

Organizational Strength & Capacity

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

Operations

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

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

Infrastructure: Facilities, Equipment & Technology

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

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

Leadership & Human Resources: Boards & Volunteers

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

- Establish an active board of directors who understand the range of nonprofit board responsibilities
- Draw volunteers from different sectors of the community, including groups and individuals, people of all ages and professions, and people who reflect the cultural and language groups represented in your customer base.
- Mentor and encourage the development of the next generation of leaders. Develop a leadership succession plan to reduce reliance on a single founder or a small group of volunteer leaders and ensure that the organization can continue

after these individuals retire from active service.

- Supervise staff effectively: set clear expectations, evaluate performance annually, and offer support and opportunities for professional growth.

Joining Forces: Merger Spokane Valley Partners - Spokane Valley



A few years ago, Spokane Valley Food Bank and Spokane Valley Community Center resolved to merge their services under one umbrella, Spokane Valley Partners, for the benefit of the community they serve. Although co-located for many years, the organizations had different organizational cultures, so the merger took time and effort on both sides. In order for the organizations to come together, both boards had to agree that this was in their organization's best interest to meet their missions, and the boards had to come together philosophically. The merger was compelling because it allowed them to operate more efficiently, increase their capacity for service, and gain more clout as a larger organization. "We are stronger financially, programmatically. Our programs complement each other," comments Ken Briggs, CEO. The food bank gained infrastructure such as better technology, information management systems, professional fundraising staff and better benefits for staff. The trust building process took time, both before and after the merger took place. The two organization's boards were very different – hands-on for the food bank, and policy-making for the community center. As part of starting fresh, the merged organization adopted a new name and agreed to hire a new CEO to oversee the new, larger organization. The executive director of the food bank stayed on as program director. Board members from both organizations were invited to join the new board.

What it Takes: Negotiating a merger requires board members who can think strategically and stay focused on their vision for the community, even if painful changes such as cutting staff or leaving one location are required in the short term. Board leaders must have the ability to build relationships and find common ground with the potential merger partner. Once the two boards agree to move forward with a merger, legal advice and/or consulting services to guide the process is helpful. Be patient – adapting to change takes time for everyone involved. Briggs also points out that programs interested in closer partnership can take incremental steps such as co-location, a shared accountant or development director, or a joint operating agreement. A merger doesn't need to be done in one fell swoop.

Eliminating the Guesswork: Operations Manual Loon Lake Food Pantry & Resource Center - Loon Lake



Several years ago, Loon Lake Food Pantry & Resource Center took a major step toward shared leadership by getting vital information out of Director Sarah Nelson's memory and into a written operations manual. Thanks to a volunteer with great writing skills and an eye for detail who took the lead, they now have an operations manual. The manual covers everything from obtaining the food to storing the food to filling out all the forms required by funders and distribution centers. Lead volunteer Fred Mesch describes the manual as a "guide for the food bank perplexed."

What it Takes: Someone willing to document what you do in writing. Other food banks can benefit from Loon Lake's experience: copies of their manual are available from Washington Food Coalition, and you are encouraged by the author to "take from it mercilessly!"

Washington Food Coalition even has a template form of this resource to make it easy for you to tailor it to your own agency's needs.

Greenwood Food Bank Inventory System

Volunteers of America Western Washington - Seattle, Everett



The Greenwood Food Bank Inventory System was developed to track the flow of food resources through the Food Bank. We have designed an Excel Inventory System spreadsheet and process that can be applied to any food bank desiring an inventory capability. It allows us better organization and visibility of resource inventory for our volunteers and staff. It's as simple as a request and the spreadsheet will be sent! We also have a Power Point available with instructions.

We recognized that we were not able to continuously provide a balanced diet to food bank customers because we often ran out of certain food items. We would have to RE-act to the shortage on the food bank shelves and ask the community for their help with these items. Unfortunately, that would take up to two weeks to engage the community with food drives to obtain the necessary donations to provide our customers with enough choices to satisfy the five food groups. This short fall became an apparent need to serve our customers a nutritionally balanced diet of grains, meat & beans, fruits, vegetables, and dairy. In order to be PRO-active, we needed to know how much food we had available so that we did not experience empty shelves. This information is also helpful when answering donor questions such as 'What do you need?'. Information is power and enables us to fulfill our responsibility to feed our hungry neighbors. It was identified by a community volunteer that an inventory system would strengthen our program's ability to meet the needs for customers and donors.

