event information.

Domestic Violence

- **24/7 helpline** available at 317-920-9320.

- **Emergency shelters,** such as the Julian Center are available for victims of domestic violence.

- **Residential and support programs.** The Julian Center offers multiple resources.

- **Information on federal assistance** for domestic violence victims who need financial help is available on ILS’s brochure about TANF and Domestic Violence.

Resources for Seniors

- **CICOA** is the Area Agency on Aging for Central Indiana, and as such, is the go-to resource for services available to seniors. Among other programs,
Employment & Educational Resources

- **Second Helpings** has a culinary job training program. For information, visit the Second Helpings website.
- **HSE/GED classes.** Call 211 or connect with local community centers to locate nearby classes.
- **Job training programs.** For information, see the Department of Workforce Development website.
- **Wage claim information.** For information, see ILS's brochure on wage claims.

Resources for Veterans

- **HVAF of Indiana** houses, supports, and advocates for veterans and their families. For information, visit the HVAF website.
- **The Military Assistance Project (MAP)** assists low-income military members, veterans, and family members with legal cases. For information, see ILS’s MAP webpage.

Immigration & Language Resources

- **Exodus Refugee Immigration** provides education, employment training, health services, and more to newcomers from 90 days up to 5 years after arrival in the U.S. For information, see Exodus Refugee’s website.
- **La Plaza** offers educational programs, workforce development support, and access to healthcare and human services for Spanish-speaking families. For information, see La Plaza’s website.
- **Immigrant Welcome Center** organizes multiple programs for immigrants, including legal services and citizenship workshops. For information, see the Immigrant Welcome center’s website.

Children & Parents

- **Car seats** are available for free from the Indianapolis Fire Department. To apply, use IFD’s online application form.
- **Diapers, formula, and baby food** can be made available in the pantry. Make sure no baby items are expired! If your pantry does not stock these items, provide information on nearby pantries that do. **Maternity Outreach Ministry (M.O.M.) House** is one example.
- **Information on low-cost daycare** and Head Start programs. See information on childcare at Childcare Answers and information on Head Start from Family Development Services.
- **WIC and Summer Servings** (see Food, above)
- **The Villages** offers community services to families, such as casework, counseling, and parent education. For information, see the Villages website.
- **The Children’s Bureau** empowers families with support and resources to prevent issues that lead to entry into the child welfare system and works with families to be able to keep their children who are in the system. For information, visit the Children’s Bureau website.

**Pets**

- **List of pet food pantries.** Use 211 to find nearby locations.
- **Information on free or low-cost vet services.** For a list of options, see the Indy Pit Crew website.

EXPANDING WRAPAROUND SERVICES

The above list does not include all available resources but provides an idea of the types of services and information pantries could offer. If you're looking for a place to start, try focusing on federal nutrition programs and other food resources. Once your pantry is comfortable with those categories, you can expand your promotion of wraparound services in a few ways:

- Ask your clients what resources they need access to or information about.
- Offer resources in which your clients have already expressed interest.
- Offer resources based on the season (e.g. tax help in the winter).
FOOD PANTRIES RUN ON VOLUNTEERS
Chances are that every pantry representative reading this manual either works with volunteers on a regular basis or is themselves a volunteer. This section outlines some of the best practices and resources for recruiting, training, retaining, and appreciating volunteers in the pantry.

DEFINING VOLUNTEER ROLES
You need to know what your pantry needs in order to recruit people to fill those needs. An established list of volunteer roles and the priority level, primary tasks, and necessary training associated with each role will help the pantry management and the volunteer experience. If you haven't already, consider creating a document with each volunteer role for both stocking days and pantry days, and mark each role according to its priority. This will tell you how many people are needed on any given day and establishes a plan for extra volunteers. This list can help you recruit or advertise for specific positions. Additionally, this list of volunteer roles will help you keep jobs on your radar that are important but not urgent.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS
Your future volunteers might not know anything about your pantry or even about food insecurity. For that reason, it's a good idea to prepare an overview of information for volunteer recruitment, including:
- The purpose of your organization and who you serve
- Overview of main volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Benefits of volunteering

Where to Find Volunteers
- **Clients** - Your clients might be willing to help but haven't been invited or don't know how to sign up.
- **Faith Communities** - Churches, mosques, synagogues, and other faith communities are great sources of volunteers. Most church pantries have volunteers from their own congregations, but there are many churches that have no pantries and are full of potential volunteers. Consider reaching out to those nearby for volunteers.
- **Volunteer referral organizations** - Several websites allow organizations to post volunteer opportunities, including VolunteerMatch.org, Idealist.org, TeenLife.com, Hungervolunteer.org, and Indyhub.org.
- **United Way of Central Indiana** - UWCI can connect your pantry to corporate volunteer groups. Use UWCI's online form to sign up.
- **Students** - Reach out to schools, scout groups, sports teams, internship programs, and clubs or other groups (4H, FFA, sororities, fraternities).
- **Volunteer service organizations** - Fill a full-time position through AmeriCorps or Senior Corps.
- **Community Service Work Program** - See next page for information.
- **Local businesses** - Coffee shops, gyms, and other places where people in the neighborhood congregate are good places to post a flyer about volunteer opportunities.
- **Volunteer fairs** - Local colleges, breweries, and other groups organize opportunities to connect future volunteers with local organizations.
- **Events** - Host a booth at a local festival to spread the word about your pantry, hand out volunteer information, and pair it with a fund drive.

Find ways to reach out to the people who are most connected to the community your pantry serves. If your pantry serves a lot of people of a certain demographic, invite that community to volunteer. Most of the time, pantries will find support by recruiting volunteers from the neighborhood. If people know that your pantry is feeding their own neighborhood, they're more likely to get involved.

VOLUNTEERS TO PICK UP FOOD
Mid-North Food Pantry has volunteers called “rescue riders” who pick up food donations from local schools and drop them off at the pantry. This is a great way for volunteers to get involved and an important service for the pantry.

In Central Indiana, 627,505 volunteers contribute 51.7 million hours of service, 43.3% of residents volunteer, and volunteer service is worth an estimated $1.2 billion. - Corporation for National and Community Service
COURT-ORDERED COMMUNITY SERVICE

Several pantries in Indianapolis benefit from inviting people to complete their court-ordered community service in the pantry. This is an underutilized approach, and it has the potential to be beneficial both to the pantry and to the volunteer. Chances are that if you’re running a food pantry, you already believe that a person’s current circumstances don’t define them. Giving people the opportunity to volunteer in a place that is safe, enjoyable, welcoming, and serving the community can do great things for the well-being of the volunteer, and it could also help you gain a longer-term supporter. For more information on signing up your organization as a community service site, call 317-327-8258 or email Probation-CommunityWork@indy.gov.

