INDY HUNGER NETWORK

Manual of Best Practices for Food Pantries

2nd Edition
February 2025

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual was created by Indy Hunger Network (IHN), a collaboration of organizations in Greater Indianapolis that promotes access for all to nutritious food through a sustainable hunger relief system. Our mission is to address systemic hunger issues and eliminate disparities in the Greater Indianapolis hunger relief system through collaboration on programs, advocacy, and research.

Since 2015, IHN has worked with food pantries in Indianapolis to increase capacity, foster collaboration, and share information and resources. In 2020, we created the first version of this manual 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 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 manual begins with a self-assessment to help pantries identify areas of strength and places for improvement. The topics were identified by IHN, our member organizations, and other 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 Greater Indianapolis area and is not comprehensive.

The first version of this manual was released in July 2020. Given the unprecedented changes that have taken place in the world, and specifically in our local food system, since then, the manual has been updated to include new information, resources, and ideas, and to ensure the most accurate and relevant information is provided.

As you use this manual, note that there are hyperlinks which will open referenced resources and websites. If you are reading a hard copy of this manual, you can open the links by accessing the digital version of the manual. Access the digital version on Indy Hunger Network's website, or by scanning the QR code below.

Thank you for your ongoing work to feed our communities.

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Original graphics for the second version of the *Manual of Best Practices* reflect the findings from the 2023 IHN Hunger Study.

ABBREVIATION GUIDE

Throughout this document, the following abbreviated terms are used:

ADA - The Americans with Disabilites Act

CDC - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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 Program for Women, Infants, and Children

ROLE & IMPORTANCE OF FOOD PANTRIES

POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY IN CENTRAL INDIANA

The distribution of emergency food through food pantries is a response to food insecurity, and food insecurity is rooted in poverty. Poverty rates in Indianapolis are higher than the national average of 11%; in 2023, 15% of Marion County residents lived below the poverty line. Specific neighborhoods in Marion County have a much higher poverty rate; more than 42,000 residents live in areas with poverty rates of over 40%.[1]

Food insecurity has its own unique set of challenges and solutions, but it is not a problem that exists in isolation. While not all people experiencing food insecurity have incomes that are technically below the federal poverty line, there is a strong link between poverty and food insecurity. Poverty, unemployment, and insufficient income are "key drivers of individual and household food insecurity across the country."[2] In other words, people in Indianapolis are not food insecure due to food scarcity; people experience food insecurity when they don't have enough money to buy the food they need.

DATA-INFORMED INSIGHTS ON LOCAL FOOD INSECURITY

Hunger continues to be a major issue in Indianapolis.

Throughout the U.S. as a whole, 13.5% of residents experience food insecurity.[3] However, in Central Indiana, the rate is significantly higher. As shown in the graphic to the right, 31% of Marion County residents have a food need, meaning they are food insecure. This represents over 300,000 people. Of this group, most people were able to access enough food assistance to avoid missing meals. About 40% of Marion County

residents experiencing food insecurity were not able to meet their food needs, even with assistance. The total number of annual meals missed in Marion County was estimated to be approximately 16 million meals in 2023, a significant increase from the 4-9 million missed meals reported per year in IHN's 2017, 2020, and 2021 studies.[4]

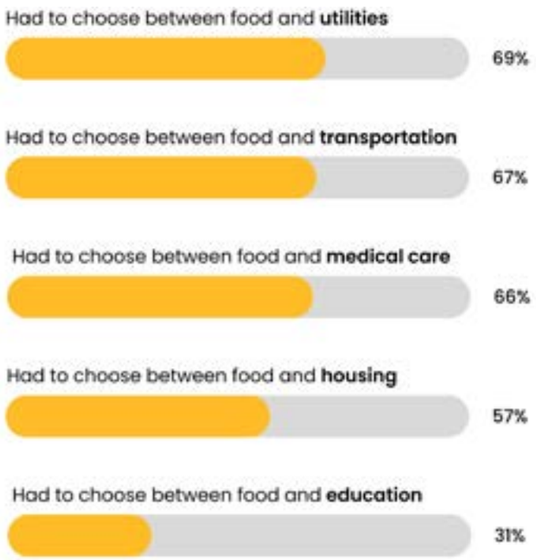
Many people with jobs are experiencing food insecurity.

Even with stable employment, food insecurity remains an issue because of insufficient wages and rising costs of living. According to IHN's 2023 Survey of Food Assistance Need, 58% of people reporting a need for food assistance are employed, and 75% of households with a food need have one or more people in their household who are employed. However, employment alone is not always enough to get by. A full-time job earning minimum wage in Indiana yields a gross annual salary of $15,080. Depending on company size and part-time versus full-time status, benefits like health insurance might not be included. A full-time job is not a step out of poverty if it does not pay a living wage. United Way describes these 'working poor' as the ALICE (Asset Limited,

Income Constrained, Employed) population, meaning households with income higher than the federal poverty level but less than the basic cost of living for the area. In 2016, 29% of Marion County residents were reported to be in this category. Including residents who make less than the federal poverty level, 47% of people in Marion County are making too little money to make ends meet.[5] For more information on United Way's ALICE project, visit the United Way website.

People experiencing hunger are forced to make compromises.

According to the Hunger in America report (2014), people using food pantries and soup kitchens responded that they:
In an attempt to meet food needs,



respondents in the same study reported using coping methods, including:

- Purchasing inexpensive, unhealthy food (79%)
- Receiving help from friends (53%)
- Watering down food or drinks (40%)
- Selling or pawning personal property (35%)
- Growing food in a garden (23%)
- More than half of respondents reported using three or more of these methods.[6]

Food insecurity is about more than missed meals.

Food insecurity "describes a household's inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life."[7] It refers to a reduction in the amount or nutritional quality of food eaten in a household due to lack of money or resources. While the number of missed meals is a good indicator of low food security, food insecurity can manifest itself in other ways as well.

The following situations are also examples of food insecurity.

- Eating smaller meals than needed, due to not being able to purchase additional food
- Eating low quality and/or unhealthy foods, due to not being able to purchase healthier or better quality food
- Feeding some household members (e.g. children), while other members of the household go without food (e.g. parents)

All of the cases above, including missing meals, are situations that should be taken seriously and addressed.

Food insecurity is traumatic.

Food insecurity is a stressful, scary, and disturbing experience that can affect people emotionally and physically. Knowing this, food pantries and other food safety net programs have the opportunity to practice trauma-informed care. For a quick summary of trauma-informed nutrition, see resources from Leah's Pantry.

Current demand for food assistance is at an all-time high.

Before the pandemic, efforts to address food insecurity were starting to pay off. For example, the estimated number of meals missed annually dropped from 9-10 million in 2014 to 4-5 million in 2017. However, hunger was markedly worse in 2023 than before or during the pandemic. The prevalence of food insecurity in Marion County in 2023 was approximately 30%, higher than June 2020 (25%), and well above the pre-pandemic level (20%). In Marion County, the estimate of meals missed was 16 million meals per year, a substantial increase from 4-9 million per year from 2017 to 2021.

> *"The **need for food assistance occurs across a wide range of household income levels**, from <50% of the federal poverty level to >185% of FPL."*
> –2023 Hunger Study

When the pandemic started, there was a sudden increase in demand for food assistance. News stations across the country reported on record-breaking long lines at food pantries. In response to the unprecedented need, the private, public, and philanthropic sectors stepped up to meet the need.

In the public sector, new programs and policies were quickly implemented to make it easier to access food. For example, monthly benefit amounts for SNAP were increased and some restrictions to receiving SNAP were waived. A new Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program was launched to provide grocery money to families with students while attending school virtually. The USDA distributed Farmers to Families food boxes to communities throughout the country. The WIC program began allowing virtual appointments to sign up for benefits. American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding supported the expansion of many charitable organizations and food assistance resources.

In the private sector, some corporations increased charitable contributions to support local food security efforts, and others partnered with local pantries or started their own food pantries to provide on-site assistance to their employees and community members.

In the philanthropic sector, food pantries and meal sites expanded operations to keep up with demand. Many food pantries removed document requirements, service area restrictions, and other intake policies, added home delivery programs, and streamlined operations to serve more people while social distancing. During the pandemic, food pantries in Indianapolis were serving significantly more people than before the pandemic—some as many as twice or triple the number of households per month. In 2022, the charitable food system (food pantries and meal sites) provided even more meals than it had in 2021 or 2020. The Lilly Endowment, United Way, and CICF also pooled resources to provide funds to support local nonprofits through the Central Indiana COVID-19 Community Economic Relief Fund (C-CERF).

As vaccines became available, social distancing requirements loosened, and employment rates increased, many middle class and higher-income families in Indianapolis began to bounce back from the difficulties of the pandemic. However, for many low-income families and people experiencing food insecurity, making ends meet is even more difficult now than it was during the pandemic. In 2022, following

The Working Hungry Documentary

The Working Hungry is a documentary that focuses on the struggles of working families experiencing food insecurity across Indiana, despite being employed. The film is available to stream on the PBS website.

the end of the public health emergency, emergency supports were scaled back. For example, SNAP benefit allotments decreased, the USDA Farmers to Families boxes program ceased operations, and some food pantries reinstated stricter intake policies. Without these supportive measures in place, and with 2022's inflation rates at their highest level in 40 years, accessing enough food has become extremely difficult for a large group of people in our communities.

ROLE OF PANTRIES IN HUNGER RELIEF

Currently, in 2025, there are at least 210 food pantries in Marion County. In total, food pantries provide needed groceries and other household items to approximately 125,000 residents each year. Food pantries make a significant impact on food security, not just for the specific individuals relying on pantries for food, but also for the overall food safety net in Indianapolis.

The food safety net (including charitable meals from pantries and meal sites, as well as meals from government sources or meals from Federal Nutrition Programs) provides approximately 180 million meals annually in Marion County to people experiencing food insecurity. Eligibility for each of the programs or resources that make up the food safety net is largely based on household income. As shown in the graphic below, individuals and families across the income spectrum (below the federal poverty level to above 185% of the poverty level) experience food insecurity. Higher-income households (i.e., those with incomes above 185% of the poverty level) are still experiencing food insecurity at alarmingly high rates, but are not eligible for any public assistance 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 income spectrum.

One Unique Part of a Larger System

Food pantries are uniquely positioned to meet needs that most other food safety net programs cannot. Food pantries can:

- Respond to food needs immediately (i.e., no application or waiting period)
- Serve people experiencing both temporary setbacks and chronic food insecurity
- Supplement assistance received from federal nutrition programs
- Serve people who have barriers to employment
- Serve people who do not qualify for federal nutrition programs
- Connect people to additional resources and information
- Provide a welcoming, empathetic experience during a stressful time

Income Bracket	Annual Income Examples	Percent of Food Insecure Residents	Program Eligibility					
			SNAP	WIC	Free School Meals	Reduced Price School Meals	Meal Sites	Food Pantries
>185% of Federal Poverty Line	>$57,720 (family of 4)	24%	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓
130% - 185% of Federal Poverty Line	$40,560 - $57,720 (family of 4)	21%	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓
100% - 130% of Federal Poverty Line	$31,200 - $40,560 (family of 4)	24%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<100% of Federal Poverty Line	<$31,200 (family of 4)	21%	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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 assistance, especially to those who are in crisis and/or do not receive enough benefits from other programs to access all the food they need.

For these reasons, pantries are a critical element of the food safety net. However, compared to some of the other food safety net programs, food pantries provide relatively few meals to the community. In Marion County, federal nutrition programs provide the majority of the meals for food insecure people, with SNAP, WIC, school meals, and summer meals providing over 80% of the total meals in our county's food safety net.[8] From food pantries to SNAP to free school meals, there are benefits and unique aspects to each program. All of the programs that make up the food safety net need to be strengthened in order to eliminate the meal gap in Indianapolis.

IHN also collects data on the number of people using various safety net programs in Marion County. In 2023, 43% of residents with a food need used food pantries, which makes food pantries the safety net program that is used by more people than any other. This percentage has increased significantly in recent years; in 2018 it was 31%, in 2021 it was 39%, and in 2023 it was 43%.[9]

SELF-ASSESSMENT

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.

IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?	NO	SOMEWHAT	YES
Pantry Accessibility			
Determine whether your pantry hours overlap with nearby pantries			
Collaborate with nearby pantries to ensure that clients can access a food pantry any day of the week			
Survey clients about pantry hours			
Evaluate the addresses of out-of-area clients to see if there is a geographic area that is underserved by pantries			
Post pantry information on Community Compass			
Post pantry information on a website or social media			
Post a sign outside with the pantry location and times			
Establish policies on when the pantry will close due to weather or other issues, and share these policies regularly			
Recruit volunteers to interpret languages commonly spoken in the pantry			
Translate pantry documents into languages commonly spoken in the pantry			
Serve out-of-area clients once per year			
Offer free parking and bike racks			
Comply with ADA requirements			

IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?	NO	SOMEWHAT	YES
Create written policies for accessibility in your pantry			
Intake Process			
Ask intake questions in a private space, and inform guests about how stheir information will be used			
Remove all unnecessary questions from the intake process			
Require only one proof of address or identification			
Improve the efficiency of intake by using digital tools			
Make all religious activities or questions optional			
Post a list of expectations for clients and volunteers			
Keep track of shopping order without a physical line			
Offer the option to make appointments for the pantry			
Offer activities and services in the waiting area			
Create written policies for intake in your pantry			
Food Sourcing			
Source food from a food bank			
Source 50% or more of food inventory from free sources			
Source no more than 40% of your inventory from any one source (other than a food bank)			
Ask for specific items in food drives			
Create written policies for food sourcing in your pantry			
Food Distribution			
Use a choice model (shopping or list)			
If using a pre-packed model, offer an element of choice (e.g. a trade table or free table)			
Give larger amounts of food to larger families			
Create written policies for distribution in your pantry			

IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?	NO	SOMEWHAT	YES
Healthy Options			
Offer healthy options every time the pantry is open			
Provide recipes or cooking and nutrition tips to clients			
Offer information on health-related wraparound services			
Provide health screenings or services on-site			
Place healthy items at eye level			
Pair meal-making items together			
Place produce first in distribution line			
Give clients multiple exposures to healthy items			
Post photos of healthy food in waiting areas			
Use 'shelf talker' signs for healthy options			
Display suggested amounts of unlimited items			
Educate volunteers about healthy options			
Offer samples or taste tests in the pantry			
Incentivize healthy options (e.g., no points, unlimited)			
Host cooking or nutrition classes, or connect people to programs offered nearby			
Create written policies for healthy foods in your pantry			
Food Safety			
Maintain food safety certification for at least one pantry leader			
Train volunteers in food safety, and post printed reminders of practices throughout the pantry			
Distribute food safety information to pantry guests			
Create written policies for food safety in your pantry			
Wraparound Services			
Promote Community Compass in the pantry			
Post information on wraparound services			
Co-locate with a wraparound service			
Invite organizations to visit the pantry to offer services			

IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?	NO	SOMEWHAT	YES
Create written policies for wraparound services in your pantry			
Serving Communities with Unique Needs			
Research the demographics of your pantry guests and neighborhood			
Offer culturally-appropriate foods			
Have a plan for improving service to at least one specific demographic served by your pantry			
Create written policies for improving service to specific communities			
Volunteers			
Create defined volunteer roles and needs			
Recruit volunteers beyond your host organization			
Use online sign-ups for volunteers			
Create a volunteer training or orientation plan			
Train volunteers in conflict de-escalation, cultural awareness, and interacting with vulnerable populations			
Train volunteers in emergency plans			
Host volunteer appreciation events			
Recognize volunteer contributions regularly			
Track volunteer time			
Solicit volunteer feedback			
Create written policies for volunteer recruitment, training, and appreciation in your pantry			
Using & Collecting Feedback			
Implement strategies to receive ongoing feedback from pantry users			
Invite pantry users to fill other roles in the pantry (e.g., volunteers, board members, staff)			
Create written policies for feedback in your pantry			
Fundraising			
Develop a consistent fundraising message			
Receive funds from diverse sources			
Train volunteers and board members to fundraise			

IN YOUR PANTRY, DO YOU...?	NO	SOMEWHAT	YES
Collect data and stories from the pantry			
Create written policies for fundraising in your pantry			
Pantry Leadership & Sustainability			
Have a pantry board or leadership group			
Establish responsibilities, roles, and term limits			
Develop contingency plans			
Conduct succession planning, including drafting a written pantry plan			
Create opportunities to develop volunteers into pantry leaders			
Anti-Hunger Advocacy			
Enroll in a anti-hunger advocacy training			
Receive updates on important policies impacting hunger			
Send comments or letters to representatives			
Invite volunteers and pantry guests 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

EVALUATING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF YOUR PANTRY

The degree to which neighborhood residents or your pantry's target demographic can easily access your food pantry's services is a key factor in determining your pantry's potential impact.

Decisions about open times and service areas are typically made in the early days of running a food pantry. It's a good idea to revisit these policies every so often to ensure your pantry is operating as effectively as possible. However, given the number and scale of changes that happened as a result of the pandemic, it is especially important for food pantries to evaluate how accessible their services are to the communities they aim to serve.

SERVICE AREAS

We recommend that pantries serve as large an area as they can serve well. Open service areas allow anyone to visit the pantry, regardless of where they live. Some pantries like having an open service area because they do not want to turn anyone away. In addition to being more accessible to more people, open service areas have have the additional benefits of making eligibility easier for everyone to understand and reducing the amount of time spent on intake. However, some food pantries simply don't have the space, food supply, food storage, volunteer labor, or other resources needed to serve everyone who comes to their door. For that reason, many pantries have defined service areas,

Serving Out-of-Area or Ineligible Patrons

If someone shows up at the pantry but is ineligible to receive food (e.g. due to their address being out of your service area), your pantry can respond in one of several ways. Below, the primary options are listed from least recommended to most recommended.

No service

Ineligible visitors are turned away with no food or resources.

Pre-packed bag

Ineligible visitors are given an emergency bag of pre-packed, nonperishable food..

Pre-packed bag + fresh foods

Ineligible visitors are given an emergency bag of pre-packed food, including perishable items (e.g. milk, fruit).

Full service (once)

Ineligible visitors are allowed to fully utilize the pantry once, as if they were fully eligible for it.

Full service (once) + referral to other pantries

Ineligible visitors are allowed to fully utilize the pantry once, and are provided with information on finding a food pantry they are eligible for.

There are several options for serving people who live outside of your service area or are ineligible for your services. Notice in this spectrum of practices, the red is generally not recommended, and the green is considered a best practice. Regardless of which method your pantry uses, referring people to another pantry is always a good idea. To do this, you can demonstrate how to use the Community Compass app, share a link to a specific resource on Community Compass, or refer them to 211.

which enable them to address needs in their neighborhoods while directing out-of-area clients to the pantries closest to them. The following factors should be considered when re-evaluating whom your pantry will serve.

Capacity

How many people can your pantry serve, given your food supply, volunteer base, financial support, and physical space? Is your pantry currently running at capacity? If you are running out of food, turning people away, or reducing the amount of food available to each household, your pantry is over capacity and should consider limiting your service area (and/or expanding operations to meet the need). On the other hand, if you could be serving more people than you currently are, increasing the service area could help your pantry increase its impact and hit capacity, especially if the increase in service area is paired with community outreach to inform residents of the expanded area that your pantry is available to them.

Service Gaps and Overlaps

How many other pantries are open to your service area? Are any nearby neighborhoods or zip codes underserved by pantries?

Simplicity for Visitors

Navigating the charitable food system while experiencing food insecurity is a stressful experience in itself. It's even more difficult for people who are new to town, people who don't speak or read English fluently, and people who change addresses frequently. To reduce barriers to accessing food, we recommend making it easy to understand your pantry's service area. Specifically, we recommend defining service areas by counties, zip codes, or townships. Unless absolutely necessary, we do not recommend dividing defined areas (e.g., "the eastern half of Hendricks County") or using boundaries that are unfamiliar to the public (e.g., parish or church-related boundaries).

HOURS

We recommend that pantries offer as many open hours per month as possible–the more the pantry is open, the more accessible your pantry will be to the community. The following factors should be considered when evaluating when and how frequently your pantry is open.

Capacity

How long and how often can your pantry be open, given your space, staffing, and other resources? If you have the capacity to extend your current hours or to add more open hours throughout the month, we recommend it so that your pantry can have as much impact as possible.

Service Gaps and Overlaps

When are other pantries in your neighborhood open? Do your hours overlap with their hours? Ideally, neighborhood residents should have access to a pantry every day of the week, including at least one or two evening and/or weekend time slots for people who are working or otherwise busy during typical work hours. If it seems like the majority of the pantries in your area are open during the day on weekdays, adding pantry hours that include evenings or weekends could significantly increase your pantry's accessibility and impact.

Community Needs

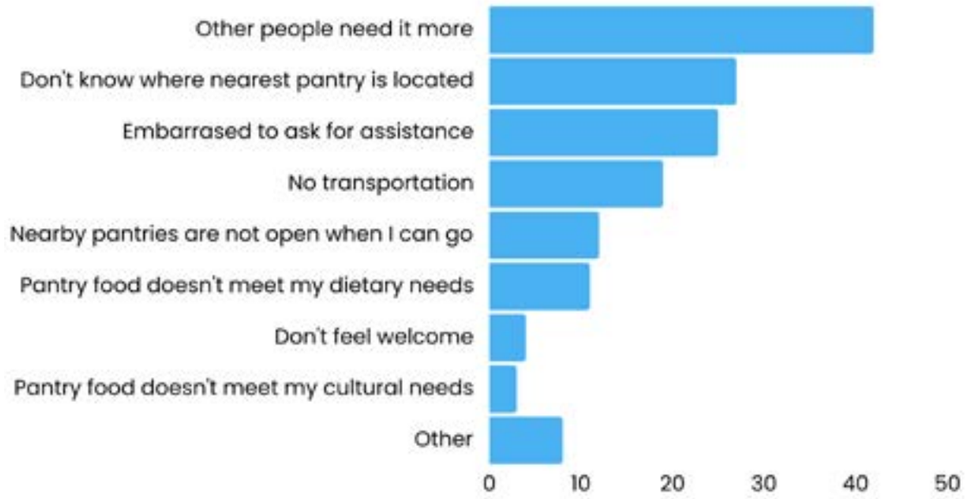
Gathering information from neighborhood residents on when the pantry should be open in order to best meet needs is a great idea, but in practice it can be difficult. For example, surveying people in the pantry will deliver skewed results, since all survey respondents will be people who are able to access the pantry. That said, there are still opportunities to center community needs and de-center pantry or volunteer preferences. Many food pantries throughout Indianapolis selected their open hours based on the needs of the pantry—for example, to align with the schedules of volunteers, food pickups, or building availability. However, this has typically resulted in pantries selecting hours in the middle of the weekday. Considering that the majority of food insecure households in Marion County have at least one member of the household who is employed, a food pantry that is only open during regular business hours is likely to be inaccessible to a large number of households.

Simplicity for Visitors

Food pantry hours can be complicated. For example, many pantries are open "the second Thursday of the month" or "the last Wednesday of the month" or "the first and third Tuesdays at 10am, and the 4th Thursday at 4pm." This can be confusing and difficult to remember. If your pantry is able to be open at the same time every week, it would make visiting the pantry easier. If your pantry is unable to be open more than once or twice per month, consider posting reminders on social media or sharing a print or magnet calendar of open dates with pantry guests.

If you have not had all the food you needed, why have you or someone else in your household not gone to a food pantry?

Responses from Indiana residents experiencing food insecurity:



WEATHER-RELATED CLOSING POLICIES

Everyone should know before arriving at the pantry whether or not it will be closed due to weather. The easiest way to do this is to have a 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 Indianapolis Public Schools are closed, the pantry is closed. If schools have a delay, the pantry will be open as usual." Other pantries make a point of updating their Facebook pages or sending out a text to people that have opted into being notified.

