

Introduction

Overview of Washington Food Coalition

Our Mission

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

Our Vision

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

History

The Washington Food Coalition is a non-profit network of food banks, food pantries, food distribution centers, hot meal and food voucher programs throughout the state of Washington. Incorporated in 1992, the WFC is the result of a merger between the Western Washington Food Coalition and Eastern Washington's Northwest Regional Food Network. Members of these independently incorporated organizations envisioned a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network. Their goal was to work cooperatively to alleviate hunger and provide a unified voice for hunger programs. The WFC currently has a diverse membership of more than 300 independently incorporated agencies.

Project Overview

Recipes for Success was originally developed in 2007 as a part of a capacity building project initiated by the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Washington Food Coalition (WFC) won a competitive bid process to implement the project, which included a series of nine regional outreach meetings with emergency food providers around Washington State, numerous in-person and telephone interviews with individuals, an online survey of providers, and action research to discover and document some of the things that are working best in the provision of emergency food to hungry Washington residents.

In 2012, as part of the 20th Anniversary Year for Washington Food Coalition, it was decided to review, and update the manual in order to keep it current and as useful as possible. Julie Washburn,, Executive Director of the Washington Food Coalition, led this effort with the help of board members and various WFC members throughout the state. The 2012 Edition contains some of the same best practices as the 2007 edition, along with many updated ones and a large amount of new practices that have developed since 2007.

Goals of this Catalog

We hope this catalog will serve the following purposes:

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

What are Recipes for Success?

Recipes for Success are best practices. A best practice is a good strategy for handling a challenge in your emergency food program's operations or service delivery. It solves a problem in a new way, and might be something other organizations could learn from or replicate.

Examples of best practices in emergency food might be:

- ...> An efficient way of taking inventory
- ...> Adjusting open hours to fit customers' schedules
- ...> A partnership with a local farmer to provide fresh food where there was a gap
- ...> A successful way of recruiting community volunteers

Some people object to the term “best practice” on the grounds that it is difficult to determine the very best approach, or that what is best in one circumstance may not be best in a different operating environment. However, we have chosen to use this term because it is the most widely used term to describe the types of ideas we have tried to identify. Other similar terms that might be equally appropriate are: good practice, better practice, effective strategy, great idea, solution, promising practice and innovative approach.

We are also trying to model best practice in the language that we use. Throughout the catalog, we have replaced the term “customer” with “customer”, “diner” or another term with positive connotations. This decision reflects our commitment to treating all people with respect, and supporting a shift in the way we think about food programs – from casting them as an emergency social service to believing they are an integral part of the fabric of the community.

Washington Food Coalition can be your link to the member agencies listed in this resource. Contact us to connect with these members if you have follow up questions or want more details.

A Starting Point

This catalog is not an exhaustive list of best practices, but a first step to build capacity among emergency food providers. These are good ideas and innovative approaches that were nominated by peers or came to our attention during the research period. In some cases, we were aware that several organizations were doing similar things, and have chosen to highlight a single example. An effort has been made to recognize and highlight the diversity present among emergency food providers, including geographic region, organization size and age, staffing levels, communities served, and type of program. We made a special effort to identify innovation taking place in more rural areas, in all volunteer organizations and in spite of other challenging circumstances. We hope that this catalog will jumpstart conversation about best practices and inspire our community to continue discussing what constitutes a best practice, and how we can best share knowledge among programs to promote high quality, responsive programs. WFC would be delighted to hear from you about the “best ideas we haven't yet heard” and help to spread the word about them in the future.

How the Catalog is Organized:

Best practice profiles are organized into five major categories:

- Food & Nutrition
- Customer Service
- Community Relations
- Transportation
- Organizational Strength & Capacity
- Fresh Food Resources (NEW in 2012 Edition)

In each category, short summaries describe best practices related to that topic. We hope some of these short summaries will spark your interest in doing something differently in your program. In addition, we have highlighted a few issues of common interest through longer sidebar articles. In addition, to help you identify practices that may be particularly relevant to your type of program, we have coded each best practice using the following symbols:



FOOD BANKS



MEAL PROGRAMS



DISTRIBUTION CENTERS



SOMETHING EVERYONE CAN BORROW FROM



NEW ADDITIONS



UPDATED ENTRIES

Food & Nutrition

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

- ...> Adjusting offerings for people with special diets or limited access to cooking facilities
- ...> Increased responsiveness to customers' cultural requirements, including offering staples sought by specific ethnic communities
- ...> Declining or limiting non-nutritive food offerings

Raising the Bar: Setting Higher Standards

Operation Sack Lunch - Seattle



Operation Sack Lunch (OSL) espouses the ideal that nutritional excellence should not be tied to economic status. Founder and Executive Director Beverly Graham says, “food has an immense amount of power in our lives from the moment we are born. When you are given food that is not quality, a feeling of unworth surrounds that. When we are working with a population that already has issues of being treated as if they don’t have worth, giving them food suitable for the trash sends the wrong message.”

OSL acts on their philosophy by buying organic whenever possible, doing a pesticide/herbicide wash on most foods, and prioritizing buying and serving fresh, quality produce at every meal. They offer a hot meal each day that includes fresh vegetables, fruit and salad greens. They don’t use food containing artificial coloring, preservatives, additives, sugar, or trans fats. The OSL kitchen uses environmentally friendly cleaning supplies and a Thermal Accelerated Nano Crystal Sanitation (TANCS) steamer system for sanitizing the kitchen.

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

RESPONDING TO SPECIFIC DIETARY NEEDS

Just for You: Meals for People with Special Dietary Needs

Lifelong AIDS Alliance - Seattle



Lifelong AIDS Alliance (LLA) provides practical support services to people living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses. LLA’s meal program, Chicken Soup Brigade, is specifically designed to provide healthy meals and accommodate special diets. The food program manager and dietitian work together to design meals for 17 different types of diets, including allergy-free, heart healthy, renal failure, vegetarian, and special religious diets.

People are qualified and referred by case managers at agencies such as People of Color Against AIDS Network and the Northwest Kidney Center, and the referral includes a nutrition screening. If the customer is at high risk, they provide nutrition therapy. LLA purchases most ingredients for their meal program because of their customers’ compromised immune systems and the program’s elaborate menu planning. Another way in which LLA strives to meet its customers’ needs is by providing delivery to several satellite locations throughout King County. These delivery hubs are at locations such as churches and community centers. A volunteer receives the food delivery packed in cooler bags from LLA’s refrigerated delivery truck. They then hand out the meals during a 2-3 hour window of time.

What it Takes: To offer a special diet meal program, you have to be able to analyze the meals for nutrition content. Computer software is the easiest method. The first step is analyzing your regular meals, and then figuring out how to adapt them to meet special dietary requirements. LLA also hires skilled kitchen staff to ensure and maintain quality, although volunteers help with many tasks such as packaging, labeling and sorting meals. Developing a labeling system is also very important to avoid a customer receiving an incorrect meal.

Honoring Tradition: Culturally Appropriate Foods

Asian Counseling and Referral Service - Seattle



Asian Counseling and Referral Service (ACRS) specializes in serving Asian Pacific Americans (APA), and their customers come from diverse backgrounds. Bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers speak more than 30 different languages, so they are able to understand and provide appropriate assistance to their customers. The ACRS Food Bank distributes foods that meet APA's dietary needs including tofu, soy milk, ramen, fish and 3,200 pounds of rice each week. Because many of these items are not regularly available in the donation stream, ACRS purchases many of them. Culturally appropriate food is just one aspect of the ways in which ACRS works to meet the culturally-specific needs of customers.

ACRS also has a convenient location in Seattle's International District with bilingual/bicultural staff and volunteers to assist customers with language barriers. The organization also translates written materials into multiple languages. ACRS Aging and Adult Services Director Gary Tang comments, "The majority of our staff are APA, so we are familiar with the food choices of our customers." He adds, "Some time ago, we saw customers tossing foods out of their bags as they left – cheese, packaged food." They talked to these customers, who often said, "It's heavy for me to carry, and I won't use it." This led to changes such as moving to a supermarket-like arrangement that allows for customer choice, as well as changes to the food offerings. Through these changes, people feel respected, and they get appropriate foods. "We do need to ask our customers what they want, how can we do better," says Tang. "Running human services, we tend to give ourselves an excuse not to push ourselves to do more – we just say resources are limited. We have to ask the hard questions! Customers do their homework, and will move to the food bank that best meets their needs."