Tips to Help with Recruitment

The following are helpful tools for recruiting new volunteers and encouraging returning volunteers to stay engaged:

- E-Newsletters to volunteers
- Sign-up Genius or Sign-Up.com
- Banners, brochures, or other resources specifically geared toward potential volunteers

Relationships are an important part of a sustainable volunteer base. Invite volunteers to connect the pantry to other parts of their lives, for example:

- Bringing friends to work alongside or organizing a volunteer group from the neighborhood, workplace, book club, etc.
- Sharing on social media
- Passing out information

Mid-North uses a business card like the one below to mobilize existing volunteers, board members, and others to recruit in their own circles. Current volunteers write their name and number on the back, so the potential volunteer can get in touch to learn more about the pantry and how to get involved.

Recruiting for Skilled Roles

Skilled volunteers who serve the pantry using their professional experience are a valuable asset for many pantry tasks, such as maintaining a website, financial management, and grant writing. Positions like these are typically treated more like a job description than a general request for volunteers. Consider creating a document that outlines the start and end date (if applicable), responsibilities, skills needed, and training provided as well as benefits of volunteering.

Volunteer Groups

Some pantries ask a particular group to staff the pantry for specific days—every Tuesday, the last Sunday of the month, etc. This works particularly well if you have a group leader and a team of people that already know one another, such as a church group, sports team, etc.

Corporate volunteer groups are usually large; for that reason they are great for projects and special days at the pantry—for example, sorting donations from a large food drive, running a holiday meal and gift giveaway, etc. See more information on corporate sponsorships in “Fundraising.”

“Volunteers bring energy, new ideas, and a desire to strengthen their communities. They can help you see your clients with new eyes, improve your organization’s operations, or provide leadership on your board.”

- Philabundance

Value of Recruitment

Make it easy for individuals and groups to find out about volunteer opportunities. Post standard days and times for volunteering on your website, social media, newsletter, or church bulletin. Better yet, give people the opportunity to sign up for specific shifts online.

Recruiting volunteers is a year-round task. Even if your pantry has filled all the potential volunteer roles, recruiting extra volunteers creates a backup plan when core volunteers step away from the pantry. Extra volunteers can also allow core pantry volunteers to take a break and avoid burnout.

Volunteering is a gateway to other forms of support. A volunteer can talk to friends and family about their experience at the pantry, attend a fundraising event, or be connected to a business that could help your pantry in other ways. You never know the benefits that a single volunteer can bring to your pantry.
VOLUNTEER TRAINING

All volunteers need training and orientation before getting involved in the pantry, both for your benefit and theirs. However, volunteers will need different kinds and amounts of training depending on their role.

All volunteers should be given the following information:

• Pantry or organization’s mission
• List of volunteer expectations
• Nondiscrimination and Civil Rights training (required for some pantries, but useful for all)
• Basics of food safety, if applicable for the role
• Position-specific tasks and skills (e.g. using intake software, shelf stocking priorities, etc.) Allow new volunteers to shadow more experienced volunteers until they feel confident. For personal shoppers, this shadowing could take 5-10 minutes, but for more complex skills, the volunteer might need significantly more training before doing the role on their own.
• Who to ask with questions or problems

Longer-term volunteers should receive all of the above information as well as the following, as applicable:

• Interacting with clients, including dealing with vulnerable populations and conflict de-escalation
• Training to increase understanding of poverty, privilege, and cultural competency. Examples include:
  • South Dakota State University Extension’s “Voices For Food” pantry toolkit, Appendix J
  • Community Action Poverty Simulation events.
  • ServSafe or other food safety certification

For templates of volunteer management forms, including sign-in, intake, orientation documents, and waivers, see the resources page of the Hunger Volunteer website.

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION & RETENTION

In an ideal situation, volunteer experience should be busy, valuable, and enjoyable. One of the simplest ways to achieve this is to make sure that volunteers aren’t bored; this involves walking the fine line of having enough volunteers to cover the priority roles in your pantry in order to run effectively but not so many volunteers doing the same tasks that anyone feels expendable or unimportant. One way to prevent boredom is to have a list of backup roles for volunteers so that everyone can be busy enough to feel that their time at the pantry was well spent. Another way to help the volunteers feel valuable is to let volunteers know what they accomplished while at the pantry. For example, at the end of a shopping day, tell volunteers how many households the pantry served that day. After a big day of sorting, let them know how many estimated pounds of food they sorted. If they’re stocking, cleaning, or doing some other task, remind them of how important their work is to the overall effectiveness of the pantry.

Communicate with your volunteers, both new and long-time, and position volunteers in ways that fully leverage their strengths, skills, and interests. You might have a college student helping clients shop who has also taken a grant writing class and would be interested in helping the pantry apply for grant support. You might have a retired data analyst who could create a better spreadsheet for easier client intake. You might have someone stocking shelves who also loves gardening and would like to start some vegetable beds at the pantry. You never know the many ways people can contribute to the pantry unless you get to know them over time, discover what they enjoy, and find out what they want to do. When people are put in roles that they do well and enjoy, especially when they’re doing this work alongside people who know and care about them, retention will be high.

Offering benefits to your volunteers as recognition of their time and energy can go a long way to improve volunteer retention and morale. Here are some examples:

• A monthly pizza party after serving in the pantry
• Gifts, such as a pantry t-shirt
• Food, drinks, and breaks during shifts
• Milestone acknowledgments - when a volunteer hits a certain number of hours, feature them in your newsletter or social media account, bring in a treat to the pantry, or write them a personalized card
• Promotions - Promoting volunteers who seem interested can be a good way of training future

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Does your pantry have plans in place in case of a fire, power outage, tornado, medical emergency, or active shooter? Ideally, every pantry should have a plan in place for each of these situations. Shift leaders should be trained to respond to such emergencies. These are some of the important details of pantry operations that aren’t urgent until they are. For more ideas on fostering resilience to prepare for emergencies, see the Appendix.
leaders while securing a dedicated volunteer force. Volunteers can be promoted to shift leads, given special tasks, or invited to be on your board.

- Appreciation Events - Volunteer appreciation events are opportunities to thank your volunteers as well as build relationships between volunteers. These events are great times to share statistics about the work the pantry has done in the past year through the work of volunteers. Some pantries present individualized recognition awards for volunteers at these events—for example, most hours award, new volunteer award, volunteer group of the year, or corporate volunteer group of the year.

**Solicit Volunteer Feedback**

Allow your volunteers to give feedback about their experiences, good and bad. You can use some of the same strategies outlined in the “Client Engagement” section to do this. Consider asking:

- Do you plan to volunteer again in the future? Why or why not?
- What was the best part of volunteering?
- What could have made your experience better?
- How can we best show our appreciation for your work?

