RIGHT TO FOOD

Beyond the Emergency

How to evolve your food bank into a force for change

ABOUT THIS MANUAL

We at Right To Food have heard from many at food banks who want to shift or augment their work to create more impact. We developed this resource to help them discuss the opportunities and challenges that arise when moving from the charity model to one informed by anti-poverty, food justice, and the social determinants of health.

This manual showcases a range of tangible ways food banks are evolving beyond emergency food provision. Many suggestions are low cost, including changing policies or procedures toward healthier food, and getting staff, volunteers, donors, and the public onside in making a shift in thinking.

The chapters are framed by the Good Food Principles — a philosophy rooted in health, dignity, and equity that underpins our work at Community Food Centres (CFCs). The Good Food Principles are shared values that unite the groups who have joined our Good Food Organizations (GFO) initiative. We discuss the rationale behind the Good Food Principles, and offer methods, tools, and inspiration to help food banks make incremental shifts toward them. At the end of each chapter, we offer questions to spur discussion among board, staff, volunteers, and members at your organization.*

The information, stories, and strategies in this manual come from the experience of our partner CFCs, featuring The Stop Community Food Centre's food bank in Toronto, as well as other CFCs, GFOs, and innovative food programs across Canada.

.....

* A note on terminology: In this manual, we refer to the people who use food banks as members. Your food bank may call those who access it clients, participants, customers, service users, etc. We find that calling people members is both inclusive and participatory — it makes people feel they're a valued part of the organization.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 5

Principle 1: Taking action from the individual to the systemic 7
- Civic Engagement
- Taking action with food programming
- Discussion questions
- Case study: Eden Food for Change

Principle 2: Believing and investing in the power of good food 15
- Creating a healthy food environment
- Rethinking procurement
- Fundraising and budgeting for healthy food purchases
- Healthy food purchasing tips
- Evolving your organization: Getting everyone on board
- Discussion questions
- Case study: The Table CFC's Core Foods Initiative

Principle 3: Creating an environment of respect and community leadership 25
- Eliminate barriers for entry
- Respect policies: What are they, and what do they enforce?
- Never underestimate a coat of paint: The value of a positive space
- Community leadership
- Respectful food distribution
- Discussion questions
- Case study: Share the Warmth

Principle 4: Meeting people where they're at 33
- Determining your community of members
- Make volunteering easy and enjoyable
- Hours of operation
- Creating programs that really work
- Discussion questions
- Case study: The Local CFC

Principle 5: Aiming high for our organization and our community 39
- Fundraising
- Evaluation
- Communications
- HR policies and workplace culture
- Programs and operations
- Create fair food bank systems and enforce policies
- Discussion questions
- Case study: Nelson Food Cupboard

Appendices: 46
- A: Good Food Principles Program Reflection Guide

RIGHT TO FOOD

Originally published in 2017 by Community Food Centres Canada, now known as Right To Food. Revised in 2025.

GOOD FOOD PRINCIPLES

The Good Food Principles act as a guiding philosophy for the work of Right To Food's partner Community Food Centres and Good Food Organizations. Your organization may not fully embody them now, but the Good Food Principles can act as an aspirational tool to chart a course forward.

PRINCIPLE 1 • **Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement**

Poverty and food issues are complex, and so are the answers. Making good food a basic right means working for change at the individual, community, and system-wide level. We therefore try to work across program areas to provide many points of connection for community members including meeting basic needs with food access programs; helping people maximize their choices by building the skills to choose, grow, and cook good food; and creating opportunities to get involved with the big picture issues that affect our communities.

PAGE 7

PRINCIPLE 2 • **Believing and investing in the power of good food**

Good food has the power to build health while connecting and inspiring people to become engaged in issues that matter to them. We strive to make good food a priority and to provide food through our programs that is delicious, healthy, sustainably produced, and pleasurable to eat.

PAGE 15

PRINCIPLE 3 • **Creating an environment of respect and community leadership**

Respect for every person's inherent value and potential to contribute underpins our work. We strive to communicate this respect through procedures that break down the stigma often associated with charity and by creating an inviting and safe space for people to sit down with their neighbours over food. We look for ways for our participants to use their assets by involving them as volunteers and leaders.

PAGE 25

PRINCIPLE 4• **Meeting people where they're at**

We avoid making assumptions about community members' skills and goals. Some come with assets to share, and others need very tangible support in order to participate. We recognize that meeting people where they're at means not judging or preaching, but working with them toward the changes that they want to make. We focus on celebrating achievements big and small as we work toward reaching individual and community goals.

PAGE 33

PRINCIPLE 5 • **Aiming high for our organization and our community**

Our organization needs to be properly resourced to do our important work. Volunteers are vital, but cannot sustain the entire sector — private philanthropy and government need to play a role in supporting our sector. Adequately staffed and funded organizations create lasting change. To this end we are committed to valuing our staff members and offering sustainable and rewarding employment. To stay accountable, we fulfill our commitments to our supporters by holding ourselves to a high standard of performance, and measuring and communicating our impact.

PAGE 39

INTRODUCTION

Working in emergency food programs, with the day-to-day focus on "food in, food out," there is rarely enough time to reflect on the larger context of our work. Starting from a place of scarcity and emergency can feel like an uphill battle, an exhausting competition for resources — just as it feels for the people who use these services.

Since food banks first opened their doors in Canada in 1981, hunger has gone in one direction: up. Food banks were established as an emergency measure. Now over 4 million people in Canada experience food insecurity and 850,000 access food banks every month.[1]

People are hungry because they do not have enough money to purchase food. Canada has a growing population of working poor whose wages do not cover basic necessities. Shrinking social assistance rates, meagre pensions, illness, and disability are at the heart of food insecurity. These problems require many different voices calling for multi-faceted solutions. Food banks need to evolve — hunger and food insecurity are not problems that food banks, in their current form, can solve.

Food banks are increasingly becoming spaces to share healthy food in a dignified way. As we have seen from the food banks housed in our partner Community Food Centres, food banks can play an important role in documenting community need, attracting people to work for change, offering a gateway to helpful programs and services, and advocating for better policy. But to achieve systemic change, action needs to occur in many arenas — from public health institutions to social service agencies, and most importantly government at all levels.

Poverty is making people sick. Studies show that living in low-income neighbourhoods can reduce life expectancy by up to 19 years.[2] By providing nutritious food and rejecting unhealthy donations, food banks can be leaders in improving physical and mental health for low-income communities.

