

# Transportation

The area of transportation presents many challenges for emergency food providers. Fuel costs have risen steadily, and the costs of owning or leasing a truck are high. As the system shifts from primarily non-perishables to an emphasis on fresh and frozen foods, refrigerated transport is required to ensure food safety. Distribution centers and food banks are meeting these challenges by sharing resources and cooperating to maximize efficiency and ensure that trucks are full rather than empty as they move food around the state. General best practices in transportation include:

- Distribution centers and larger agencies investing in trucking equipment and transporting food on behalf of smaller food banks and meal programs
- Food banks working in coalition to share the expenses and benefits of owning a shared vehicle
- Working in partnership with trucking companies and trucking schools who can provide donations of transportation and vehicle maintenance

## Going Places: Trucking School Partnerships Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc. - Moses Lake



Community Services of Moses Lake, Inc. (CSML) partners with the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program at Big Bend Community College to safely and reliably transport food. The partnership is beneficial for both: students need to complete a certain number of hours of driving time and CSML needs additional transportation resources. CSML contracts with the CDL program to pickup from Northwest Harvest (NWH), Yakima once a month. They complete three direct drops to area food banks, and the rest comes to CSML in Moses Lake. The program promotes safety and maximizes resources. It also works out well for NWH, since they have to load one huge truck instead of nine little ones. "It's a win-win for everyone, as far as we can see," says Penny Archer of CSML. "Plus the drivers get to learn interpersonal skills – they're getting more than just a driving experience." One challenge with a school relationship is that there are always new drivers. However, the instructors are a constant, and handle the scheduling directly with NWH to match their changing class schedule. The partnership grew from a single volunteer who suggested that CSML staff meet his instructor.

**What it Takes:** The school provides the trucks and drivers, and carry their own insurance coverage. CSML's board insists on an annual contract that releases them from liability. CSML covers gasoline costs at fifty cents per mile. Students cannot participate in loading or unloading, so it's important to be able to field volunteers to unload the truck promptly on arrival.

*"Fuel costs are so high, none of us can afford to roll those wheels empty."*

*– Mike Regis, Director of Procurement Northwest Harvest*

## Evaluation: Working for You Rotary First Harvest -Greater King County



Rotary First Harvest (RFH) acts as a conduit between farmers and the programs that serve hungry individuals and families in our region, collecting produce and other nutritious food and getting it into the existing emergency food distribution channels. Since their focus is on transporting food, they solicited funding to conduct research on ways to improve transportation for the hunger

response network. The research was conducted by a professional research firm, and included key person interviews with diverse stakeholders such as commercial trucking groups who were donating services or offering reduced rates, as well as distribution centers and EFAP lead agencies receiving high volume donations. The resulting report provided fresh insights for RFH and their partners. To David Bobanick, Executive Director, important learnings included gaining insight into businesses motivations for donating and increased clarity about key transportation corridors and trucking hubs statewide. They also learned that “it’s a deal breaker if the truck and driver has to sit and wait at either end” of a donated trucking run, so they are working to reduce waiting times at both donation locations, such as cold storage facilities and distribution centers. These insights will allow RFH to be more strategic in deciding what donations to accept and to advocate for changes that will improve the experience of donors and their willingness to continue to provide pro bono trucking services .

**What it Takes:** Research can be an invaluable aid to meeting your mission and goals more strategically. In particular, listening to donors and other community partners can reveal new opportunities to leverage resources and talent for community benefit. Formal research such as the study RFH commissioned requires expertise to design effective and scientifically valid research methods. For this type of research, you may want to seek outside funding and/or join together with other organizations that would also benefit from the research in order to support consulting costs. The project will also require active involvement from your organization’s leadership to help define research questions and identify relevant stakeholders.

## Traffic Busters: Cooperative Trucking

### Emergency Food Network, Northwest Harvest, Coastal Harvest - State-wide



The agencies above have been collaborating for some time on transportation, sharing food and moving it out to people. By working together, the group is able to increase efficiency, reduce transportation costs, and take advantage of special opportunities. This was coordinated in response to a situation several years ago, when Emergency Food Network (EFN)’s past Executive Director David Ottey received a call about a very large potential donation of frozen vegetables in Grandview and Wenatchee, Washington. The amount of food was too large for EFN to handle on their own, and without collaboration, they would have had to refuse the donation. After consulting with Northwest Harvest (NWH)’s Director of Procurement Mike Regis, a plan was worked out for NWH to secure temporary storage for the Grandview vegetables, while EFN dispatched a truck to retrieve the donated product in Wenatchee. On the way to Wenatchee, EFN’s

driver stopped at NWH’s Seattle warehouse to pick up a load of food they needed delivered to Wenatchee, so the truck didn’t travel out there empty. Meanwhile, during this same 36-hour period, EFN received assistance from Coastal Harvest, who drove to Oregon to pick up a donation on their behalf. Regis sees many benefits to the collaborative relationship these three organizations have developed: “Fuel costs are so high, none of us can afford to roll those wheels empty. We try to make the most efficient use of our equipment and professional staff. In addition, this increases our ability to serve donors – you have to make sure that when the donor calls, you can respond. And all of us are getting into delivery now. We receive more donations of frozen and chilled foods, and the health department has become more stringent about keeping food at safe temperatures, which means we need to deliver in refrigerated trucks.”