**TRACK VOLUNTEER TIME**

Ask volunteers to sign in and out during their shifts. For volunteers working remotely or who volunteer by driving, find out how many hours on average they work per week, and then ask them to let you know if they spend more or less time in a given week volunteering. Keep track of all the volunteer hours given to your food pantry. It can be as simple as a spreadsheet with the date, the number of volunteers and the total hours that day. Volunteer hours can also be translated into monetary value using an [online volunteer hour calculator](#). These metrics are helpful to have for volunteer appreciation events, for demonstrating community support while fundraising or grant writing, and for helping the board understand when it might be time for the pantry to hire a volunteer coordinator.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- “Food Pantry Agency Volunteer Manual,” Philabundance
- “Ten Tips for Keeping Your Volunteers Motivated and Happy,” Engaging Volunteers
- Free classes on volunteer recruitment and retention, Indianapolis Public Library
IMPORTANCE OF HEARING FROM CLIENTS
Receiving feedback from clients and inviting them to participate in the pantry is beneficial for everyone. Input from clients can increase the effectiveness of the pantry because it shows what clients think and want. Additionally, soliciting feedback invites clients to participate in the anti-hunger work your pantry does, as opposed to maintaining a transactional model of giving in which clients are always on the receiving end. When decisions are made about the pantry, are clients at the table? Pantries have a unique opportunity to flip the traditional power dynamic of charity by inviting clients to do more than just receive food. In doing so, clients will have the opportunity to participate in an important cause and advocate for themselves, and your pantry will be better off for it. The experts on the needs of the poor and hungry families in your neighborhood are the individuals lining up at your door. We are neglecting an important source of information if we do not listen to them, and they likely have valuable ideas about how the pantry can be most effective.

POSTURE OF SOLICITING FEEDBACK
If you solicit feedback from your clients, these are some good guidelines:

- **Assure clients they won’t be punished for giving negative feedback.** There can be a fear to speak up if clients think the pantry might not receive their comments well. It can be painful to hear critiques, but it’s important to hear clients’ perspectives.

- **Ensure that providing client feedback is voluntary.** Invite people into the process, and let them choose to participate or not. Avoid adding additional questions to client intake in order to collect information.

- **Solicit feedback about topics that you are able and willing to address.** Ask questions about topics you are willing to address, and be prepared to make changes based on the feedback.

- **Ask relevant questions with unknown answers.** Ask about topics that are going to be helpful in making your pantry as effective as possible. Questions about employment, income, education level, and housing are not the best use of time because these data are already publicly available. Collect data that aren’t already being collected. If you don’t know where to find the data that already exist, one of the best starting points is SAVI (http://www.savi.org).

IDENTIFYING THE QUESTION(S)
What do you want feedback on? Here are some topics to consider:

- Food quality and preferences
- Food quantity and frequency of assistance
- Clients’ experiences in the pantry
- Convenience of distribution times and policies
- Interest in wraparound services
- Safety in and around the pantry

For more help with this part of the process, consider taking SAVI’s “Module 1A: Frame the Problem” class (http://www.savi.org/support-training/savi-training).

METHODS OF SOLICITING FEEDBACK
**Surveys**
Surveys are best for collecting simple answers to a small list of questions from medium to large groups of participants. For more information on conducting surveys, see The Urban Institute’s “Surveying Clients about Outcomes” (https://tinyurl.com/ClientOutcomes), or enroll in SAVI’s “Module 2C: Create & Use Survey Data” class.

**Client Comment Cards**
Client comment cards are an easy, cheap way to collect ongoing feedback from clients. These cards can be as simple as a blank card with one question at the top—for example, “How was your experience at the pantry today?” Other ideas are to ask clients to rate a few aspects of their experience (e.g. food selection, treated respectfully, wait time) on a scale of 1-5 or to share the best and worst thing about the pantry that day. Cards
can be anonymous or have the option of allowing a follow-up from the pantry. Collecting cards could be as simple as having a comment box stationed in the pantry. If you're interested in encouraging many clients to use them, consider incentivizing it—for example, when a client puts a comment card in the box, they get a ticket for one extra item next time they visit.

**Point of Sale Data**
Point of sale data track client choices. While there is no “sale” of items at a pantry, the same practices that grocery stores use for collecting data on customer choices could be beneficial to food pantries. By tracking inventory, food pantry managers can get a sense of what their clients’ preferences are and how the pantry’s attempts to push or nudge specific products are working.

**Informal Polls**
Informal polls are another easy, cheap, and anonymous way to ask your clients a specific question. For example, the pantry could set up a sign with a question and then set up three containers below it, each labeled with a different answer to the question. Clients could drop their pantry ticket into the answer box of their choice.

**INVITING CLIENTS INTO OTHER ROLES**
Beyond these strategies for soliciting client feedback during a specific window of time and in response to a specific topic, pantries also have other, longer-term options for incorporating client voices into the day-to-day work of the pantry, including:

- Forming an Advisory Committee that clients can join. For more information on this idea, see the Oregon Food Bank’s [Client Engagement report](#).
- Creating roles on the pantry’s Board of Directors to be filled by current or former clients.
- Allowing clients to serve as volunteers and when available, inviting clients to apply for open pantry staff positions.
Fundraising can be one of the most difficult and time-consuming aspects of running a pantry. By focusing on the most obtainable sources of funds, your efforts will be more productive. The topics in this section are laid out in order from the generally easiest to the most difficult to secure. Typically, a pantry with strong financial support will have funding from all of these categories.

**DONATIONS FROM INDIVIDUALS**
Local residents are generally a pantry’s best supporters, and individual donors are the source of most of the dollars given to charities. Large grants from foundations and corporations can provide significant sums of money, but donations from individuals make up 80 percent of all charitable giving.1 This support can come through one-time contributions or ongoing contributions. Below are some ideas for soliciting these types of gifts:

- Creating newsletters and social media campaigns
- Making phone calls, writing letters or emails, and arranging face-to-face meetings. Communications are most effective when personalized or coming from someone you know. Talk about your pantry with friends. They may want to donate without you even having to ask when they learn about the service your organization is providing.
- Fundraising events, such as meals at local restaurants with profits benefiting your pantry
- Organizing fund drives, such as digital food drives or shelf-sponsorship programs
- Encouraging your board members, staff, and volunteers to invite their communities to get involved
- Offering pantry tours to potential donors

Two important things to remember when soliciting donations are:

- **Ask** for financial support. Don’t just hint at needing help. If possible, ask for a specific amount and tell potential donors what that amount would accomplish. Develop a consistent fundraising message so everyone asking for donations uses correct information.
- **Thank** your donors. Small donors can become large donors, and one-time givers can become monthly supporters, if you are intentional about thanking the people who contribute. They will remember it. Ideas for thanking donors include personalized cards or emails, appreciation events, or free pantry gear.