Food banks offer many strengths and possibilities. They often have valuable connections to local industry and service agencies and maintain relationships with thousands of community members, presenting a wide reach. Food banks also enjoy a positive reputation because of their long history of public service, and they allow volunteers to feel they're making a tangible contribution. These assets can power civic engagement and momentum for addressing larger change.

While food banks provide access to emergency food, most aren't able to consistently offer healthy or sufficient quantities of food. Many food banks want to do more to reduce social isolation, improve health, or address the policies that create poverty and hunger. But addressing broader systemic issues and solutions seems too wide a chasm to cross when already faced with a steady flow of unhealthy donations, lack of staff and physical infrastructure, and a chronic funding shortage.

It's not the responsibility of food banks or the charitable sector at large to solve deep-seated inequities. While inspiring food skills programming and healthy food banks can improve conditions in the meantime, only policy reform will get people out of poverty. In many ways, the stopgap measures food banks provide allow governments to step back from their responsibility to adequately support, feed, and house those in vulnerable situations. When policies are falling woefully short and people are going hungry, it's all the more important that food banks be part of the solution. Food banks can model a vision in which everyone, no matter their income, has access to healthy food, is treated with dignity and respect, and has the confidence and knowledge to speak up about issues that affect them most. And they can do it by calling for the systemic changes needed so no one needs to rely on food banks in the future.

In this manual, we offer practical ways food banks can build on strengths and resources to look beyond emergency food provision, offer a range of services to meet more complex needs, and set their sights upon bigger picture issues. By using the Good Food Principles as a guide, we outline tangible ways food banks can reduce stigma, increase food choice, and provide healthier and culturally appropriate food. And we offer insight into how food banks can foster leadership, advocacy, and valuable skills that, over time, will help people become agents in their own lives and in their communities.

Principle 1:

Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement

PRINCIPLE 1:

TAKING ACTION FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE SYSTEMIC — FOOD ACCESS, FOOD SKILLS, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Those who access food banks do so under diverse circumstances, but they all lack access to healthy, affordable food. Food security means that everyone has the right to a culturally appropriate, affordable, safe, nutritious, and sustainable food supply. So while food banks are well positioned to alleviate hunger on a short-term, individual level, they will never achieve food security in the broader sense without policies that enshrine it.

There's great power in bringing a systemic lens to this work — food banks are in a prime position to amplify their members' voices and experiences. They can speak to the larger issues that cause hunger: poverty, housing, gender/class/race/disability-based inequity, and more. Doing so means thinking about programs and activism at individual, community, and national scales.

This chapter offers inspiration for addressing and breaking down barriers that cause hunger. We suggest ways to create new programs in food access, food skills, and engagement.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

Principle 1: Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement
Taking action with food programming 9
Community action 11
Discussion questions 12
Case study: Eden Food for Change 13

Principle 2: Believing and investing in the power of good food 15
Principle 3: Creating an environment of respect and community leadership 25
Principle 4: Meeting people where they're at 33
Principle 5: Aiming high for our organization and our community 39

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS PROGRAMS

THE ISSUES WE FACE

FOOD INSECURITY

Rates of food insecurity across Canada are either rising or persisting. **More than 4 million Canadians struggle to afford enough to eat, and 1 in 6 children in Canada are affected by food insecurity.**[2]

LOW WAGES AND INADEQUATE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE RATES

People are hungry because they are poor. This includes the working poor and people on social assistance. **62% of food insecure households are employed. 61% of households that rely on social assistance as their main source of income are food insecure.**[3]

CHARITABLE SECTOR CAN'T KEEP UP

The charitable food sector works hard to pick up the slack, but many organizations are under-resourced and can't meet the demand for their services. **38% of food banks have to cut back on the amount of food they provide because of insufficient resources.**[4] And many food insecure households don't use food banks because of the stigma associated with them.[5]

OUR RECIPE FOR CHANGE

1. **Offer dignified food access programs**, operate them to the highest standards of health and quality, and use the most accountable, transparent policies possible.
2. **Meet immediate needs and provide the opportunity for social connection** and links to other Community Food Centre programs and community resources.
3. **Involve those affected by food insecurity** to volunteer in programs and play leadership roles. Create ways for those affected by food insecurity to push for policy responses that address the issue at the scale of the problem.

KEY INGREDIENTS

- Warm, welcoming, and non-judgemental staff and volunteers
- Bright, beautiful spaces
- No intrusive questions, line-ups or means testing
- Fair and consistent food distribution
- Healthy, delicious, and high-quality food (focus on local and sustainable sources)
- Connections to other supports, programs and services

PROGRAMS ON THE MENU

+ Community meals
+ Affordable produce markets
+ Healthy food distribution

THE CHANGE WE'RE COOKING UP

↑	↓	↑	↑	↑
AVAILABLITY, ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY OF HEALTHY FOOD	STIGMA	SENSE OF DIGNITY	COMMUNITY BELONGING	CONSUMPTION OF FRUITS, VEGETABLES AND OTHER HEALTHY FOODS

THE PROOF IS IN THE PUDDING

"I got more vegetables in today's lunch than I can afford to buy in a month."

–Community member at Dartmouth North Community Food Centre (Dartmouth, NS)

93 %

of people surveyed say their Community Food Centre is an important source of healthy food

"It helps me with food. I would have a much more difficult time making ends meet without it."

–Community member at The Local Community Food Centre (Stratford, ON)

TAKING ACTION WITH FOOD PROGRAMMING

At Right To Food, we support our partner Community Food Centres and member Good Food Organizations in designing programs that balance breadth of impact vs. depth of reach; for example, meal programs that meet immediate needs of larger numbers of people alongside skills and engagement programs that allow some participants to go deeper in areas of interest. Programs like community kitchens and gardens hone a practical life skill while offering up a sense of camaraderie more than the transient nature of food banks allow for. Ultimately, diversifying programming helps a food bank to meet the complex needs of people they work with.

DROP-IN MEALS

There is a high chance that people coming to your food bank are already hungry, so offering a drop-in meal during hours of operation is an obvious response to an immediate need. Serving a healthy, delicious meal in a positive social space can provide a morale boost for members. Community meal programs are often seen as complementary to a food bank and can use the same operational mechanisms for food procurement, staffing, and program hours. If you do not have the resources or space to offer a full meal, you might consider healthy snacks or a small café-style area.

A drop-in meal program alongside a food bank provides and models good food, beyond the often very basic provisions that food banks can offer. It creates a common space for people to connect socially, and provides an additional area for people to wait to use the food bank without lining up or experiencing the stress that can accompany waiting, especially when hungry. Please see the related resources at the end of this chapter for a link to Right To Food's community meals manual.