What it Takes: Tang advises that finding volunteers who are representative of the communities served helps dramatically with cultural competency. At ACRS, they have relationships with 14 different ethnic associations who send volunteers to help with food sorting and home delivery. Volunteers who are from the same culture or speak the same language as customers can help with collecting information from customers, as well as understanding their community's needs and preferences.

Reaching Out: Culturally Competent Groceries

Lifelong AIDS Alliance - Seattle



Lifelong AIDS Alliance (LLA), as part of their practical support services to people with living with HIV/AIDS and other life-challenging illnesses, offers a grocery program for customers who are healthy enough to cook for themselves. Groceries can be tailored to suit customers' medical needs (such as a "soft" bag for people with chewing difficulties), limited cooking capacity (low- and no-cook bags), and ethnic dietary preferences. They recently began offering an East African Grocery Bag, and a Latino grocery bag is planned for the future. Nicole Sievers, RD, CD, Nutrition Services Supervisor, sees the East African bag as an important way to connect with East Africans, a hard-to-reach population who may be hesitant to sign up for AIDS-related services. In trying to figure out how best to reach them, they thought "since our meals are not currently appropriate, maybe we can do something with our groceries." They created the

special bag by identifying a few key items that would appeal to East African immigrants. Working collaboratively with a local Ethiopian grocery store, they include injera (Ethiopian flatbread, a staple of the East African diet) and a few other ethnic specific ingredients. These few key items are supplemented with the usual fruits, vegetables and protein items. Just having a few ethnic-specific items seems to make a big difference. Slowly, via word of mouth, their East African customer base is growing.

What it Takes: An ability to identify community needs, relationships with individuals from the target group you wish to serve to help you identify appropriate foods, partnership with an ethnic grocery store or other source of culturally-specific foods.

“When you can get public and private agencies to come to the table, that’s when great things happen.” – Beverly Graham Founder & Executive Director Operation Sack Lunch

CUSTOMER EDUCATION

Be Your Own Celebrity Chef: Cooking Demonstrations Care & Share Food Bank - Grand Coulee



When staff at the Grand Coulee Area Care & Share Food Bank (CSFB) realized that many of their younger customers didn’t know how to cook, they decided to demonstrate how to cook commonly available items right on site during food bank hours. They advertised the demonstration to customers through flyers put in their food bags that listed upcoming events. The items cooked during the demonstration are included in customers’ bags that day, along with recipes. Care & Share focuses on the basics. Director Fern Blaylock says, “I even cooked a pot of pinto beans—45 minutes, they couldn’t believe it! I did it all on a hot plate.” The rice demonstration included basics of how to cook rice along with the chance to taste four different rice recipes: plain rice, fried rice, stir fry and rice pudding. The demonstrations took hold right away. People brought their friends, and demos attracted many people. CSFB received fewer returns of the demonstrated items as a result.

What it Takes: Doing demos requires a kitchen facility, or at minimum a hot plate, recipes for food currently available at the food bank, one or more volunteer chefs, and plates and utensils to allow food sampling. A nice extra is to give out cooking utensils such as measuring spoons to customers who need them. Blaylock recommends letting people know in advance what you will be cooking, and making your kick-off event especially nice. The chefs should have food handler’s permits. Check with your local health department if any other permits are necessary. This is a great chance for your volunteers to show off their cooking expertise and/or dramatic flair.

INCREASING QUANTITY, QUALITY AND VARIETY

Smart Shopping: Bulk Buying Committee Seattle Food Committee - Seattle



For the past 28 years, the Seattle Food Committee (SFC) has pooled funds to purchase foods in bulk for Seattle food banks. Seattle’s meal programs are also invited to participate with the committee to streamline ordering. The program is managed by an SFC committee supported by staff at Solid Ground’s Food Resources. Food Lifeline (FLL) provides a staff person who attends the meetings and acts as a buying agent. SFC decides on a percentage of funds that are put into a common pot and used to purchase high priority items which are then distributed to all eligible programs using an allocation formula. A special effort is made to maintain geographic diversity on the committee. Every year, SFC surveys members regarding their top three priority needs to help set the committee’s priorities. Protein items, including meats and eggs; milk, fresh produce and rice generally top the list. The committee sets limits of its funding, to purchase non-food items such as paper and plastic bags for repacking food. The committee then looks at funding available for the year, and starts making buying decisions. After many years, they have agreement on certain regular purchases, such as purchasing eggs around Easter and peanut butter and/or tuna fish to carry families through the summer. The committee meets monthly, monitoring spending and making additional purchasing decisions while sticking to identified priorities. “This is a way of being good stewards of our funding, stretching it as far as we can,” comments Trish Twomey. The only drawback she can find is that individual food banks can’t tailor their purchases. “We try to choose foods that have broad appeal, such as vegetables used across many cultural groups,” she notes.