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Two local pantries organized the Fairs Care fundraiser at the Marion County Fair. The pantries sold advance tickets to the Indiana State Fair at a reduced rate (or with a food donation).
IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS
In-kind contributions are products or services that are given to the pantry (at a discount or free of charge), which would otherwise need to be purchased. Find local companies that offer the goods and services you need, pitch your idea, show your nonprofit status, and ask if they would be willing to make a tax deductible contribution. Examples of in-kind contributions include:

- Discounted or free truck rentals for food pickups
- Shelving or freezers from a home improvement store
- Plants or seeds from a garden supply company
- Brochure design from a graphic designer
- Flyers from a printing company

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS
Partnerships with a local corporation can be mutually beneficial. Your pantry could receive funds, food donations, and volunteers, and in return, the company will be able to reach its goals of community investment and public relations. These types of partnerships or sponsorships could be ongoing or focus on a one-time event. For a sample letter to initiate contact with a local company, see the Healthy Pantry Packet created by Jump-IN for Healthy Kids.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT
Having your pantry written in as a line item in the budget of your church, school, or host organization is a huge asset, primarily because it provides a predictable source of funding. If your pantry is not written into the budget of the organization it’s connected to, consider collecting and presenting data from the pantry as well as inviting members of the board or other decision-makers to tour and volunteer in the pantry for a day. Use that opportunity to explain the need for consistent funding to support pantry operations.

CORPORATE GIVING PROGRAMS
While many corporates have formal giving programs, the few listed below have simple programs that are easy to join and use:

- Meijer SimplyGive
- Kroger Community Rewards
- Amazon Smile

TAX DEDUCTIONS
Your pantry likely already has receipts ready to give to donors large and small so they can deduct their contribution in their taxes. The Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) creates even more incentive for companies to donate to your pantry. NAP offers $2.5 million in tax credits ($40,000 maximum per organization) annually for distribution by nonprofits. When individuals or companies donate to a NAP organization, they will receive a tax credit on their Indiana taxes worth 50% of their contribution. For more information, visit the NAP webpage.

“You are not asking for something for nothing, nor are you asking for something for yourself. You are simply asking the person to support the work you are doing to fight hunger in your community.”
-Hunger Free NYC

GRANTS
Challenges of Grant Funding
Grants from the government or private foundations are a primary funding source for most nonprofit organizations. Because of their ability to provide large sums of money, grants are also an appealing source of funds for food pantries. While grant funding is appealing for obvious reasons, it also has its downsides, including the following points.

Restricted Funds
Very few funders allow their grant money to be used for ongoing operating costs, let alone to be used as unrestricted funding (i.e. to be spent however the nonprofit needs). Almost always, a receiving organization must propose a very specific project and budget for funding, and they must stick to that plan throughout the grant cycle. In other words, grant funding comes

Corporate volunteers from Fifth Third Bank sort through thousands of pounds of donated food at Servant’s Heart of Indy Food Pantry.
with strings attached. If your pantry needs money for a specific project, such as piloting a new program or offering new services to meet a proven need, purchasing a specific piece of equipment to increase capacity, or renovating physical space to expand operations, you might be able to consider grants as a source of funding. If, however, you need funds to cover necessary expenses like food, utility bills, staff time, or transportation, you will be unlikely to find grant funds to cover those costs.

**Required Time and Skills to Apply**

Crafting a grant proposal requires a specific style and format of writing. While these skills can be learned through library books, online resources, and community classes, even the most seasoned grant writers spend a significant amount of time applying for grants. Time spent includes researching opportunities, drawing connections between the organization’s projects and the foundation’s funding priorities, creating accurate budgets, and garnering letters of support from local organizations. The average amount of time it takes a professional grant writer to create a proposal for a foundation is 15-25 hours. Unless someone at your pantry has successfully applied for grants in the past, it will likely take your pantry much longer to complete this process. Before you start spending your time applying for grants that you are not guaranteed to receive, consider whether or not you actually have the extra time in your schedule to give this process the time it requires. Otherwise, you may compromise your current work with the pantry without anything to show for the lost time.

**Community Grants**

Unless someone in your pantry has grant writing experience or you have a specific project that aligns well with the funding priorities of a foundation, the best grants for a food pantry to start out with are smaller community grants. Many large companies (e.g. Walmart, Costco, etc.) run community grant programs that offer smaller grants (typically $5,000 or less) to local nonprofits, typically with less strenuous and competitive application processes.

**Grant Writing Resources**

If you have the time, skill, appropriate project, and wherewithal to apply for grants, here are a few resources that can help make the process easier:

- Sample documents, including cover letters, letters of inquiry, proposal budgets, and full proposals are available at the Grantspace website.
- The Indianapolis Public Library provides access to the Foundation Directory Online and Foundation Grants to Individuals Online. The library also occasionally offers free classes on using these resources.
- Purdue Extension organizes “The Beginner’s Guide to Grant Writing Workshop,” which teaches participants how to prepare and submit a proposal. This two-day event takes place throughout Indiana.
- To determine if your organization is ready to apply for a grant, complete the Grant Readiness Checklist from Funding for Good.
- A guide to the elements of a grant proposal is available on the Nonprofit Guides website.

**TIPS FOR FUNDRAISING: DATA & STORIES**

Receiving support, whether it’s from an individual, foundation, or company, is dependent on how well you convey your pantry’s impact and need through a combination of data and stories.
Data

Pantries looking to increase their funding need to have numbers that show their pantry’s current impact and the continued need for the pantry. Your pantry should be collecting some of these data internally, including:

- Number of individuals served per month or year
- Number of unique households served per month or year
- Number of total client visits per month or year
- Number of volunteers per year
- Total volunteer hours per year
- Amount of donated food received per year
- Amount of food distributed per year (pounds or meals)
- Pounds of food distributed per household (total pounds distributed divided by number of households served, or average actual pounds received by individual households)

Additionally, if your pantry is serving a large number of clients from a particular demographic, or if your pantry is intentionally making efforts to improve pantry operations, find ways to record that. Examples include:

- Number of veterans served (or percentage of total clients)
- Number clients needing translation served (or percentage of total clients)
- Pounds of fresh produce distributed (or percentage of total food distributed)

Other helpful data will focus on the city or neighborhood your pantry serves, and those metrics are collected by other organizations. Some useful data might include:

- Poverty rate in your service area
- Demographics in your service area
- Mean income in your service area

Several resources exist to help you find these data on the community. For data directly related to local hunger, Indy Hunger Network’s 2017 *Survey of Food Assistance Need in Marion County* is a good starting point (https://www.indyhunger.org/studies-reports). For data on almost any other topic, including demographics, income, household size, and housing costs, SAVI is an excellent resource. SAVI is a program of IUPUI’s Polis center. You can access their free tools on the SAVI website, or sign up for their free classes to learn how to use these tools.

Stories

While data are necessary to show funders the measurable impact your pantry has on the community, numbers can be hard to relate to. In contrast, personal stories and experiences collected in your pantry have the ability to make an emotional impact. Together, data and stories complement one another; inspiring stories are backed up by solid data, and this combination ideally brings donors to empathize and to act.