Northside Food Pantry displays their weather policy as one of the first things clients see when they enter the shopping area.

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. In recent years, growing numbers of pantries have started allowing more frequent pantry visits, with some allowing people to visit as often as they need.

Low wages contribute to chronic food insecurity

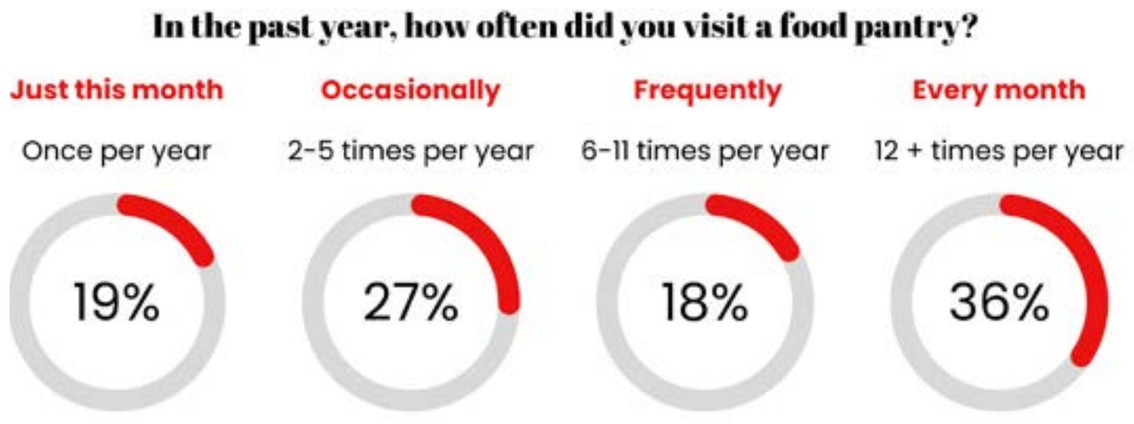
Indiana's minimum wage is $7.25 per hour. According to the Good Wages Initiative, a living wage is at least **$18 per hour + health insurance**.

MEETING EMERGENCY AND ONGOING NEEDS

As mentioned in the last section, food pantries are uniquely positioned to respond to both acute and chronic food needs. Food pantries have historically provided emergency food to people experiencing temporary setbacks. However, there is also a growing demand for food pantries as an ongoing, supplemental food source.

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.

The shift from pantries addressing primarily emergency needs to addressing primarily ongoing needs is due to several factors. One of the biggest factors is wages—many people experiencing food insecurity are employed for wages that are too low to cover their basic needs. These families continue to earn paychecks, but the paychecks are never high enough to cover all of their basic needs, food included.



This shift also has important implications for pantries. First, in order to best meet ongoing needs, pantries might consider allowing people to use the pantry more often. Second, pantries might consider increasing the amount of food they provide to each person. This is especially important for pantries that are only open once or twice per month.

REMOVING BARRIERS TO ACCESSING FOOD PANTRIES

While food pantries are positioned to be one of the most accessible food resources in the food safety net, there can still be many barriers that prevent people from accessing food pantry services. Open hours and limited service hours can be major barriers, as discussed above. Listed below are some of the other common barriers to accessing pantries, as well as ideas for removing these barriers.

Home Delivery Programs

Before 2020, pantries that offered home delivery services were almost unheard of. While there were a few food pantries across Central Indiana that offered delivery, it was certainly not a common practice. However, the COVID-19 pandemic changed that. Almost immediately in March 2020, home delivery programs started to become one of the central ways that people experiencing food insecurity accessed food. Currently, multiple pantries are using home delivery as an innovative solution to pantry accessibility issues. For more information about home delivery programs, routing software, and platform integrations, see the following articles:

- Food Bank News - Routing Software
- Food Bank News - Uber Eats Delivery
- Food Bank News - DoorDash Platform and Link2Feed

A sign outside of ICAN Food Pantry helps direct visitors to the pantry.

Unclear Expectations

Not knowing basic information about the pantry (when the pantry is open, that the pantry will not run out of food, what the eligibility requirements are, etc.), can prevent people from using the pantry, especially people who are new to the charitable food system. If someone puts the time and energy into getting to the pantry and is unable to be served because pantry times changed without notice, the pantry ran out of food, or their address wasn't included in the service area, they will be less likely to risk the time and transportation cost of going to food pantries in the future, and their family's food supply will become even more unstable. Pantries that are open to the public should be listed with accurate information on both Community Compass and 211.

If your pantry is not listed on Community Compass, either email communitycompass@indyhunger.org, or fill out the feedback form on the app or website. If your information changes, contact Community Compass using the email address above or through the feedback form. If your pantry is not listed on 211, submit a 211 inclusion request on their website. If your information changes, try to report the change as soon as possible using the Provider Search webpage.

In addition to Community Compass and 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 people to the correct place and create a welcoming atmosphere.
- Information on a website or social media page with open times, requirements, and service area makes it easier for clients to find accurate answers to their questions. Since most people have smartphones, including at least 71% of low-income individuals, an online presence is helpful.
- Provide flyers, brochures, or other informational materials to local organizations serving your community (e.g., libraries, community centers, schools).
- Update your pantry's hours on Google Maps and Apple Maps.
- If your hours change or if the pantry closes temporarily, consider sharing that information on social media.

Intake Policies

Requiring specific documents, referrals, or paperwork to access the food pantry can prevent people from using the pantry. Even if a person lives in the service area and meets the criteria to utilize the pantry, these requirements can be a barrier when they either don't have the proper documents or when they don't feel comfortable sharing personal information with the pantry.

Here are some ideas to consider to address barriers from intake:

- Reduce the number of documents and activities required for service. Consider whether or not your pantry needs to require any documents. If documents are required for reporting or other record-keeping, then in most cases we recommend requiring just one document per household for proof of address, such as an ID with current address, a recent bill with address included, or a recent piece of mail displaying address. Additionally, if possible, we recommend eliminating activities that are required for service (e.g., referrals from outside agencies, participation in religious services or activities). Note: Pantries receiving TEFAP foods typically have additional policies to follow regarding intake, and participating pantries must keep up-to-date on current TEFAP requirements.

> *"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

- Allow proxy shoppers. Proxy policies allow a designated representative to pick up food for another person who otherwise could not access the pantry.

Hours Based on SNAP Distribution Date

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 was once the case, SNAP benefits are currently 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.

Last Name	Deposit Date
A/B	5th
C/D	7th
E/F/G	9th
H/I	11th
J/K/L	13th
M/N	15th
O/P/Q/R	17th
S	19th
T/U/V	21st
W/X/Y/Z	23rd

Depending on your pantry's reporting requirements (e.g., TEFAP distribution sites), your pantry might be required to have both the proxy shopper and the person being represented by the proxy complete and sign a form before the proxy is allowed to receive food from the pantry. If a proxy form is not required by external partners, we recommend allowing pantry visitors to pick up food for at least one additional household.

For more on this topic, see Section 3: Intake Process.

Transportation

People who use food pantries also use diverse modes of transportation. In urban areas like Indianapolis, we see pantry guests walking, as well as using bicycles, cars, buses, and ride shares. Proximity to a bus line is somewhat out of the pantry's control, but the rest of these modes of transportation can be accommodated in order to increase accessibility. Here are some accessibility questions to consider: Is there plenty of free parking near the pantry? Is there a safe and secure place to park bicycles? If your pantry is a drive-through pantry, do you have options for pedestrians and/or people who will be dropped off from cars? While some parts of the city might see more cars and others might see more walkers, cyclists, and bus riders, it's important for pantries to consider how all types of transportation will be accommodated at the pantry.

Here are some transportation-related tips for improving access to the pantry.

- If your pantry is on/near a bus line, apply for free bus passes from IndyGo to share with people who want to visit the pantry.
- Add bicycle racks outside the pantry.
- Secure enough free parking near the pantry to ensure visitors can park.
- Ensure sidewalks, parking lots, bicycle racks, and other areas around the pantry are safe and well-lit.

Physical Space

Transportation and location are aspects of a pantry's physical accessibility. In addition, pantries should consider the accessibility of the pantry space itself.

Here are some accessibility questions to consider.

- Are your doorways, shopping aisles, and floors accessible via wheelchair?
- Is your pantry space accessible to someone who can't use the stairs?
- If not, how can you accommodate pantry guests who have physical limitations to entering the pantry?

In some cases, improving accessibility might be as simple as adding a ramp into the building. In other cases, pantries might consider options such as adding an accessible waiting area and training volunteers to shop for people who are unable to access the pantry space.

Additionally, since physical accessibility is connected to physical safety, one or more pantry leaders should be trained in conflict de-escalation. To a similar end, many pantries also opt to post visual reminders of their policies on weapons in the pantry.

Here are some tips to improve the accessibility of your pantry's physical space:

- Add ramps, widen doorways and aisles, repair sidewalks, and ensure pantry space is accessible to someone in a wheelchair.
- If your pantry area is physically inaccessible to some (e.g., because of stairs), create a policy for serving people in an alternative location or manner.
- Train pantry leaders in conflict de-escalation.
- Post a no-weapons policy at the entrance of the pantry.

Communication & Language

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.

- Recruit volunteers to be interpreters throughout the intake and distribution processes.
- Adopt a distribution model that requires less verbal or written communication, such as a shopping model.
- Translate the pantry list into other languages or use pictures.
- Use apps, translator devices, and/or professional services to provide real-time interpretation and translation. Many pantries are successfully using mobile apps to speak and type back-and-forth with people who don't speak English. Alternatively, some food pantries have started using handheld translator devices, which can operate without internet and do not require a phone. Finally, for conversations that involve a lot of information or that require the use of a less commonly spoken language, professional translation and interpretation companies (e.g., GLOBO Language Services, Midwest Lanage Services) offer on-demand, phone-based interpretation services. These services are typically charged by the minute and are available in essentially every language spoken in Indiana.

Stigma & Fear of Disrespectful Treatment

Embarrassment about needing food assistance, as well as the fear of being mistreated while seeking food assistance, can prevent a person from accessing the resources they need. IHN's 2023 Hunger Study found that of the Marion County residents who are experiencing food insecurity but not using food pantries, 25% of that group said the reason they don't use food pantries is because of embarrassment. Furthermore, this study also included questions about perceptions of discrimination while seeking food assistance (from pantries, as well as other private and public sources). Half of respondents felt looked down upon by people they encountered while seeking assistance. Up to one quarter of respondents sensed overt hostility. Food pantries have the ability to be a special kind of safe place in the community. Many food pantries in Indianapolis are intended to be a form of ministry or, at least, an expression of personal, organizational, or religious values. While no pantry leader would intend to create a hostile, unwelcoming, disrespectful environment for the people seeking food from the pantry, the feelings of stigma and embarrassment are so strong that food pantry leaders and volunteers need to intentionally go out of their way to create a welcoming, non-judgmental environment.

Here are some ideas for reducing stigma and discrimination in the pantry.

- Train all public-facing volunteers so they understand why people are visiting the pantry and can have some of the most common misconceptions about food insecure people corrected. Additionally, prepare these volunteers with information on how to respond when things go wrong in the pantry (e.g., What should happen if it seems like someone's trying to break a pantry rule?).
- Create a culture of never communicating badly about people in the pantry. Even a whispered joke or an eyeroll shared with another volunteer can do a lot to erode feelings of trust and safety.
- If someone is turned away from the pantry, asked to put items back, or corrected in any way, clearly explain the policy so it's less likely to be seen as a personal act of discrimination.

INTAKE PROCESS

FIRST POINTS OF CONTACT

Intake (or registration) is usually one of the first steps to receiving food in a food pantry. The intake process allows pantries to collect information on who and how many people they are serving, and determine whether or not each person is eligible to receive food. The overall pantry experience is strongly influenced by the intake process, because how people are treated when they arrive at the pantry sets the tone for the rest of the experience. In order to prevent creating frustration, stress, or defensiveness, pantries should strive for an intake process that is welcoming, unintrusive, organized, and minimizes wait time.

PANTRY IDENTIFICATION

To collect information on who and how many people the pantry is serving, and to determine whether or not each person is eligible to receive food, pantries will typically ask each person for their name, address, and the number of people in their household. Some pantries might also ask about age groups for household members, veteran status, or other details. For the first visit, pantries typically request at least one document to verify the person's name and address (e.g., a recent bill). During a person's first visit to the pantry, some pantries provide some sort of card to streamline this process in the future. Pantry shopper cards (like the one pictured to the right from Old Bethel & Partners Food Pantry) allow pantry staff and volunteers to quickly confirm that someone has already provided documents to verify their eligibility for the pantry and is already in the system or database.

In recent years, some food pantries have taken the shopping card one step further, by offering scannable (barcode or QR code) cards. A shopper can scan their card, and their intake management software (e.g., Food Bank Manager) will automatically log the information.

MANAGING INTAKE DATA

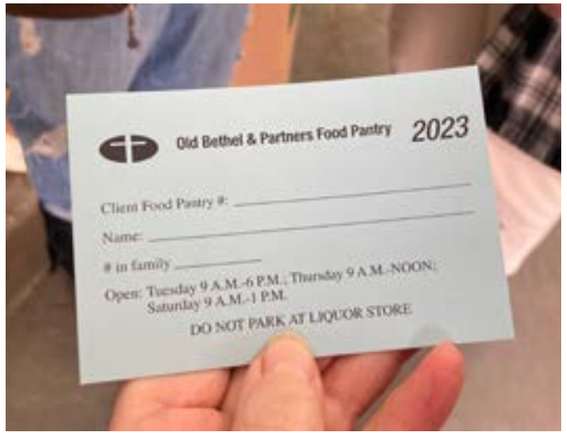
Digital vs. Paper Intake

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.

Digital options for intake

Below are the most commonly used options for intake:

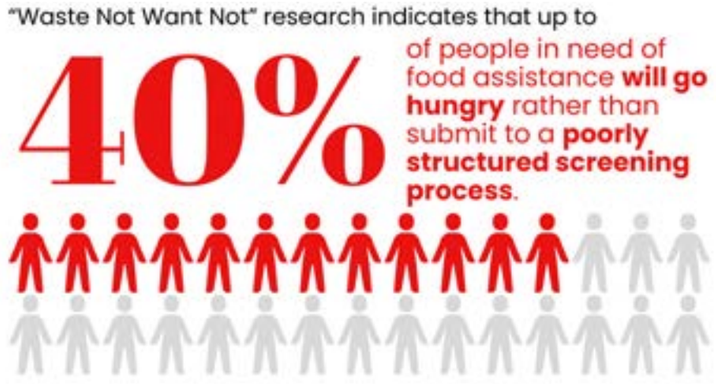
- Custom Spreadsheets and databases - Some pantries use custom sheets and databases set up in Microsoft Excel, Google Sheets, or Microsoft Access. These are inexpensive options that can be used without internet. However, these platforms are less user-friendly for pantry staff and volunteers, require more time to set up initially, and can be less secure than other options.
- Intake software - The most widely used intake software for pantries in Indianapolis is Food Bank Manager. Other options include PantrySOFT, Food Pantry Manager, Link2Feed, PantryWorx, and SmartChoice. These options have a monthly or annual payment (payment amounts vary) and are web-based. BosWell offers free web-based software for pantry intake.



CREATING A GOOD INTAKE PROCESS

Protect Private Information

If your intake process involves sharing personal information (such as name or address), ensure that this information can be shared privately, either on paper or out of earshot of other people. Additionally, be direct with your clients about how their information will be used. For example, will their names be reported to another organization? Finally, take care of the information collected in the pantry. If it's stored as hard copies, make sure the papers are securely stored in locked cabinets. If it's stored digitally, ensure pantry leaders are following good cybersecurity practices with regard to passwords, wifi networks, and data breaches.



Only Ask Necessary Questions

Not only does streamlining the intake process save time, but it also makes the process better for clients. Most pantries ask about the following, in order to be able to accurately track the pantry's impact data.

- Name
- Address
- Number of people in the household
- Age ranges of household members

Some pantries might also be required by specific funders or partners to ask about veteran status or eligibility (e.g., "Do you have a child that goes to this school?")

Finally, some pantries select one or two questions that help the pantry to provide more effective and tailored service. For example:

- How will you be getting home today (bike, bus, car, walk)? Pantries that are able to provide sturdier bags to walkers and bikers, or boxes to those with cars, might find this question useful.
- Beyond today's groceries, are there any additional resources we can help you connect with? Pantries with a good understanding of available wraparound services might find this question useful. For more information, see Section 8: Wraparound Services.
- Do you have any upcoming birthdays in the family? Pantries that provide birthday bags, cake-making kits, or other special items might find this question useful.
- Do you need any diapers, formula, or baby-specific items? Pantries that stock baby-specific items often prefer to identify households who need these items during intake.

Pantries that distribute TEFAP food ask everyone to sign a simple statement indicating that they are in need and meet the income requirements for assistance. Unless your pantry distributes TEFAP food, we do not recommend asking people to self-attest or verify their income. Additionally, we recommend that pantries do not ask about the following during intake:

- Religious beliefs or affiliation
- Participation in SNAP or other programs
- Salary or wages
- Citizenship status
- Explanation of why assistance is needed

Require As Little As Possible

Most of the largest pantries in Indianapolis require only one piece of identification, showing proof of address, for intake. We recommend other pantries follow suit, requiring people to provide a maximum of one document of their choice to show name and address (i.e., a utility bill, photo ID, lease agreement, or piece of mail). Some people 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 Required Religious Activities

Many pantry staff and volunteers are involved in feeding hungry people because their faith compels them to do so. Pantry organizations and volunteers can and should feel free to be transparent about that motivation with the people around them. While people and pantries are welcome to express their faith openly, requiring people to participate in religious activities in order to receive food can inadvertently discourage people from using the pantry. In the long run, religious requirements can reduce the number of people who can be impacted through your ministry. The best practice for pantries that want to offer religious activities (e.g., prayer, Bible studies, devotional services, baptisms) is to ensure the activities meet the following criteria.

Old Bethel & Partners Food Pantry sets up a box to collect prayer requests from shoppers. Using the box is entirely optional. This allows pantry leaders to give shoppers the opportunity to join in a faith-based activity, anonymously or not.

- Activities should be voluntary, not required.
- Invitations to participate in activities should happen after food is received, so there is no room for misunderstandings that participation is a prerequisite for receiving food.
- Activities should take place at a different time and/or place from the food distribution. If the activity is happening while the pantry is open, it should happen in a different room (i.e., not the waiting area for the pantry). If the activity is happening in the pantry itself, it should happen when the pantry is closed for distribution.

Below are some good examples of religious activities offered by pantries.

- Host a service after the pantry closes and/or in a different part of the building.
- Offer printed information about activities, resources, or services available at the church, mosque, temple, etc. in pantry waiting areas.
- After food is received, ask shoppers if they have prayer requests.
- After food is received, invite shoppers to attend services or activities.

Promote Dignity And Respect

The suggestions above not only streamline the intake process, but also help to ensure people who need food aren't discouraged from using the pantry. In IHN's 2023 Hunger Study, 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 (25%) was that people are embarrassed to ask for assistance. This rate of embarrassment has increased significantly since the 2017 study, when 16% of respondents reported embarrassment kept them from going to a pantry. Unnecessary questions and required documents during the intake process add to that feeling of embarrassment. Additionally, as shown in the infographic above, research suggests that as many as 40% of those in

need will go hungry rather than submit to an invasive screening process.[10] The need for food in Indianapolis is so great that we cannot risk turning people away due to intake practices.

BARRIERS TO PROVIDING DOCUMENTS

Here are some reasons why certain documents might be difficult for some people or households to provide for food pantry intake.

- People who are unhoused, sleeping on a friend's couch, or living in a hotel might not have mail, utility bills, or lease agreements. We've included a few tips that might help your pantry navigate these barriers, but even with these tips, providing documents can be difficult for this group. Some pantries label unhoused people within the pantry database as "No Permanent Address," which allows the pantry to waive some of the typical intake requirements. If the pantry visitor is staying with someone in your pantry's service area and needs mail for a proof of address, the pantry could ask permission to send a piece of mail from the pantry to the address where they're staying, so they can bring it in next time. However, this is not an option for everyone in this situation, because staying with a friend or family member can be a violation of the original tenant's lease. If the pantry visitor is currently living in a hotel, you could encourage them to bring in their hotel registration form as proof of residence.

> *"We agree that there are families taking advantage or working the system, maybe even up to 20% of those we serve.* ***We have chosen to focus on the 80%*** *who are not and allow those who are to continue to do so. This has allowed us to create an environment that allows families coming to us to know we trust them from the first step into our doors. It is a barrier for many to come and ask for help...This philosophy allows us to lower that barrier and to...battle against hunger together.* ***There is no us and them, instead there is a "we"*** *environment of togetherness."*
>
> ~Local pantry leader

- People who are immigrants might fear risking their residency or citizenship status by using food assistance programs. While it is no longer the case (as of the time of writing this manual) that documented residents can be penalized for using public benefits like food assistance, there could still be some lingering fear and misinformation that causes immigrants to be wary of participating in these programs for fear that it could prevent them from attaining full citizenship. One of the best ways to address this barrier is to educate people who come to your pantry 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.
- People who are undocumented 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 can be a divisive topic, hunger doesn't need to 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.
- People 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 like updating the address on an ID or locating Social Security cards and 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.
- People who have recently moved might not have an updated proof of address. It could seem like people 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.
- People 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.

BEFORE AND AFTER INTAKE

Wait Times

Wait times are different for each pantry, and they can vary greatly based on day or time. It can be useful to measure the average amount of time a person 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 people utilizing your pantry, not to mention the overall feel of your pantry. Below are a few reasons why reducing wait times is important.

- Reducing wait times gives people time to address other aspects of their lives. People experiencing poverty and/or food insecurity tend to have 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 a WIC class, 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, people 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 people to visit the pantry as soon as they start running low on food, the risk of missed meals is reduced.
- Reducing wait times improves the pantry 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 can 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 people spend waiting, the pantry experience will be improved for everyone.

Managing the Line

Pantries use a variety of systems to keep track of the order in which people are served. While many pantries have traditional self-regulated lines, this has the potential to create problems. It can lead to disagreements over who is first in line, and it can encourage people to line up hours in advance of the pantry opening in order to secure their spot. Alternative 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.

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 the people waiting. For example:

- Offer cooking demonstrations and taste tests. Purdue Extension and other organizations offer recipe demonstrations (See more in "Healthy Options"). Taste tests could offer samples of 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 through printed information and/or direct service (See more in "Wraparound Services").
- Make meals or snacks available to clients. Many pantries are connected to a soup kitchen, so a hot meal is available before or after shopping in the pantry or while they wait for their bags to be filled. 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. Visit www.secondhelpings.org for information on partnering with Second Helpings for their Hunger Relief Program.
- Create a comfortable waiting space. Especially if people are expected to wait for more than about 30 minutes, we recommend offering an indoor seating area and restrooms with changing tables.

FOOD SOURCING

DEVELOPING A DIVERSE SOURCING PLAN

Most food pantries in Indianapolis source the food that they distribute from multiple places. 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% of your pantry's food supply from any one source (other than a food bank).

SOURCES OF FOOD

Below is a non-exhaustive list of local sources of food.

Food Banks

We recommend that every food pantry partners with a food bank. Food banks exist to provide free and/or steeply discounted food to food pantries. There are two food banks serving Marion County: Gleaners Food Bank of Central Indiana and Midwest Food Bank, Indiana Division. Midwest Food Bank also serves counties throughout Indiana, and the Feeding America network of food banks covers every county in the United States. Pantries are required to apply to become agency partners with the food banks in order to receive food from them. Pantries are allowed to receive food from both food banks–you're not required to choose one over the other. We strongly recommend applying to partner with both Midwest Food Bank and Gleaners Food Bank. Even if your pantry has applied in the past and been denied or has chosen not to work with one of the food banks for other reasons, we encourage you to reach out again and learn more; food bank policies and requirements have changed over the years, and what wasn't a good fit several years ago might now be a great fit for your pantry.