**What it Takes:** This collaboration has been very successful because all three agency leaders have a can-do attitude to help each other accept donations quickly. “We jump on it,” says Regis. To establish this type of collaboration, try to find partners who have a collaborative and can-do attitude when dealing with challenges – a willingness to go after the product and say thank you in a sincere way. For food banks in other parts of the state, going in together to share transportation costs may allow you to accept greater quantities and new types of donations, especially if together you can afford to share a refrigerated truck.

# Collaborating Locally: Sharing a Truck

In Seattle, South King County and Kitsap County, food bank coalitions are working together to ensure that they are able to get the deliveries they need from Food Lifeline (FLL), Northwest Harvest (NWH) and others. Here's how it's working for these coalitions:

- In Seattle, Solid Ground (SG) operates two trucks to provide delivery service to 19 of the 26 food banks in the city. One refrigerated truck is owned by SG. A second truck is leased three days a week. Both are driven by professional drivers employed by SG, and they also budget for maintenance and repairs, fuel, insurance and a cell phone system to communicate with the drivers. Thanks to City of Seattle funding, SG is currently able to offer delivery service to food banks free of charge. In the past, food banks have contributed to cover trucking costs based on a formula that accounts for their size and usage. The schedule has been developed over the years, and is difficult to change as many food banks plan their hours according to the delivery schedule. SG has a relationship with a local trucking service that provides substitute drivers when the regulars are ill or on vacation, and having these reliable substitutes has been very helpful.
- The South King County Food Coalition Transportation Project was developed to increase the capacity of emergency food providers in South King County. Instead of using rented trucks, unreliable paid transport service or volunteer transport, the Transportation Project pools resources from several agencies to purchase a truck and fund a driver to pick up and deliver donated food. Participating food programs have better access to food from FLL and NWH and other local businesses as a result. By sharing cost and transportation, food delivery is streamlined. After initial research and negotiation, funding was acquired to hire a part-time driver – three days a week – and to purchase a 20-foot delivery truck with a 12,000 pound payload and electric pallet jack. The Multi-Service Center (MSC) is the fiscal agent of the project and the primary owner and caretaker of the truck. Currently, six agencies operating eight programs are Transportation Project participants. Each agency pays a per-trip cost that covers part of the costs of operating the program, and grant funding covers remaining costs.
- In Kitsap County, many food banks benefit from Bremerton Foodline's truck. They carry FLL and NWH deliveries out to the north end of Kitsap County at a cost of \$20 per food bank per trip. This works well for everyone since the trucks used to drive that way empty en route to pick up donations of fresh produce from grocery stores in that area. The Kitsap County Food Bank Coalition (KCFBC) also has a partnership with a local trucking company. KCFBC collectively purchased a truck trailer, and the trucking company keeps the trailer at their location and makes monthly runs on the ferry to pick up food at NWH and deliver it. The trucking company donates their time and costs for these runs.

## Checklist of things to think about:

- Scheduling
- Truck (with or without lift gate)
- Maintenance and repair costs
- Equipment for loading and unloading, such as a pallet jack or fork lift
- Roadside assistance
- Qualified driver
- Role of lead agency Insurance for the vehicle
- Cost sharing system

## Tips from the Pros:

- Make sure you have a skilled, reliable driver with a good driving record and the customer service and interpersonal skills to deal well with a changing array of volunteers and a variety of loading situations. They may need a Commercial Driver's License depending on the size of the truck, and should prioritize safety.
- In developing your budget, make sure to establish a maintenance reserve fund to cover repairs and upkeep costs for your truck. Research your insurance needs as well.
- Consider leasing a truck. The rental company may offer roadside assistance and insurance options, and you won't have to deal with repairs.
- Think through what additional equipment you may need, such as a lift gate and pallet jack. SKCFC keeps their pallet jack in the truck at all times. They can't load as many pallets, but the pallet jack can be used at each location.
- Grants and government funding are likely sources of capital to purchase the truck, but these donors will want to see your plan to sustain the project over time.
- Develop a cost-sharing plan that is affordable for participating food banks, and get their commitment to participate in advance. Consider inviting meal programs to participate, too.