What it Takes

Step One: To begin setting up the Inventory System, an average item count per box must be established for each Food Category. Then it is entered into the Assumption Sheet and is used to track the item count per food type. The Assumption Sheet should be completed prior to entering information into the Inventory System spreadsheet. Then Daily Tally Sheets and Inventory Box Tags are created (A sample is included in the Inventory System spreadsheet). This is as simple as listing the Food Category (Canned/Dry/Bulk/Meat/Dairy/Produce) and the Food Type under it (Fruit/Vegetables/Soup/etc). The date should also be added to ensure a First In, First Out best practice.

Step Two: A physical count of the current inventory in the food bank should be the starting point for implementation. Inventory Box Tags are dated with today's date and placed on each box. As a box receives a box tag, a tick mark is placed on the Daily Tally Sheet under the appropriate Food Type. Once physical inventory has been completed, the Daily Tally Sheet is used to input the data into the Inventory System spreadsheet by Food Category Type.

Step Three: When a new donation is received and it is time for it to be evaluated, the food is sorted into Food Type. When a box is filled, the correct box tag is selected, dated and the Food Type is circled. A Daily Tally Sheet is ticked under the appropriate Food Type and then the box is moved to inventory storage area.

Step Four: Throughout the day, as volunteers remove boxes from inventory to stock the food bank shelves, the box tags are removed and placed in a designated area. At the end of the day, the tags are collected, counted by Food Type, and then subtracted from the Food Category spreadsheet. The Daily Tally Sheet is also input into the Food Category spreadsheet.

Step Five: Once all information for the day is entered, it will automatically be combined into the Inventory Summary sheet. This can be used regularly to plan healthy meals for food bank customers.

The biggest indicator has been that we are now alerted to what food items we are in need of before we run low. This ensures that our customers receive healthy meals when they come to the food bank. Another indicator has been an improved outreach strategy. We can target specific needs and ask our community partners to step up to the plate and donate so our shelves do not become empty. We have a resource easily available to all the staff so they can communicate the food bank needs at any time.

The inventory system has actually showed us more efficient and effective uses of our agency's resources. Staff time is being used more effectively when deciding what items will be used to stock the shelves for the week because we are able to see at a glance

the amount of food we possess. Before the inventory system, much more time was being wasted in the effort to decide on what to stock the shelves with because we didn't know how much we had or what was coming in.

One of the biggest resources our agency has is volunteers. The inventory system has made our volunteers even more effective because they can quickly locate items by date in an assigned location. Volunteers have been empowered to see the importance of food safety even though they have been trained on this. For instance, meat is dated when it goes into the freezer and volunteers can see which meat should be pulled first to ensure best practices in food safety.

Our outreach efforts have improved because information is now quickly available to any staff or volunteer that is speaking to individuals, groups, churches and/or schools about the food bank needs. Whereas before, the staff had to gather information from a number of people to accurately determine what food we needed.

When reviewing the inventory summary we can identify if certain items are not being cycled into the food bank for meal selection. This alerts us to the possibility of foods that may be waiting too long in inventory and expiration could occur. To ensure food safety, we would then physically inspect expiration dates and develop a meal plan to include those items. The summary also allows us to make sure that we are providing well balanced choices to meet the increased demand of people who use the food bank.

To meet the increasing needs of hungry people, we created an inventory system that can maximize our facility storage, volunteer and staff time, community partnerships, and overall insurance in food safety best practices. It has strengthened our food bank program enormously to better serve our customers with nutritious food.

Food in Motion

Operation Sack Lunch - Seattle



Food in Motion OSL approaches the work we do in the community from a place of shared resources. With our Food In Motion program, we currently rescue more than 300,000 pounds of viable, nutritionally dense food, and high quality proteins, each year, that otherwise would be discarded into the waste stream. We use this food for the more than 1200 meals we prepare daily for the hungry and food insecure; breakfast, lunch, and dinner, seven days each week. We also share these resources with other agencies in the Seattle area; providing pick-up and delivery for those organizations that do not have transportation resources or the ability to procure high quality meal ingredients. Food In Motion has allowed us to develop relationships with a variety of donor partners. Meal preparation, focusing on nutritional content and dietary restrictions, as well as meal ingredient rescue is the primary focus of our organization. We network

with and complement other meal programs by being active partners in rescuing, sharing, and delivering nutritionally dense meal ingredients to their respective programs. We monitor and evaluate our efficacy by keeping accurate records, conducting surveys, and including our stakeholders in organizational decisions.