Gleaners Food Bank

Gleaners Food Bank 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. Additionally, Gleaners administers other programs that pantries can participate in to access more food–most notably the Direct Agency Pickup (DAP) Program, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and HATCH for Hunger.

The DAP Program connects pantries to grocery stores and other retailers to pick up donated product. Through the DAP Program, a pantry can get set up to do weekly pickups of short date or out-of-season products from their local Target, CVS, Kroger, or other major retailer. This program is most appropriate for pantries that are open at least once per week due to the shelf life of the products.

TEFAP is a federal program that distributes USDA commodity crops to pantries via Feeding America food banks, such as Gleaners Food Bank. Pantries receive large quantities of staple foods at no cost and must adhere to specific operational and administrative requirements.

Midwest Food Bank

Midwest Food Bank 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.

Food Rescue and/or Gleaning Organizations

Several organizations organize the collection and donation of food that would otherwise be thrown away. While most of this work is done either through the organizations listed below or through the Gleaners DAP Program, there are some businesses that you can establish a relationship with for donations. Some local pantries have had success with Entemann's Bakery, Pizza Hut, Indianapolis Fruit, Panera Bread, Einstein Bagels, or

corner stores for picking up surplus food. Organizations that rescue surplus food are listed below.

Second Helpings

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 and meal sites (a.k.a. soup kitchens). Redirects are ingredients and food items that are distributed to pantries. Available food varies.

Society of St. Andrew

Society of St. Andrew gleans food from farms, farmers markets, and other sources and donates the produce to pantries free of charge. Most gleaning happens during the growing season, from May to November. Donations typically consist of a large amount of one type of produce. No application is necessary to receive food.

K-12 Food Rescue

K-12 Food Rescue connects pantries with schools. Pantries pick up excess food from specific schools every week. Donations typically include individual servings of milk, fruit, vegetables, and yogurt.

Move for Hunger

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.

Food Donation Connection

Food Donation Connection connects pantries to restaurants and other sources of prepared surplus food.

Grocery Programs for Pantries

Some retail stores, like Meijer, Kroger, and Target, 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, shoppers can choose to support your pantry. Every time they swipe their Kroger card, your pantry receives money to be spent in the store. Through Target Circle, shoppers can vote to select a nonprofit that will receive a donation.

Wholesale & Retail Purchases

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.

- Comprehensive Inventories Solutions (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).
- 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 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.

If your pantry is interested in making wholesale purchases but isn't able to access lower price points due to making smaller orders, we recommend banding together with other pantries. To learn more about collective buying power in pantries, see this article.

Gardens

Indy Urban Acres, 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 and fresh herbs that pantry guests want.

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, inviting people to participate in the pantry, and educating the community about the needs of the people you serve.

Servant's Heart of Indy ordered cloth bags printed with the pantry's logo. The bags are distributed at a church with a list of requested items inside, and the congregation returns the bags filled with donations.

Here are some tips for organizing effective food drives.

- 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). Food drives can also be digitized through Amazon or other vendors that allow pantries to create online wishlists, and donors can purchase items from the list.
- Prioritize nutrition. Requesting healthy items in food drives is a simple and effective way to source more nutritious food. One easy way to do this is to include nutritious food on your food drive donation list. Reach out to IHN's Healthy Nudges program if you would like recommendations for improving food drive donation lists and ways to request healthy items. Another way to prioritize nutrition is to organize a fresh food drive by asking for bags of apples, clementines, potatoes, onions, winter squash, garlic, and other produce items with long shelf lives.
- 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.
- Remind participants to check expiration dates. While food pantries can distribute some past-date items, food drive participants should know that this is not an opportunity to clean out the cupboard.
- Advertise the drive at every stage. Provide posters and promotional materials to the donor organization prior to the food drive. Encourage the donor to host a kickoff event to start the drive, when appropriate. At the end of the food drive, be sure to thank the donor on social media and/or send a photo with information on the number of pounds donated.

Additionally, we recommend trying 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: All kinds of local businesses might be interested in hosting a food drive, either for their staff or

their clients. Stop in to your local gyms, hardware stores, insurance companies, car dealerships, hairdressers, coffee shops, restaurants, and retail stores to share the opportunity.

- 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.

In planning your food drive, we encourage you to 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.

Our final recommendation for food drives is to partner with other pantries 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 more 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.

Virtual Food Drives

Growing numbers of food pantries are organizing virtual food drives as a way to source food while engaging a remote network. This article lists multiple software options for virtual food drives, including free options.

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 $2.50 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 actual or assumed food preferences. Typically, this list includes items like peanut butter, tuna, pancake mix, cereal, and macaroni and cheese. While these are useful items, adhering to a stocking list can be one of the most expensive ways to stock a pantry. In contrast, pantries that stock their shelves with items they can receive for free or at food bank prices are able to operate cheaply while still meeting the needs of the people served. Since food pantry food is most often used by families to supplement existing food resources (e.g., SNAP benefits, grocery budget, etc.), food pantry leaders have no way of knowing which ingredients a family has in their cupboards or how those foods could be combined with pantry options to create a meal. What we do know is the more usable items a household receives, the more resources the family has to meet their needs—food and otherwise. Ensuring that all food groups are available in the pantry is a great practice, but the specific items available within those food groups can be flexible. This gives freedom to the pantries in terms of stocking and often results in a larger variety of choices for shoppers.

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, including the following information: date, donor, type of product (e.g., produce, bakery, meat, etc.), and pounds donated.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

FOOD DISTRIBUTION MODELS

There are two primary models pantries use to distribute food—pre-packed models and choice models—and within each of these models are variations. Choice models, those that allow people to select their own foods, are the best practice in most contexts. However, some pantries may have specific reasons for offering pre-packed foods. Whenever a pre-packed model is used, we encourage the incorporation of elements of choice to better meet individual needs. However, some pantries have specific, legitimate reasons for offering pre-packed foods—in these cases, pre-packed models can be utilized and can be improved by incorporating elements of choice.

Pre-Packed Model

Using a pre-packed model, pantries distribute standardized bags or boxes of food. 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 people using the pantry, and it does not encourage interpersonal interaction in the pantry.

Below are some ideas to improve upon a pre-packed model.

- Create a place for pantry users to return unwanted items. This could also be a "trade table," someone can 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 that are available for people to select from, in addition to their pre-packed bag. This could consist of produce, bread, miscellaneous items, expired goods, or items the pantry has in abundance.
- Provide a larger amount of food to larger households.
- Solicit feedback about items the pantry should prioritize stocking (more in Section 11: Collecting and Using Feedback).

> *"Having **the ability to refuse something** is a way to have choice. It gives peace of mind that they're not taking something they can't use, because there's a lot of guilt around that."*
> -Illinois food bank worker

Choice Models

Choice models, as the name suggests, prioritize giving shoppers the opportunity to select food they take home from the pantry. Selections can be made by using a list or by shopping for food like in a grocery store.

List Model

Using a list model, pantries create a list of available items. Shoppers 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 a shopping model.

There are also some disadvantages with this model. For example, shoppers aren't able to see the food or its labels to make decisions, and shoppers who can't read or have language barriers might struggle to indicate their preferences. Additionally, 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 shoppers can choose bonus items, in addition to their bagged selections. This table could include items the pantry has in abundance, items that are difficult to sort, or items the pantry wants to encourage, like fresh produce.
- Use a digital or blackboard list to make it easier to update the list when inventory changes.
- Translate lists into commonly spoken languages and/or add photos to the lists, so they are accessible to more people.
- Ask about dietary restrictions (e.g., religious diets, allergies, health-related restrictions) either during intake or on the list.
- Rather than asking shoppers to mark the items on the list that they do not want, consider switching to a model in which shoppers select the items on the list that they do want. This allows for more choice and is more similar to a shopping model.

Shopping Model

Using a shopping model, shoppers choose their own items from pantry shelves, similar to how they would at a grocery store. While some pantries allow shoppers 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 a few different methods pantries use to communicate how much food each person can choose.

- Points: Each shopper is given a total point limit. Generally, larger households will be given higher point limits. In the pantry, each item or shelf is marked with a point value. Pantries can label specific items as four-for-one point, two points, etc., based on inventory. Fresh produce or items available in abundance can be marked as zero points to encourage their selection. Limits can also be set for popular or expensive items (e.g., pantry can choose to label milk, "2 points, limit 1 per household").
- Item Limits: Each shelf is marked with the number of items that can be selected from that shelf. This number is typically based on supply and household size. For example, a shelving unit with a variety of canned and dry beans might have a sign that reads, "Beans: Choose 2. Households of 5+ choose 3."

Peanut butter is 4 points and jelly is 2 points at the HVAF of Indiana pantry.

This shelf at Northside Food Pantry has an assortment of beans, and the sign indicates how many packages of beans a client can choose, based on the size of the family.

- Weight, volume, and other measures: Some pantries distribute food using weight or volume limits. For example, some pantries allow shoppers to fill up one large, reusable grocery bag per visit. Shoppers can select any items in any quantity, as long as they fit inside the bag.

Westminster Neighborhood Services allocates a certain number of points to each household. Larger households have a larger number of points to spend in the pantry.

It is generally recommended that pantries distribute more food to larger households. In a shopping model, 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.

Monitoring Options

Whether your pantry uses points, item limits, or another measure, choice model pantries typically monitor selections in order to ensure the pantry guidelines are followed. The most common ways for pantries to do this are:

Volunteers at HVAF of Indiana bag items in the checkout area, while using a tablet to keep track of item limits.

- Volunteers as shopping assistants: Each shopper is escorted through the pantry by a volunteer. The volunteer can explain the pantry policies, ensure the policies are followed, and help to promote healthy items. This setup enables volunteers to have the most interaction with shoppers.
- Volunteers stationed throughout the pantry: Volunteers are stationed around the pantry in order to answer questions and ensure policies are followed. This setup enables volunteers to also assist with restocking their areas.
- Volunteers counting in the check-out area: Shoppers select items independently, and before the shopper leaves the pantry, the items are checked out by a volunteer. This can be as simple as visually scanning the cart to ensure item limits were followed, or can be as complex as implementing a point-of-sale system, similar to the check-out lines in a grocery store. This setup provides the most autonomy to shoppers, but it requires good signage throughout the pantry.
- Automated monitoring: Shoppers are assisted by electronic devices. Tablets can be affixed to carts in order to calculate the items selected as the shopping is in progress. To read about an example of automated monitoring, see this article.

The Hunger Inc. Food Pantry uses a shopping model with item limits. Shoppers are given a specific color of card based on household size. The card lists the item limits for pantry items. The card is clipped to the shopping cart for easy reference and so that volunteers can quickly determine how many items each shopper can select.

Grace Care Center uses a point-of-sale (POS) system for their pantry checkout process. The look and feel of this process is very similar to a grocery store.

OTHER DISTRIBUTION MODELS

While food pantry distribution models tend to fall into one of two categories—pre-packed or choice—based on whether items are selected by the giver or the recipient, there are additional types of distribution models used by pantries, especially within the last five years: hybrid distribution models, home delivery, and online ordering.

Hybrid Models

Hybrid models are a combination of pre-packed and choice models. Hybrid distribution is a large, broad category that can mean multiple different things. Below are the three of the most common types of hybrid distribution models.

- The pantry uses a pre-packed model with elements of choice. As described earlier in this section, there are strategies pre-packed pantries can use to add elements of choice into their model. For example, a pantry using this type of hybrid model might give every person 1 pre-packed box of canned goods and shelf-stable foods, and allow shoppers to select their own fresh produce and bread. This model can be a useful way to begin transitioning into a full shopping model.
- Distribution models vary based on the day. Using this type of hybrid model, a pantry might be open for in-person shopping every Tuesday and open for drive-through distribution of pre-packed bags every Thursday. This model can help to increase the accessibility of the pantry to a larger group of people, and it can also allow the pantry to accommodate groups of volunteers who prefer different distribution models. However, this model also has the potential to create added confusion for shoppers and to create complications with inventory and policies for volunteers.
- The distribution model is chosen by the shopper. This type of hybrid distribution model gives shoppers more choice than any other model. When a pantry using this type of distribution model is open, for example, each person utilizing the pantry has the opportunity to select how they would like to receive their food—would they like to take a pre-packed bag and go, or would they like to shop for their items? Someone who has no dietary restrictions or is in a hurry might opt for the pre-packed bag, while another person with more specific needs might opt to wait in line to make their own selections. In this situation, the pantry will prepare pre-packed bags for distribution and will also have their shopping area ready. This model has only been adopted by a few food pantries in Indianapolis, but if a pantry has the space and volunteer power to implement this model, it is a powerful way to ensure your pantry is distributing food in the way that works best for the people served.

Hope Worldwide distributes food through a drive-up food pantry.

Home Delivery

Delivering pantry items directly to a person's home was an uncommon practice before the pandemic, but it has since become a relatively widespread service offered by both food banks and food pantries. Offering home delivery is a great way to increase access to the pantry by ensuring that people who are homebound due to illness, physical ability, or other reasons are able to receive pantry food. The demand for this service is remarkably high, particularly if it is available to everyone (i.e., anyone who requests service, as opposed to being limited to people who are homebound or over a certain age). Some food pantries and food banks deliver the food using their own pantry vehicles, while others have partnered with third-party companies like Uber Eats, Instacart, and DoorDash to implement this service.

Online Ordering

Allowing people to select their pantry items remotely—similar to making an online grocery order—is another practice that became significantly more popular during and after the pandemic. Pantries can choose from a variety of online ordering platforms. The simplest and cheapest option we've seen is using a Google Form that gets manually updated by pantry volunteers based on inventory. There are several more advanced options as well, which can be set up to automatically sync with pantry inventories, including PantrySOFT, SmartChoice, and PantryEasy. After an online order is placed, the order can either be picked up from the pantry during certain hours, delivered via home delivery, or stored for pickup in a secure locker. For more information on digital ordering, see two articles from Food Bank News: Article 1 and Article 2.

BENEFITS OF CHOICE MODELS

Choice Models Reduce Waste

When pantry food is pre-packed, most households will leave the food pantry with at least one item they won't use. There are several reasons why someone might not eat the items given to them, including allergies, health restrictions, religious traditions, dental issues, lack of necessary kitchen equipment, and preferences. 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% of the food given will not ultimately be consumed by those intended beneficiaries." Unfortunately, it's a common occurrence that on distribution days, many pantries that use pre-packed models discover pantry food discarded on the sidewalk, at the bus stop, or in a nearby trash can. Allowing shoppers to choose their own food decreases expenses associated with waste and maximizes the impact of pantry resources.

> *"People were worried about clients taking too much food and having to keep an eye on things...We had to train volunteers and say, '**We're excited that this person is taking that food and getting what they need.**'"*
>
> -Food pantry leader

What Is a Household?

Identifying households has the potential to be tricky. Generally speaking, most food assistance programs consider a household to be a group of people who live together and who share the majority of their meals and/or groceries with one another. Since poverty and financial instability can create complicated living situations, it's not uncommon to find multiple households of pantry shoppers who share one address. An easy example of this is roommates who buy and eat food separately. These separate households may or may not be biologically related, and the list of people living together at any given time might 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 the people who come to the pantry asking for food. If someone says they do or don't share food and other resources with others, we recommend taking their word for it.

Choice Models Preserve Dignity

When people who utilize the pantry are invited to 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 shoppers will likely feel most respected when they are able to make food selections in a similar way.

Choice Models Provide Useful Information

In pre-packed pantries, we recommend pantry leaders find ways to solicit feedback from their communities about the types of food and other items to offer. In a choice model, pantry leaders can easily learn which foods are most popular and desired by observing the selections made on distribution days. 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 conduct surveys as extensively about food preferences. This allows you to make more strategic purchases or organize more effective food drives in the future.

Choice Models Encourage Interaction

Choice models provide more opportunities for volunteers and shoppers to interact. This interaction has the potential to make the pantry more gratifying for both volunteers and shoppers. Additionally, these interactions can be an opportunity for volunteers to share information about nutritious options, how to use specific ingredients, wraparound services in the community, and other relevant topics.

Hornet Park Food Pantry offers a choice model in a room used for other activities throughout the week. By setting up folding tables and utilizing rolling shelving units, the pantry is able to offer a shopping model in this space.

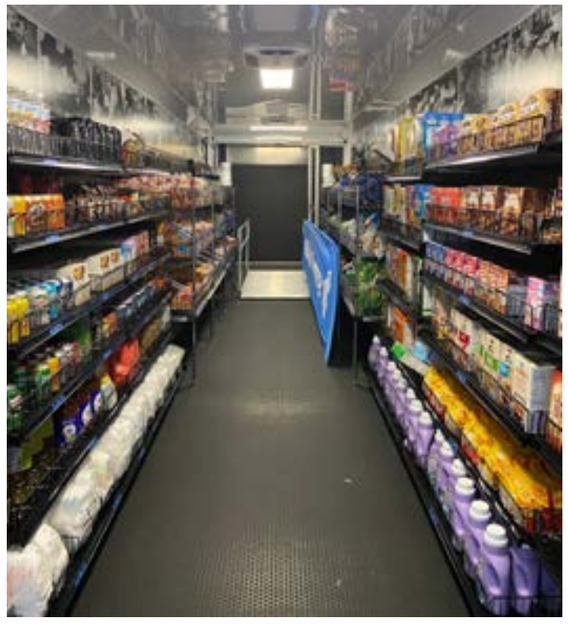
A pantry inside one of the Jane Pauley Community Health Centers offers a shopping model for one person at a time. By regularly restocking the food shelf and the refrigerator, the pantry is able to keep up with demand and provide fresh, frozen, and shelf-stable foods to the clinic's patients.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT CHOICE MODELS

Myth #1: Shoppers Will Take Too Much Food

The primary way pantries ensure shoppers 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/or 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. That said, anecdotal reports indicate that when shoppers do not have guidelines on how much to take, many will actually take too little, either because they underestimate their need or they want to make sure to leave enough food for others.

> *"The food doesn't belong to us — it belongs to the community. It's not our job to control.* ***It's our job to make the food available.***"
>
> -Food bank staff



Grace Care Center operates a mobile pantry. A shopping model of distribution is available in this small space with a single aisle.

Myth #2: Choice Models are Expensive

While choice models might require some new equipment (e.g., shelving, shopping carts, signs), once the pantry is set up and functional, choice models actually have the potential to be less expensive than pre-packed models. Since choice models prevent wasted food and resources, they can stretch a pantry's budget further. Additionally, choice models are an ideal outlet for donated food, because you can operate with a less predictable food inventory. While pre-packed models focus on ensuring each person leaves with specific items that might need to be purchased, choice models can offer clients any donated products the pantry receives. For example, if a pantry gets 12 cans of beets in a food drive, a pre-packed pantry might struggle to know how to distribute that relatively unpopular food to their line of 50 households. However, a shopping model pantry can simply put the beets on the shelf of canned vegetables and eventually a few shoppers will be happy to select them.

Myth #3: Choice Models Require Extra Volunteers

There are several ways to use volunteers in 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 shoppers, volunteer recruitment and retention could become easier.

Myth #4: Shoppers Will Make Poor Food Choices

Shoppers in general, whether in a grocery store or in a food pantry; select the foods that they or their family members will eat. Just like someone who shops at a grocery store, a person shopping at a food pantry will typically select a combination of items- some healthy and some not. Sometimes

> ***How The Other Half Eats***
>
> We recommend the book "How the Other Half Eats" by Priya Fielding-Singh to anyone working in the charitable food space, and especially to anyone who is interested in developing a deeper understanding of why people make the food choices they do. If you've ever found yourself wondering why someone experiencing food insecurity might use their limited funds to buy their kid a bag of chips instead of buying a bag of apples or why a food pantry shopper might select pastries instead of wheat bread, this will be an interesting read. We've heard of one or two pantries in Indianapolis that have had pantry staff and volunteers read this book together. If your pantry ends up reading the book as a group, the publisher has put together a list of questions to guide the discussion.

the unhealthy choices are made for obviously good reasons, such as a parent selecting a cake or cake mix for a child's upcoming birthday. However, all of the food selections a person makes in the pantry are based on personal factors and individual circumstances that pantry staff and volunteers aren't able to see. Just because a choice is unhealthy doesn't necessarily make it a bad choice. Someone might choose an unhealthy food because it is predictable, because it is what their kids will eat, because it is comforting, or because it is culturally significant, and all of those are good reasons to make a food choice. Of course, Indy Hunger Network is a strong advocate for the availability of nutritious food in the charitable food system. We believe the best way to improve nutrition in the pantry is to ensure the pantry has as many nutritious options as possible, not to restrict people from taking items that are unhealthy. Healthy choices can be encouraged by offering a variety of healthy options, offering tools and information on using healthy foods, and even incentivizing shoppers to select healthy foods, (see more in Section 6: Healthy Options), but not by withholding the items that are less healthy. Ultimately, pantry shoppers, like everyone else, will make their own choices about what to eat. It does nothing for a person's health, nutrition, or stability in life to leave the pantry with a can of green beans if they never eat it.

Myth #5: Choice Models Require Extra Space

Choice models don't necessarily require more space than pre-packed models. In fact, many food pantries in Indianapolis offer a shopping model in a room that was formerly used as a closet.

Below are two ideas for utilizing a small pantry area.

- If your building 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

Thinking of re-embracing a choice model after COVID?

Here are some tips to get started.

1. Review the **mission of your pantry** and consider how it aligns with your distribution model.
2. Start by offering **one opportunity for choice** in the pantry. For example, offer pre-packed bags and choice-model fresh produce.
3. Add **an opportunity for guests to give back items** they don't want. For example, offer a table near the exit for guests to leave unwanted items (and select from others' unwanted items).
4. **Listen to feedback** from the people you serve. See Section 11 for more information.
5. Work with IHN and other partners to **get support** as you work to adopt a full choice model.

Transitioning to a Choice Model

Hunger Inc. Food Pantry operated as a pre-packed model food pantry for 39 years before switching to a choice model in 2022. With buy-in from the pantry's Board of Directors and support from IHN's Healthy Nudges Program (see more: Healthy Options), Hunger Inc. rearranged their pantry area to allow shoppers to select their own foods. As a result, not only do their volunteers appreciate the interaction with shoppers, but the pantry is able to more easily source and distribute a wide array of foods and hygiene items. To read about other pantries that have switched to a choice model, see this article.

*"Switching to client choice has put the **one-on-one, personal touch** with people. We talk some and get to know them better and know their situation–some down on their luck and some a lot worse. **We are very satisfied switching to client choice.**"*

-Hunger Inc. Food Pantry leader

rolling shelving units. During open hours, shelving units are rolled out for shopping, and when the pantry closes, all the shelves are rolled back to storage.

- If your building only has a very small room or closet to dedicate to the pantry, these small spaces can be used simply by allowing only one or two people to shop at a time.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON FOOD DISTRIBUTION

While choice models are generally accepted to be the best practice for food distribution, the pandemic significantly decreased the prevalence of choice model pantries. Many pantries–in Indianapolis and nationwide–that had a shopping model before the pandemic are now operating with a pre-packed model. The pivot away from choice has multiple potential causes: some pantries have found that they can serve more people in less time by using a pre-packed model; some pantries have found that their volunteers prefer tasks with more predictability and less interaction compared to tasks associated with choice models; some pantries continue to practice social distancing due to concerns related to COVID and other illnesses; and some pantries no longer have enough space indoors to accommodate the influx of shoppers they've had since the pandemic.