> "I realized it's not the end of the world to have to use the food bank. I'm not alone in the situation. There's a sense of community."
>
> — Community meal and food bank participant at **The Table CFC**, Perth, Ontario

AFFORDABLE FOOD MARKETS

Buying our own food offers us the choice to purchase our favourite foods, the specific ingredients we need for the evening's meal, and personally or culturally significant foods. Doing so also gives us some agency over our health — it can be as basic as reading ingredients or nutrition labels, or seeking out low-sugar or gluten-free options for a diet-related illness. Starting an affordable fresh food market in a community where grocery stores are expensive or few in number offers folks with lower incomes an opportunity to make choices about their purchases. Such markets can target existing food bank members, as many who use food banks are part of the "working poor" and may have some resources to devote to low-cost produce. You may also find that affordable markets bring in a new member group — those who avoid food banks due to logistics or stigma.

For a market to work for your organization and the community, the prices will need to be lower than your local grocery stores, and the quality and convenience will need to be the same if not better. Your market can be a source of joy and dignity when it offers quality, fresh food in a pleasant atmosphere.

Carrefour Solidaire CFC's 3 Paniers *alternative grocery store is a direct response to a need expressed by the community for better neighbourhood access to fresh, healthy, affordable food.*

Establishing an affordable food market may require staff and volunteers, a certain amount of start-up funds, a place to operate, and ways to store fresh produce. Food banks tend to have some of this infrastructure, as well as a potential customer base, so hosting a market on site may be feasible. Markets can also complement what is on offer at most food banks, providing healthy options and fresh produce vital for long-term health.

Markets operate on a non-profit basis and usually seek to recover costs of the produce to be sold at the market. The sponsoring organization, be it the food bank or a partner organization, subsidizes the start-up costs, staffing and volunteer coordination, and product loss. How to use excess produce is a key question for markets — our CFCs have found that offering a community meal program is a great way to use leftovers, minimizing waste and expense.

FOOD VOUCHERS

Offering healthy food vouchers to those on low incomes can help make fresh, local, and other more costly ingredients more accessible. People who receive vouchers can access farmers' markets and groceries in ways that are more mainstream, offer more choice, and support healthy or locally produced food.

The challenge of food vouchers is primarily fundraising: either by making the case internally for diverting some funds from other programming, or by appealing to donors who see the vouchers as a better way to support health and dignity.

Another option gaining in popularity is to partner with health care providers who write a prescription for fresh produce, which is then redeemed at a local market. In the United States, this approach has attracted significant funds and attention through programs like the market-matching dollars provided by Wholesome Wave, as well as support from insurance providers that see promise in the savings derived from preventing illness through a healthy diet. Please see the related resources at the end of this chapter for a link to our backgrounder on fruit and vegetable vouchers.

FOOD SKILLS AND FOOD DEMOS

Food skills programs such as community gardens and cooking are an excellent complement to emergency food programs. While many people come through our CFC doors seeking a food hamper or a hot meal, they learn about opportunities to exercise their green thumb or hone their kitchen savvy. Food skills programs offer a different access point for community members, and often have the biggest impact in terms of improved health and sense of belonging.

When surveyed, participants in food skills programs in CFCs across Canada report dietary improvements, including eating more regularly, trying not to overeat, eating fewer processed foods and more fresh foods, and eating healthier fats and more vegetable proteins. In 2016, 80% of participants were eating more fruits and vegetables or had made other dietary improvements because of participating in CFC programs.

Right To Food has created manuals, learning modules, and other resources on community gardens and cooking programs — many of which are available online at cfccanada.ca. We focus on food demonstrations in this manual, as they take the least investment to set up and don't require a commercial kitchen to operate.

Along with promoting cooking skills, food demonstrations are a great vehicle for catching people's attention and celebrating healthy food. Food is one thing that people can feel like an expert about — we all bring some food knowledge to the table. Demonstrating different cooking techniques and recipes centred on items received from the food bank is a great way to empower food bank recipients to cook at home.

Many CFC members report that they want support in making positive changes to their diet, suggesting that nutrition, meal planning info and recipes, and cooking classes and workshops are most useful.

Community kitchens, like NorWest Co-op CFC's Make & Take program give participants a chance to try new recipes in a low stakes setting.

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Those who access food banks are usually experiencing a myriad of struggles. Personal concerns — including mental and physical health, housing, employment, and social isolation — can overlap hunger and poverty. A civic engagement program (which Community Food Centres call the Community Action Program) extends a kind of support that food cannot — be it via access to information or an opportunity take action on local and systemic issues. It's an important complement to food access and food skills programming in so far as it pushes for movement on the underlying issues that cause food insecurity in the first place.

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL

A good way to provide individual support is by hosting third party service or information providers in your space during program hours. It's ideal to survey your members and the community to find out what issues are most affecting them. Here are some ideas for workshops or clinics that our partner Community Food Centres and member Good Food Organizations have found successful:

- legal: lawyer referrals, understanding court documents, notaries
- immigration: non-status rights, appeals, refugee status, applying for citizenship
- job search: referrals, writing résumés and cover letters, coaching
- identification: applying for or replacing lost/stolen ID
- voter awareness: being aware of candidates, voting without ID
- health: referrals to health care providers and dieticians, information on diet-related illness
- housing: assistance with searches, applications, tenant rights
- taxes: understanding how to file or claim benefits
- haircuts

Networking and partnering with neighbourhood agencies can build community support and prevent service duplication. When your organization supports individuals' needs, you build stronger bonds between members, which creates a stronger community.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY OFFICE

The community advocacy office at CFCs is intended to empower members with lived experience of poverty and other forms of marginalization so they can help fellow members struggling with similar issues.

Advocates are able to draw on their own experiences of navigating systems — from social assistance and

Dartmouth North CFC's community advocates host a voting party to boost election turnout.

Food demos at The Stop CFC

Food demos can showcase how to cook the healthy foods distributed via the food bank.

As The Stop CFC's food bank started to offer more fresh, whole foods, staff received requests about how to cook them and increase the nutritional value. In the beginning, food demos were special events, a "chef off" with two cooks competing to make the most inventive and best-tasting meals using food bank hampers. The Friday food demos have been in place for over five years and work well when run simultaneously with the food bank and other Stop initiatives like the Community Action Program and drop-in meals. With 40 to 50 people attending each week, the demos last for about two hours, including preparation, tasting, and questions. Being consistent with the day and time each week was key to its success. The Friday food demo is now a popular weekly program in which participants learn food skills, ask questions about food preparation, taste new foods, and learn nutritious, local, seasonal, and affordable recipes.

mental health services to taxes and benefits — to help others. Some advocates live in subsidized housing, are parents, and/or have experienced violence.