Collecting stories about your pantry’s work is a task that can be done by staff, donors, volunteers, and clients. Personal accounts from clients can resonate with potential donors because of the stories’ ability to build empathy. Having a collection of stories at hand will help your pantry write compelling grant applications, form partnerships with other organizations, and garner other kinds of support.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- “Financial Toolkit for Food Pantries,” Healthspark Foundation
IMPORTANCE OF PANTRY LEADERSHIP
No one can run a successful food pantry alone. Just as you need a group of volunteers to carry out the work, you need a group of trusted leaders to ensure that the pantry fulfills its mission in the community. The people who do the day-to-day work of running the pantry should not also be responsible for directing the organization or pantry as a whole. If your pantry is one of several programs run by a broader organization, you can opt for a less formal leadership structure, such as a Steering Committee or Advisory Committee, since your larger organization already has a Board of Directors. It’s critical to have a group of leaders that will support the pantry and provide oversight. In most cases, and certainly when the pantry has its own stand-alone nonprofit status, the model for pantry leadership is a Board of Directors.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
The primary purpose of the Board of Directors is to govern the organization and provide financial oversight. This group is responsible for creating policy and strategies to carry out the mission, using resources wisely, and following the legal standards for the organization. Generally, a board should consist of 7-18 members, meet regularly (e.g., quarterly), and represent a diversity of voices relevant to the work of the pantry. Board term lengths are generally 2-3 years with a limit of 2-3 terms. If possible, tenures should be staggered. Board members can provide huge benefits to the pantry; they help raise money, form new partnerships with their networks, provide financial and legal oversight, and use their varied professional or personal experiences to guide the work and mission of the pantry.

Relevant & Diverse Backgrounds
If your pantry is looking for new members for its board or committees, it can be easy to select the leaders who are already involved and who you already know. However, branching outside of your circle can bring new perspectives and resources to the pantry. Below are some of the backgrounds and characteristics that might be useful to have in leadership of a pantry:

- Knowledge of nonprofit operations
- Connections with the community
- Background in finance, accounting, or business
- Experience with social services
- Diverse perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds
- Passion for the pantry’s mission

“With a diversity of experience, expertise, and perspectives, a nonprofit is in a stronger position to plan for the future, manage risk, make prudent decisions, and take full advantage of opportunities.”
-National Council of Nonprofits

COMMITTEES
Committees can be developed either in addition to the general board or in the case of pantries that are part of a larger nonprofit, as a way of providing focused leadership without forming a Board of Directors. Within a board, committees allow a smaller group of people to focus on a specific aspect of the nonprofit and then report back to the board. Common committees include Steering, Advisory, Finance, Executive, Fundraising, Program, Marketing, and Advocacy.

PANTRY PLANS
Regardless of which kind of leadership model your pantry uses, one of the functions is to make plans for the future. While there is a great deal of financial planning, event planning, etc., two important kinds of plans that are commonly overlooked in a pantry are contingency plans and succession plans.

Contingency Plans
One of the things your board or a committee can help with is contingency planning. How will your pantry respond and adapt to emergencies in the community that require more food? Can you ramp up operations by adding a pantry day or distributing more food on each visit? Examples of emergencies to consider in developing contingency plans are government shutdown and furlough of employees, disruptions to SNAP and WIC, and economic recessions.
Succession Plans
Ensuring Pantry Sustainability

Another kind of planning your pantry should regularly engage in is succession planning. If something were to happen today that would prevent you from having any involvement in the pantry from now on, would the existing staff and volunteers of the pantry be able to carry on the work? Would pantry efficiency and quality decrease in your absence or worse, would the pantry cease to exist? In many pantries, the bulk of the responsibility falls on one person. You owe it to yourself, your volunteers, your supporters, and the community that relies on your help to prepare those around you to take on your responsibilities as seamlessly as possible.

Developing Leaders

One of the most important parts of a succession plan is equipping future pantry leaders. Even the most detailed written plan won’t be useful if there aren’t people who are ready to carry on the work. Generally, these leaders won’t just appear—people need to be given opportunities to grow into leadership. The most important trait to look for in future leaders is a passion for the work of feeding people. This isn’t as easily taught as day-to-day tasks and general pantry knowledge. Below are four steps for developing future leaders:

1. Assess all volunteers for their interest in leadership or other primary volunteer roles.
2. Maintain a list of the top 3-5 candidates for each role.
3. Create experiences that develop the needed skills and experiences in candidates.
4. Whenever possible, plan a leadership departure or transition 6-12 months in advance.

“Make some room for new and different people to take the lead. That’s how your hard work will continue and where your most important legacy lies.”
—Lianne Picot, Charity Village

Creating a Written Pantry Plan

The following pieces of information should be captured in written form and kept in a safe place in the pantry:

- Account numbers, usernames, and passwords
- History, development, and mission of the pantry
- List of primary people involved, including staff, board members, and volunteers, as well as the chain of command
- Proof of nonprofit status, if applicable, such as IRS determination letter
- Budget details and financial reporting process
- Ongoing funding sources, including for any current grants
- Pantry roles, including responsibilities, training material, and names of people trained for each role
- Food sources, process for receiving food from each source, and contact information
- Intake procedures and policies
- Nutrition policy for food sourcing
- Quantity of food distributed and process of data collection
- Daily schedule from open to close on stocking days and distribution days
- Monthly or yearly schedules, including audits, inventory, and reports
- Overhead, bills, and ongoing infrastructure expenses
- Laws, regulations, and certifications

Make a note on your calendar to spend an hour every six months updating the information in this document.

CREATING PANTRY POLICY

When you find something that works well in the pantry, write it down and make it a policy. Keep track of what you do in the pantry and what makes it successful. From fundraising to client intake to food sourcing, each pantry has its own specific, unique strategies that work in their particular context. Keep a record of what you do and why you do it, and when you leave the pantry, the good work you’ve done will remain.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Management Help
- “Boards & Governance,” State of Indiana
- Nonprofit Ready
- “Community Development Legal Project,” Indiana Legal Services
- “How to Build a Nonprofit Organization Series - Board Management,” Indianapolis Public Library
- Blue Avocado
The conditions that have produced inexplicable hunger in a land of plenty will not be changed overnight, but they will never change at all unless we begin to address the real issues standing in the way of eliminating hunger, not just alleviating it.”  
- Sharon Thornberry, Oregon Food Bank