At IHN, we understand that what works best for one pantry and for one community won't necessarily work best for another pantry or community. We know that several of the largest pantries in the city have had to modify their distribution models–including reducing the amount of choice available–in order to continue serving thousands of people each week with the physical space and volunteer power available to them. Nevertheless, this post-pandemic time is an opportunity for small and medium-sized food pantries to offer a level of service that isn't always possible at larger pantries, and one of the most impactful ways to do this is to offer a choice model. If your pantry is able to offer choices to the people you serve, whether that means fully adopting a shopping model or adding a few opportunities for choice, we highly encourage you to consider doing so. Adding choice is not only beneficial for the reasons outlined throughout this section, but also because of the newly decreased availability of choice model pantries throughout the city.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

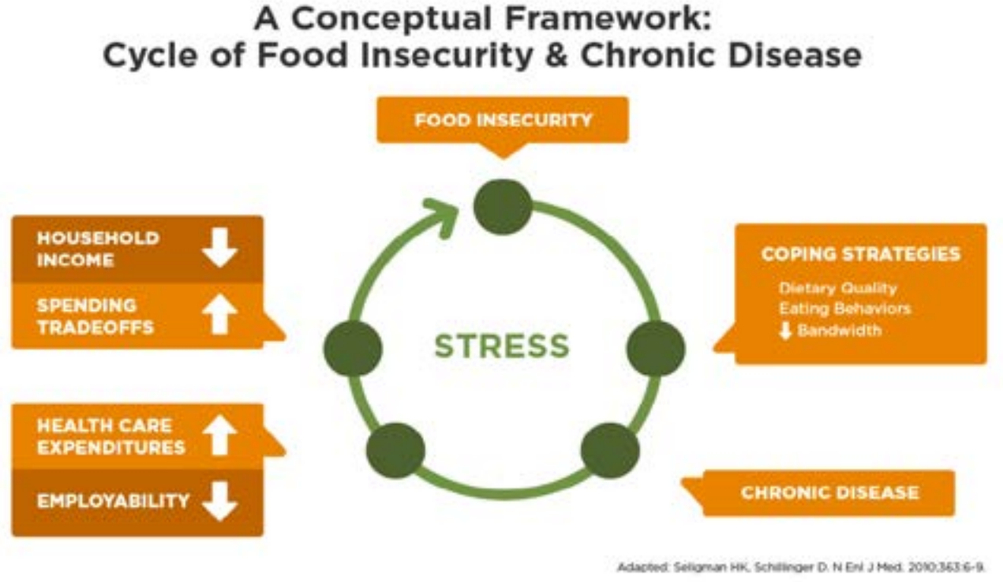
- *Making the Switch: A Guide for Converting to a Client Choice Food Pantry*
- *Charity Food Programs that Can End Hunger in America*, John Arnold

HEALTHY OPTIONS

HUNGER AND HEALTH ARE CONNECTED

Food insecurity and poor health exist together in a vicious cycle—food insecurity leads to poor health, and poor health increases the risk and/or severity of food insecurity. Having insufficient food and money makes it nearly impossible to maintain healthy habits, eat nutritious meals, and 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.

Poor health and food insecurity are connected because of a lack of the money and resources required to meet needs without making compromises. 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."[11] The graphic below shows the reasons for this disparity in more detail. As shown in the graphic, the relationship between health and food security 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 as 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 poor health. 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.[12]

- The health effects of food insecurity for children include low birth weight, iron deficiency anemia, birth defects, asthma, poor mental health, unhealthy weight gain, impaired growth and development, and poor academic performance. Children who are food insecure are more likely to experience poor diet quality and unhealthy weight gain. Additionally, they are at higher risk for chronic disease, impaired growth and development, and unfavorable health behaviors in adulthood.
- The health effects of food insecurity for adults include diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, pregnancy complications, stroke, obesity, poor mental health, poor oral health, and premature death.
- The health effects of food insecurity for seniors include diabetes, poor mental health, congestive heart failure, hypertension, and lower cognitive function.

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

The primary barrier to eating healthy meals: cost

Responses from food insecure families in Indiana to the question, "Why don't you and your household always eat nutritious meals?"

The risk of **diabetes** among people who are food insecure is about **2x higher** than those who are food secure.

HEALTH NEEDS IN THE PANTRY

In a 2014 study, Feeding America found that two-thirds of people using food pantries reported choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care. With this in mind, it is easy to see how food pantry guests' health is at risk, especially considering that 33% of households using food pantries have a household member with diabetes, and 58% have a household member with high blood pressure.[13] The statistics are clear: food pantry users have important 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 reliably eating enough nutritious food. So why do people not eat nutritious foods? In IHN's 2023 "Food Assistance and Hunger in Indiana Report", food insecure families were asked why they don't always eat nutritious meals. Their answers are shown below. Very few respondents (3%) indicated they chose 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 cost. 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. Survey respondents who were food insecure reported that the nutritious foods they most frequently lacked were fruits (72%), vegetables (68%), protein (45%), dairy (28%), and whole grains (23%) These are foods that are expensive to purchase but vital to our health.

IMPROVING NUTRITION IN THE PANTRY

There are many different ways that food pantries can improve the health and nutrition of the people they serve. By following HER guidelines and stocking the pantry with healthy items, providing health services and/or information on nutrition and health, promoting healthy items, and implementing other healthy nudges, pantries can help shoppers make healthy food choices and prevent or manage chronic disease.

What is "Healthy?"

In 2019, Healthy Eating Research convened a panel of experts in the charitable food system, nutrition, and food policy fields to create clear, specific recommendations for evidence-based nutrition guidelines tailored to the unique needs and capacity of the charitable food system. The expert panel chose to focus primarily on saturated fat, sodium, and added susgar to determine whether or not a food is healthy. Due to evidence linking high consumption of these nutrients to elevated risk for diet-related chronic diseases. These thresholds are now referred to as the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines and are used widely throughout the charitable food system.

Stock the Pantry with Healthy Foods

There are a variety of ways to increase the amount of healthy food in your pantry's inventory. Below are a few ideas.

- Organize healthier food drives by specifically requesting healthy food donations. See this document for recommendations on updating an existing food pantry donation list to include healthy items. In addition to the shelf-stable items included on that list, don't forget that food drives can also source fresh foods. We've seen pantries successfully organize food drives to collect apples, clementines and other citrus fruits, potatoes, winter squash, onions, and other long-lasting fresh foods that do not need constant refrigeration.
- Make new food sourcing 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. For more ideas, see Section 3: Food Sourcing.
- Set guidelines for ordering food for the pantry to ensure that your pantry's monetary donations are used for nutritious items. As discussed in Section 4: Food Distribution, there are many sources of free or extremely discounted food (e.g., food banks, grocery store donations, food rescue programs). However, the foods that are available for free at any given time might not always be healthy items. For that reason, we recommend that pantries make a policy of sourcing as much food as they can for free and discounted rates and reserve the majority of their limited food budgets for purchasing healthy items or other items that might be harder to find for free.

The on-site food pantry at Gleaners Food Bank has a machine to offer free health screenings, including blood pressure checks.

Which foods should pantries promote?

Below are healthy foods that are easy to identify and promote.

- All fresh and frozen fruits
- All fresh and frozen vegetables
- Eggs
- Whole grain bread, pasta, and tortillas
- Brown rice and quinoa
- Dry beans and low-sodium canned beans
- Milk (skim, 1%, 2%)
- Unsweetened plant-based milk (almond, rice, oat)

This is just a starting point. **There are many additional healthy options!**

OFFER HEALTH SERVICES & INFORMATION

Offer Health Services

Organizations like the Marion County Public Health Department, the YMCA, the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, and local hospitals and clinics have set up temporary and/or permanent stations at food pantries for health services. Examples of services offered at food pantries might include: preventative health screenings like blood pressure checks, flu and COVID vaccines, treatment of minor conditions, etc. In some cases, pantry staff and volunteers could also be trained to administer some screenings.

Healthy nudges make the **healthy choice** the **easy choice!**

Share Information about Other Programs

Providing information on health resources available for uninsured or underinsured clients can be helpful for people visiting the food pantry. This could include information on Medicare, Medicaid, and Expanded Medicaid (Healthy Indiana Plan 2.0), sliding scale clinics, and free community health fairs. For more ideas, see the Section 8: Wraparound Services.

Distribute Health and Nutrition Information

An easy way to provide health information in the pantry is to hang posters and/or distribute printed flyers. Posters can be hung in the waiting areas or in the drive-through line, and flyers can be offered via a magazine rack. Flyers on foods to select or avoid based on specific health needs or on understanding nutrition labels and nutrition guidelines would be useful to share. For examples, see the flyers below.

- Eating Well with Diabetes
- American Heart Association
- Heart Healthy Eating
- Navigating Food Assistance Programs with Food Allergies
- Canned Foods Nutrition
- How Long Will this Produce Last?
- Stretching Ingredients
- Eating More Whole Grains
- Fruit and Veggie Bingo
- Diabetes-Friendly Food Choices at the Pantry
- Tips for Reducing Salt and Sodium

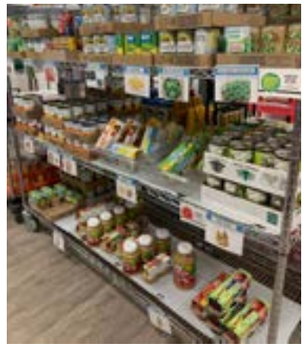
Information about Diabetes

Looking to provide more information about diabetes in the pantry?
Check out the **Cooking Matters for Diabetes** addendum!

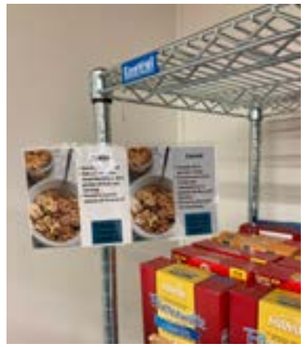
IHN's Cooking Matters program has compiled a booklet of information on cooking healthy food on a budget while managing diabetes. Pages of the booklet can be printed and shared, or entire copies can be made available to shoppers who would benefit from the information.

Cooking Matters even teaches cooking classes specifically for people who have diabetes, using the Diabetes Curriculum!

Learn more at **www.indyhunger.org/CMdiabetes**



The Riley Food Pantry displays identification signs alongside SWAP shelf talker signs.



Westminster Neighborhood Services uses bilingual signs with nutrition information.

Hunger Inc. Food Pantry added a fresh produce poster to "prime" shoppers to make healthy choices.

PROMOTE HEALTHY ITEMS WITH HEALTHY NUDGES

What Are Healthy Nudges?

The term "healthy nudges" refers to practices that encourage the selection of healthy choices. In this context, they are changes in the pantry environment that promote healthy food selections. While data indicate that people using food pantries want and need healthier foods, some shoppers still need to be encouraged to select these items in the moment. The next pages outline a variety of options for implementing healthy nudges.

Improve the Placement of Healthy Items

- Create an attractive and abundant display for items you want to promote. For example, apples stacked in a basket or on a produce display table look more appealing than apples in a half-empty box on a shelf, and positioning boxes at an upward angle can help shoppers see the items inside.
- Place healthy items at eye-level on shelves, with less healthy choices placed at the bottom or top of shelves. This way, the less healthy items will still be available if shoppers look for them, but the attention-grabbing items will be the healthiest items. If your pantry frequently has children shopping with their parents, try to place unhealthy items outside of a child's eye-level as well.
- Bundle items together for meal-making ideas. Displaying items together that can be used to make a healthy meal can help shoppers visualize what they could cook with specific ingredients. Consider some of the following pairings: rice and beans, oatmeal and nuts or dried fruit, tuna and celery (for tuna salad), chickpeas and lemon (for hummus). For more ideas about items that can be grouped together and for signage templates to promote these items, see this document.
- Position fresh produce and other healthy items first in the distribution line. Shoppers are more likely to take items when their carts are relatively empty, so offering healthy items at the beginning of the pantry experience will typically result in the selection of more healthy items.
- Offer produce or grocery bags with fresh produce, so fresh items are kept clean and organized in pantry carts or baskets.
- Offer multiple exposures to healthy options. Giving shoppers more than one opportunity in the distribution line to select a specific healthy item can increase their chances of choosing it. In a Feeding America report, one pantry found that providing multiple opportunities to select whole wheat bread in the distribution line increased the chances of a shopper choosing whole wheat bread by 90%.[14] For example, in addition to a fresh produce display, offer specific fruits and vegetables throughout the pantry to be paired with other items.

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

HVAF of Indiana has a separate shelf of low-sodium vegetables that are available at 4-for-1 point.

Use Signs to Promote Healthy Choices

- Use "priming" techniques to encourage guests to think about healthy options before shopping. In Feeding America's report, hanging pictures of oranges in the waiting area increased the rate at which shoppers chose oranges to nearly 100%.[15] Here are some ways to encourage pantry guests to start the shopping experience with healthy food on their minds: post a list on a whiteboard in the waiting room of fresh produce or other healthy options that will be available that day, display photos of healthy options on a TV, hang posters of nutritious food in the waiting and intake areas, train intake volunteers to mention one or two healthy options during the intake process, use images of healthy items in your signage and branding. These subtle changes can make an impact.
- Use "shelf talker" signs (i.e., small signs affixed directly to food shelves) to draw attention to healthy items. These signs can have a variety of messages—for example, low sodium, heart-healthy, healthy snack, high fiber, protein-packed, recipe available. If you're interested in getting started with shelf-talker signs, here are a few resources: the Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) box contains color-coded shelf talker signs; Food Gatherers offers printable "healthy pick" signs; printable templates can be edited on Canva.

Westminster Neighborhood Services has a display case refrigerator stocked with healthy items. As indicated on the sign, shoppers can select as many items as they will use.

- Label uncommon items with names and cooking tips. For example, root vegetables (turnips, parsnips) could be labeled, "Cook like a potato," and staple items (rice, dry beans, legumes) could include simple cooking instructions. For examples of food identification cards, see this resource.
- Display suggested amounts to normalize taking a lot of healthy food. For healthy items that are unlimited or zero points, pantries can display signs with messages about quantity, for example, "Fill up a bag," "Take as many as you can use," "A family of 4 usually takes 8+ apples," "Slice and freeze for the future," or "Take a few extra!"

Incentivize Healthy Options

Another easy way to encourage shoppers to select more healthy items is to adjust the way healthy items are counted in the shopping process.

- If you use a point system, fresh produce could be made zero points, and other healthy items could be made 2-for-1 point. We've seen one local pantry offer canned corn (higher sodium content and more expensive for the pantry) for 1 point, and offer ears of fresh corn (healthier choice and shorter shelf life) for 10-for-1 point–this is a great example of adjusting point values based on nutrition and inventory. 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 (measuring by pounds, volume, etc.), consider making specified healthy items free, or don't count them toward the set limit.

Educate Volunteers about Healthy Options

Volunteers who are in the distribution line during pantry hours can encourage shoppers to make healthy choices if the volunteers 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 learn. Some ideas include:

- Providing a quick overview of the unfamiliar items before the pantry opens
- Allowing volunteers to sample the foods so they can speak from their personal experience
- Asking volunteers to test out a recipe using the ingredient

Volunteers in all kinds of 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, intake volunteers can help "prime" healthy choices by mentioning some of the healthy options available that day, and volunteers who help shoppers bring their groceries to their cars can spread the word about upcoming classes or events related to nutrition.

Create Opportunities for Shoppers to Try New Foods

Some people, regardless of income, can be reluctant to try foods that are unfamiliar to them. That said, people experiencing food insecurity typically have additional barriers to trying new foods. Since food budgets are so limited, it can be very risky to use limited funds on items you don't know if you or your family members will like. Even in a food pantry, where the items are free, opting to use any of your allotted points on items you aren't entirely sure you'll like and use can be daunting. As a result, food pantry guests might use their points on items they know will be eaten, like white bread, macaroni and cheese, or fruit cocktail, rather than taking home something new and healthy, like whole grain bread, chickpea pasta, or fresh pears.

> *"If 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."*
>
> -Local pantry leader

Here are some ideas for removing these barriers to trying new foods:

- Allow shoppers to select healthy items without having to choose them over less healthy counterparts. For example, at the bread section, shoppers could be allowed to select 2 bread options—one sliced white bread, bakery item, or other less healthy item, and one from a shelf of whole grain options. As another example, miscellaneous healthy items could be available on a special free shelf where shoppers can select an extra item.
- Offer samples, recipe demonstrations, and/or taste tests of healthy items. This can be as easy as opening a package of ready-to-eat food, such as whole grain crackers or dried fruit, or slicing up a piece of fruit and offering samples. Pantries can also offer samples of a prepared recipe that uses a featured item. Taste tests are a great way to keep people entertained while they wait in the pantry, and they can help shoppers get excited about items that haven't been popular in the pantry previously. For more information on hosting a taste test, see this guide.
- Partner with other organizations to offer taste tests. Some pantries have hosted representatives from the Marion County Public Health Department, Purdue Extension, Million Meal Movement, and Pack Away Hunger to offer samples of healthy recipes.

Make it Easier to Cook with Healthy Items

Sometimes healthy food options are turned down because shoppers don't think they have time to prepare them. Below are a few ideas that can help reduce this barrier.

Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP): The Stoplight Approach to Pantry Nutrition

Supporting Wellness at Pantries (SWAP) is a method for categorizing and promoting healthy foods in food pantries using a stoplight approach. Pantry foods are categorized and labeled green (choose often), yellow (choose sometimes) and red (choose rarely) based on their levels per serving size of sodium, added sugar, and saturated fat. The SWAP method uses the same research as the Healthy Eating Research (HER) Guidelines to determine what is healthy. Since the SWAP method can be a lot to take on all at once, we recommend that interested pantries purchase the SWAP kit, which contains shelf-talker signs, posters, and information for getting started, and begin implementing this method in increments. To learn more about SWAP, visit the Gleaners Nutrition Hub. For assistance implementing SWAP in your pantry, contact IHN.

Cooking Matters

Indy Hunger Network's Cooking Matters program teaches participants how to make healthy, nutritious, and affordable meals, and how to use nutrition information to make healthier choices. Participants engage in an evidence-based, hands-on cooking demonstration. At the completion of class, participants take home ingredients to recreate what was made in class at home. Programming can be offered in a variety of ways: virtual classes, in-person series classes, in-person one-time classes, or classes taught through Satellite Partnerships. For more information, visit the IHN website.

- Make meal kits by grouping a healthy recipe with all the ingredients needed for that recipe in a bag. Some easy meals to start with include chili and casseroles.
- Offer cooking and nutrition classes in partnership with Cooking Matters and/or Purdue Extension. Other local partners might be willing to lead classes as well. Classes can be hosted on-site, or pantry guests can be referred to off-site or virtual classes.
- Provide 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. We recommend finding recipes that include no more than 8 ingredients, that have built-in flexibility (e.g., allow substitutions for some items, can be cooked in the oven or the microwave), take less than 45 minutes to prepare, and require no special equipment or unusual ingredients. For more information finding recipes that are a good fit for the food pantry, see this guide.

The Mary Lee Maier Community Food Pantry created a booklet of fast and easy recipes using pantry food.

The Harvest Time Food Pantry offers recipe cards from Leah's Pantry at their registration counter.

These resources are good starting points to find appropriate recipes:

- Cooking Matters: Available in English, Spanish, Chinese, French, and Vietnamese.
- Feeding America Healthy Recipes: Available in English and Spanish.
- Leah's Pantry: Available in English and Spanish; printed cards available for purchase.
- Gleaners Food Bank Nutrition Hub: Available in English or English and Spanish.
- Food Hero: Available in English and Spanish.
- EatFresh: Available in English; includes information on dietary restrictions, like gluten-free, low sodium, vegan, or dairy-free.

HEALTHY NUDGES FOR PANTRIES THAT DON'T USE SHOPPING MODELS

This section's list of healthy nudges was compiled mostly with shopping model pantries in mind. However, all pantries can work toward promoting healthy options.

Here are some ideas for pantries that use lists or menus for food selection.

- Place healthy options at the top of the lists.
- Mark healthy options with symbols or labels. For instance, add a thumbs up icon next to healthy items, add a "diabetes-friendly" or "healthy choice" label to specific items, or color-code the list based on nutrition.
- Create meal bags with ingredients for healthy recipes.
- Make fresh produce or other healthy foods free or bonus items.
- Add "recipe available" or "cooking tip available" next to uncommon items.
- Offer on-site Cooking Matters classes, or refer guests to off-site and/or virtual cooking classes.

IHN's Healthy Nudges Program

Are you interested in making several nutrition-related improvements to your pantry, but aren't sure where to start? IHN's Healthy Nudges Program provides equipment and technical assistance to food pantries in Central Indiana that need support implementing improvements to increase their ability to source, store, distribute, and promote healthy foods. For more information, visit the IHN website.

Ideas for pantries that distribute pre-packed bags include:

- Offer information about the healthy items included in pre-packed bags. Pantries can post this information in the line, or offer printouts that identify items and provide cooking or nutrition tips.
- Make recipes available for items provided.
- Offer on-site Cooking Matters classes, or refer guests to off-site and/or virtual cooking classes.

TURN YOUR NUTRITION PRACTICES INTO POLICIES

Our final recommendation on this topic is something every pantry can do: make sure your pantry's practices to improve nutrition and promote healthy foods are documented as a policy! The primary purpose of the nutrition policy is to ensure that any improvements or strategies implemented by current and former pantry leadership are documented, explained, and can be carried forward in the event of leadership changes.

