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This brochure was created by Fatima Carson, a member of the 14th Class of Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellows 2007-08, during her field placement at Connecticut Food Bank.



A PARTNERSHIP TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER

Mailing Address
P.O Box 8686
New Haven, CT 06531

Main Office and Warehouse
150 Bradley Street
East Haven, CT 06512
Phone: (203) 469-5000

Fairfield Warehouse
74 Linwood Avenue
Fairfield, CT 06824
Phone: (203)-256-1935

Waterbury Warehouse
56 Eagle Street
Waterbury, CT 06708
Phone: (203)759-1919



Promoting Client Choice



How Food Pantries Can Most Effectively Alleviate Hunger

Introduction

Pantries are one of the main ways of getting food from the warehouse shelves of Connecticut Food Bank to the community members who would benefit most from these resources.

While the Food Bank distributes millions of pounds of food each year, this food only aids in the goal of alleviating hunger if it is consumed by the intended recipients, **people in need**. Research from Gleaner's of Western Michigan's Waste Not Want Not project found that if people are given arbitrary selections of food without regard to their needs, tastes, habits, traditions, abilities, and circumstances that up to half the food given will not be consumed by intended beneficiaries. This finding is further supported by first-hand experiences of pantry volunteers and clientele. There are numerous stories of pantry volunteers who dutifully pre-bag identical grocery bags for distribution, only to later find items from the distribution scattered throughout the parking lot. By giving clients items that they neither want nor can use, valuable food resources in the community are wasted.



Programs Department Contact Information

Kate Walton
Programs Director
(203) 469-5000 ext. 323
kwalton@ctfoodbank.org

Luray Bouffard
Programs Coordinator
(203) 469-5000 ext. 322
lbouffard@ctfoodbank.org

Sherry Grant
Programs Coordinator
(203) 469-5000 ext. 313
sgrant@ctfoodbank.org

Rich Tirado
Programs Coordinator
(203) 469-5000 ext. 324
rtirado@ctfoodbank.org

Para información en español comuníquese con:

Laura Falanga
Procurement/Programs Asst.
(203) 469-5000 ext. 331
lfalanga@ctfoodbank.org

Rich Tirado
Programs Coordinator
(203) 469-5000 ext. 324
rtirado@ctfoodbank.org

Resources

Making the Switch: A Guide for Converting to a Client Choice Food Pantry, Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks

Client Choice Manual, Purdue University College of Consumer and Family Sciences and the Indiana TEFAP Program

Client Choice Models, Capital Area Food Bank of Texas

How to Run a Food Pantry, Assembled by Jeff Thomas, West Michigan Gleaners

Models for Now and the Future, Second Harvest Food Bank of East Central Indiana

Charity Food Programs That Can End Hunger In America, John M. Arnold Executive Director, Second Harvest Gleaners Food Bank of West Michigan, Inc.

Concluding Thoughts

Asking for food assistance in America is one of the most humiliating experiences a person can be forced to endure. As organizations who seek to serve people in need in our community we should attempt to



make our clients' experience as dignified and empowering as possible. After all, the purpose of our work is to help our clients. We all enjoy exercising choice in our daily lives so pantry clients should also be able

to choose what foods they would like to eat and will be able to use. Even a very limited amount of choice is better than having no choice at all. Be creative. Get feedback from your clients. Contact Connecticut Food Bank's Programs Department for more assistance. The possibilities are endless.



One way in which Connecticut Food Bank seeks to eliminate waste and more effectively work to alleviate hunger in our service areas is by promoting **client choice** among our partner pantries. There is a wide range of ways that client choice can be implemented in a pantry. The fundamental idea behind it is that by allowing clients to choose what foods they receive food waste will be eliminated and each client will be more able to satisfy his or her needs.

In promoting client choice we are asking partner pantries to move away from the system of distributing standardized food bags. While we recognize that both systems of client choice and traditional pre-bagged distribution methods have strengths and weaknesses, we believe that in working to alleviate hunger, methods of distribution modeled on client choice are the most effective.

Traditional Pre-Bagged Distribution Model

Strengths

- ⇒ Appearance of being fair- every client receives more or less the same thing.
- ⇒ Pantry controls nutritional value of the food package and amount of food distributed.
- ⇒ Actual distribution takes very little time.

Weaknesses

- ◆ It is demeaning for clients to be told what to eat.
- ◆ Does not take into account the needs and preferences of the families receiving the food.
- ◆ Recipients may have allergy, religious, and/or dietary restrictions that prevent food from being used.
- ◆ Clients may lack the capacity to prepare the food they receive.
- ◆ Not all food given to clients is used, resulting in waste.
- ◆ To create identical bags, pantries must use resources to purchase foods that are not available at the Food Bank.
- ◆ Valuable volunteer and staffing time is spent packing bags and little time is spent interacting with clients.



Table Top System

Your pantry acquires cases of food and boxes of salvage but you don't have room to set your pantry up like a store. Put your cases on tables by food group, open them up



and allow clients to make selections. Any leftover product will go into storage until your next distribution. This is at least comparable if not easier than hauling in the cases, opening them and packing bags/boxes.