What it takes: OSL is an organization that has been built on services that are accessible and inclusive to all. There are no requirements or restrictions associated with receiving a meal or food resources from our organization. We are committed to our foundational premise that Nutritional Excellence is a right we are all born to, not a privilege that we earn. OSL is also committed to contributing to the health and sustainability of the food safety net for the greater Seattle Area. We believe that hunger can be eliminated in our community by the sharing of resources, and ideas, and by the creation of a common voice that is non-political in nature, promoting the communal common good as the focal point. We created Food In Motion as an instrument to organizationally participate in addressing hunger needs with and for the greater community. We currently have 46 food donor rescue partners, and 22 meal supply agency recipients. These numbers fluctuate. Through these partnerships we schedule pick-ups and deliveries, sort food, maintain temperature control, and anticipate what our partner agencies are looking for to better serve their customer base.

We are an organization that has learned to navigate with fluidity while we also understand that we must create concrete action steps towards our own longevity in order to continue to be a major component in Seattle's food safety net for challenged populations. This understanding has a multidimensional benefit to our customers and to our own program. Our Food In Motion program (FIM) contributes to the greater hunger needs in the Seattle community by providing nutritionally dense, quality proteins and other meal supplies such as produce, herbs, etc. to other Seattle area Meal Providers for their customer base, thus expanding our reach to the hungry and food insecure in our community. We also participate in the 'greening' of Seattle and work to help eliminate the extraordinary amount of food that is dumped into the landfills each year. Food items account for 13% of landfill waste. More than 33 million tons in rotting food is dumped into the garbage each year creating methane, greenhouse gases, which are 22 times more toxic than carbon dioxide. Wasted food costs Americans over 100 billion dollars each year. FIM puts only a small dent in this extraordinary waste, but it is a start. By rescuing more than 300,000 lbs or 150 tons of food each year before it hits the waste stream, we contribute to the economic well-being of all the programs we share these resources with, as well as contributing to the well-being of our own customers by offering meals that are made with safe, healthful and quality ingredients. Finally, through networking and partnerships we actively participate in our dedication to building the capacity and sustainability of our over-all organization and to continue to be instrumental in the ongoing creation of a sustainable food system for the hungry and food insecure in our community.

Saluting Good Ideas

Food Lifeline - Seattle



Food Lifeline (FLL)'s Excellence Awards are designed to promote and share great ideas that will help end hunger. Begun in 2006, the program invites large and small agencies to nominate their best practices for recognition in several categories. The idea grew out of FLL's experience monitoring agencies that contract with them, and being impressed by the amazing work that agencies are doing but others may not see. "There are many 'best practices' that agencies develop but are unaware of how unique or effective they are compared to what other similar programs may be doing. They are also not necessarily aware of how many other agencies could benefit from borrowing their great idea," says Tiffani Kaech, Agency Relations Manager. Although FLL always tried to share this information informally, the Excellence Awards gives the ideas more visibility, recognizes the agency publicly for their creativity, and encourages them with a cash award. Applications are solicited in four areas of excellence, and several FLL board members serve as judges. To promote fairness, judges evaluate applications with agency identifying information removed. Award winners are held secret until they are announced at the FLL annual agency conference, where they receive a plaque, a check and are publicly applauded for their work. FLL has tried to create a process that allows even the smallest volunteer-run agency with a great best practice to apply and win. By applying, agencies agree to share their idea, put it in a how-to format for others to read, and even polish their grantwriting skills.

What it Takes: FLL has worked to create an accessible, fair process for identifying and recognizing best practices in emergency food. For a program like this to work, it is important to keep the application and process simple and transparent. Designate a contact person to be available to answer questions or give advice to applicants. Set a realistic timeline allowing adequate time for each stage in the process. If you want to make awards on an annual basis, design your program to be sustainable and manageable over time.

Get Ready: Preparing for Disaster



While many food banks and meal programs help families and individuals respond to the recurring emergency of hunger, they have yet to create and implement a plan to respond to a local or regional disaster or emergency. But recent natural disasters across the country and around the world have started some programs preparing before disaster strikes. Barb Shimizu, Coordinator, South King County Food Coalition (SKCFC) points to Hurricane Katrina which hit the Gulf States in September 2005 as the impetus for their disaster planning. "We realized that it was 'our customers' sitting stranded on those rooftops,"

she said. Emergency food programs are a valuable resource “in efforts to reach and educate vulnerable populations such as low-income families, immigrant populations, and shut-ins,” says Shimizu.