Through this program, food banks are able to receive first rate product that is not dependent on the donation stream. The committee always purchases enough that each food bank has a sufficient supply of the item to last one week or two weeks for

distribution. Once decisions are made, FLL staff researches options and consults with committee leadership to get final approval on a purchase. The food is delivered to FLL's warehouse and is distributed from there (bulk purchasing info for Seattle food banks is even incorporated into FLL's online ordering system).

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

Complimenting Donations: Purchasing Food

Northwest Harvest - Seattle



Purchasing food to supplement donated food has always been a practice of Northwest Harvest (NWH). “There is a limit to what is available through donations, especially when it comes to protein – it just isn’t available. Our goal with purchasing is to offer a more varied menu and more nutritional items,” says Bonnie Baker, Director, Hunger Response Network. Protein, rice, dried beans, pasta and tomato sauce are among the top items that NWH purchases for distribution. In order to decide what to purchase, NWH gets formal and informal input from member programs in a variety of ways. They hold regional meetings around the state in addition to their large annual meeting. In addition, they have a series of questions that they ask programs on the bottom of their monthly statistics form, including what trends they have observed, challenges and successes, and feedback on the product received from NWH. As

a result, says Baker, “We hear what people are short on.” After assessing the needs, NWH begins the process of projecting donations for the coming year. Past information on donations broken down by nutritional category is used as a basis for creating a “shopping list.” Purchasing is also influenced by where they can get good deals on large quantity purchases.

What it Takes: Of course, funds are the most critical factor to permit purchasing food. However, savvy buying depends on experience in food purchasing. NWH maintains contacts throughout the country and a lot of experience, which allows them to get excellent prices and the maximum benefit for their dollars.

Food Drives: You’re in the Driver’s Seat

Hood Canal Food Bank - Hood Canal



Hood Canal Food Bank (HCFB) targets specific items that are missing from their shelves, and gives out a list of these items to drive organizers such as churches and schools. “We need these extra items to fill our menu, so we started approaching people, and now they come to us for a list when they’re ready to do something,” says Kathy Roberson, Executive Director. They ask for things they can’t get through the donation stream or discounted, such as large, hearty soups, Hamburger Helper® and chili. Roberson notes the importance of selecting items that match your customers’ needs, whether ethnic or other dietary preferences. The drives give community members a chance to connect with the community via the food bank.

What it Takes: Many food banks have reported success with food-specific drives. Asking for specific items is educational for donors and makes them feel that their donation will make a difference. The only requirement is having a person familiar with current and anticipated stock make up a list to share with drive organizers of what is needed at that time.

“We need these extra items to fill our menu, so we started approaching people, and now they come to us for a list when they’re ready to do something,”

– Kathy Roberson, Executive Director Hood Canal Food Bank.

Creative Shopping (aka Extreme Couponing) Good Cheer Food Bank - South Whidbey Island



The story begins with Ula Lewis. Ula who is a coupon shopper had a discussion, awhile back, with Damien Cortez the Good Cheer Food Bank Coordinator. Ula was getting some of her food for free and asked Damien if the food bank could use it! Damien saw the value of what she was doing and started giving Ula some funds; Good Cheer could use the savings and free food always comes in handy!

This is where the idea of creative shopping comes into play, it is “thinking outside of the box” as Damien would say. “We were dealing with a tough recession and some of our food resources were going elsewhere; our logistics needed to be rearranged” says Damien.

The creative buying program of using coupons continued to grow. Ula and friends would go to grocery stores with their coupons, purchase merchandise, stand in line to checkout and then do it again and again. The reason for doing the shopping over and over was because there were coupon limits.