When the advocacy office is open, members can drop in to talk with an advocate and receive support. Sometimes members come by just to talk with someone who has a friendly and supportive ear. The value of listening cannot be understated. Poverty can be very isolating, and many members use the advocacy office to connect with others and make friends. That said, most visitors to the advocacy office are looking for help with an issue.

Two advocates staff the advocacy office at a time. Working in pairs allows them to support each other and pool their knowledge and experience, thereby addressing almost any situation that comes up. For example, some advocates are experts in disability services while others know the laws around tenants' rights inside out; some are skilled at online research while others feel more confident on the phone.

Peer advocacy clinics are also a great in-house option for providing information and referral services for people who visit your food bank.

At Dartmouth North CFC, 85% of members surveyed said that the advocacy office helped resolve the issues they were facing.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do we know what else people want from our organization? If we are unsure, can we survey our program users to find out? Who else do we need to talk to?
- Is there a need for or interest in any complementary programming? Do we have the resources to consider cooking programs, community gardens, small local herb beds, advocacy meetings, or more?
- Can we provide a newsletter with our hamper that features events, programs, recipes, health facts, and information about policy?
- What does our current messaging (e.g. donor appeals, brochures, signage, media talking points, etc.) say about what we think are the causes of hunger and food insecurity? Can we rethink our communications to be less stigmatizing or more oriented toward the root causes?
- Do our current hiring, volunteer recruitment, and training processes reflect an understanding of the systemic issues we address?
- Do our program users have the support they need to access other programs that may help them with broader issues?
- Are there other community agencies we could partner with to bring in information and referral services?
- How can we involve people in issues in ways that are immediately relevant and aim for longer term change? Are there ways for both members and donors to get involved? Are there campaigns we can join and add our voices to?

CASE STUDY:
EDEN FOOD FOR CHANGE: TAKING GOOD FOOD PRINCIPLES TO HEART

Eden Food for Change, a member of Right To Food's Good Food Organizations initiative, is at an exciting time. Based in Mississauga, Ontario, the eight-person operation runs a learning kitchen, cooking classes, and a fresh produce box in addition to a long-standing food bank. Its mission is to increase access to good food in a dignified manner, develop food skills to encourage healthy eating, and empower the community through education, outreach, and advocacy.

Eden's programs, mission, and even its name are actually pretty new. Up until May 2015, the organization was called Eden Community Food Bank, reflecting that for the past 25 years, giving out food to hungry people was its primary activity.

According to Bill Crawford, Eden's executive director, the organization realized that the political change required to create better living conditions and wages for those who were using its food bank wasn't happening. Eden wanted to support the short-term needs of hungry people while creating opportunities around good food so folks could grow, learn, and take steps toward self-sufficiency.

The shift started happening at the board level about six years prior. According to Bill, "We sought out fresh produce in a big way for our food bank. To create a more inclusive and empowering environment, we recently started calling those who use our food bank 'members' or 'participants' rather than 'clients.' We added new programming too — we created a community learning kitchen in 2013 which is now staffed by a chef who runs regular healthy cooking classes and groups."

In 2014, Eden embarked on more formal organizational changes including revising its mission and vision statements and adopting new guiding principles. Eden held three meetings over twelve months so staff and board members could work through the transition, troubleshoot, and re-strategize as needed.

Of course, the changes met with some pushback from long-standing volunteers who were resistant toward using funding in any way besides feeding people. To manage these responses, the staff and board worked slowly and communicated frequently with everyone about the process and provided opportunities for input along the way.

Bill has advice for organizations looking to make similar changes: "Give yourself a long transition period to give people time to process and fully own the change. Secure dedicated funding for the shift, especially if it's going to change how your organization operates. Hiring a consultant to support the process also helped us immensely. And finally, don't hold on to a vision too tightly. If you keep it to yourself it's only your vision, but if you are sharing your vision then more people can take ownership of that and make it their vision too."

Principle 2:

Believing and investing in
the power of good food

PRINCIPLE 2:

BELIEVING AND INVESTING IN THE POWER OF GOOD FOOD

It can be more expensive to offer healthy food compared to the processed and non-perishable items food banks often receive and distribute. But if we take the view that everyone, no matter their income, deserves access to healthy food then offering it through our food banks is simply the right thing to do. Not only does distributing healthier food build in a basic attitude of respect and dignity toward its recipients, it affirms a commitment to equity and social justice that hopefully one day will become enshrined in policy.

Food banks rely on public and corporate donations. Within the traditional charitable approach, there is an idea that "beggars can't be choosers" and "food is food." This perception results in donations of food that are non-perishable, of low nutritional value, and high in salt and sugar. This line of thinking doesn't recognize that food-insecure people have personal and cultural preferences or specific dietary needs. In an ideal world, everyone has access to healthy choices in the food they eat and provide to their household.

Believing and investing in the power of good food also means considering larger food systems. How is the food produced? Where does it come from? Are the farmers and food producers paid fair wages?

Following this Good Food Principle means connecting with local farmers who use sustainable farming practices, whenever possible. If a fair and sustainable food system is what we want, we have to make a point of investing in sustainable food and farmers who use environmentally responsible growing practices. Food cannot be regarded as "cheap." Cheap food relies on a system wherein farmers and harvesters (often temporary migrant workers) are not paid fairly for their work.[3] It's important, then, for food banks to know where their food originates — and to break the cycle of receiving food donations that are solely dictated by company surpluses.

This chapter provides a number of proven approaches you can take to build your food bank's momentum around improving access to good food and creating a healthier community.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

Principle 1: Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement 7

Principle 2: Believing and investing in the power of good food
Creating a healthy food environment 16
Rethinking procurement 17
Fundraising and budgeting for healthy food purchases 18
Healthy food purchasing tips 20
Evolving your organization: Getting everyone on board 20
Discussion questions 22
Case study: The Table CFC's Core Foods Initiative 23

Principle 3: Creating an environment of respect and community leadership 25
Principle 4: Meeting people where they're at 33
Principle 5: Aiming high for our organization and our community 39

CREATING A HEALTHY FOOD ENVIRONMENT

To motivate your organization toward change, start by asking yourself:
- Where did this food originate?
- What is the nutritional value of the food collected and what are the impacts of distributing unhealthy food?
- What foods would our members like to receive?