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROGRAM</th>
<th>PROGRAM DESCRIPTION</th>
<th># SERVED (FY17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)</td>
<td>Enables low-income families to purchase food</td>
<td>42.2 million individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Lunch Program</td>
<td>Provides free or reduced price lunch to children in school</td>
<td>30 million children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Supplemental Nutrition Asst. Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)</td>
<td>Enables low-income parents, infants, and children to buy nutritious foods; provides nutrition education and referrals</td>
<td>7.3 million individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program</td>
<td>Provides vouchers for WIC recipients to redeem at farmers markets</td>
<td>1.7 million participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and Adult Care Food Program</td>
<td>Provides nutritious meals to children and seniors in daycare settings</td>
<td>4.5 million individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National School Breakfast Program</td>
<td>Provides low-cost or free breakfast to children in school</td>
<td>14.7 million children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer Food Service Program</td>
<td>Provides free meals and snacks to children during school breaks</td>
<td>2.6 million children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Farmers' Markets Nutrition Program</td>
<td>Provides low-income seniors with vouchers to redeem at farmers markets</td>
<td>816,207 individuals (FY16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program</td>
<td>Provides free fresh produce during the school day in elementary schools</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Milk Program</td>
<td>Provides milk to children not participating in other nutrition programs</td>
<td>41 million servings per month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)</td>
<td>Provides commodity food to State agencies, which distribute to nonprofits assisting low-income people</td>
<td>824 million lbs. distributed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commodity Supplemental Food Assistance Program</td>
<td>Provides commodity foods to low-income seniors</td>
<td>630,000 individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations</td>
<td>Provides commodity foods to low-income households living on or near Indian reservations</td>
<td>90,000 individuals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Federal nutrition programs are huge—they directly benefit millions of people. On a national level, SNAP alone provides about twelve times the number of meals provided by the Feeding America network.³ (Feeding America is the nationwide network of over 200 food banks that supply food, including USDA commodities, to pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and other programs in every county of the country.⁴ The Feeding America food bank serving Marion County, along with 20 other Indiana counties, is Gleaners Food Bank.) Private charities cannot compensate for the impact of even the smallest budget cuts to SNAP.⁵

Reason To Advocate #2: Address Root Causes of Hunger

Hunger is a symptom of poverty, which requires solutions beyond food aid. To help pantry clients and their families long-term, we need to address the reasons why more families keep falling into poverty and why some can’t manage to climb back out. Food helps, but there are so many other issues connected to poverty that play a role, including housing and wages. We can’t address all of these issues through food pantries, but pantries can advocate for large scale improvements that benefit low-income people.

VOTER EMPOWERMENT

One way to help your clients’ voices to be heard is to encourage them to vote! For information on conducting a voter registration drive at the pantry, see the flyer on voter registration drives from Indiana’s Secretary of State.

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HOW TO BE AN ANTI-HUNGER ADVOCATE

Know Your Representatives and Understand the Political Process

You can find your representatives at www.house.gov and www.senate.gov. If you want to learn more, enrolling in the “Changing the Systems to End Hunger” class organized by Bread for the World is a good place to start. For more information on the class, email pcase@bread.org.

Stay Informed

Stay informed about policies affecting hunger, including:

- Federal nutrition programs. These programs are funded through the Farm Bill and Child Nutrition Reauthorization. Protecting and strengthening these programs directly contributes to food security.
- Wages. People who work full time jobs should, in principle, be able to afford food. Policies reflecting that ideal would allow more working families to provide for their own food needs.
- Other topics that affect the day-to-day lives and futures of low-income people, including predatory lending practices, expanded Medicaid and affordable healthcare, safe and affordable housing, and eviction prevention.

One of the easiest ways to stay informed on these topics is to sign up for newsletters and alerts from trusted sources, including FRAC, Bread for the World, and MAZON. (See “Additional Resources” for more information.)

Speak Up

Once you understand the policies being discussed and you know who your representatives are, find appropriate strategies and times to voice your comments. Effective strategies for making your voice heard include:

- Communicating with representatives using personalized letters or emails with specific action items, including bill numbers or names of pending legislation
- Visiting representatives face-to-face
- Participating in public meetings
- Writing letters to the editor

Ideally, these actions will be timed to coincide with current events, hearings, and public comment periods. For more ideas on how to use these and other strategies, see the “Agency Advocacy Toolkit” from Philabundance.
Amplify Your Voice by Joining with Others

Your work will be more impactful if you join existing groups of people advocating for the same issues, or if you invite your community to join with you. Consider hosting or participating in letter writing campaigns or other collaborative advocacy efforts. You can also invite your pantry staff to join you, as well as church members, volunteers, and the local community. Additionally, your pantry can equip its clients to advocate for themselves by inviting them to participate in advocacy projects. Their personal stories and experiences can make a huge impact. As you invite others to join you, keep in mind that most people, no matter how educated, will likely need training and guidance to figure out how the political system works, who their representatives are, and what steps to take to effectively raise the profile of an issue.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Bread for the World is a Christian advocacy organization that equips people to write letters, meet with representatives, and work with others to end hunger. Bread for the World Indiana offers introductory classes on hunger advocacy called “Changing the Systems to End Hunger.” For information, visit Bread for the World’s state website or national website.
- MAZON is a Jewish advocacy organization that equips synagogues, schools, organizations, and the public to advocate to end hunger.
- Feeding America provides information on hunger advocacy on their website and offers email or text alerts on specific pieces of legislation.
- Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) publishes research and reports on food insecurity. Their website provides updates on current policies.
- Indiana Coalition for Human Services provides tips on communicating with legislators via phone, email, and letter. Their website posts updates on current bills and offers newsletters and alerts.
- “Agency Advocacy Toolkit,” Philabundance

Bread for the World Indiana representatives meet with Senator Todd Young.
There isn’t one perfect framework for running a food pantry, but there are some strategies that tend to work well for both those serving and those being served. This manual has provided an overview of options and ideas for food pantries. Choosing which options will work best in your context and the steps you take next is ultimately up to your pantry team.

CHOOSING THE NEXT STEPS
Reading through this manual, which topics or ideas stood out to you? Talk with your board members, volunteers, and clients about your pantry’s areas of excellence and the areas where you have room for improvement. Here are some questions to consider:

- Which topics in this manual is your pantry team most excited or passionate about?
- Is there any low-hanging fruit? Are there any strategies that are possible for you to accomplish without a lot of additional effort or resources?
- Which changes could make the biggest impact on your clients?
- Which changes would make your job easier?

INCREASED IMPACT THROUGH COLLABIMATION
Some of the practices in this manual require additional funding, space, labor, or other resources. Many pantries will only be able to gather the resources to put these practices into action if they collaborate with other pantries. If you want to be as effective as possible in addressing your community’s needs, consider partnering with organizations around you who are doing this work.

Pantry Collaboration
Here are some ways we’ve seen pantries collaborate successfully:

- Sharing transportation for food pickups, including renting a vehicle together, taking turns doing food pickups, and borrowing a vehicle from another pantry in exchange for help or payment

- Sharing pantry documents as templates, including volunteer training manuals, informational brochures, and volunteer recruitment information

- Consolidating food orders to access lower price points in wholesale or bulk markets

- Sharing storage space, especially refrigerator space

- Exchanging advice, experience, and ideas

- Partnering with a pantry that has young volunteers with complementary skills

- Collaborating on a large food drive

- Referring clients to other pantries

- Sharing extra food and resources, including perishable items that will go bad before your next pantry day and items your pantry doesn’t have the capacity to store

- Consolidating pantries. Many pantries across the country have merged and found that the pantry not only survived the change, but could serve more clients with less work. Are there any pantries in your neighborhood that could complement your pantry’s work by adding strength to your weak points? If merging would make your work more enjoyable and effective, and if the community you serve could be better off for it, it’s an option worth considering. The first steps to considering this option are to identify your pantry’s strengths and weaknesses and to get to know the pantries around you.