With funding from King County, SKCFC completed an assessment as a first step that “will provide the foundation upon which we can build our emergency preparedness plans.” The assessment gave SKCFC members a clearer picture of the hazards facing their community. An Americorps*VISTA member from the Washington State ReadyCorps joined the SKCFC in December 2006 to assist members in completing their emergency plans and putting important pieces in place, such as making arrangements for each food bank to have an alternate location to operate from in the event that their facility is shut down due to disaster-related damage. “Acting together makes sense. If your neighbor doesn’t have a strong plan and you do, there’s a problem. We now understand how it is all going to fit together” adds Shimizu. SKCFC expects to continue their preparedness work together. “Consider the decision to purchase generators. Think of the duplication of effort if each food bank is researching generators separately. It makes sense for one person to research it and to seek funding together. The same goes for developing educational materials for our customers.”

Seattle embarked on its own initiative which benefited from the six-month presence of Nick Maryns, a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow through the Congressional Hunger Center. The Seattle Food Committee (SFC), which represents each of the 27 food banks, worked to create an emergency response plan for local agencies. The plan aims to prepare food banks as a coalition, as individual agencies, and to educate customers. The primary goal is to enable food banks to communicate effectively, work together to share resources, and refer customers appropriately in a disaster situation. Maryns developed a comprehensive guide to disaster preparedness (see reference below), including a template for an emergency preparedness plan that would be useful to any food bank in any type of disaster. One thing that Maryns heard from food bank staff and volunteers is that they feel disaster-preparedness is important, but that they simply feel that they “don’t have time” to tackle the issue. For individuals who feel this way, he suggests taking incremental steps – for example, dedicating five minutes once a month to prepare for an emergency. Though it can seem daunting and unrealistic amidst the urgent daily events of a food bank, there are simple measures that can be taken to better prepare for a disaster, he says.

Robin Rudy, Director, Tenino Community Service Center, took her first step by creating a special emergency pack for diabetics. It contains a cooler pack for insulin and room to hold pills and other items. Working with the Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department, she has helped prepare the Tenino Food Bank for an emergency by educating its volunteers and customers alike. All customers are regularly given pamphlets with their food bags, with information on what to do in a disaster, such as how to make one’s own emergency package. Many food bags also contain a bar of soap, provided by the county to encourage hand-washing and other hygienic practices, to prevent the spread of the flu and other diseases. Rudy has also been working with Robert Coit, Executive Director, Thurston County Food Bank, on disaster preparedness at a county-wide level.

Maryns says one of the most important things in an emergency situation is to know who has what information, and who can do which tasks. Having updated contact lists, making sure that all staff and volunteers know how to shut off gas lines, and maintaining a first-aid kit are all basic actions which any food bank can and should take. Maryns also acknowledges that for individuals and families who face food insecurity as part of their daily lives, thinking about what they would do in a disaster situation may be overwhelming. One lesson he has learned very quickly is the importance of how the message is delivered. Rather than sending a message of fear, make the message an empowering one, he notes. For example, instead of emphasizing how unprepared people are, share what they can do to better prepare themselves. Resource: *Hungering for Disaster Preparedness: Strategies, Resources and Tips for Food Pantries and Their Coalitions*, available on the web at <http://www.solid-ground.org/publications/HDP.pdf>.

INFRASTRUCTURE: FACILITIES, EQUIPMENT & TECHNOLOGY

Blueprints: Food Bank Design Tri-Cities Food Bank - Richland



Ten years ago a fire allowed Tri-Cities Food Bank, Richland (TCFB) to build a new facility from the ground up. Given this opportunity they sought to create the best possible food bank – food enters through the rear and leaves through the front. Customers arrive and enter a large waiting room where TCFB offers resource and referral information. People are then invited into a small, private side room for intake. For the physical food distribution, TCFB offers a shopping experience – customers shop up and down aisles selecting food from many available choices. “It makes them feel in control of the process and gives them dignity,” comments Executive Director John Neill. In the back of the building is a large warehouse where food is received, with a loading dock and forklift. TCFB’s Kennewick site has a similar layout, and they are now planning to replace the smaller Benton City location with a new, similar facility.

What it Takes: The biggest requirement to lay your food bank out like TCFB is lots of floor space. TCFB also boasts a large walk-in freezer and refrigerator, which allows them to serve a greater variety of foods. While not every food bank has this kind of space, for those that do, setting up a store-like environment with aisles, and providing a comfortable waiting area are great design features.