Community Food Centres strive to create a healthy food environment — one shaped by policies and values that promote food access and procurement, encouraging members to make healthier food choices throughout their lives. We want members who visit our food banks to come away with nourishing food, renewed dignity, and a stronger connection to community.

A HEALTHY FOOD POLICY

At Right To Food, food agencies of all sizes regularly ask us how they can create good food policies and successfully implement them. Common concerns include alienating donors, losing food donations, and believing that food bank members do not want healthy food.

It's true that creating a healthy food policy can start with figuring out how to reject certain foods. At first this feels like asking for less food. Alienating long-standing donors and reducing your food levels is not the goal here; the purpose is to educate your donors, guide the type of foods that are donated, and bring in more healthy whole foods. Food banks already have basic guidelines for sorting food, e.g. discarding opened food or dented cans. A healthy food policy builds on this process.

To begin creating a healthy food policy, we propose you examine exactly what food you are distributing and take inventory through a nutritional value lens.

How to get started

1. Take stock of the food you distribute. Designate the food into three categories:
- high-nutrient value (whole foods), e.g. fresh produce, dried beans, eggs
- low-nutrient value (more than five ingredients, includes higher levels of salt, sugar, fat), e.g. macaroni and cheese, canned pasta, juice
- no nutrient value (junk foods), e.g. chips, pop, candy

2. From here you can start asking key questions:
- What percentage of food is of low or no nutritional value?
- What category do you want to decrease?
- What category do you want to increase?
- Can you completely eliminate a category?

Your answers to these questions will form the basis of your healthy food policy. We suggest targeting the low-hanging fruit — junk food. Many food banks across Canada and the U.S. have implemented a no junk food policy, with positive outcomes.[4] Your policy will guide your donations and ideally include a list of preferred choices, along with a rationale.

Creating your foundational policy

While you can refine and specify your policy over time, we recommend starting with a statement of values — why you are now focusing on increasing fresh food access and how it will be done. Including a statement of values will help explain the change to donors, staff, volunteers, and members.

Here is an example of a first-stage healthy food policy:

In order to prioritize healthy offerings our food bank does not accept candy, pop, or chips. Diet-related illness in the general population is on the rise and is especially the case in lower-income or income insecure populations who frequent food banks. Our preferred food items are listed below. As always, monetary donations are welcomed and will be used to purchase healthy, local, seasonal foods in an effort to support the local food economy and increase nutritious offerings to our food bank members.

Adopting even one of the following directions for your healthy food policy can make dramatic changes in what is supplied to your food bank:
- We do not accept dented, expired, or unlabelled cans.
- We prefer items with five or fewer ingredients.
- Monetary donations are preferred as they give us the ability to purchase fresh, local, seasonal foods to support the local food economy and accommodate members' requests.
- Monetary donations enable us to efficiently purchase food at fair prices from local distributors and farmers.
- Items with low or no salt, sugar, and fat are preferred.
- We do not accept cookies or baked goods.

RETHINKING PROCUREMENT: PUTTING OUR MONEY WHERE OUR MOUTH IS

Putting your healthy food policy into action means working at all levels, from purchasing food and receiving in-kind donations to growing food and making sure your policy is enacted in as many ways as possible. This section will discuss food drives, healthy food purchasing, and growing food.

In order to thrive, local, sustainable food systems need localized and sustainable financial investment. Yet for individuals and families living on low incomes, high-quality local food is beyond what their budgets will generally allow. Not that local food is too expensive; in fact, we believe that the price of food needs to reflect an investment in sustaining the land, the time taken to care for animals, and a living wage paid to workers. The generally low cost of food throughout the food system has been made possible by unsustainable farming practices, factory farming, and underpaid labour. While these problems in many ways require large-scale, policy-based solutions, food banks can still play a significant role in supporting local food systems.

RUNNING HEALTHIER FOOD DRIVES

A quarterly call to the community and corporations to donate food is a necessity for most food banks. Some food drives require the food bank to sponsor the event or for staff to take part in an activity, such as a public stunt to collect food — filling buses, making sculptures out of cans, or leading a workplace team-building exercise. While actions like these raise awareness of hunger and compel people to donate, they do not make the connection to why the event is being held: the lack of food security in your community. High profile food drives, then, become detached from the issue of poverty and the nutritional value of the food being collected.

The bottom line is that food banks need healthier food donations. You want donors to comply with your new healthy food policy, but not at the expense of making them feel badly about what they have offered in the past.

Rejecting certain foods means having a discussion around the politics of food waste and throwing out food. Food banks have often been dumping grounds for food unwanted in mainstream channels, like expired and damaged products. Empathy can be a useful tool here: imagine how it feels to receive products that are less than palatable, nutritious, or appropriate to culture or tastes. Having to “take what you can get” contributes strongly to the stigma that food bank members experience. Drawing on the positive, you can use your new food policy’s “wish list” and rationale to frame your appeal for healthy food donations. Other suggestions to communicate a shift to healthier food are outlined at the end of this chapter.

Healthy food procurement need not stop with food drives, however. Here, we explore other ways good food can find its way to your food bank.

FOOD RECLAMATION OR FOOD RESCUE

Food reclamation programs seek to acquire and distribute food items that are:

- unsellable due to being short dated (close to expiry or best before date)
- surplus items from grocery stores, food distributors, food corporations, and markets
- end-of-the-day restaurant and bakery products
- leftover (gleaned) harvest in farmers’ fields

There can be value in food reclamation and many Community Food Centres and food banks are focused on providing good quality, healthy, rescued food.

Most cities have food reclamation programs that quickly distribute rescued items while they can still be used. Becoming a member of a reclamation program can be a great opportunity to receive healthy, fresh food donations, including produce and dairy. However, the agency needs to have the capacity to store, sort, process, and use the product before it goes bad. Food recovery trucks typically visit local agencies once or twice a week depending on the number of potential food recipients and program arrangements. Making these trips means being highly organized and also having flexibility in programs to take unknown items at a moment’s notice.

Having a food policy in place makes it easier for staff to know what to take off the food recovery truck. Assigning a staff person to be your agency’s food champion reduces the number of employees going out to the truck, and increases adherence to your food policy.