It happens too often that a pantry leader makes incredible strides in adopting best practices, only to have those practices reversed by the next pantry leader who has good intentions but does not understand, for example, that the healthy items were placed in the front of the line for a reason. Creating a nutrition policy might sound very formal or official, but in most situations it doesn't have to be fancy or time-consuming to create. A nutrition policy can be as simple as a one-page document that lists the nutrition-related practices that are currently used in the pantry and a brief explanation of each. Of course, once a policy is created, we strongly recommend training staff and volunteers on these policies, and ensuring copies of the policy are available for reference. To get started, see this example of what a nutrition policy can look like and include, as well as this corresponding template to create a similar policy. For large pantries that would like to create a formal policy or make improvements to an existing policy, a more in-depth guide can be found here.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Nutrition Hub, Gleaners Food Bank
- Hunger & Health, Feeding America
- *The Power of Nudges*, Feeding America
- Jump IN for Healthy Kids
- "More Than Food," Foodshare Food Bank

FOOD SAFETY

BASIC FOOD SAFETY IN PANTRIES

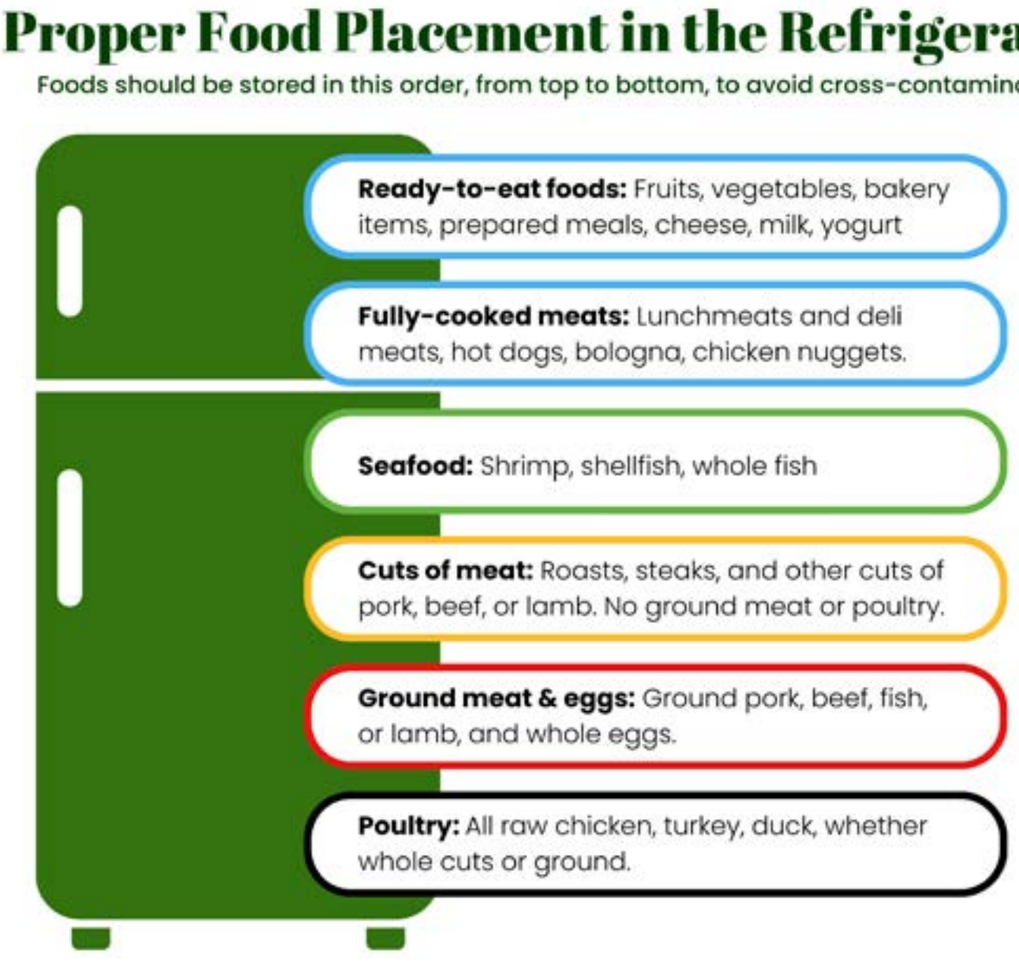
To ensure the food your pantry distributes is safe to consume, it is important to follow specific food safety protocols, and to make sure that pantry volunteers are trained in the necessary food safety information. While some food pantries might be required by their partners to follow additional food safety policies, this section outlines the typical guidelines food pantries need to follow, as well as the resources available to help develop and implement your pantry's food safety policies.

Maintain a Clean and Safe Pantry Environment

Keeping the pantry space clean and safe includes proper handwashing stations, pest control, keeping the pantry tidy, and sanitizing the areas where food is stored and handled, as well as the equipment that comes into contact with food.

Specifically, the following guidelines should be considered:

- Shelves should be positioned so that food is never closer than 6 inches to the floor or 4 inches from a wall.



- Pantries should regularly work to prevent pests (rodents, cockroaches, pantry moths, etc.). This includes sealing openings to the outside, checking donations and food deliveries for signs of pests, storing food in proper containers, and working with pest control companies as needed.
- Store food to avoid cross-contamination. Pantries with plenty of space and equipment can easily prevent cross-contamination by storing meat in a separate freezer from vegetables, for example. Smaller pantries can practice safe storage by ensuring that foods likely to carry bacteria are stored underneath other foods; a refrigerator holding raw chicken, fresh vegetables, and fish should be stored in this order, from top to bottom: fresh vegetables, fish, raw chicken. Additionally, raw meats should be kept in food storage containers in order to prevent juices from spilling and contaminating other items.

Receive Safe Foods from Approved Sources

While food pantries are allowed to distribute some expired foods (see "Confused About Expired Foods?" below for more information on food dates), there are other guidelines pantries can follow in their food sourcing and distribution to promote food safety. Specifically, the following should be considered:

- Track food recalls to ensure the pantry does not distribute recalled food. Food banks do a good job of ensuring recalled food is not distributed from the food bank to pantries, but pantries should pay attention to recall announcements if they source food from anywhere else.
- Dispose of any food items that have been opened or punctured, are missing labeling, or show signs of pest damage. Do not distribute food that is spoiled (i.e., moldy, foul-smelling, or discolored).
- Avoid cans that are rusty, bulging, have a dent on the seam or rim, or dents that come to a point.
- Do not distribute items that have not been inspected, such as homemade baked goods or home-canned items. Homegrown, whole produce is safe to distribute.

Record And Maintain Safe Temperatures

Record cold storage temperatures at the start and end of each day. Refrigerated food should be below 41 degrees F, and frozen foods should be below 0 degrees F. Dry storage should be between 50-70 degrees F. For information, see University of Nebraska Extension's food storage chart.

Keep Foods Cold During Distribution

Some pantries are fortunate to have cold storage units stationed within their

Confused About Expired Foods?

Food date labeling can be extremely confusing for people both distributing and receiving food from food pantries. Food manufacturers use different terms to label their food—"best by," "use by," "expiration," etc. These labels are typically an indicator of peak quality, rather than safety. In many cases, food banks and other food sources provide foods to pantries that are already past date.

Except for baby food, baby formula, and medicine (which should be discarded after the dates pass), it is safe for food pantries to distribute past-date foods. For more information, see this in-depth guide written for food pantries focused on the shelf lives of various products, as well as how long foods are safe past their date codes. To display information about shelf life and food dates in the pantry, see this printable poster.

distribution lines, which allows the food to be distributed without major concerns about keeping fresh and frozen foods cold. In these cases, the only improvements a pantry might consider making would be to reduce the amount of time that refrigerator and freezer doors are open. It can strain equipment, compromise food safety, and delay distribution lines when a shopper, for example, digs through a chest freezer to find their choice of meat.

However, for the pantries that distribute outdoors, in non-climate controlled buildings or in distribution lines that do not have nearby cold storage units, it is important to take extra precautions in order to keep foods cold. Here are some ideas:

- Use tents to cover food outside, even in nice weather. The shade will slow down how quickly cold items thaw, melt, and spoil in the sun.
- Cover cases or pallets of cold food with insulated blankets when the food is in transit in a non-refrigerated truck or being distributed in the pantry without refrigeration.

God's Bounty Food Pantry keeps their produce cold by using food safe bins with freezable inserts.

Crooked Creek Food Pantry distributes eggs and other cold foods from giant coolers that can be moved using a pallet jack. Pre-packed carts of food are stationed under a tent during distribution to protect the items from sun and precipitation.

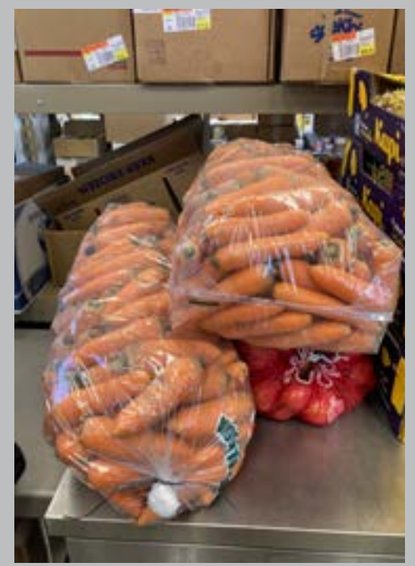
- Store cold food in coolers to provide insulation that is more stable and longer lasting than tents or blankets.
- During pantry hours, distribute cold foods shopper-by-shopper. For example, when a pantry shopper arrives at the meat and dairy counter, they will see a sign or display of their available options (e.g., turkey breast or ground beef, and 2% milk or soy milk), and a pantry volunteer will fetch the requested items from a nearby cooler and refrigerator.
- If your pantry does not offer many choices for cold foods (e.g., every household receives the same meat, dairy, and egg options) distribute pre-packed cold bags that are kept frozen or refrigerated until the entire bag is given to a shopper.
- Pantries that offer a large variety of foods that need to be kept cold can place items in bins with frozen ice pack inserts. These bins can be arranged to fit on one mobile shelving unit.
- If your pantry has display case refrigerators or freezers and extra space in the distribution line, display cases can be wheeled into the distribution line during pantry hours and then wheeled back to storage when the pantry is closed.
- Pantries can use cold tables, ice buckets, or bins with freezable inserts to offer limited quantities of cold foods in the distribution line. For example, the meat station in a pantry's distribution line might be a folding table with a few freezable bins on top—one bin of fish, one bin of hot dogs, one bin of chicken. Shoppers make their selections, and volunteers continue restocking the cold trays as needed to replenish the station.

Complete Food Safety Trainings

Food safety training is available to food pantry leaders, and is required by some funders, foods-providing organizations, and health departments. Gleaners agencies can complete their food safety training through

Repackaging Bulk Foods

Some food pantries receive bulk foods that need to be divided into smaller quantities in order to facilitate distribution to shoppers. These foods might come from a food bank, a wholesale club, or other source. Generally speaking, the only foods that pantries are allowed to repackage (without requiring special facilities, equipment, and processes) are whole, fresh fruits and vegetables. For example, large containers of onions, potatoes, carrots, and other produce items can be divided into smaller bags for distribution, as long as the repackaging is done in a clean environment, the foods are packaged into new, clean, food-safe containers, and the pantry does not peel or slice the foods.



For all other bulk foods, there are additional requirements pantries must follow in order to repackage them. For an overview of these requirements, see this guide. For in-depth information on repackaging non-ready-to-eat dry products (e.g., rice, dry beans, pasta), see this report.

Gleaners; other food pantry leaders can complete the Food Handler Course through ServSafe. Once leaders have been trained, volunteers should have access to information on food safety through posters and posted policies, training, and orientation.

The Good Samaritan Act

Learning about food safety can be nerve-wracking for some food pantry leaders, due to fears about being liable or legally responsible for the foods distributed from the pantry. What happens if someone gets sick from food they got at the pantry?

While it's important to take precautions to prevent illnesses and other food safety issues, it's also important to know that The Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act legally protects donors and charitable food distributors like food pantries that provide free food in good faith to the community. For more information, see this fact sheet.

Apply for a Food Pantry License

If your pantry distributes foods that require cold storage, we highly recommend getting a food pantry license. Pantries in Marion County can submit the Food Pantry Application form from the Marion County Public Health Department (MCPHD). The fee to be licensed is $20 per year.

SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT FOOD SAFETY

Food pantry leaders have the opportunity to educate others about food safety. Specifically, we strongly advise that pantry leaders provide food safety information both to pantry volunteers and to pantry guests.

- All kinds of pantry volunteers can benefit from a better understanding of food safety, because food safety is needed in picking up food from the food bank, transporting food from a store or other donor, receiving and inventorying food, storing food, putting food in the distribution line, and answering questions from pantry guests. Pantry volunteers who regularly lead shifts or spend significant time in the pantry might benefit from completing a training program through ServSafe or Gleaners. Less frequent volunteers could benefit from receiving a quick written and/or verbal overview of the pantry policies on food safety that are relevant to their specific volunteer tasks. Making posters and other printed information available throughout the pantry can also be a helpful reference.
- Pantry guests can also benefit from learning about food safety in the pantry. Our top two recommendations for educating pantry guests are 1) to share information on at-home food safety, such as cooking temperatures, cross-contamination, and storage practices, and 2) to share information on product dating to ensure that shoppers who receive food past the sell-by date do not throw away the food or develop negative views toward the pantry due to not understanding food date policies.

FOOD SAFETY AND ALLERGIES

Approximately 33 million people in the United States have a food allergy. That's 11% of adults and 8% of children. Because of the prevalence of food allergies, it's safe to say that every food pantry serves people with food allergies on a regular basis. Food allergies are different from food sensitivities or food preferences. Many people who have allergies could experience life-threatening reactions if they ate an allergen. For that reason, it's important for food pantries to consider how to best serve people with food allergies.

Another reason why pantries should consider making a special effort to provide allergen-free foods is because foods like gluten-free pasta are often significantly more expensive than their counterparts. Grocery bills could be much higher for people with allergies, which particularly affects people experiencing poverty and/or food insecurity.

Accommodating Allergies in the Pantry

Pantries can't predict which foods will be allergens for the people they serve, but pantry leaders can use data to inform their strategies for offering allergen-free foods. The nine leading causes of food allergies identified in the US are milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soybeans, and sesame.

Here are some recommendations for accommodating allergies in the pantry.

- Make an effort to source allergen-friendly foods, in addition to your regular items (e.g., select plant-based dairy products from the food bank, add gluten-free items to your food drive lists).
- Prioritize sourcing items that are naturally free of the top allergens, such as all fruits and vegetables (frozen, fresh, or canned), rice, meat (beef, chicken, turkey, pork, lamb), beans, and corn tortillas.
- Offer a choice model so shoppers can choose items that are safe for them to eat (See Section 5: Food Distribution). If your pantry uses a pre-packed distribution

Little Free Food Pantries

Indianapolis has hundreds of little free food pantries. Similar to a little free library, these pantries are stationed in yards, at building entrances, and other locations throughout the city. They offer free groceries, available 24/7, available via a self-serve model. Sometimes these pantries are tended by a specific person or organization, but typically they are kept going (or not) by well-intentioned neighbors.

Generally, we don't advise starting little free food pantries because of the following food safety concerns:

- Pest issues – Since most little free pantries are not entirely sealed or air-tight, they are susceptible to ants, cockroaches, mice, moths, and other pests.
- Lack of donation information – Since most little free pantries are stocked by individuals in the community, there is no information available about why the food is being donated or how the food has been handled prior to donation. For example, were the canned foods left in a hot car for a few hours?
- Unsafe temperatures and humidity – Since most little free pantries are made out of old newspaper holders or makeshift shelters outdoors, the temperature inside the box is highly dependent on the outside temperature. This can expose food to extreme cold and heat, as well as to high humidity. All of these variations can cause even shelf-stable foods to become unsafe or even fatal to consume.

Beyond food safety, we have also found that these boxes are unreliable sources of food for people experiencing food insecurity. The vast majority of little food pantries are stocked sporadically, which means a person who needs food might arrive to find an empty pantry, a few canned vegetables, or a granola bar, none of which provide a sufficient meal or make good use of a person's valuable time.

We've seen a few little free food pantries in Indianapolis that are well cared for, and as such are assets to the neighborhood. These well-run little pantries are generally on-site at an established food pantry with a consistent supply of food, are tended at least once daily to ensure they are stocked and food-safe, and are run by people who have training in food safety. In these cases, a little free food pantry can provide emergency, after-hours support to people who rely on the pantry for groceries.

method, consider allowing shoppers to swap out items they cannot eat. For example, if all pantry boxes contain a jar of peanut butter, create a way for someone who is allergic to peanuts to receive a different item instead.

Northside Food Pantry displays a food allergy warning sign alongide foods with known allergens.

Labeling Guidelines

There are legal requirements for food labeling through the Fair Packaging and Labeling Act. Most of the requirements fall on food manufacturers, grocers, and even food banks, as opposed to food pantries, but the general guidelines are as follows.

- All packaged food (most food pantry products) that contains more than one ingredient needs to have a label that includes the item name, manufacturer name, weight, and list of ingredients. All packaged foods that end up at a pantry after being sourced from a grocery store or food bank will already be labeled in this way.
- Whole, fresh produce does not need to be labeled.
- Prepared foods (i.e., rescued food from bakeries, restaurants, etc.) are not legally required to be labeled, but it is recommended that pantries label the items, if they don't already have labels. Label information should include a disclaimer that the food has been rescued and may contain or have come into contact with allergens, a description of the food (e.g., cheese pizza), the date of the donation, and the name and location of the donor. These labels can be affixed to each item, or can be displayed as a shelf sign in the pantry. If you regularly receive prepared foods that do not arrive at the pantry already labeled, check with your Gleaners representative to see if there are any additional guidelines or requirements for safe distribution of these foods.

To learn more about food pantries that are intentionally providing food to people with allergies and other dietary restrictions, see this article.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "Food Safety Fact Sheets", USDA
- "Be Food Safe," Feeding America

WRAPAROUND SERVICES

PANTRIES CAN OFFER MORE THAN FOOD

Wraparound services are the community resources and social services available to address needs beyond emergency food. By connecting pantry guests to these resources, pantries can address the multi-faceted needs faced by low-income people more effectively than by providing only food. Since food insecurity is a symptom of poverty or crisis rather than an isolated experience, almost all people utilizing pantries have needs beyond their immediate food needs that could be met by connecting with other available services.

There are many government programs and nonprofit organizations designed to address the needs of families in poverty or crisis, but they're not always well-known or easy to understand. If people who are eligible for services do not know that services exist, do not know they are eligible, or have other barriers to applying, they will not be able to benefit from the services. Food pantries are uniquely positioned to break these barriers by connecting people to resources and programs that could help them gain stability in their lives and even address root causes of food insecurity. This section includes strategies for promoting wraparound services in the pantry, as well as a partial list of resources to consider promoting. Implementing these strategies can have a huge return on investment in terms of shortening the pantry line.

Brightwood Community Center offers relevant flyers and brochures using a magazine rack.

PROMOTING WRAPAROUND SERVICES

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

- Co-locate services so that another social service is always available in the same location as the food pantry. For example, the St. Vincent de Paul Client Choice Pantry has a Gennesaret Free Clinic on-site for free medical care, the Community Cupboard at Gleaners Food Bank offers a blood pressure screening machine in the waiting area, and Grace Care Center offers ESL classes, vehicle and bicycle repairs, and a thrift shop for household items.
- Organize visits from service providers to offer services or information during pantry times. For example, a mobile clinic could be stationed in your pantry's parking lot a few times per year. Other examples of services include blood pressure screenings, mobile dental clinics, free tax preparations, or SNAP enrollment. Visiting organizations can also provide printed information about off-site services.
- Offer person-to-person assistance for referrals. Some pantries have volunteers, staff members, or social workers who are trained to talk with pantry guests about available resources and provide information, referrals, and assistance with next steps.

- Make digital or printed information available in the pantry. Most service providers offer free flyers, brochures, posters, business cards, or other printed materials. These resources could be displayed on a table, brochure rack, or bulletin board in a central location. Remember that QR codes can be more easily updated and take up less space than full posters or flyers. Many pantries are also embracing digital displays for wraparound service information. For example, a TV screen in the pantry waiting room could rotate through various slides with resource information.

Providing Non-Food Items in the Pantry

The idea of offering wraparound services is based on the fact that people experiencing food insecurity often need help with more than food. Helping pantry guests find the support they need can move people more quickly out of poverty and economic instability. One easy way pantries can help meet other needs is by providing non-food items in the pantry, which creates space in a pantry guest's budget for other costs like housing and healthcare. Everyone needs household items, but SNAP and WIC do not cover these purchases. Below are some commonly-requested items that many households need.

- Soap, shampoo, shaving cream, razors, and deodorant
- Toilet paper and paper towels
- Dish soap and laundry detergent
- Can openers
- Diapers and baby wipes
- Tampons and pads
- Vitamins
- Pet food
- Clothing
- Furniture

Few pantries can offer all of the items listed above, but providing just one or two non-food items can go a long way. For items that are frequently requested but not able to be offered at your pantry, consider providing information on other pantries or organizations that provide these items.

How to Source These Items

Sometimes non-food items are available from food banks (e.g., Gleaners Food Bank, Midwest Food Bank). Many pantries receive household or hygiene items from retail donations (see Section 4: Food Sourcing for more information). Some of these items can be added to food drive donation lists. For example, we've heard of many successful toilet paper drives. Finally, there are a few organizations that provide non-food supplies to food pantries, including:

- The Indiana Diaper Bank provides diapers and wipes to food pantries and other community partners throughout Indiana.
- I Support the Girls provides tampons, pads, and underwear to nonprofits.

WHERE TO START

Deciding Which Services to Promote

The next few pages include a long but incomplete list of commonly needed wraparound services. There are so many available resources in Indianapolis that it probably won't be practical or possible to connect your pantry guests to every resource listed. Instead, we recommend starting small and scaling up. Find ways to promote the resources that are most relevant to your pantry guests and that your pantry has capacity to promote.

Here are some questions to help you get started identifying which wraparound service to start with:

- Have you surveyed your pantry guests or community to learn about common needs and interests? (See Section 11: Community Feedback and Engagement for more information on surveying.)
- What connections do you have within your organization, congregation, or neighborhood? For example, you might have a hospital down the street that could occasionally conduct health screenings or outreach on-site; you might have a member of the congregation who works at a law office and could help arrange a free legal advice clinic; or your organization might have existing partnerships with other nonprofits and could request copies of educational materials from those partners.

COMMONLY NEEDED RESOURCES

Food

- Community Compass: Community Compass connects people to food resources through a website and mobile app. Users can find their nearest food pantry, meal site, SNAP or WIC retailer, or WIC clinic and can also screen themselves for SNAP and WIC eligibility.
- Free cooking and nutrition classes: Cooking Matters is a cooking and nutrition education program offered by Indy Hunger Network that equips people who have limited budgets with the skills to shop for and cook healthy meals.
- Referrals to hot meals and to other food pantries: We strongly suggest that pantries use Community Compass to refer pantry guests to other food pantries. Pantry information (open hours, documents required, etc.) changes frequently, so printed lists of pantry information become outdated almost as soon as they're printed. Community Compass is updated daily, and pantry information is much more likely to be accurate. To use Community Compass in the pantry, we've seen pantries successfully use a few strategies: provide flyers or business cards with Community Compass information; make a tablet or computer available in the waiting area so people can use Community Compass; or use the "share" feature on Community Compass to send a specific pantry to a guest using text or email.
- Information and enrollment assistance for federal nutrition programs: Helping someone enroll in SNAP or WIC is one of the fastest and most effective ways to address ongoing food needs. Pantry guests 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 the informational brochure for details about Marion County's WIC program. Additionally, Community Compass includes a SNAP and WIC screening tool. Because the process can be confusing, some applicants may need assistance in completing the SNAP application. Volunteers can be trained to do this. See Hunger Free America's SNAP Outreach Toolkit for information on recruiting and training volunteers for SNAP outreach. You can also connect pantry guests to IHN's Food Resource Services Hub (FRSH), which can help people apply for benefits and connect to other food resources.
- Information on free summer meals: The Indiana Department of Education supports

the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which 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. Families can also apply for SunBucks, a benefits program that provides $120 for each eligible, school-aged child in a family during the summer months when school is not in session.

- Information on nutrition incentive programs: Many farmers markets and some grocery stores offer matching programs for SNAP and/or WIC. Visit the Fresh Bucks website to learn about local incentive programs and CICOA's Produce for Better Health webpage for information on their program that provides seniors with free boxes of produce twice a month.
- For additional information on each of the federal nutrition programs and how they work, see IHN's Federal Nutrition Program Toolkit.

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.

St. Vincent de Paul's food pantry in Indianapolis offers medical care through the on-site Gennesaret Free Clinic.

- Information on sliding scale or low-cost clinics: Find information on specific centers using this list of Federally Qualified Health Centers.
- Resources on mental health and substance use, including treatment programs, support groups, and naloxone (a medicine that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose). Specific sites and resources can be found using the CHIP Handbook of Help or 211. You can also encourage clients to use 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- Information on free STI and HIV testing: See the Damien Center, Step-Up, Inc., and Community Health Network. For resources throughout Indiana, see the Department of Health's list of testing and counseling sites.
- Host or offer information on vaccine clinics: For information on pop-up and regularly-held clinics, see Marion County's Vaccintate Indy! Initiative and the Indiana Immunization Coalition. These organizations may also be open to hosting vaccine clinics at pantries.
- Onsite health screenings, such as blood pressure checks and pre-diabetes screenings.
- Community health fairs: Events can be found using 211 or Community Compass.

Legal & Financial Assistance

- Indiana Legal Services (ILS) offers free civil legal assistance to low-income people in Indiana. ILS helps people who have legal problems that decrease their ability to meet basic needs, but does not handle any criminal cases. ILS also has a SNAP appeals program. For information, see ILS's brochure on appeals.
- 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.
- Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic offers criminal record expungement, license reinstatement, and immigration law assistance.