Super Freeze: Combining Resources to Build Capacity Kitsap County Food Bank Coalition - Bremerton



To meet a common need for additional freezer space, members of the Kitsap County Food Bank Coalition pooled their EFAP proviso funds and put the money toward a large walk-in freezer to be owned by and located at Bremerton Foodline (BF). While BF owns the freezer, participating coalition members contribute to the operating costs of the freezer. The freezer has a separate electric meter, and BF invoices participating food banks for a one-eighth share of energy costs each quarter, plus \$25 per quarter toward a shared maintenance fund. The money is actually remitted to the coalition and then BF is reimbursed. Monica Bernhard, Director, says the formula is designed to recover costs, and that BF does not make any money toward overhead or other costs unrelated to the freezer itself. The freezer benefits everyone, allowing for bulk donations and purchases, and providing a back-up in case an individual food bank’s freezer goes on the fritz. Not every coalition member participates in cost-sharing, because some boards were unwilling to commit either EFAP funds at the time of purchase or ongoing cost-sharing. In spite of this, use of the freezer is open to all organizations recognizing the community benefit.

What it Takes: A significant shared purchase like this requires advance planning. You will need to get commitments from each agency board. In this case, BF took the lead in presenting a proposal to the coalition for the capital investment and the cost recovery plan. This information was in turn presented to members’ boards. Even though not everyone chose to participate, they were able to get a quorum to proceed, with BF investing additional funds beyond what other partners could.

Ingenuity: DIY Tools Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc - Moses Lake



Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc. (CSML) has created a slip-sheet attachment to help unload truckloads of food not on pallets, such as USDA cereal. The cereal came in on a slip sheet – a thick sheet of cardboard – and needed to be dragged off the truck and placed onto a pallet. CSML did some research and discovered that the standard solution for pulling slip sheets, a special attachment for a fork lift, costs \$5,000. “I had a vision and talked to a friend of mine that’s a retired machinist. Together we’ve created a slip sheet puller/clamp for about \$45 that’s worked like a charm,” says Peny Archer, Operations Manager.

What it Takes: Ingenuity is the main requirement to design a new tool. In this case, Archer had a vision and was able to communicate what she needed to a machinist who could fabricate the tool from existing tools – a vice grip and an angle iron. Archer also reports that others can benefit from their experience, since the fabricator says he would be more than happy to build one for other food banks --but you have to come to Moses Lake to pick it up!

Partner, not Donor

Coastal Harvest - Hoquiam



Coastal Harvest recently received a grant from the Grays Harbor Community Foundation, not as simply a donor to our organization but rather as a partner. We approached the foundation with a proposal to build an ongoing relationship that was different than the traditional relationship between a donor and a recipient.

We asked for the GHCF to work with us to provide fork trucks for our facility. But first, we asked them to look at the issue from the eyes of the nonprofit. We all tend to buy used equipment and run it into the ground—we often just don't have the funds to do proper upkeep. So when a fork truck starts having trouble, we spend money...and then spend more and more trying to keep it alive. By the time the trouble becomes serious we are bleeding money into this equipment. Traditionally, this is the point at which we seek help from a foundation in the form of a grant to buy another used truck.

The problem is that we are too late. Even if you buy a good used fork truck, your budget is already in the hole trying to fix the old one. There was no time to shop around or seek a deal on a truck, you needed to get one ASAP and put it to work. The cycle begins anew because now you have a used truck and a tight budget means you'll tend to shortchange the maintenance on your "new" truck. We asked the GHCF to help us break that cycle.

The proposal we submitted was for a multi-year grant. The first phase was to bring our existing fleet up to minimum safety standards to help us in the short term. The next phase was to help us to buy new trucks in the longer term. But we did more than just ask for money. We asked for the foundation to expect more of us than they usually would. For them to be partners, they needed to know that we were spending their dollars as if they were our own. They needed to set an expectation that we would take the responsibility of maintaining the new equipment in a way that would ensure maximum lifespan. Simply put, we asked them to trust us to also be a good partner as we managed their donation and requested that they hold our feet to the fire to do just that.

By finding the best deal we can for our new trucks, by adhering carefully to maintenance schedules and treating our equipment as our own, we believe we can make the most of the funds provided. By asking for open communication and for the foundation to take an interest in how we do these things, we believe they will see this partnership as beneficial and will want to continue it into the future. Together, we will break the cycle of the peaks and valleys of most grantor/grantee relationships where an agency quickly spends the monies given, has zero incentive to care for the equipment and then simply asks for another replacement down the road. Together, we'll squeeze every ounce of benefit from every dollar and make the funds given by the GHCF a true investment in our community.