GROWING YOUR OWN FOOD

There are many urban agriculture resources on the web and on Right To Food's own website, so we'll briefly highlight the viability of growing your own food for your programs The overarching question is whether or not it is realistic to have a production garden or greenhouse supply your food bank or other programs with healthy food. Since there are many schools of thought on this topic, here are some points to consider:

- What is the main goal of your garden program and of the people involved? Is it to reduce social isolation, teach people how to grow their own food, or share traditional or cultural growing practices? Or is to supply the food bank and hence reduce the need to rely on charitable sources?
- What is the budget for program resources, including the number of staff and volunteers and their time? If saving money by growing food for your programs is your goal, could you more efficiently purchase quality food from local farmers? Can your gardens reliably supply food for a program? If so, in what quantity?
- What is the scale of your operation? How many community gardens do you have? Do they produce enough to provide food to both garden participants and the food bank?
- Do you have enough human power to dedicate time to planning, maintaining, and harvesting the garden? Volunteers can help with harvesting and maintenance, but it's advisable to have skilled and dedicated staff overseeing the garden.

Depending on your answers, using your garden programs to grow for the food bank may or may not be an appropriate solution to your need for healthy food. Ultimately, growing your own food takes a lot of resources — time, space, and money — with the possibility of failing to achieve production goals. Focusing on creating a productive garden may take away from the garden's larger community-building possibilities. It might be worthwhile to spend your resources sourcing local produce and using the garden as a programming space to build community and boost social connection.

Growing food to use in your programs is a big undertaking but not impossible. For instance, The Stop CFC used to have a 50/50 policy whereby 50% of the garden harvest went to garden volunteers and the other 50% went to the food bank. It was understood that if garden yields were low or volunteer numbers were high in a particular year, the food bank would receive less of the harvest. Meal programs can be a good outlet for smaller amounts of produce, if you have a creative chef on your team. Smaller programs such as community kitchens and food demos may also be well positioned to showcase and consume smaller amounts of food.

FUNDRAISING AND BUDGETING FOR HEALTHY FOOD PURCHASES

Having a healthy food policy and evolving your organization toward a healthy food focus can actually bolster your fundraising efforts — donors and the public are keen to support better health for communities. It's also an opportunity to reach out to new donors who may not have previously felt aligned with your work.

The true spirit of "believing and investing in the power of good food" lies in budgeting. Having money enables you to make decisions about the food coming into your food bank. A healthy food policy helps explain why you want to raise money to purchase healthy, local, seasonal food. Creating a "healthy food fund" can help you dedicate dollars to food purchases and build them into your budget on an ongoing basis.

HEALTHY FOOD FUND FOR FOOD OF THE MONTH

The idea behind the Food of the Month program at The Stop CFC is to offer at least one local and seasonal food item each month through the food bank and in other food programs. For example, if corn and tomatoes are the Food of the Month for September, then these items will be showcased throughout the month. During meal programs and food demos, members can taste these foods being prepared in different ways; at the food bank, members can take fresh corncobs and tomatoes home for free; and in community kitchens, members experience preparing a warm soup or an autumn salad for themselves with these ingredients.

The Stop also distributes recipe cards and a monthly programs calendar that features recipes and/or nutritional information about the Food of the Month. Taken together, the program is about much than distributing healthy food — it's about building skills, knowledge, and confidence around preparing and eating these featured items.

The Stop uses dedicated funds to purchase the Food of the Month from local farmers and distributors, thereby supporting the local food economy. Often the volume purchased is large enough to warrant planning ahead with a farmer, and to receive a good but fair wholesale price. Purchasing in volume ensures adequate produce for the various food programs and increases ease of delivery.

BUY A ROW

BC-based Nelson Food Cupboard asks the public to "buy a row" of farm-grown vegetables in lieu of donating canned goods. Individuals donate the dollar value of a certain length of field row of their chosen crop. The Food Cupboard then uses that money to pay the farmer come harvest. Compared to the traditional food drive, this approach aligns better with the organization's mandate for healthy and dignified food and simultaneously supports local farmers. Here's how Nelson Food Cupboard frames it:

> "Donate fresh produce to the Nelson Food Cupboard by 'buying a row' of locally grown vegetables. Choose which vegetable you want to 'purchase,' how long of a row, and send us a cheque. We order it from a local farmer and send you a charitable receipt. Everyone wins — we support local producers at the same time as stocking the Food Cupboard with nutritious, fresh, local food."
>
> — **Nelson Food Cupboard**, Nelson, British Columbia

FARMS FOR CHANGE

Held at The New Farm in Creemore, Ontario, Farms for Change is an annual bash featuring delicious food and drinks prepared by chefs and set to the tune of a plein-air concert. With a special interest in food justice and growing food that is heirloom and organic, The New Farm marries the two by donating the money raised by Farms for Change to community food programs. The farm fostered this unique relationship with The Stop CFC in 2009, and Regent Park CFC in Toronto and Right To Food were later added as recipients.

To raise funds, The New Farm recruits and hosts chefs and musicians for an evening of music and food on the farm. The money raised from ticket sales and a live auction is dedicated to The Stop and Regent Park CFCs for ordering food from The New Farm throughout the year. It's a win-win situation: the CFCs receive fresh, organic food as well as cash donations, and The New Farm has a guaranteed customer purchasing large volumes of produce. Of course, the successful events depend on The New Farm's vast contacts, event-planning savvy, and enormous amounts of hard work organizing food and a concert while running a busy farm!

One of the guest chefs at Farms for Change — a fundraiser for The Stop and Regent Park CFCs held annually at The New Farm.

RAISE MONEY OR APPLY FOR GRANTS FOR EQUIPMENT

Having a walk-in fridge and freezer enables a food bank to accept more healthy food donations and purchases. Some regional food banks offer grants to other organizations in their network for capital and operational expenses. Grants for equipment are relatively easy to get, and are even more readily achieved if an organization fosters a partnership with a kitchen equipment company.

HEALTHY FOOD PURCHASING TIPS

Here are a few tips to streamline healthy food purchasing:
- have a healthy food policy in place
- have as few people as possible involved in ordering food — assigning one or two people is ideal
- obtain adequate food storage — a walk-in fridge and freezer, shelving, and pantry space
- if your organization runs food programs outside of the food bank, enable these staff to plan menus and place orders in advance, allowing whoever is in charge of food ordering to place one streamlined order

The biggest piece of advice is to recruit one or two staff members to be your agency's healthy food champion. This person will put your food policy into practice and vet all incoming food orders. The most obvious choice is a chef (if you are lucky enough to have one on staff) since they have the skills and knowledge required to make high-volume purchases of healthy food.