REVISITING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT
Creating a Plan to Strengthen Your Pantry
Now that you’ve finished reading this manual, revisit your completed self-assessment to identify areas of improvement and future goals for your pantry.
The coronavirus pandemic has impacted every pantry in the city, as well as the food system as a whole. Widespread disruptions to the food supply, job market, and everyday life have created a situation in which food pantries are serving more clients than ever before, while rapidly adapting their operations. It is a difficult time that will have long-lasting effects on our city. However, we're fortunate in Indianapolis that the major hunger relief organizations, local government, and other organizations are accustomed to collaborating. This collaboration has enabled organizations like IHN, Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank, Second Helpings, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, the Salvation Army, and many pantries throughout the city to quickly develop a coordinated response to meet increased need. We're proud of the way that hunger relief organizations have ramped up their operations while following public health guidelines, and it's phenomenal to see that approximately 78% of food pantries in Marion County stayed open to continue serving the community throughout the pandemic.

**PANTRY RECOMMENDATIONS: COVID-19**

Below are our suggestions, based on conversations with our partners, publications from the CDC, and strategies adopted by other hunger relief organizations. Some of our recommendations might be more conservative than what the county or state is recommending for the public, and that is because pantries serve vulnerable populations, and many of the volunteers staffing pantries are also at high risk for COVID-19. We want to be careful about procedures for resuming normal operations and lifting restrictions simply because food pantries provide such a vital service to the community. We cannot afford to put the emergency food system at more risk than necessary.

**Pantry Safety Information**

- We strongly recommend following the guidance of ISDH, MCPHD, and the CDC, which routinely release updated guidelines on their websites.
- Sanitize anything clients, staff, or volunteers touch, including door knobs, tables, and iPads. Clean frequently touched items, like carts or pens, between each use. Details on cleaning recommendations can be found on the [CDC website](https://www.cdc.gov).
- Make masks, handwashing stations, hand sanitizer, and/or gloves available to clients and volunteers.
- Distribute or post information about symptoms, prevention measures, and available resources (such as testing sites). Information can be placed in each client’s pantry box or made available during intake.

**Pantry Accessibility**

- Several pantries have started or expanded delivery programs that transport food directly to clients’ homes while minimizing social contact. Some pantries rely on volunteers to make the deliveries.
- While most pantries have shifted to drive-through models, some have many clients without cars. In that case, we recommend making accommodations to serve pedestrians or bicyclists—for example, offering a walk-through line with bike racks.
- Consider temporarily expanding or removing service area boundaries, especially if your pantry has the capacity to serve more clients.

**Intake Process**

- Intake requirements can be waived. We suggest counting the number of households served and the number in each household, but eliminating as much of the rest of the intake process as possible. Pantries distributing TEFAP commodities should follow guidance from ISDH regarding intake.
- Allow shopping by proxy for anyone who feels sick, is over age 60, or has health conditions that put them at a higher risk. Remember that proxy shoppers could be unable to present typical required documents. Consider posting proxy information on your website, social media, or in your pre-packed boxes.

**Food Sourcing**

- If you are organizing food drives during this time, we recommend creating a new list of wanted donation items. Pantries that are pre-packing food will likely need larger quantities of fewer items—for example,
it might be better for your pantry to receive a case of canned beans instead of a bag of assorted items. Your supporters might not have thought about this, so we recommend sharing this information.

- For donated foods, there is a chance the virus could be on the surfaces of the items’ packaging. One way to avoid spreading the virus is to let nonperishable items sit for a few days before handling and distributing them. If you don’t have the ability to do that, consider hanging signs to remind your clients to wash their hands after handling pantry items.

**Food Distribution**

- If possible, increase the amount of food distributed to each client in order to decrease the number of visits to your pantry (or another pantry).
- Most pantries are currently distributing pre-packed boxes of food using a drive-through or walk-through model. Some pantries prepare both shelf-stable boxes and refrigerated or frozen boxes. In an effort to offer an element of choice, some pantries allow clients to make choices about produce, bread, or other items.
- If space is limited, consider allowing clients to make appointments to visit the pantry so fewer people are there at one time. This could be done by assigning a set number of clients to 15-minute intervals.
- Some pantries have still managed to use a client choice model. If your pantry uses client choice during this time, ensure that all food is touched only by gloved and masked volunteers instead of clients, and that a 6-foot distance is kept between people.
- In order to maintain social distancing for walk-through pantries, we recommend limiting the number of people allowed in a given space at one time. A simple way to calculate the capacity of your space is to count how many people fit in the line or distribution area while maintaining a 6-foot distance.
- If possible, accommodate clients who have dietary restrictions—specifically those who are diabetic or have dairy or gluten allergies. Accommodations could include preparing pre-packed boxes for dietary restrictions or allowing volunteers to remove an item from a client’s bag if it isn’t appropriate.

**Healthy Options**

- Because of the disruptions to the supply chain, it can be hard to source healthy foods. We recommend reading the “Food Sourcing” section to identify any food sources your pantry isn’t currently utilizing, (e.g. HATCH for Hunger, Society of St. Andrew).

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Crooked Creek Food Pantry has a drive-through pantry. Tables of fresh and shelf-stable food bags and boxes are prepared for each client under tents in the parking lot.

Mid-North Food Pantry has a client choice, walk-through pantry. The photo on the left shows the line of food tables clients select from. The photo on the right shows that two tables separate volunteers from clients, and the food options are displayed on the tables closest to the volunteers. Gloved and masked volunteers bag the food for clients while maintaining social distancing.
• It can be difficult to distribute fresh foods in pre-packed boxes. Consider allowing clients to choose what they’d like from a list of items in a cooler, or pre-pack refrigerated bags that are kept cool during distribution. If your pantry is having trouble sourcing fresh foods, see the resources in “Healthy Options” for lists of healthy foods that are shelf-stable.

• We recommend distributing cooking or nutrition information and recipes while using pre-packed bags. If you’re giving out lentils, for example, simply place a half-sheet paper in the bag with a lentil recipe.

• If your pantry is offering elements of choice, healthy nudges are still possible. If you’re using lists, consider placing healthy items at the top of the list or marking healthy choices with symbols. For an example of a pantry list with healthy nudges, see the Shopping List on the Gleaners Nutrition Hub website. If clients are walking through the pantry, find ways to make the display appealing and offer healthy items at the front of the line.

Food Safety
• We recommend separating shelf-stable pre-packed bags from fresh or frozen pre-packed bags so the contents can be stored safely and easily.

• If you’re distributing food outdoors, coolers can hold pre-packed bags or items available for client choice. Umbrellas, tents, and cold blankets can also help regulate temperature. Alternatively, pre-packed bags can be stored in a refrigerator or cooler and transported outside in batches, as needed.

Wraparound Services
• We encourage pantries to continue offering non-food items. Consider sourcing sanitizer, tissues, masks, and cleaning products to give to clients.