Enticing Skilled Volunteers to Work for You

Friends in Service to Him (FISH) Food Banks of Pierce County Tacoma



FISH Food Banks of Pierce County knew they needed technology assistance, and decided to put out a call for interns at the local community colleges. Instead of a student intern, FISH Food Banks lucked out when Tacoma Community College's Director of Information Technology responded to their notice. She has installed computers, made technology improvements at a number of their eight sites, and is developing a program to track customer information.

What it Takes: Beth Elliott, Executive Director, highly recommends connecting with your local college to find a computer literate person who can assist your organization with customized solutions.

STRENGTHENING BOARD LEADERSHIP

Deep Roots: Building a Community-Connected Board Toppenish Community Chest - Toppenish



Toppenish Community Chest (TCC) established itself as an independent community organization just four years ago. Prior to that, the local food bank had run under the auspices of several area churches. A few short years later, they are well-known in the community and have a new facility funded by a successful capital campaign. Cecelia Chavez, Executive Director, is clear about how vital the board of directors is to TCC's success. "If you have a core group of at least 10 active, working people thinking ahead and using their connections, you can get somewhere," Chavez says. TCC's board consists of 15 people from different backgrounds

— farmers, schools teachers, the CEO of the Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic, and so on. "Each member has an entity behind them, so they have extra help. Every time we choose a new member, it's something to do with a community service in town. This way, they can access more help, and more people know about the food bank. For example, farmers get us fresh fruit, and our teacher organizes the local school to do a food drive."

Because they want committed, active members, TCC has a thoughtful recruitment process which includes an in-person presentation of the food bank's work to the board candidate, covering "what we have done and what we expect from them." Expectations include working in the food bank at least monthly, and organizing one fundraising event per year. If there is a match, the new person is voted in. TCC feels it is important for board members to spend time at the food bank itself, sorting groceries or doing other daily work. This allows them to know what is really going on at TCC. Chavez adds, "When they see that the work they do pays off, they get interested in doing more. They see the customers getting help. It is working for us."

What it Takes: To build a strong board, it is important to have a thoughtful recruitment process, and be honest about what is required of board members. At TCC, community connections are a key requirement for new board members, and this strategy has extended their reach in the community. TCC has established a strong board culture that promotes service and accountability. Aspects of this culture include setting clear, specific expectations for board members, maintaining a focus on the organization's mission and accomplishments so that board members feel they are making a difference, and ensuring that board members have supportive organizations backing them up.

RECRUITING AND MANAGING VOLUNTEERS

One Call: Centralizing Volunteer Coordination Hopelink - Redmond



Hopelink has six food bank locations, and centralizes their volunteer coordination. The volunteer coordinator, located in their central office, processes all new volunteer applications. This provides a consistent system in terms of who gets approved as a volunteer, keeps applications in one place, and takes some of the work of volunteer management away from food bank staff. For example, the volunteer coordinator handles background checks on new volunteers, and schedules volunteer orientations. "I only have to worry about scheduling," says Teresa Andrade, Food Bank Coordinator, Northshore Hopelink.

What it Takes: This system works best for a larger organization with multiple sites and enough volunteers to justify a coordinator position.

Start Early: Utilizing High School Volunteers

Wapato Food Bank - Wapato



Wapato Food Bank works with the local high school to actively recruit volunteers. Students need community service hours, and the school principal is willing to provide a list of students who need to fulfill hours and their phone numbers. Roy Cardenas, Basic Food Educator, calls the students directly and invites them to work at the food bank. “The extra manpower is great,” says Cardenas. “We usually have elderly women as volunteers, and it’s hard for them to lift 50 pound bags of beans and rice. I was picking up a lot of heavy items, and thought it would be nice to have help!” The students come in on an as needed basis, and are particularly helpful around the holidays. No extra supervision is necessary, and the school seems to select kids who are easy to manage.

What it Takes: Establishing a relationship with a school and having a designated person who can call students and schedule their shifts.

Rethinking Support: Celebrating Volunteers

Hood Canal Food Bank - Hoodspert



Two of the larger churches in the Hoodspert community have a luncheon for volunteers and customers of the Hood Canal Food Bank (HCFB) to celebrate them. All are welcome. HCFB provides some of the food and the church members bring other things, like salads. “It has been so successful! The people that come to the food bank really look forward to it – once a month they can go and have a nice lunch,” reports Director Kathy Roberson. The luncheon is set up in the church, and the pastor comes and sits down with people at lunch. “It’s just once a month, but it’s meaningful to the people, and also the volunteers. It gives them camaraderie. They’re not just working, they’re also relaxing together.”

What it Takes: Community partner to host the luncheon, volunteers to cook and serve. Could be started on a quarterly basis at first.