Standard Bag Plus Grab Bag Option

Your pantry distributes its traditional fixed, standardized food bag/box, but then also displays varieties of additional items from the pantry, permitting



clients to take specified amounts – for example, one item per household member, six items – or unlimited amounts of those goods. Fresh produce, bread and baked goods or any “odds and ends” which find their way into the pantry are excellent

candidates for such distribution. This is a good option for providing a standard bag to clients with no food resources, yet still giving these clients the ability to choose items freely from the available inventory.

Swap Table- Take It or Leave It

This is a good transitional step to becoming more client-friendly. Your pantry provides a fixed menu bag but you provide a table for clients to leave items they don't want or need so that other people may pick extra of these discarded items. This reduces waste.

The Food Pyramid System-To Be Used With Grocery Store Model

All of the food items in the pantry are classified into food groups (protein, fruits and vegetables, grain items, dairy, fats/sweets/desserts, condiments, etc). Items are color coded. Example: Red = Protein; Blue = Grains; Yellow = Veggies etc. Ideally each client would be able to select as many



items from each of these groups as would meet his/her needs. Another option is to allow clients to select a certain number or poundage of food from each of the food groups. Example: 7 grain products, 5 protein products, 8 fruits/veggies, etc.

The Item List System

Your pantry acquires a variety of food and itemizes what is available on a list. This list is given to clients as they arrive to pick up food. Lists say how many items from each category a client may take based on family size. Clients indicate on the list the items they want, and the pantry staff assembles their bag. This system works best in conjunction with the Point System, Pound System, or Food Pyramid System. Specifically, each item on the food list would have a point or pound value associated with it, and the client would need to “shop” from the list according to his or her point or pound allotment. Combine this with a grab bag option – where there are some items on a table that they can select from (e.g. bread, pastries, snacks, household, cosmetics, etc.). Make sure you update your list prior to each distribution to reflect your inventory. Be sensitive to clients that may have trouble reading or have English as a second language. This system of client choice is limited in that clients cannot actually view the items and select them first hand but it is a good transitional step because it does not require your pantry space to be physically altered.



Client Choice Model of Distribution

Strengths

- ⇒ Empowering! Clients can choose what food they will receive.
- ⇒ Clients receive the food they want, and that will be most useful for them.
- ⇒ Eliminates waste because when given the option to choose, clients don't take food they will not use.
- ⇒ The pantry is able to more fully take advantage of Connecticut Food Bank's constantly changing inventory and will not have to purchase items for identical bags.
- ⇒ Pantry volunteers can monitor which food items are popular and which ones are not. This information will help the pantry stock popular items.
- ⇒ Interacting with clients makes volunteering more rewarding and makes the experience more personal for clients.
- ⇒ Pantry can still control *amount* of food going out; client choice just impacts the *kind* of food going out.
- ⇒ Volunteer time is saved by not having volunteers pack bags and extra time can be used to have the pantry open longer.
- ⇒ Giving clients choice will promote their joy and satisfaction!

Weaknesses

- ◆ May require a restructuring of the pantry's layout and food storage system.
- ◆ Volunteers may need to be reoriented to different tasks.
- ◆ Distribution will require more time and pantry may need to be open additional hours to serve clientele.



Ways to Implement Client Choice in Your Pantry

Grocery Store

Ideally, food pantries set themselves up like little grocery stores, stocking food shelves with a variety of food and non-food items. Clients can browse among the goods and select items they want and can use, just as they would at a store. If some very popular items are available in only limited supply, it is okay for the pantry to put limits on how many of those items a client can take.



Open Distribution- To Be Used With Grocery Store Model

Clients can choose from all available foods, any amount that they want, with no restrictions and no rules.



Number of Items System- To Be Used With Grocery Store Model

All of the items in the pantry are made accessible to clients. Each client is assigned a maximum number of items that they can get per visit based on their family size. The larger the family the more items they should be allotted per visit. A variation of this system is giving each client a number of grocery bags based on family size, and allowing them to fill the bags with whatever items they choose.

The Point System- To Be Used With Grocery Store Model

Each item in the pantry is assigned a point value based on the price of the item in a grocery store. Pantry clients are given a point allowance - based on family size and need - to spend during their visit to the pantry. The clients may spend their points on whatever items they choose.



One way to illustrate the point value of a product is by color coding each item. A color sticker is placed on the package which corresponds to a legend that is posted in the pantry.

The Pound System- To Be Used With Grocery Store Model

The pound system assigns point values to foods based on weight. Each client is allotted a certain number of points based on family size. Another way to implement the pound system would be to have a total number of pounds assigned to each client based on family size and then to have them select up to that many pounds of food from your available inventory.



A good formula for determining how many pounds of food to distribute to a client is: 4lbs x number of people in the client's household x number of days worth of food that they need from this visit. Example: 4lbs x 5 family members x 3 days = 60lbs of food.