• Wraparound services information can be distributed by packing flyers in food boxes, posting yard signs, or offering flyers during intake. We recommend focusing on health information, internet options, SNAP & WIC, Community Compass, pantry delivery programs, unemployment resources, eviction prevention, utility help, and domestic violence.

• For clients who need assistance applying for SNAP, the Gleaners SNAP Application Assistance Hotline is available at 317-644-1280.

• Unless you have the space and time to allow donations of used clothes, books, and other items to quarantine or be sanitized before handling, we recommend pantries temporarily stop accepting these donations.

Volunteers
• Encourage vulnerable volunteers to stay home if they can’t practice social distancing in the pantry. This includes older adults, people who are pregnant, and anyone with a health condition that puts them at risk.

• Require volunteers who feel sick or have recently been exposed to the virus to stay home.

• Train volunteers on the pantry’s new procedures for cleaning, disinfecting, and social distancing.

• We recommend that volunteers handling food items be required to wear gloves at all times. Rubber gloves can be sanitized and reused if disposable gloves are limited. Additionally, we recommend that volunteers interacting directly with clients wear masks.

• Many pantries have had their usual volunteers temporarily step back from the pantry. To tap into a different pool of volunteers, consider reaching out to people who have volunteered for special events (e.g. holiday programs), people who are working from home, and students who are home for the summer or e-learning. For more ideas on recruiting volunteers, see the “Volunteers” section.

• There are many ways for volunteers to work remotely. Potential tasks include: finding and writing grants, developing partnerships or corporate sponsorships, gathering nutrition information and recipes, collecting wraparound service information, creating a website or social media page, recruiting other volunteers, and planning food drives or fund drives.

• Volunteers who can be on-site but need to practice strict social distancing can contribute by improving the physical pantry space, packing bags of food, repairing equipment, and delivering food boxes.

Client engagement
• Inform the community when there are changes to your hours or other policies. If your pantry closes or changes hours, please email communitycompass@indyhunger.org as soon as possible so IHN can keep the Community Compass app updated.

Fundraising
• When applying for grants or asking for contributions, be prepared with current updates on your pantry’s response to COVID-19—for example, how many clients you’re serving compared to last year at this time and how your operations have changed.

• Consider asking volunteers who are staying home during the pandemic to help with grant writing and fundraising.
PANTRY LEADERSHIP

- We recommend that pantries continue to meet (virtually) with their Boards of Directors or other leadership teams in order to guide the plans for the pantries.

- As your pantry taps into a different pool of volunteers, consider finding ways to keep those new volunteers involved in the pantry after the pandemic ends. One strategy is to invite volunteers to join the Board or other committees.

ADVOCACY

- Advocacy work focused on relief packages, nutrition programs, and emergency response are critical during this time. We also recommend that pantries consider educating clients about voting, as absentee ballots could be used in upcoming elections. People who move or change residences frequently, as many pantry clients do, are more likely to miss their opportunity to receive a ballot. As we approach election season, consider sharing reminders about the timeline for registering and mailing ballots, instructions on filling out ballots properly, and offering opportunities to register at the pantry.

RESUMING NORMAL OPERATIONS

Following the lead of our partners, we do not recommend that any pantries begin serving clients indoors or removing social distancing guidelines until at least the end of August, if not through the fall. As we approach winter, if we don't have a vaccine yet, pantries will need to begin planning how to continue to serve outdoors using drive-through methods, how to ramp up delivery services, or how to limit the number of people allowed inside the pantry at any given time (by making appointments, being open more frequently, or spreading out the pantry to multiple rooms).

INFECTIOUS DISEASE AFTER COVID

Some of the lessons learned from this pandemic are good reminders for life after COVID-19. Even after we have a vaccine and resume normal life, infectious diseases will continue to be a problem. Statistically, pantry clients are more likely to have health issues and are more vulnerable to illness. Additionally, clients may be in precarious situations that prevent them from taking sick time at work. Since people tend to congregate at pantries, it’s worthwhile to develop policies in your pantry that will mitigate the spread of other infectious diseases, like the common cold and flu. Consider providing information to your clients and volunteers, implementing sanitation policies in the pantry, increasing the air flow and space between clients in your pantry, and continuing to use protective barriers to limit the spread of potentially infectious particles.

DEVELOPING RESILIENCE

We hope we will not face another pandemic for many years to come, but there will be other crises. Since we cannot predict the details of how each pantry will need to prepare, the best way for pantries to prepare for emergencies is to develop resilience. Below are some action items for building resilience:

- Recruit diverse volunteers of different ages and occupations. Cross-train volunteers on a variety of pantry tasks so they understand how the work is done.

- Develop relationships with pantries and other organizations around you. Get in the habit of collaborating with those organizations.

- Keep an emergency supply of items your pantry needs. If possible, maintain an emergency fund for essential expenses in case of unexpected events.

- Ensure your succession plan (see “PANTRY LEADERSHIP & SUSTAINABILITY”) is updated and easy to find.

- Establish clear methods for communicating with clients, volunteers, and the neighborhood. Make sure people know where to find updates about the pantry.

- Diversify your food sourcing plan. Form connections to the local food system and to regional suppliers.

- Preserve and improve your pantry’s relationships with donors, local partners, volunteers, and other organizations.

- Increase your pantry’s capacity to distribute different types of food—canned, boxed, fresh, and frozen.

- Improve your pantry’s ability to scale up distribution in the event that you need to meet increased demand.

- Build your clients’ resilience to crises by connecting them to wraparound services, advocating for strong public programs, and providing nutritious foods.

- Ensure your Board of Directors or leadership team is adaptable and accessible in order to call meetings with short notice and to make changes to pantry operations as necessary.

- Invite people with diverse professions, skills, and networks to join your Board of Directors or pantry leadership team.

- Diversify your pantry’s funding sources.
ENDNOTES

Role & Importance of Local Food Pantries


2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.


9. Ibid.


12. Ibid.


14. Ibid.

15. Chart data collected by Indy Hunger Network from service providers, including Feeding America/Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank, Second Helpings, St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, SNAP, WIC, CICOA, Meals on Wheels, Summer Food Program, and Child & Adult Care Food Program. Percent of food provided directly from food pantries and soup kitches is based on Map the Meal Gap (Gundersen, Engelhard, Satoh, Waxman), Feeding America data.


17. Data collected by Indy Hunger Network from Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank, Second Helpings, Connect2Help, Purdue Extension, and local pantry coalitions.

Pantry Accessibility


3. Ibid.

4. Henehan, “Experiences of Community College Students.”


Intake Process


Food Sourcing


Food Distribution


Healthy Options

2. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Hunger In America, 2014
7. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
15. Interview by author, Indianapolis, September 30, 2019.

Volunteers


Client Engagement


Fundraising


Pantry Leadership & Sustainability


Hunger Advocacy

5. “Feeding America Opposes Proposed Rule.”