Increasing Volunteer Workforce

Good Cheer Food Bank - South Whidbey Island



With the economy struggling, it has been hard to increase food and financial donations at the same rate that needs are increasing for food bank customers. People continue to want to help, however, and the efficient and effective use of their offers to volunteer can make a significant difference in the service provided to the community. Last year Good Cheer Food Bank was able to significantly increase the number of volunteer hours provided through a combination of public outreach and volunteer coordination.

Good Cheer Food Bank serves a unique community including the cities of Langley, Clinton, Freeland, Bayview, and Greenbank. South Whidbey Island is growing in population, yet local wages are lower than many parts of the state. High costs of living mean that more people are turning to Good Cheer to help make up the difference between their paycheck and putting food on the table.

In 2010, Good Cheer provided food for up to 25% of the local population. Early in the year we found that the number of new customers was growing faster than the rate of food and monetary donations. One way to reduce non-food expenses is to increase the amount of service hours provided by community volunteers.

What It Takes: Good Cheer uses a number of strategies to increase the number of useful volunteer hours. To replicate this program, any or all of them can be used by similar food banks around the state. With these strategies in place volunteer hours increased from 26,366 in 2009 to 32,737 in 2010.

- **Recruitment and Training:** In addition to our general public awareness outreach, Good Cheer makes specific appeals for volunteers on a regular basis. Recruitment and training includes a volunteer job description, brochures, application

forms, training video, and an annually updated volunteer handbook.

- Coordination: It takes resources to effectively utilize resources, and this year we saw a great return from our designation of a staff member as Volunteer Coordinator. We utilize technology in the form of our Salesforce data base to record hours and to send out email blasts to our volunteers to announce needs. Although paying a staff member to coordinate volunteers takes funding, the rewards are great – Good Cheer volunteers donated hours equaled to 20 Full Time Employees in 2010.
- Communication: Volunteers need to know their work is appreciated, and they need to feel part of the overall mission and activity of the food bank. Good Cheer provides a newsletter specifically for volunteers three times a year. Volunteer Forums are held quarterly where we specifically ask for their feedback in how to improve service to our customers or to help meet their volunteer needs. Forums are also used for team building, to provide training and share business information. Once a year volunteer sare asked to participate in a satisfaction survey, in which we use the feedback to improve our program.
- Rewards: Although volunteers don't ask for rewards, they do appreciate being thanked and Good Cheer makes sure to thank volunteers often in person, through events specifically for the volunteers, personally with thank-you cards or emails and publically through printed materials, on our web-site, on Facebook, or in our BLOG posts. In addition, this year Good Cheer has partnered with Something-To-Give as a way to analyze volunteer data to help improve our program.

Focusing on the recruitment and retention plus the effective & efficient use of volunteers is of utmost importance in these days of high need and low finances. In 2010 Good Cheer wages increased by 1.2%, during the same time volunteer hours greatly increased, from 26,366 in 2009 to 32,737 this year – an increase of 24%. The number of volunteer hours donated is financially equivalent o more than \$685,000, or 20 full time staff employees.

By actively, strategically, and efficiently using community volunteers we are making the most use of this donated resource. The volunteer labor allows us the ability to utilize financial donations to more direct costs such as food. Ultimately, more needy people are able to receive food to support their family.

The major steps we have taken to make sure our agency is making efficient use of our resources are:

- Implementing a point system, and refining it when needed to ensure we can provide nutritious food to a growing customerle
- Creating a garden on food bank land to grow our own produce
- Utilizing volunteers to increase service while reducing expenses

This project is a “best practice” because strategically utilizing community volunteers allows us to provide a better level of service to the hungry in our community. In addition to allowing us to feed more people for a cheaper cost, this program is easily replicable for food banks throughout the region.

By increasing the number of volunteer hours you are also strengthening your team (your organization) and involving more individuals in your work. As an added benefit it also provides an opportunity for food banks customers that choose to give back to an organization that is also serving them.

Top three answers when asked why do you volunteer?

- To help others
- Good Cheer's mission (To create a hunger-free community)
- To use free time constructively

An example of a best practice is when you can increase your revenues by 12.9% while increase you expense by only 2.6%. That is bottom line numbers on Good Cheer's 2010 Profit & Loss Comparison over the previous year. The strongest contributor to making that possible was increasing the amount of volunteer hours by 24%.