- The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) offers free income tax preparation to qualified individuals. To learn more, see the information compiled by the IRS on free tax preparation.
- Budgeting, credit counseling, and personal finance classes organized by the pantry or other community organizations. Community centers like the John H Boner Community Center frequently offer financial classes or programs. Community Action of Greater Indianapolis (CAGI) and the Boner Center offer Individual Development Accounts, which are bank savings accounts that can help low-income individuals build assets and move towards financial stability.

Housing, Utility, & Furniture Assistance

- Subsidized housing programs: For an overview of these resources, see Indiana Legal Service's brochure on subsidized housing.
- Referrals to pantries with household items: Pantries offering household items can be found through 211.
- Information on applying for household items through St Vincent de Paul. People 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. Consider posting a flyer from the state government and sharing information about the United Way of Central Indiana's program for those who do not qualify for government assistance.
- 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 unhoused veterans to HVAF of Indiana.
- Provide a list of organizations offering rent and financial assistance, including referrals to the local Township Trustee office.
- Information on Rent and Mortgage Assistance: For information see the Indiana Housing & Community Development Authority (IHCDA) and Indiana Housing Now. The IHCDA also offers information on Section 8 housing choice vouchers.
- Information on income-based home repairs: See the City of Indianapolis' Homeowner Repair Program (HRP) and Greater Indy Habitat for Humanity's Home Repair Loan Program.
- Information on weatherization programs offered by Community Action of Greater Indianapolis.

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.

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 - 300 E. Fall Creek Parkway N. Drive | 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 - 311 Production Dr | 317-327-8800
- Warren - 501 N Post Rd |
- 317-327- 8947
- Wayne - 5401 W Washington St | 317-241-4191

Among other programs, CICOA offers home-delivered and congregate meals.

- Meals on Wheels of Central Indiana offers home-delivered meals and pantry boxes to seniors.
- 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.
- Home Repairs for seniors who want to age in place can be provided at no cost by Home Repairs for Good.

Clothing & Personal Care

- Changing Footprints supplies free shoes to food pantries.
- Laundry & More provides free laundry for families in Lawrence.
- I Support the Girls sources feminine hygiene items for pantries. For information, see the Indianapolis affiliate page on the I Support the Girls website.
- Dress for Success offers professional attire in addition to career and success coaching for women seeking economic independence.
- Nonprofit Resale Stores: The Society of St. Vincent de Paul operates local resale stores (Mission27 and NobleCause), which financially support the SVdP food pantries.

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 and Community Compass.
- 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 Resources

- A 24/7 helpline is 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; Coburn Place offers resources and safe housing for victims of domestic abuse and their children.
- Information on federal assistance for domestic violence victims who need financial help is available on ILS's brochure about TANF and Domestic Violence.
- Information on the Domestic Violence Network: Pantries can request printed resources through the form at this link.

Employment & Educational Resources

- Second Helpings has a free, culinary job training program.
- 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.
- Job opportunities and apprenticeships: EmployIndy helps youth, young adults, and adults navigate pathways to employment.

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.

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 US.

- La Plaza offers educational programs, workforce development support, and access to healthcare and human services for Spanish-speaking families.
- Immigrant Welcome Center organizes multiple programs for immigrants, including legal services and citizenship workshops.

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 SunBucks (see Food, above)
- The Villages offers community services to families, such as casework, counseling, and parent education.
- Firefly Children & Family Alliance 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.

Pets

- Referrals to pet food pantries. Use 211 to find nearby locations, such as Fido Indy and the Stable Food Pantry.

Transportation

- Bus passes: Pantries can apply for free bus passes to distribute to pantry guests through the IndyGo Foundation.
- Bike shares: Through IndyRides Free, Marion County residents are eligible for a pass to use Pacers Bikeshare.
- Car repairs: Community Action of Greater Indianapolis offers car repairs for participants in their case management program. For information on the program and applications, see the CAGI website.
- Rideshares: Lyft offers discounted rideshares for SNAP users through the Lyft Up program.
- Overnight parking: Safe Park Indy is a program for unhoused individuals living in their cars, which provides a safe overnight environment and connection to social services.

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. After reviewing the resources and information above, if you're still not sure where to start, we recommend connecting pantry guests to additional food resources. Try focusing on federal nutrition programs (SNAP, WIC) and Community Compass. You can start by offering QR codes, flyers, and other printed information, and eventually begin inviting organizations to help with SNAP applications, demonstrate Community Compass, or help people screen themselves for program eligibility. Once your pantry is comfortable with connecting guests to additional food resources, you can expand your promotion of wraparound services.

Next steps for expansion could include:

- Asking pantry guests about the resources they need access to or information about.
- Offering resources based on the season (e.g., tax filing assistance in winter/spring, Energy Assistance Program information in late summer/early fall).

SERVING COMMUNITIES WITH UNIQUE NEEDS

ALL COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCE HUNGER, BUT NOT EQUALLY

Food insecurity is experienced by all different kinds of people. This is something many food pantry leaders know better than anyone, because of the wide variety of people who end up in food pantries. Pantry lines include people from many backgrounds, of all ages, speaking a variety of languages, using every different type of transportation, and with various levels of educational attainment. Hunger is pervasive and impacts people of all backgrounds and geographies.

> *"The struggle against hunger is a daily reality for too many Americans, and* ***food insecurity is not equally experienced across different communities or groups****. Historically underserved communities, such as people of color, Indigenous communities, members of religious minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, rural communities, and many others, often face* ***barriers to getting the healthy food*** *they need for themselves and their families."*
>
> -USDA FNS

While it's true that hunger can impact anyone, there are some communities that experience hunger disproportionately. Some information on this topic has been woven in throughout the Manual of Best Practices, such as the fact that Black residents of Marion County experience food insecurity at twice the rate of white residents. This is why we encourage pantry leaders to examine their pantry policies and structure to ensure pantries are as effective and accessible as possible.

There are many communities that are not only disproportionately impacted by hunger, but also face additional barriers to using food pantries and accessing other types of food assistance. Pantries can make small but important changes to ensure the needs of these communities are better met. While some food pantries are open only to specific, underserved communities (e.g., HVAF of Indiana, Indiana Youth Group), the majority of food pantries are open to the broader community, yet may serve large numbers of people from underserved groups. While serving the broader community is important work, pantries that consider the unique needs of the specific people in their communities are better equipped to make a real impact.

In this section, we will briefly explore some of the barriers faced by religious minority communities, unhoused people, seniors, immigrants and refugees, LGBTQ+ people, and people experiencing mental health crises and substance use disorders. We will also provide a few ideas and resources for tailoring service to these communities. The list of communities that are underserved is not exhaustive, and the lists of ideas for serving these communities is simply a starting point. As you continue getting to know who your pantry is serving and what their needs are, your pantry will be able to identify additional steps toward improvement and accessibility.

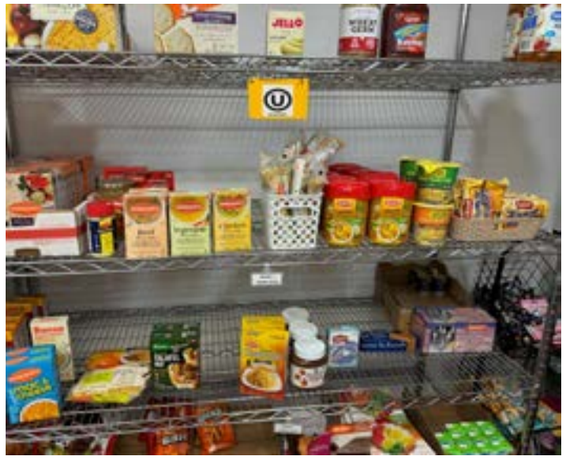
Minority Religious Communities

While the majority of food pantries in Indianapolis are affiliated with a church, Indianapolis residents have a good deal of religious diversity. There are approximately 15,000 Muslims, 7,000 Jews, 2,300 Buddhists, and 1,200 Hindus in Marion

County, as well as 5,000 Sikhs in Central Indiana.[16] Some people with different faith traditions might feel uncomfortable visiting a church at all. However, people of various religious backgrounds and affiliations rely on food pantries run by churches or secular organizations.

Below are a few ideas for serving people from minority religious communities.

- Try to develop a general understanding of who your pantry is serving and what some of the food and cultural norms might be.
- Train your volunteers to be welcoming and respectful to people who have specific dietary restrictions.
- Do not require religious participation in order to receive food. While food pantries can and should be upfront about their motivations for serving the community (e.g., faith), invitations to participate in a devotional, church service, prayer, or other religious activity should happen after food is received and should be entirely optional.
- When possible, refer people who follow special religious diets to pantries that specifically source food for that diet. For example, Jewish Family Services offers a kosher pantry, and multiple mosques throughout Indianapolis offer halal food.
- Stock foods with common dietary restrictions in mind. Meat is one of the biggest considerations in religious dietary restrictions—some people do not eat pork, some people only eat halal meat, others specifically do not eat halal meat, some people do not eat shellfish, some people do not eat meat at all. This can seem confusing and overwhelming, but to simplify, here's what we recommend: always have at least one meat option on-hand that is not pork, and always have at least one vegetarian protein option (e.g., tofu, plant-based meat). If you want to take it a step further, try to always have fish on-hand as well.



Popsie's Pantry (Jewish Family Services) offers kosher food in the pantry.

- Increase choice in the pantry. If your pantry serves an extremely diverse group of people, the more choice people have over the foods they select, the better. Since there are so many different dietary restrictions to keep track of, creating more opportunities for choice enables people to select the foods that are most appropriate for them. If your pantry does not use a choice model, consider at least allowing visitors to exchange the meat item they received for something different.
- Consider religious holidays when sourcing and distributing food. If your pantry serves a large number of Jewish neighbors, consider sourcing matzo or brisket leading up to Passover or potatoes and applesauce for Hanukkah. If your pantry serves a lot of Muslim neighbors, consider prioritizing foods that are high in protein, healthy fats, and whole grains during the month of Ramadan. Additionally, if your pantry serves many Muslims but is not connected to a mosque, we recommend ensuring neighbors can pick up food from the pantry during times other than sunset or evening hours.

> *"We know far and away that **people would rather not eat** than to break with their religiously informed diets."*
> *-Jessica Chait, Met Council*

People Who Are Unhoused

There are many different situations a person could be in that would classify them as "unhoused." While the first thought that comes to mind for many people is someone who lives outside or stays in a homeless shelter, the term also includes people who are staying with friends or family members, living in a hotel, or living out of their car. For these reasons, it's not often possible to know by looking at someone whether or not they're housed, but many people in food pantry lines are experiencing housing insecurity and would benefit from additional services.

Below are a few ideas for serving people who are unhoused.

- Do not rely on observation to determine if someone is unhoused. Similarly, do not expect people to volunteer the information without being prompted. We recommend finding a discreet way to screen every person your pantry serves to determine if they are unhoused. For example, during intake, rather than starting with, "What is your address?," consider asking, "Do you have a permanent address?" If they say yes, then request their address. Alternatively, if intake is completed via a paper or online form, allow guests to check a box that says, "I am currently unhoused." This will help your pantry better determine resources to make available.
- If your pantry has a service area, make a policy for what the pantry should do when a person does not have a permanent address. In many cases, food pantries choose to serve all unhoused people, and opt to either skip the address field in their system, or add the address of the nearest shelter or DFR office. Additionally, keep in mind that many unhoused people will not have access to a photo ID, and even fewer will have a photo ID with an updated address. They are also unlikely to have a piece of mail.
- Consider sourcing food that does not require a kitchen or refrigeration. For example, fully cooked, shelf-stable foods are a good option. When distributing canned goods, find the cans with pop-top lids (or make can openers available on distribution days). Additionally, seek out donations of prepared food (e.g., sandwiches, cut fruit, single-serve drinks). Finally, keep in mind that many unhoused people have dental concerns, so we advise against offering, for example, whole apples as your only produce option. [17]
- If your pantry does not use a choice model, consider creating pre-packed bags of items that are shelf-stable and ready-to-eat, such as canned items (soups, vegetables, beans, meat), dried fruits, nuts or peanut butter, bread, whole fruit or packages of sliced fruit, snacks, and drinks.

Seniors

Older adults often face transportation barriers, dietary restrictions, technology difficulties, and mobility challenges that can limit their ability to visit a food pantry.

A few ideas for serving seniors include:

- Since many seniors rely on other people and services for transportation, consider co-locating the food pantry with another relevant resourcere, to allow seniors to make the most of each trip, or consider offering home delivery. For additional information about pantries that offer home delivery to seniors, see this article on senior hunger and this article on home delivery.
- Some seniors have mobility challenges and might have difficulty standing in lines, walking at the pace of the line, knowing where to put a walker while

pushing a cart, and carrying bags and boxes of groceries to their cars. At the very least, food pantry leaders and volunteers should be made aware of these challenges, so the pantry can respond on a case-by-case basis. However, creating a few pantry-wide changes could be useful for seniors and other shoppers as well. Consider adding chairs to the waiting area, offering to fill orders for anyone who has difficulty moving through the pantry themselves, and allowing carts to be wheeled directly to cars. Additionally, if your pantry serves a large population of seniors, consider adding senior shopping hours. Special shopping times, specifically for people over a certain age, allow pantries to slow down, offer more tailored service, and also provide a social opportunity for seniors.

- As much as possible, offer choice in the pantry. The most common dietary restrictions for seniors relate to dental challenges and to managing chronic diseases and medications. Ideally, senior shoppers will have the opportunity to select their own foods in the pantry. Consider these common dietary restrictions when sourcing food. In order to ensure seniors have appropriate choices in the pantry, we recommend sourcing low-sodium items and soft foods.
- If your pantry serves many seniors and/or offers a senior shopping day, volunteers should be coached in interacting effectively with people experiencing memory loss. To learn more, visit Dementia Friends Indiana.

Immigrants or Refugees

In our communities and our food pantries, we have many people who are new to the country, learning a different culture and language, and navigating paths to citizenship or residence. In Marion County, about 10% of residents are foreign-born, including refugees, recent immigrants, and people who immigrated to the U.S. many years ago.[18] While people in different situations—and from different cultures—

This infographic came from the Cultural Food Guide. For more information, see the full guide.

have different needs and experiences, there are some general guidelines food pantries can follow to improve service to immigrant communities.

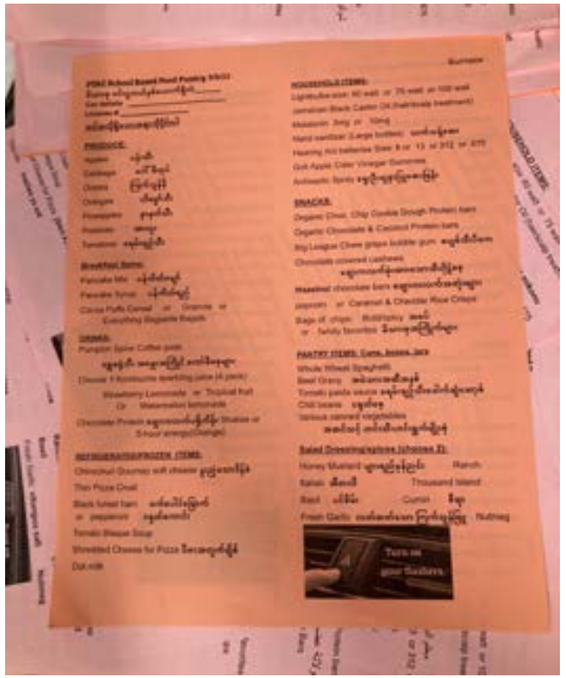
To help immigrants and refugees access your pantry easily, do not require unnecessary documents to receive food. We strongly recommend against asking for social security cards or numbers, birth certificates, government-issued identification, or green cards. Consider asking only for a piece of mail, a bill, or a lease agreement to show proof of address, and think about whether you need any documentation at all. If your pantry needs to collect information on the people visiting the pantry, be sure to be transparent about how the information will be used and stored. For example, will the intake information be reported to any government agencies? Will reports on pantry usage be made anonymous? Will the pantry simply report to the food bank on the number of people served? Many undocumented people will be hesitant to participate in activities that could somehow flag them to the government, and even some legal residents are nervous to participate in assistance programs because of concerns about compromising their legal status (primarily due to changing policies about public charges). As much as possible,

limit the information collected during intake and communicate openly about how the information collected will be used.

One way that Southeast Community Services prioritizes culturally appropriate foods is by offering dried herbs and spices.

Even if your pantry serves quite a few immigrants, there is a good chance there are many more immigrant neighbors in your community who do not use your pantry, either due to lack of awareness or fear. We recommend conducting outreach to immigrant communities in your neighborhood. Distribute translated flyers through trusted organizations, meet with community groups, and share information with local leaders. In all of this outreach, remember to highlight that everyone is welcome at the pantry, regardless of immigration status. For more information on conducting outreach, especially with undocumented people in mind, see this article.

Many immigrants are still learning English. Translating written materials and offering interpretation in the pantry can help bridge language barriers. For written materials, pantries can identify one or two languages that are most commonly spoken in the community and work with a volunteer, bilingual pantry guest, community partner, or professional translation company to translate important information into those languages. To start, consider translating signs about pantry hours and eligibility, important instructional signs (e.g., "take a ticket," "do not enter"), intake forms, food lists (for list-style distribution methods), and shelf signs (for shopping models). To take this work one step further, consider offering interpretation services in the pantry. Some pantries are fortunate enough to have volunteers who speak languages used in the pantry, and those volunteers are a valuable resource for communicating with people during intake, while shopping, or to answer questions on someone's first pantry visit. Alternatively, there are other interpretation options available. Some pantries have found success using free mobile apps, handheld interpretation devices, and/or an on-demand, phone-based interpretation service. To learn more about language barriers in the pantry, see this article.



The Perry Township Academic Center has translated their shopping lists into multiple languages.

Consider dietary preferences and cultural differences when sourcing food. If your pantry serves a large number of people from one specific culture, try using the Cultural Food Guide to identify and source a few

special foods that are generally preferred by people from that region. For pantries that serve a more diverse group of people from many different cultures, there are some general principles to keep in mind that can make your pantry's food selection more likely to be culturally-appropriate across the board. For example, focus on sourcing whole (unprocessed) foods, prioritize fresh fruits and vegetables, offer alternatives to canned items (e.g., offer dry beans, not just canned beans), offer herbs and spices, and ensure shoppers have protein options other than pork. To learn more about sourcing strategies for these foods, see the Cultural Food Guide.

Even after making every effort to offer culturally appropriate foods in the pantry, the vast majority of pantries will also offer many foods that many of their American-born guests appreciate, but are unfamiliar to some immigrants. Examples might include peanut butter, pancake mix and syrup, canned beans, and macaroni and cheese. If your pantry serves a large number of immigrants, consider providing cooking demonstrations, hosting Cooking Matters classes, offering taste tests, or providing recipes and cooking tips to pantry guests. All of these activities will provide information on using common pantry foods and can help immigrants take home additional foods from the pantry. However, we do not recommend focusing on these educational activities instead of offering culturally-appropriate foods. The two should be done in combination.

If your pantry provides information on wraparound services, offer this information in languages commonly spoken in your pantry. Many organizations offering wraparound services have translated versions of their flyers available.

The LGBTQ+ Community

Recent studies continue to show that people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (also known as LGBTQ) experience food insecurity at significantly higher rates than non-LGBTQ people.[19] Because of the high rates of hunger experienced by this community, as well as some of the barriers faced in accessing food assistance, food pantries have an opportunity to make a real impact in this area.

Here are a few ideas for serving the LGBTQ community.

- People who are transgender, nonbinary, or gender non-conforming might have identification and other documents with names, genders, and photos that do not exactly match the description of the person in your pantry. It can be a long, difficult process to update documents to officially change names, gender markings, or photos. Be sure your intake volunteers are trained to handle these situations. Our recommendation is to do whatever is needed to help the people in your pantry access food. Depending on your setup, that could mean accepting an outdated ID or requiring only a proof of address. If the name on the ID does not match the name given in the pantry, use the name the person introduced themselves with and not the other name.

> *"...transgender and gender non-conforming people reported* ***feeling unwelcome at food pantries****. Although 79% of those surveyed reported food insecurity, only 22% utilized local food assistance resources. One person reported being asked to sit through a church service where the pastor spoke out against homosexuality. Such barriers get in the way of helping a population that is* ***disproportionately affected by hunger****."*
>
> -UCLA Williams Institute

- Practice using gender-neutral language when talking with pantry guests. For example, instead of referring to someone as a man, woman, lady, or gentleman, consider using words like "person," "volunteer," "neighbor," or "shopper." Consider dropping greetings with "sir," "ma'am," or other gendered terms. These terms are meant to be respectful, but it's embarrassing for everyone when the wrong one is used.
- Remember that many people are using pronouns you might not assume they would use. Some pantries make a practice of asking each person about the pronouns they use. Other pantries provide name tags for shoppers and volunteers, and people are encouraged to write their pronouns on the name tag. Alternatively, an easy solution to avoid keeping track of everyone's pronouns is to use the general "they" for anyone you don't know.
- If your pantry offers non-food items that are typically gendered (e.g., underwear, tampons and pads, adult diapers, condoms, makeup, shampoo and other toiletries), allow people to select from all available options, rather than assuming who might need which items.
- Do not require religious activities in order to receive food. Food pantries are strongly encouraged to make sure that participation in religious activities (e.g., devotionals, services, prayer) in the pantry is optional and takes place after people have already received food.
- Reach out to organizations that work with LGBTQ people (e.g., IYG, Damien Center, Trinity Haven, GenderNexus) to let them know your pantry is available and welcoming to the LGBTQ community. Some social service organizations also host an informational table at the annual Indy Pride Festival.
- Train pantry staff and volunteers to treat everyone with respect, regardless of their religious or political beliefs about LGBTQ+ people. All people, no matter how they look, act, identify, or who they love deserve to have their basic needs met, including food and being treated with respect.

People Experiencing Mental Illness & Substance Use Disorders

The relationship between food insecurity and mental health and/or substance use can often be cyclical. A common narrative is that people experience food insecurity because they have mental health challenges or substance use disorders. In many cases, it happens the other way around: people experience mental health challenges or rely on substance use at least in part due to the trauma and stressors of experiencing poverty and food insecurity. Either way, food pantries frequently serve people who are actively experiencing challenges with mental health or substances.

Below are a few ideas for serving people experiencing these challenges.

- Train pantry leaders, shift leads, and regular volunteers in mental health first aid and conflict de-escalation. Tensions can run high in food pantry waiting areas, so when conflicts arise, pantry workers should be equipped to handle the conflict in a way that maintains the safety of other guests but does not prevent anyone from receiving the food they need. If someone is so disruptive that it's upsetting other guests, consider providing them with a pre-packed bag of emergency food and sending them on their way.
- Pantry leaders should also be trained in the administration of naloxone/Narcan. This drug reverses the effects of opioid overdose. The Marion County Public Health Department, as well as other health departments and organizations in other locations, offer community trainings and provide doses of naloxone to participants.
- Create or re-think pantry policies about substance use. In some pantries, if a person seems to be intoxicated, they are asked to leave the pantry without receiving food. We recommend a firm policy against having or using drugs or alcohol in the pantry. However, we also recommend making every effort to provide food to people in the pantry, whether or not they used substances

before visiting the pantry. If someone is so intoxicated that it's causing problems for other guests, consider providing them with a pre-packed bag of emergency food.