Make sure your food purchaser
- supports and promotes your new healthy food policy
- knows local food distributors
- understands sustainable farming practices including seasonal, organic, and low spray
- can network and find new food suppliers as needed
- has a culturally diverse knowledge of cooking
- understands food volumes and measurements (e.g. knows they need about 10 cups of rice for 20 people; can navigate purchase units like pounds, pieces, and cases)
- can guide food program staff toward seasonally appropriate foods and offer substitutions

The goal is to steward your policy so it becomes part of your agency's culture. Doing so requires a dedicated, unwavering person who can implement your healthy food policy at different scales while making appropriate exceptions as necessary.

EVOLVING YOUR ORGANIZATION: GETTING EVERYONE ON BOARD

Challenging the perception that food banks are a solution to hunger is an important first step in changing the narrative around the role they play in society. Certainly, there isn't enough food supplied through food banks to effectively end hunger: even the most highly resourced food banks have a hard time keeping their food at the level of quantity and quality that they would like. Many food banks are only mandated to supply three day's worth of food per month to each member and few have the refrigeration or storage necessary to stock perishable foods. Over many years of research and reporting, Food Banks Canada and The Daily Bread Food Bank have shown that individuals who use food banks regularly skip meals and forgo buying food to pay for bills and other life necessities such as housing. Being transparent about these facts is important so no one is under the impression that food banks are entirely solving the problem and no more needs to be done.

Flowing out of this systemic narrative is making real change at ground zero: your food bank. This starts from within and takes energy, negotiation, and a certain amount of gumption. The approach to change can range from "get full consensus" to "get with the program."

A new focus on healthy food often comes with some hard choices and a need to address resistance from the public and from within. Examining the values and true goals of your organization is a large part of the work of bringing everyone on board. While healthier food will likely be a central goal, there are many ways to communicate your new values, including advocating for policy change and providing skill-building, health-promoting, or empowering programs.

Getting your staff, management, volunteers, donors, and the public to embrace healthy food takes some crucial conversations. Your plan needs to cover:
- internal communication: reframing your mission with your board; consulting with staff and volunteers to address any concerns or resistance; implementing policy across the organization; consulting stakeholders, members, and the larger community on what they need from your agency and where the gaps lie

- external communication: creating materials that reflect your new, healthier direction; featuring your new healthy food policy on the website, on posters in your space, in donor outreach, messaging, and more

To combat any tension during your evolution, you can provide research and evidence on diet-related illness and poverty. You can also examine members' health needs, cultural traditions, and food preferences and provide evidence to your staff and the public that your members appreciate access to healthy food. It's also helpful to compile information on the programs and skills that members and the larger community want and need, whether through regular surveys or during the intake process.

Sometimes food bank staff worry that "we won't take everything" messaging will result in people not donating. But evidence shows that donations continue with this type of messaging in place and, in fact, many donors appreciate having guidelines so they can maximize the impact of their donation.

Changing how you communicate about your food bank can be one of the first steps toward a social justice or right to food approach. Part of moving in this direction includes providing venues for public participation. You can change the discourse from one of "give food to food banks in order to reduce hunger" to "give healthy food to food banks because people with low incomes have higher rates of diet-related illness" or "everyone deserves/has the right to good food" — messaging that conveys everyone deserves to share in the health and happiness that good food can bring.

In terms of imagery, featuring doleful, hungry-looking people creates a dynamic in which poor people are simply victims. Images that show people looking more empowered and that feature good food and social settings may be more inspiring to donors and also reduce the stigma of using your services — after all, who wants to think of themselves as a victim?

Meal Exchange, an organization that works with universities and colleges on food and hunger issues, tried this social justice approach in its 2014 "Trick or Eat" door-to-door food collection campaign. That year, rather than only collect cans, it created a postcard and social media campaign that invited people to take part in a conversation about what it would take to end the need for food banks. A food bank could similarly pair giving a food donation with an action to, for example, sign an online petition or contact a politician.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do you have a food policy in place? If yes or partially, what does it cover?
- Has your agency recently audited the foods it normally carries? Can you identify the food items/categories that have little to no nutritional value? Is there room for you to eliminate the most unhealthy food item you currently distribute?
- What would a communications plan targeted to the public and donors outlining your move toward healthier food look like? How might you get buy-in from your staff and volunteers for the values and implementation of your healthy food policy?
- How can you make your food drives reflect your organizational priorities, including your healthy food policy?
- Do your hampers contain fresh food? How can you work toward increasing this food category?
- How much time does your food bank team spend on collecting donations and sorting food? Is there a way to reduce these hours?
- Can you identify someone at your agency who has the skills required to be your designated food purchaser?
- Can purchasing for food programs dovetail with purchasing for the food bank?

CASE STUDY:
THE TABLE CFC'S CORE FOODS INITIATIVE: GUIDING THE WAY WITH HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

In Perth, Ontario The Table CFC's Good Food Bank faced a number of challenges, chiefly that a high proportion of its food donations were unhealthy. Its Core Foods Initiative, started in January 2014, aims to ensure that fresh, healthy food is available at the Good Food Bank and that at least 70% of a food hamper is made up of healthy food items.

In developing the Core Foods Initiative, staff gathered data about the nutritional needs of their food bank members. Once the plan was drafted, staff consulted the board of directors and returned to volunteers and members for their reaction. Staff then created a public document outlining their core foods values and specific asks for donors.

The Table has defined core foods along the following criteria:

- rich in nutrients
- in environmentally friendly packaging
- locally grown and/or produced
- low in sodium (salt)
- low in fat
- minimally processed
- fewer than 3-5 ingredients on the label

Nudging people toward healthy choices

Core foods have lower "food point" counts than non-core foods — so participants who choose healthy products will take home more groceries. For example, when spending one point at the Good Food Bank, you can get 6 cups of brown rice, 4 cups of parboiled rice, or 3 cups of white rice. To further encourage healthy selections, shelving in the Good Food Bank is arranged to highlight the highest quality foods.

The Table also encourages food bank members to join the community meals, participate in a community kitchen, and talk to their peers about how they manage their diet. This way healthy food is a consistent thread throughout the participant experience at The Table.

Asking for healthy food donations

Grocery stores are key players in food donations for The Table. They run their own corporate drives, and they prepack bags with items The Table requests so that shoppers can make a no-fuss donation. In a recent food drive, The Table staff handed out the core food list as customers entered the grocery stores.