Ula began to develop relationships with the store managers and this provided the food bank with a real bonus, coupons with no limits. She would make sure that she would not deplete any one store of their supply of product through her use of the coupons and I think this helped in her relationship building. Now they have a checker that works specifically with her or an associate to streamline the process!

Sharing the Surplus Seattle's Union Gospel Mission - Seattle



A little over a year ago, we began to form relationships with companies that were able to provide us with large amounts of food and operating supplies on a regular basis. Some of the product was highly perishable and even though we serve over 1200 meals each day, we knew there would be more than we could use in a short period of time. We realized that a great deal of food would go to waste unless we found a way to share it with other organizations fighting hunger and homelessness. We had also observed that, like us, organizations such as yours received certain types of food on certain days of the week. Sometimes we miss out on needed product simply be the virtue of when our order date is. This led us to ask ourselves whether or not there might be an opportunity for us to fill in a gap by networking with some of the smaller non-profits whose focus is similar to ours. We knew we had surplus. We just needed to take a look at the possibilities for sharing it. The result is a distribution program that shares our surplus food, toiletries and operating supplies with a number of smaller non-profits that are focused on serving homeless and poverty level men, women & children of Seattle.

How could this program be replicated? Describe the planning and implementation steps you followed to put this project or program into place.

This program could be replicated by any organization that has built relationships that result in more product than they can use or product they receive that is not usable by their organization. We followed the following steps in putting our program together.

1. We realized that we would not be able to provide food to every non-profit that would like to receive it and that we were also responsible to our donors as to how their gifts were used. With that in mind we created an initial list of non-profits that shared a mission statement similar to ours or was already associated with the mission in some way.
2. The “partner” list, along with our request for permission to share excess product outside the mission was presented to our executive director for approval. This list has expanded by 20% in the last 9 months.
3. Once we received approval, we determined how much of the dairy product we currently received could be used by our programs within a specified period of time. We also looked at our toiletry usage to determine what the needs of our programs were.
4. We looked at our current staffing, operations schedule, and internal program shopping needs to determine what our opportunities and limitations would be in trying to share any surplus product we might have.
5. Our review really gave us the layout for our program:
 - i. We would need to send a list out on Wednesday afternoon with non-profits contacting us by email or phone with their orders.
 - ii. Participating non-profits would need to be able to pick up their orders.
 - iii. Pick-up appointments would be needed to ease congestion at the storehouse and the days for pick-up would need to be Thursday, Friday, and Monday.

General procedures were created and distributed to everyone on our list with a request for programs to contact us if they were interested in participating. Programs that contacted us became participants and several more have been added since we began the program last spring.

What were your program or project objectives? How do you measure success? What have your outcomes been? Our objectives were to share excess product that we received with other non-profits that are doing work similar to ours for the purpose of helping men, women, and children in need, form and build strong relationships with these non-profits, and cut down on the amount of food and other products going into our landfills.

We measure success in terms of the amount of waste we have to dispose of, the number of number of non-profits that continue to request product from us, the comfort the recipients have in calling us when they have a specific need to fill, and our comfort in calling them if we have a need. Because of this program;

- ...> We have experienced a large decrease in expenditures to dispose of spoiled food and non-food product that we are unable to use for one reason or another.
- ...> We are also finding that as we build relationships with our partners, they share with us when they have more than they can use of an item. We have received badly needed produce and seafood from partners whose donor base is different than ours. In turn, the agencies we partner with have no problem calling to ask if we have something they're looking for.
- ...> More food and toiletries are moving out into the community where they are needed. We provide 10-12 pallets of food to participating food banks each week. Toiletries are not offered every week. We average 2 -3 pallets each month.
- ...> We believe that our sense of stewardship is recognized by our donors. GIK donations have almost doubled over the same period for last year. A large percentage of this is food.
- ...> We are able to take large mixed donations because we know we have places to share what we can't use. This allows us to take more and that also allows us to give more. In addition to our partners, we are also able to more internally in terms of food baskets and support to area seniors.

We thought about cost and efficiency as we put our program together. Offerings are sent out after all of our internal programs have had an opportunity to take or reserve what they need for the coming week. We do not deliver product and that conserves fuel and manpower. Agencies need to place an order. There is no just showing up to pick up food. Agencies are asked to pick-up their order during the middle of the day when we are not in the process of loading or unloading our trucks.