- Offer wraparound service information about relevant community resources. For example, people experiencing mental health challenges might benefit from learning about crisis hotlines, low-cost counseling, support groups, and tips for managing stress. People with substance use disorders might benefit from learning about accessing naloxone doses and fentanyl test strips, as well as information on recovery services.
- Some food pantries have started offering free counseling sessions as a co-located wraparound service. This is a great way to take the next step in supporting the mental health of the people you serve. To learn more about a pantry offering counseling, see this article.

People with Physical Disabilities

A person who has physical disabilities might experience any number of barriers to accessing food. Moreover, recent studies have shown that households that include someone with a disability have a significantly higher cost of living, primarily due to adaptive resources needed to complete daily tasks. [20]

Below are a few ideas for serving people with disabilities.

- Ensure pantry signs, websites, and important documents are designed with visual impairment in mind. For example, use high contrast colors and large fonts.
- Improve the physical accessibility of the pantry for people who use wheelchairs, walkers, or other assisted mobility devices. This could include widening doorways and aisles, adding ramps where there are steps, allowing guests to use elevators, or creating an option for curbside service or delivery for people who aren't able to access the pantry.
- Remember that service animals should be allowed in the food pantry, just as service animals are allowed in grocery stores. As in every setting, service animals must be well-behaved and under control, they should be clean and healthy, and they can be asked to leave if the animal becomes aggressive. The ADA indicates that sites cannot ask for proof of certification for service animals.
- Explore your options for bridging communication barriers for people who are blind or deaf. The gold standard would be to have ASL interpreters and to offer a shopping experience tailored to people who can't see the items on shelves. However, other accommodations can also go a long way toward expanding accessibility. For example, volunteers can communicate with people who are deaf by writing or typing. Additionally, volunteers can help select foods for people who are blind by practicing clear, patient, and descriptive verbal communication.

Additional Underserved Communities

This chapter is meant to serve as a starting point for improving service to some of the largest groups of people who experience food insecurity and have unique barriers to accessing food. Of course, there are many more communities of people who could have had a dedicated section in this chapter–veterans, college students, people who were formerly incarcerated, and people experiencing domestic violence, among many other groups, could be added.

Additionally, we cannot overstate how important it is for food pantries to take seriously the connections between food insecurity and race. In Indianapolis, as in the rest of the country, a long history of racism and discrimination paired with ongoing structural barriers has resulted in worse health outcomes and higher rates of food insecurity and poverty among people of color. People who are Black, Hispanic, Indigenous, and other people of color across the board experience disparately higher rates of poverty and food insecurity. For example, in Indianapolis, Black residents experience hunger at twice the rate of white residents.[21] This does not mean that white residents do not experience food insecurity, or that addressing food insecurity in predominantly white communities is not extremely important. Rather, people of all backgrounds and identities experience food insecurity, some communities experience disparate rates of hunger and additional barriers to accessing sufficient food. While some information on this topic has been woven throughout this manual, it deserves a specific mention as well. Due to the insidious, powerful, hard-for-some-to-see nature of structural racism, this is a topic that is bigger than this manual can begin to address. That said, below are a few ideas to serve as a starting point for thinking about race in your pantry.

- As a leadership team, learn about structural racism and create opportunities to share takeaways with volunteers. If you aren't sure where to start, we recommend the Seeing White podcast by SceneOn Radio, the For Good podcast by the Central Indiana Community Foundation, and SAVI's Racial Equity Report Card. Most national hunger organizations also offer resources on the intersection of food and race.
- Note the diversity of the community your pantry is located in. Do your pantry leaders, board members, and volunteers reflect that diversity? One of the most straightforward and impactful ways to start doing anti-racism work in the pantry is to put people of color and other people representing marginalized communities in positions of power. Doing so not only helps the pantry operate more effectively and impactfully, but it increases the chances that other neighbors will see the pantry as a resource for them.
- Develop internal goals for improving your awareness of the impact of racism on food access and to addressing these barriers. As with all good goals, these goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. Start small, measure your progress, report on your outcomes, and then start again with bigger goals.

WHERE TO START

At Indy Hunger Network, we rely on data to inform our next steps, and we encourage pantry leaders to do the same. Take a look at both who your pantry is currently serving and who is in your pantry's neighborhood or service area, and move forward from there. Developing an understanding of who your pantry is currently serving could be done in several ways—looking at intake data, anonymously surveying pantry guests, or using anecdotal data from a group of volunteers. Figuring out who is in your neighborhood or service area is generally more straight-forward. While there are many ways to find and use existing data, we generally recommend using the Community Profiles tool developed by SAVI to find demographics for your area.

Once you have this information, you can prioritize one or two communities that are most relevant to your pantry and neighborhood, and begin working on implementing some of the tips listed above (as well as other ideas from your team or online resources) to improve accessibility and service to those communities. Trying to improve your service to so many different underserved communities might seem overwhelming. We advise you to take it slowly and intentionally, one step at a time, and to find encouragement in the fact that, generally, what improves pantry service for one underserved community improves the pantry for everyone.

VOLUNTEERS

FOOD PANTRIES RUN ON VOLUNTEERS

Nearly every food pantry leader in Indianapolis either works with volunteers on a regular basis or is themself 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

Many food pantries, especially smaller pantries or those that are relatively new, only recruit general volunteers to help with anything needed on a pantry day. One of the first steps to improving volunteer management at a pantry is to create specific volunteer roles. This typically means creating an established list of volunteer roles and the priority level, primary tasks, and necessary training associated with each role. If you haven't already, consider creating a document with each volunteer role for both stocking days and distribution 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. Having a list of roles can help you recruit or advertise for specific positions, and helps to ensure potential volunteers understand what they are signing up for. Additionally, this list of volunteer roles will help you keep jobs on your radar that are important but not urgent, so you're ready to assign a new role when a new volunteer or intern joins the pantry.

Below are some common volunteer roles in food pantries.

- Shift leader
- Check-in, registration, or intake specialist
- Personal shopper or order filler
- Cardboard disposal, cleanup
- Shelf stocker
- Donation sorter
- Food bank pickup driver
- Donation pickup driver
- Delivery unloader

Don't forget to consider adding remote volunteer roles! There are many ways a person can contribute to the work of the pantry without leaving home. Potential tasks include: finding and writing grant proposals, developing partnerships or corporate sponsorships, gathering nutrition information and recipes, collecting wraparound service information, creating or maintaining a website, social media page, or newsletter, recruiting other volunteers, and planning food drives or fund drives. Offering remote volunteer opportunities is a great way to include people who otherwise couldn't or wouldn't volunteer.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Most food pantries have one or two obvious sources of volunteers. For example, a food pantry at a church might rely heavily on church members to run the pantry, or a school-based pantry's volunteer base might come primarily from the PTA or teachers. However, we strongly recommend that pantries branch out in order to recruit a diverse network of volunteers. Doing so not only helps the pantry acquire additional volunteers, but it improves the resilience and sustainability of the volunteer base and can improve pantry operations. In an ideal situation, your pantry should have volunteers of various ages, with different professional backgrounds, different races, ethnicities, genders, and language proficiencies, and different skill sets. Diversity—in every sense of the word—has nearly unmatched power for ensuring a pantry's volunteer base is strong, sustainable, and able to face any unpredictable challenges ahead. To work toward increasing the size and diversity of your volunteer base, consider some of the following sources of volunteers.

> "Today's volunteers expect an **easy registration process** that is quickly accessible. With technology being at the forefront of the modern era, registration should be available online."
> -VolunteerHub

Where to Find Volunteers

- Shoppers/pantry guests: Some of the people you serve might be willing to volunteer but haven't been invited or don't know how to sign up. People who utilize the pantry can make for incredible volunteers; they understand how the pantry works, they know how the experience might be improved for shoppers, and they can provide valuable insight to pantry leaders. If shoppers start volunteering at the pantry, be sure to decide the pantry's policy for when those shoppers receive their food, so they aren't penalized for volunteering or given unfair advantages. If you're stuck on this point, don't let it stop you from inviting shoppers to volunteer. Contact IHN and we will help you think through a policy for your specific context.
- 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 don't have a food pantry and are full of potential volunteers. Consider reaching out to faith communities in your neighborhood, even if you don't share a faith tradition. Additionally, if your pantry is connected to a larger denomination, consider reaching out to the other churches within that denomination for support, even if they aren't in your neighborhood. Finally, a few local pantries have had great success hosting Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) missionaries to volunteer in their pantries. This approach provided the pantry with reliable volunteers for a year, and the volunteers have sometimes brought valuable cultural and language skills to the pantry.
- Volunteer referral websites: Several websites allow organizations to post volunteer opportunities, including Charitable Advisors, Volunteer Match, Idealist, Teen Life, and IndyHub.
- United Way of Central Indiana: UWCI can connect your pantry to corporate volunteer groups.
- Students: Reach out to schools, scout groups, sports teams, internship programs, and clubs or other groups (4H, FFA, sororities, fraternities). High school students and college students often need volunteer hours or are looking for extracurricular activities. Most universities have job/volunteer boards and host volunteer fairs throughout the year.
- Volunteer service organizations: Fill a full-time position through AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, the Episcopal Service Corps, Public Allies, or a similar term-based volunteer service organization.

- Community Service Work Program: Court-ordered community service is an underutilized approach, and it has the potential to be beneficial both to the pantry and to the volunteer. For more information on signing up your organization as a community service site, email Probation-CommunityWork@ indy.gov.
- Local businesses: Coffee shops, gyms, and other places where people in the neighborhood congregate are good places to post a flyer about volunteer opportunities. Additionally, some local businesses might be interested in having their staff participate in a volunteer day at the pantry.
- Community fairs and events: Local colleges, neighborhoods, breweries, and other groups organize opportunities to connect future volunteers with local organizations. For example, your organization could host an informational table at your neighborhood block party or at cultural festivals.

Tips to Help with Recruitment

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

- E-newsletters or regular update emails to volunteers
- Online signups for volunteer slots (for example, using Sign-up Genius or SignUp)
- 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 volunteer with them or organizing a volunteer group from the neighborhood, workplace, or book club
- 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 can 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.

Volunteer Management Software

Many software options are available to help food pantries recruit and manage volunteers, including offering online sign-ups and automated reminders, tracking volunteer time, and communicating with volunteers. Depending on the size and needs of your pantry, volunteer management software can be a huge help and improvement. See this article for a list of available software, and to read examples of how this software is used in the pantry.

Recruiting for Skilled Roles

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. Openings for 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, and skills needed, as well as the 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 or sports team. Corporate volunteer groups are usually large; for that reason they are great for projects and special days at the pantry, such as sorting donations from a large food drive or running a holiday meal and gift giveaway. See more information on corporate sponsorships in Section 12: Fundraising.

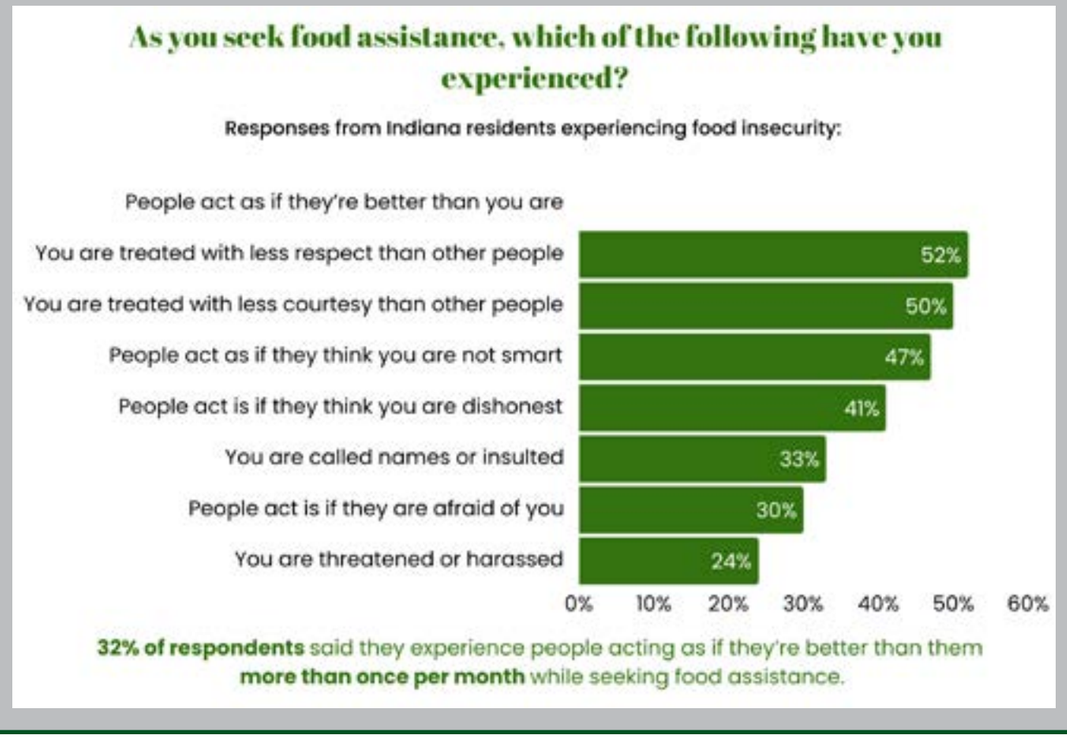
VOLUNTEER TRAINING

All volunteers need training and orientation before getting involved in the pantry—for your benefit, the volunteers' benefit, and the benefit of the people you serve. However,

How Are People Treated in Your Pantry?

Volunteering at a food pantry is an admirable choice, so it's easy to assume that everyone working in a food pantry is caring and compassionate toward the people they serve. However, people are not always treated well in pantries. In IHN's 2023 Hunger Study, survey respondents in Marion County were asked about their perceptions of discrimination while seeking food assistance. The results were unsettling and show major room for improvement. See the graphic below for a summary of the findings.

Improving these metrics starts with volunteers. Volunteers need to be taught the expectations for how people are treated in the pantry, they need to be given tools, resources, and policies for how to respond when an issue arises, and pantry leaders need to correct behaviors or reassign roles of volunteers who aren't able to treat people with respect, courtesy, and warmth.



volunteers will need different types and levels of training depending on their role.

All volunteers should be provided the following information before beginning a volunteer shift at the pantry.

- Pantry or organization's mission
- List of volunteer expectations
- Nondiscrimination and Civil Rights training (required for TEFAP pantries, but useful for all)
- Basics of food safety, if volunteer will be handling food
- Position-specific tasks and skills (e.g., using intake software, shelf stocking priorities, understanding shelf labels). 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, like intake, the volunteer might need significantly more training before doing the role on their own.
- Overview of common issues or questions and how to address them (e.g., for personal shoppers, what happens when someone takes more food than they're supposed to? For donation sorters, what happens if a package is leaking?)
- Introduction to the person they can go to with questions or problems during their shift

Longer-term volunteers and shift leaders should receive all of the above information as well as the following, as applicable.

- Training on conflict de-escalation and mental health first aid
- 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 Food Handlers Certification or other food safety certification
- First aid training, including administration of naloxone (Narcan)
- Knowledge of emergency preparedness plans–what happens in case of a fire, power outage, tornado, medical emergency, or active shooter?
- Cross-training. In order to create a sustainable and nimble team, regular volunteers should understand how to do at least one other job in the pantry, besides their primary role, so they can fill in for volunteers when needed.

For templates of volunteer management forms, including sign-in, intake, orientation documents, and waivers, contact the Director of Food Assitance Programs at IHN.

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, 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 will stay 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 distribution day, tell volunteers how many households the pantry served that day. After a stocking and sorting day, let volunteers know how many (estimated) pounds of food they sorted. If they're cleaning, unloading, or doing some other task, remind them of how important their work is to the overall effectiveness of the pantry, and tell a story about the impact the pantry has on people's lives.

A volunteer at the St. Christopher Food Pantry sorts food while interacting with other volunteers.

As much as possible, we recommend working with your volunteers to identify tasks that will fully leverage their strengths, skills, and interests. For example, a college student who volunteers to be a personal shopper might have recently taken a class in grant writing and could use that skill to help the organization. A shelf-stocking volunteer might be a retired data analyst who could create a better system for intake. You never know the many ways people can contribute to the pantry until you get to know them and find out what they like 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 also go a long way to improve volunteer retention and morale. Ideas include:

- Snacks or lunch available 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 leaders while securing a dedicated volunteer force. Volunteers can be promoted to shift leads, given special tasks, or invited to serve on your board of directors.
- 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

We recommend creating opportunities for your volunteers to give anonymous feedback about their experiences, good and bad. You can use some of the same strategies outlined in Section 11: Community Feedback & Engagement to do this.

Here are some questions to 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 those 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
- Free classes on volunteer recruitment and retention, Indianapolis Public Library

COLLECTING & USING FEEDBACK

IMPORTANCE OF FEEDBACK

Receiving feedback from the people your pantry serves and using that feedback to inform decisions about the pantry is important work that benefits everyone involved in the pantry.

The most obvious benefit of receiving feedback from the people you serve is that your pantry will get valuable information from food insecurity experts, and that information can significantly improve the effectiveness of the pantry when it is taken seriously and put to action. The people who best understand the needs of the food insecure families in your neighborhood are the people lining up at your pantry door. We are neglecting an important source of information if we do not listen to them, as many people will have helpful ideas about how the pantry can be most impactful.

Soliciting feedback invites pantry guests to more deeply participate in the work of the pantry, as opposed to maintaining a transactional model of giving. In a transactional model, people experiencing food insecurity are always on the receiving end, while the volunteers and others who control resources are always on the giving end. In situations like these, when decisions are made about the pantry, it's common for the only voices in that decision-making process to be food pantry staff and volunteers, not people receiving food from the pantry. Unfortunately, this kind of transactional, us-and-them setup is common, not just in food pantries, but across all food safety net programs. While the state agency administering SNAP, for example, is unlikely to make major changes to invite SNAP recipients to have more of a voice in how the SNAP program is run, food pantries are uniquely positioned to invite the people they serve into deeper participation. Without significant red tape or official policy changes, food pantries can flip the traditional power dynamic of charity by inviting pantry guests to do more than just receive food. In doing so, the people you serve will have the opportunity to participate in an important cause and advocate for themselves, and your pantry will be better off for it.

*"Remember that **the people served by the pantry are the experts** when it comes to what they and their families need...The most effective approaches to behavior change are often the ones created by people doing the changing!"*
-Oregon Food Bank

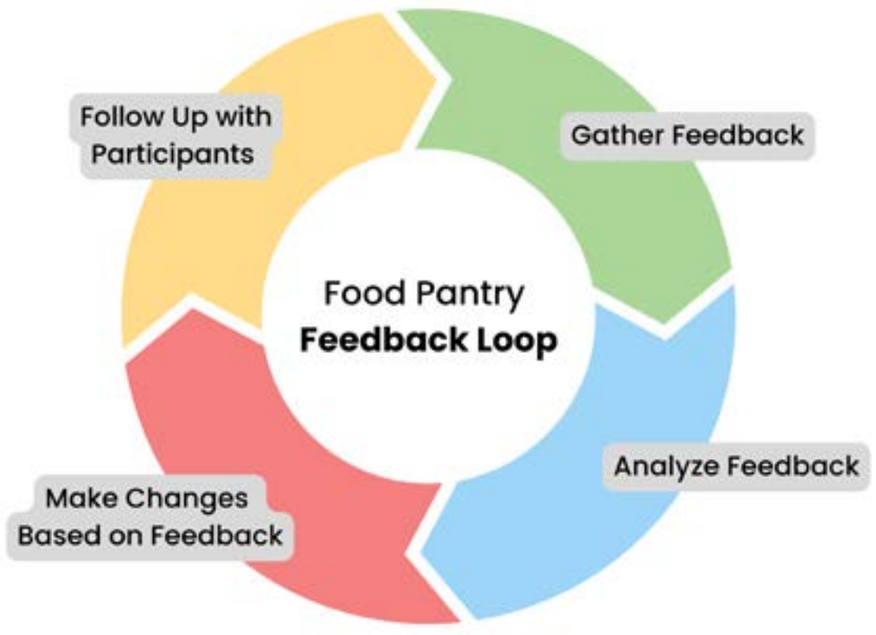
CREATING FEEDBACK LOOPS

There are four stages to receiving and using feedback in an organization like a food pantry. It's important to include all of these stages when soliciting feedback, whether the feedback is given through a formal survey or an ongoing suggestion box. The graphic to the right displays the four stages, and a few tips for each stage are outlined in the following pages.

Gather Feedback

Feedback can be solicited in many ways. Here are a few tips to make sure you receive useful feedback from your pantry guests.

- When possible, allow feedback to be shared anonymously. Unless there is a specific reason why those who submit feedback need to be identified, make every effort to show that feedback will remain anonymous. This will help your pantry receive more feedback and more honest feedback, especially if the people you serve aren't accustomed to providing feedback in the pantry yet.
- Make it clear that both positive and negative feedback are wanted. As much as possible, try to assure pantry guests that there will be no negative repercussions for giving negative feedback. There can be a fear of speaking up if it isn't clear that comments will be received well.
- Ensure everyone knows providing feedback is voluntary. Invite people into the process, and let them choose to participate or not.
- Avoid adding additional questions to the intake or registration processes, as this can slow down the intake process and come across as a requirement.
- Make every effort to survey a diverse group of people to ensure the feedback is representative of multiple perspectives and backgrounds.
- Be strategic about the questions you ask. Identify areas or topics that you are able and willing to address feedback about, and ask questions that you don't know the answer to yet.
- Some topics your pantry might want feedback about include food quality and preferences, food quantity, frequency of assistance, guests' experiences in the pantry, convenience of distribution times and policies, interest in wraparound services, and safety in and around the pantry. We suggest selecting one topic at a time.
- Questions that provide information that is available elsewhere shouldn't be asked. For example, data about employment, income, education level, and housing are already publicly-available down to the zip code or census tract level. If you don't know where to find existing data, one of the best starting points is SAVI.
- Questions that provide feedback on areas you're unable or unwilling to change should not be asked yet. For example, pantries should only ask about food preferences if they have the desire and resources to add several new items to their typical stocking list. A pantry might want to use this information in a grant proposal to seek more resources.
- Consider incentivizing participation in this process. For example, each person who completes a survey gets to take one extra item.
- For more help with this part of the process, consider taking SAVI's "Module 1A: Frame the Problem" class.



Analyze Feedback

The process of analyzing feedback will vary, depending on how feedback is solicited. For example, regularly reading and recording the notes inside a suggestion box is very different from organizing information shared during a focus group session. While the specific steps will vary, this step exists in any feedback loop. Carefully document and review all feedback received, make note of the ideas mentioned by multiple people, and identify priorities for taking action. One tip for this process, when possible, is to separate findings by demographics. Food selection might be excellent for 90% of your guests, but to your growing number of pantry guests from Haiti, for example, the selection might be excellent only to 10%. This would be an important distinction to note.

Make Changes Based on Feedback

Collecting feedback without acting on what you learn is a waste of time for everyone involved. It would be much better to never ask for feedback than to ask for it and do nothing with it. If people take time to participate in a process and see nothing come from it, they lose trust in the process. Food pantry leaders do not need to immediately implement every idea they hear from the people they serve. However, it's important to at least make one or two changes within a reasonable time frame.

Follow Up with Participants

This is the most frequently forgotten step of the process, but it's quick, easy, and important. After receiving feedback, analyzing the feedback, and identifying changes to make, communicate about this process with pantry participants. If you're making an improvement, clearly explain that this improvement is coming as a result of the feedback given last month. If there were more suggestions provided than the pantry is able to implement, explain how suggestions are being prioritized, and give an estimate for when some changes will be made. Let people know that their suggestions have been recorded and saved, shared with the board, and/or will be revisited at a certain date. Implementing changes in the pantry can sometimes take longer than people expect, and communicating about the process is the easiest way to help everyone understand the value of the feedback they provided.