*In 2011, 1.7 million Washington volunteers dedicated 218.9 million hours of service. Nearly 22 percent of all volunteers either collected, prepared, distributed or served food.
(source: Volunteering in America)*

Unexpected Partners: Working with Inmate Crews & Court-Mandated Volunteers

Lewis County Food Bank Coalition - Centralia



Lewis County Food Bank Coalition (LCFBC) utilizes inmate labor from the county jail's inmate release program. These inmates work shifts at the food bank and must be supervised by trained volunteers. LCFBC picks up the inmates at the jail for their shift, and returns them to the jail at the end of the workday. "We decided to do it because the inmates are good workers, and most of our volunteers are older, and we're able to always know that we can have four pretty able-bodied people there all day to load and unload, clean, and help us with light maintenance in the warehouse. It's a matter of free, good, reliable, consistent labor work," says Bonnie Pedersen, Coalition Treasurer. For the inmates, the work provides an opportunity to get out and be exposed to a positive work environment. For some, it is their first experience of volunteering. They have been very good workers, and LCFBC depends on their contributions to keep their food bank running. When they moved, volunteers from the jail contributed professional skills such as painting and carpentry as well.

What it Takes: Inmate volunteers must be supervised at all times. The Sheriff's Department provides training to LCFBC volunteers who will be providing supervision, and it is important to follow the Sheriff Department's guidelines. LCFBC provides meals for the volunteers during their shift. Transportation must also be provided. LCFBC generally has a crew of four inmates come for each shift, so a volunteer usually picks them up using an LCFBC van. The first step is to establish a relationship with the Sheriff's Department or equivalent public agency in your area.

Tips from the Field for Managing Volunteers

- Set clear expectations for volunteers. The Salvation Army (SA) in Anacortes has a written volunteer agreement that outlines expectations of volunteers, such as notifying SA in advance if they are unable to work a shift, signing in and out, attending training and protecting customer confidentiality. They also use a volunteer orientation checklist.
- Pay attention to group dynamics. At Bainbridge's Helpline House, the volunteer coordinators have noticed that volunteers stay involved and enjoy their work more when they feel they are part of a cohesive team. They watch for personality matches and try to group people that work well together.
- Convey your values and philosophy to volunteers during training. Helpline House has also developed written materials to help communicate their approach and values to volunteers. The following is excerpted from their handout about communications:

What do we want to communicate?

- The interdependence of those in the human community ("No man is an island")
- The dignity and worth of every human being (Acceptance)
- The validity of asking for help (All of us have problems some of the time.)
- The need to give as well as to receive (Each has the ability to be contributing members of our community.)
- The recognition of the difficulty in making systems work
- The need for information, time and attention to solve problems and make choices
- The assurance that information shared will be confidential
- The role is of a concerned neighbor (Peer)

What we can offer is time, attention, accurate information, connections and a way to feel worthwhile.

- Deal directly with the issue of hungry volunteers! Agencies develop different policies regarding having customers volunteer – some swear by it, and other believe it is best not to have individuals wear both hats. The most important thing is to clarify and communicate your organization's policy.
- At SA Anacortes, volunteers are given the agency's policy in writing, stating in part: "Volunteers are strictly prohibited from retaining food items for themselves. If there is a volunteer who is in need of assistance they are invited to fill out the proper paperwork during hours of operation. No individual will be denied food assistance, however, they do need to

follow the proper channels.”

- St. Leo's Food Connection (SLFC) Director Kevin Glackin-Coley comments, “The best thing and the toughest thing about working here is that we have volunteers from the community in need. It is what allows us to keep our doors open long hours, and it keeps the face of hunger right in front of us.” To recognize volunteers and also to reduce the temptation to take food during volunteer shifts, SLFC has instituted a shopping policy that anyone who works more than 10 hours per two week period can get an extra shopping period. However, they also make it clear that people can't do shopping as food comes in, taking what they want.

Whatever your organization's policy, it's important to remind volunteers of the rules regularly, to reduce temptation and opportunity to steal food, and to ask people who violate your policy to leave.

- Recognize and adapt to changing volunteer trends. With more baby boomers delaying retirement and more competing demands on people's time, food banks have trouble recruiting volunteers willing to work one or several shifts per week as has been customary in past years. Patricia King, Pantry Shelf Director comments, “When I first started, people were working every Tuesday or every Friday. It's been increasingly hard to get people to sign up for every week. I started asking people for one shift a month, and they knew they could trade their shift if needed. We attract more volunteers with this flexible system.”
- Celebrate! Recognize your volunteers in large and small ways. Social events such as an annual volunteer recognition luncheon, a birthday party for a long-term volunteer, or holiday celebration can help build community among your volunteers.