METHODS OF SOLICITING FEEDBACK

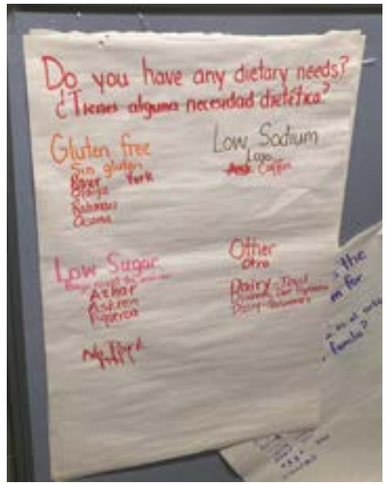
Surveys

Surveys are best for collecting simple answers to a short 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" or enroll in SAVI's "Module 2C: Create & Use Survey Data" class.

Comment Cards

Comment cards are an easy, cheap way to collect ongoing feedback. 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?" Alternatively, respondents can be asked to rate a few aspects of their experience (for example, food selection,

After Hunger Inc. Food Pantry transitioned to a choice model, the pantry hung a locking feedback box in the waiting area so guests could provide their suggestions and ideas anonymously.



The Mary Lee Maier Community Food Pantry collected information on dietary restrictions by hanging giant post-it notes for guests to add information to.

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. Cards can be collected in boxes stationed throughout the pantry.

Point of Sale Data

Point of sale data track choices in a choice model pantry. 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 leaders can get a sense of the shoppers' preferences and how the pantry's attempts to push or nudge specific products are working.

Informal Polls

Polls are another easy, cheap, and anonymous way to get information on a specific topic. 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. Participants could drop their pantry ticket, assigned number, or other voting material into the answer box of their choice.

INVITING GUESTS INTO OTHER ROLES

Beyond these strategies for soliciting feedback during a specific window of time and in response to a specific topic, pantries also have other, longer-term options for incorporating the voices of the people they serve into the day-to-day work of the pantry, including:

- Forming an Advisory Committee that community members and pantry guests 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 people who utilize the pantry
- Inviting pantry guests to serve as volunteers and, when available, to apply for open staff positions at the pantry.

FUNDRAISING

RAISING SUPPORT FOR THE PANTRY

Fundraising can be one of the most difficult and time-consuming aspects of running a pantry. By focusing on the most readily obtainable sources of funds, your efforts will be more productive. The funding sources in this section are laid out in order from those that are generally easiest to secure to those that are most difficult to secure. Typically, a pantry with strong financial support will have funders 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 64% of all charitable giving. This support can come through one-time contributions or ongoing contributions.

Below are some ideas for soliciting gifts from individuals.

- Enable people to make online contributions on your website.
- Create newsletters or email updates to send to all volunteers, board members, previous and current donors, and anyone else involved in the pantry. These communications should include updates about the pantry and its impact, as well as requests for donations. People are much more likely to donate if they are asked.
- Maintain an active social media presence, and make sure the organization informational page or section and some of your posts include a link for donations.
- Leverage your board members in fundraising. On most nonprofit boards, each member is expected to either make a personal donation, engage their own contacts to raise funds, or both. If your board is not currently involved in fundraising, a simple training could help board members feel more equipped to take this on. Consider asking board members to sign a commitment form at the beginning of the year agreeing to make a donation, as well as upholding other expectations of board members.
- Encourage your pantry staff and volunteers to invite their friends, families, and communities to support the pantry.
- Connect with people in your personal network. Some of your friends, neighbors, or relatives might be glad to hear how they can join the work you're doing. Talk about the pantry as you interact with people through work, school, neighborhood associations, your faith community, club, or other communities you are part of, and remind people how they can get involved in the work if they're interested.
- Organize low-cost fundraising events. For example, some pantries partner with local restaurants and receive a portion of the proceeds from a specific restaurant shift.
- Organize fund drives, such as digital food drives or shelf-sponsorship programs.
- Offer pantry tours to potential donors.

*"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*

Two important things to remember when soliciting donations are:

- Ask for financial support. Don't just hint at needing help, but, when possible, ask for a specific amount and tell potential donors what that amount would accomplish in the pantry. Develop a consistent fundraising message, so everyone asking for donations uses correct information. For example, each year, calculate how much it costs for your pantry to serve one household and make sure this number stays consistent in all communications during that year. If the cost has increased, share that information to demonstrate the need for more donations.
- 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 and demonstrating the impact of their gifts. Ideas for thanking donors include personalized cards or emails, appreciation events, or free pantry gear.

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 in-kind contribution.

Examples of in-kind contributions include:

- Discounted or free truck rentals for food pickups, either from a business that owns a box truck, or from a truck rental company like Penske and U-Haul
- 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 community investment and public relations goals. 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, contact IHN's Director of Food Assistance Programs.

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.

Sonny Day Food Pantry partners with a nearby business that provides in-kind support by allowing the pantry to use their box truck to pick up food from the food bank. While this particular business wouldn't be able to provide the same service to other pantries, there are many businesses throughout the city that own box trucks and might be willing to partner with your pantry!

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 $25 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.

GRANTS

Challenges of Grant Funding

Grants are a primary funding source for most nonprofit organizations. While grant funding can provide large sums of money, grants funding also has its downsides, as described below.

Restricted Funds

Very few funders allow their grant awards to be used for general operating support, or as unrestricted funding (that is, to be spent however the non-profit needs). Typically, a grant recipient 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 with strings attached. If your pantry needs money for a specific project, such as piloting a new program, offering new services to meet a demonstrated need, purchasing a specific piece of equipment to increase capacity, or renovating physical space to expand operations, you might have luck applying for grants. If, however, you need funds to cover ongoing expenses like food, utility bills, staff time, or transportation, you will be unlikely to find grants to cover those costs.

Time and Skills Required to Apply

Crafting a grant proposal requires a specific style and format of writing. While these skills can be learned through books, online resources, and community classes, even the most seasoned grant writers spend a significant amount of time on each grant proposal. Time spent includes researching opportunities, drawing connections between the organization's projects and the funder's priorities, creating accurate budgets, and collecting letters of support from partner organizations. The average amount of time it takes a professional grant writer to create a proposal for a foundation is 15-25 hours, and that estimate is significantly higher for government grants. Unless someone at your pantry has successfully applied for grants in the past or has recently completed a class or training in grant writing, 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.

Competition

While there is a large pool of money available to be distributed through grants, there are also many other nonprofit organizations competing for those same funds. In an ideal world, all charitable organizations would receive plenty of financial support based solely on the merit of their work; however, in reality, nonprofits typically need to stand out as exceptional and innovative in order for their proposals to be noticed by funders. It can be hard to make the important, day-in-day-out work of feeding people remain interesting and exciting in the eyes of funders. This doesn't mean you shouldn't try to apply—just realize that it can take several good applications before ever receiving funding because so many other nonprofits are also requesting support.

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

Grants from Existing Partners

Some of your pantry's current partners might offer grant opportunities. These opportunities can have a higher success rate, since you already have a relationship with the funder. For example, Indy Hunger Network and Gleaners Food Bank both offer small grants to food pantries.

Community Grants

Many large companies (for example, grocery store chains, banks, retailers) run community grant programs that offer smaller grants (typically $5,000 or less) to local nonprofits, typically with less intensive and competitive application processes. Check with companies you work with about grant opportunities by visiting their websites or talking to the store manager.

Grant Writing Resources

After reviewing some of the challenges of grant writing, if your pantry is still interested in applying for grant support, below 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 Candid 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 focused on using these resources. Check with the Indianapolis Central Library for details.
- Leah's Pantry has released a recorded Webinar on Grant Writing for Pantries
- United Way of Central Indiana's Nonprofit Learning Center offers classes on grant writing and fundraising.
- 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 at this website.

Volunteer Grant Writing Position

While your pantry might not have the time to write grant proposals or the funds to hire a professional grant writer, you might still be able to find someone to help. Have you considered taking on an intern, AmeriCorps member, or volunteer whose sole responsibility is grant writing? If you ask around, you might find a college student or young professional in the area who would like to practice grant writing to build their resume but needs an opportunity. For a small stipend, this student could become your pantry's grant writing intern for a semester, summer, or year.

TIPS FOR FUNDRAISING: METRICS & STORIES

Receiving support, whether it's from an individual, foundation, or company, is dependent on conveying your pantry's impact and need through a combination of metrics and stories.

Metrics

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

- Number of people served. This could be the number of households or individuals, per month or per year, and could be duplicated or unduplicated, so long as you know what the metric is and are keeping track of it.
- Number of volunteers and 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 people 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 people 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.

Do the demographics of your leadership match those of the people you serve?

For many of us working in the food system, it has long been apparent that certain communities experience food insecurity at disproportionately higher rates. For example, IHN's Hunger Studies have shown that Black residents of Indianapolis experience food insecurity at a rate that is twice as high as that of white residents. Increasingly, grant makers and other funders are becoming aware of social determinants of health and are seeking to fund food-related projects that intentionally reach people who experience additional barriers to receiving food. Addressing these disparities is becoming important to more funders, and questions about these efforts are increasingly common in grant applications and reports. When asked about the demographics of pantry clients and the efforts a pantry is taking to better serve them, answers like the following are no longer acceptable from pantries that are not representative of the communities they serve.

"We serve everyone, regardless of race."

"Our pantry is run by volunteers, so we can't control that it isn't representative of the community we serve."

Instead, here are some prompts for your responses that you will be able to give once some of this work has been started:

"Our service area has the following demographic makeup. In our pantry, we have taken the following steps to make our pantry more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible for everyone."

"Until recently, our pantry volunteers and leadership have not been representative of the community we serve. We're proud of the work we've done in the last 3 years to improve our pantry, including diversifying our staff and volunteer base by x% by inviting the people we serve to volunteer and by establishing new partnerships with local businesses."

"We acknowledge how important equity is to food security, and last year we finalized a three-year plan to establish the ways our pantry will measure and improve our efforts to reach underserved communities."

Funders want to give to the pantries that are making the most impact, and in most cases, that includes being proactive about work to improve representation and service to populations that face extra barriers to food access. Grant makers, including Indy Hunger Network, want to see measurable progress toward established goals, particularly if the pantry is currently not representative of their community.

Some useful data might include:

- Rates of poverty and food insecurity in your service area
- Demographics (race and gender) in your service area
- Mean income in your service area

Several resources exist to help you find this information on the community. For data directly related to local food insecurity, Indy Hunger Network's Hunger Studies are a good starting point. 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 IU Indianapolis' 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. For pantries that are located outside of Central Indiana, the U.S. Census and American Community Survey data are available online.

Stories

While metrics 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, metrics 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 pantry guests. Having a collection of stories at hand will help your pantry write compelling grant applications, form partnerships with other organizations, and garner additional support.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- "Financial Toolkit for Food Pantries," Healthspark Foundation

PANTRY LEADERSHIP & SUSTAINABILITY

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. 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.

> *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*

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 3+ members, meet regularly (for example, 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 to avoid having too many members join or roll off at the same time. 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 and personal experiences to guide the work and mission of the pantry.

Prioritizing 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 whom you already know. However, branching out to recruit board members 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 the leadership of a pantry.

- Fundraising or philanthropy experience
- Background in finance, accounting, or business
- Legal experience
- Experience with social services
- Lived experience of food insecurity and/or poverty
- Experience in the grocery industry
- Knowledge of nonprofit operations
- Connections with neighbors or community groups
- Connections with corporations or local businesses
- Passion for the pantry's mission

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 organization and then report back to the board. Common committees include Steering, Advisory, Finance, Executive, Fundraising, Program, Marketing, and Advocacy.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Succession Plans: Ensuring Pantry Sustainability

If something were to happen today that would prevent a key pantry leader from having any involvement in the pantry in the future, would the existing staff and volunteers of the pantry be able to carry on the work? Would pantry efficiency and quality decrease in their absence or, worse, would the pantry cease to exist? In many pantries, the bulk of the responsibility falls on one person. Pantry leaders owe it to themselves, their volunteers, supporters, and the community that relies on your help to prepare those around you to take on your responsibilities as seamlessly as possible.

For many of us who worked in the charitable food system during the pandemic, the topic of succession and contingency planning hits closer to home more than it did before 2020. We lost many wonderful people, both food pantry leaders and volunteers, during the pandemic. Each pantry that lost someone is, no doubt, still feeling that loss. It's a loss not just to that pantry, but to the community as a whole. Thankfully, and incredibly, the majority of food pantries managed to stay open throughout the pandemic, but it wasn't easy for any pantry. As we move forward, take time to create written plans, record pantry policies, build up the next generation of leaders, and preserve the legacy of pantry leaders, both past and present. It's work that can seem tedious and can easily get moved to the back burner, but it is important work to ensure that your pantry remains a resource for the community for years to come.

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 no one is 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.

"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****."*

Below are four steps for developing future leaders.

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

Remember, some of the best future leaders in your food pantry might be people who are currently receiving food from the pantry.

Creating a Written Pantry Plan

Creating a written pantry plan doesn't have to be extremely difficult or time-consuming. Rather than thinking of a pantry plan as a polished, formal document, try thinking of it simply as a running list of important information that you add to or update as needed. The following pieces of information should be captured in written form and kept in a safe place in the pantry or saved digitally on a platform that others can access.

- 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 and each person's contact information
- Contact information for pantry emergencies
- Proof of nonprofit status, if applicable, such as IRS determination letter
- Budget details and financial reporting process
- Ongoing funding sources, including 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, promotion, and distribution
- Efforts and policies surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion in the pantry
- Quantity of food distributed and process of data collection and management
- Daily schedule from open to close on stocking days and distribution days
- Monthly or yearly schedules, including audits, inventory, inspections, and reporting
- Overhead, bills, and ongoing infrastructure expenses
- Laws, regulations (including TEFAP guidelines, if applicable), and certifications

It's a long list of information, but we recommend starting with the most important information your colleagues would need if there were a sudden change in leadership. Take ten minutes to jot that information down, and then make time each week to add more information to the list. Once you have a complete plan on paper, we recommend making a note on your calendar to spend half an hour every six months updating the information in the document.

Creating Pantry Policies

When you find something that works well in the pantry, write it down and make it a policy or standard operating procedure. Keep track of what you do in the pantry and what makes it successful. From fundraising to intake to food sourcing, each pantry has its own specific 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 be carried on.

Contingency Plans & Developing Resilience

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of contingency planning, but it also showed how impossible it is to ever be fully prepared for a specific emergency. Even the best-prepared food pantry in 2019 was not prepared for a global pandemic. It's important to think seriously about how your pantry will respond to emergencies in the community that require an increase in food supply and how you could ramp up operations quickly if needed. However, since we can't predict the details of what pantries will need to prepare for, we recommend pantry leaders focus on building resilience.

Here are some action items for building pantry resilience to be better equipped to take on any emergency or challenge that arises.

- 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 is updated and easy to find, and that pantry leaders and volunteers know it exists.
- Establish clear methods for communication, both with volunteers and the community. 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 strengthen your pantry's relationships with donors, local partners, volunteers, and other organizations.
- Increase your pantry's capacity to distribute different types of food, including 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 pantry guests' 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, leadership team, and staff.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Management Help
- "Boards & Governance," State of Indiana
- Nonprofit Ready
- "How to Build a Nonprofit Organization Series - Board Management" Indianapolis Public Library
- Blue Avocado

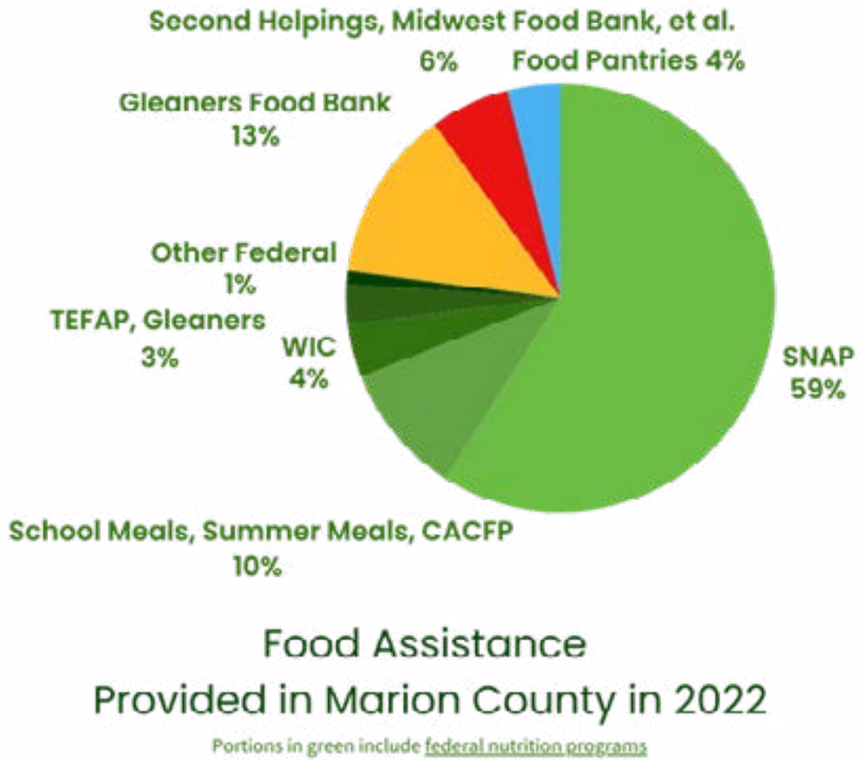
ANTI-HUNGER ADVOCACY

IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY

As discussed throughout this manual, food pantries play a unique and vital role in anti-hunger work. However, private charities alone are not currently meeting all of the food needs for households struggling with food insecurity. In fact, they are not even coming close. Meeting this need requires efforts from both the public and private sectors. The charitable response to hunger needs to be paired with a public response for two main reasons: federal programs are able to feed significantly more people than pantries can, and policy changes have the capability to address root causes of food insecurity.

Reason #1 to Advocate: Federal Programs Feed More People

The largest, most commonly known federal nutrition programs are SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; formerly known as food stamps), the National School Lunch Program, Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program for seniors. While these are the best known, the USDA runs over a dozen programs that provide food and related resources to low income families and other vulnerable members of our communities.



Federal nutrition programs are massive in scale, and they directly benefit millions of people. On a national level, SNAP alone provides about nine times the number of meals provided by the Feeding America network. 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. The Feeding America food bank serving Marion County,

along with 20 other Indiana counties, is Gleaners Food Bank. Private charities, like food pantries, simply cannot compensate for the impact of even the smallest budget cuts to SNAP. A breakdown of the percent of emergency meals provided by both private and public sources in Marion County is included in the pie chart to the left.

To learn more about each of the public programs providing food assistanc, check out Indy Hunger Network's Federal Nutrition Program Toolkit.

Reason #2 to Advocate: Address Root Causes of Food Insecurity

How can we ensure that every American can afford groceries every week?
What can we do to prevent people from ever having to skip meals in order to pay for medicine, heating, or housing? These questions have answers beyond food pantries, and beyond the entire food safety net. Food insecurity is a symptom of poverty, and poverty requires solutions beyond the scope of what even the best food pantry can offer. To fully address food insecurity, we also need to address the reasons why there are so many people who can't afford the basic necessities in life. Addressing these root causes means working to strengthen and improve our food safety net programs, and it also means advocating for other policies that directly affect low-income people.

ADVOCACY & THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath demonstrated the importance of advocating for strong public programs to support people experiencing food insecurity and the organizations that make up the food safety net. Near the beginning of the pandemic, demand for food assistance in Marion County nearly doubled. However, thanks in large part to policy changes to public programs, the food safety net was able to keep up with the increased demand for food. In the public sector, new programs and policies were implemented to make it easier to access food. For example, monthly benefit amounts for SNAP were increased and some restrictions to receiving SNAP were waived. A new Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program launched to provide grocery money to families with students while attending school virtually. The USDA distributed Farmers to Families food boxes to communities throughout the country. The WIC program began allowing virtual appointments to sign up for benefits. The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding supported the expansion of many charitable organizations and food assistance resources. Once the pandemic programs and policies ended, however, rates of food insecurity rose to a historic high.

When public programs like SNAP, WIC, school meals, and TEFAP are adequately funded and have implemented policies that reduce barriers to accessing food, the food safety net is able to keep up with an unprecedented need for food. If strong programs can make such an incredible impact during a global pandemic, imagine the impact they could have on our communities if they were always so well supported and so easily accessible.

HOW TO BE AN ANTI-HUNGER ADVOCATE

Vote

Register to vote and vote for candidates whose platforms support feeding programs that you think are making a positive difference.

Engaging Pantry Guests in Advocacy

Increasing numbers of food banks, food pantries, and other hunger relief organizations are creating opportunities for the people they serve to get involved in anti-hunger advocacy. In some cases, pantry guests are provided with advocacy opportunities, such as opportunities to sign on to letters to legislators, while waiting in line at the food pantry. In other cases, participants are trained to speak about their experiences with food insecurity and poverty and offered opportunities for speaking to public audiences or legislators. In return, food pantry leaders gain useful information and important perspectives to inform their advocacy efforts. To learn more about successful examples of this work, see this article.

Know Your Representatives and Learn About the Political Process

You can find your state representatives online. If you want to learn more, IHN has a Director of Advocacy who can help you get involved.

Stay Up-To-Date

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 be able to afford food and other necessities, but that is not the reality in Indiana. Stay informed about policies related to increasing the minimum wage, creating jobs that pay a living wage, and job training programs.
- Other topics that affect the day-to-day lives and futures of low-income people, including regulating predatory lending practices (e.g., payday loans), expanding Medicaid and affordable healthcare, ensuring safe and affordable housing, and prevention of eviction.

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). Indy Hunger Network also has an Advocacy Committee that meets regularly to discuss current policies and anti-hunger advocacy opportunities. To learn more, reach out through the IHN website.

Speak Up

Once you understand the policies being discussed and you know who your representatives are, find appropriate strategies and times to voice your support of or opposition to specific policies and pieces of legislation.

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. Staffers keep track of the number of constituents who reach out about specific issues and report these numbers to the representative.
- Visiting representatives face-to-face during lobbying days or other events.
- Participating in public meetings for local advocacy.
- Writing letters to the editor. Ideally, these actions will be timed to coincide with current events, hearings, and public comment periods.

Generally speaking, a personalized letter is better than a pre-filled form letter, and a face-to-face meeting is more effective than a letter. However, some type of advocacy is always more effective than nothing.

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, you can invite the people your pantry serves 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

- MAZON is a Jewish advocacy organization that equips synagogues, schools, organizations, and the public to advocate to end hunger, especially focusing on hunger in the armed forces and among veterans.
- 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 anti-hunger advocacy.
- Feeding America provides information on anti-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.
- The Agency Advocacy Toolkit from Philabundance provides practical tools and strategies for anti-hunger advocacy.
- Putting Forth a Blueprint for SNAP Advocacy, Food Bank News
- The Good Wages Initiative certifies and showcases Marion County employers committed to providing full-time employees both a wage of at least $18/hr and access to health insurance benefits.
- Two documentaries ("The Working Hungry" and "Food, Insecure") focus on the experiences of working families in Indiana experiencing food insecurity.

NEXT STEPS

INCREASING YOUR PANTRY'S IMPACT

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 those practices for food pantries. Identifying the practices that will work best in your pantry's specific context is ultimately up to your pantry's leadership team.

Reading through this manual, which topics or ideas stood out to you? Talk with your board members, volunteers, and shoppers about your pantry's areas of excellence and the areas where you have room for improvement.

Here are some questions to consider:

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

INCREASED IMPACT THROUGH COLLABORATION

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 some of 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
- Collaborating on a large food drive
- Sharing extra food and resources, especially perishable items that could go bad before your next pantry day
- Consolidating pantries. Many pantries across the country have merged and found that the pantry not only survived the change, but could serve more people 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.

Endnotes

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