Results

According to The Table's 2015 food bank member survey

- 71% varied their food purchases in the grocery store because of the Core Foods Initiative;
- 69% learned something new about nutrition and healthy eating during their visit to the Good Food Bank since the Core Foods Initiative started; and
- 65% made changes to their diet, with many mentioning that they were eating more fruits and vegetables.

Principle 3:

Creating an environment of respect and community leadership

PRINCIPLE 3:

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF RESPECT AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

From the elderly man who worked all his life but whose meagre pension now falls short to the single mom whose income no longer covers all the bills, asking for help can cause shame.[5] Arriving, then, to an under-resourced food bank doing its best in cramped quarters with limited food choices can, inadvertently, compound this sense of stigma. Unfortunately, this can leave those in need feeling as if they don't deserve any better.

Food banks emerged as a stopgap solution to an acute upshot in need. The makeshift setup was all that was possible in this emergency situation. Yet as food banks have remained on the scene and organizations have formalized around them, many have sought out creative ways to counter the associated shame and stigma. They have done so through an approach that foregrounds respect and dignity despite the difficult and often demoralizing circumstances their members face.

Food banks have the potential to be a site of hope and health, made possible through a strategic plan that places values of dignity and respect at the forefront. Putting these values into action means critically examining a food bank's operations and processes — from the physical space to the subtle and not-so-subtle messages members receive — as well as considering how to move beyond the charity model by offering support and opportunities for involvement.

When members of The Table CFC access its food bank and programming, they come away with the joy and empowerment of being part of a community. As one member said, "I like coming here because they always make you feel welcome and ask how you are. That makes a big difference." Another remarked, "The community is a great help. It feels very welcoming here, non-judgmental, lots of interesting people with so many stories." As members become more involved in programming like community meals and peer support, they flourish: "I volunteer. I have a task to do so it gets me out of the house. Otherwise I would stay home, suffer mental illness or breakdown. I feel like I contribute."

In 2016, 76% of Community Food Centre participants made new friends at their centre who they feel close to, can talk to about what's on their mind, or could call on for help. Almost all, 95%, felt that they belonged to a community at their CFC. Finally, 73% said their mental and/or physical health have improved because of their involvement with their CFC.

In this chapter, we'll consider some easy and low-cost steps you can take to create an environment of respect and community leadership that your members, staff, and the public will all appreciate.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

Principle 1: Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement 7
Principle 2: Believing and investing in the power of good food 15

Principle 3: Creating an environment of respect and community leadership
Eliminate barriers for entry 26
Respect policies: What are they, and what do they enforce? 26
Never underestimate a coat of paint: The value of a positive space 28
Community leadership 29
Respectful food distribution 29
Discussion questions 30
Case study: Share the Warmth 31

Principle 4: Meeting people where they're at 33
Principle 5: Aiming high for our organization and our community 39

ELIMINATE BARRIERS FOR ENTRY

No organization can supply an unlimited amount of food, so it's important to set criteria for members. But it's certainly possible to make the criteria for accessing your food bank or food programs less intrusive. A more open criteria process built on trust could mean reducing or avoiding means testing, questioning whether you need to ask for identification, and not forcing members to go through an intake process that collects sensitive information like legal status and level of education. Aside from verifying that someone lives within your catchment area, what do you actually need to know?

Intake self-assessment

The following questions will help you assess if your food bank's intake process adequately conveys respect and supports people's dignity:

- Do you collect more than name and address? If so, why do you need this extra information?
- How much time do you spend determining someone's eligibility? Is that where you want to spend your time?
- Consider the perspective of someone coming to get the food. How would it feel to be asked the questions in your intake process?
- Does your organization have an undue emphasis on preventing fraud or "double dipping"?
- Do you do means testing? If so, why is this important?

The bottom line:

- collect the minimum amount of information required to distinguish households from each other
- don't overly focus on fraud — it really does not happen that much
- let people decide for themselves if they need your service — it's a much more dignified approach

RESPECT POLICIES: WHAT THEY ARE, AND WHAT DO THEY ENFORCE?

Creating a respectful environment for all begins with truly understanding and empathizing with your members through personal conversation and stakeholder engagement. From that point, you can create respect policies that honour those realities.

We believe everyone has the right to good food and that right includes being able to get it in a safe place. Along with making sure staff and volunteers treat people respectfully, you need to make sure that participants who use your services are treating each other well. Try some of these techniques:

- set an inclusive tone and create a safe, welcoming space for a diverse array of members
- ensure staff are trained and equipped to take responsibility and respond when someone is mistreated
- employ measures to quickly resolve conflicts between community members and with staff or volunteers

Creating a respect policy can be simple: policies don't have to be invented from scratch or even be original. Find one you like from another agency and adapt it to suit your space and community. We've shared a basic respect policy below for you to adapt.

What is important is that your policy demonstrates fairness and consistently addresses non-adherence. It's also important to keep your policy clear and concise: not too complicated, easy to read, and translated into the appropriate languages for your community to understand.

CREATE YOUR OWN RESPECT POLICY

1. A good way to start a respect policy is by including a unifying statement about why people are here to use your service.

Everyone deserves to access food from this place. Please make sure you are contributing to making this space welcoming and are not impeding on someone else's right to be in this space and access food. Please remember that everyone has a right to food.

2. From here, outline exactly what you mean by respect — for whom, and including the space.

This space is anti-oppressive. We do not allow physical or verbal discrimination of any form, including sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, poor bashing, and intolerance of visible and invisible disabilities. This space is for everyone, and territorial behaviour including bullying will not be tolerated.

3. If you are experiencing a particular issue, such as inappropriate language around children, outline the concern in this part of the policy.

Please be mindful that this space strives to accommodate a diverse community of people including children and seniors. We ask that you keep the mood positive and refrain from using language that is offensive or vulgar and not suitable for young ears.

Intoxication or drug use may be an issue for your space, and some individuals are able to handle being in an altered state in public better than others. At The Stop CFC there is not a specific policy around intoxication — if someone is intoxicated but is not breaking any of the respect policies, then there is no reason why they cannot stay. Staff and volunteers use the respect policy in this situation: being intoxicated will not get you kicked out in and of itself, but language and behaviour that go against the policy may.

4. Make a statement about how to voice a complaint, the process for evaluating a situation, and the consequences for violating respect policies.

If you feel that you have been discriminated against or see that someone else has not been treated well in this space, please talk to a staff member. If it is found that you have not been following our respect policies, staff will ask you to either participate in resolving the issue or leave the space until the issue can be resolved.

5. Make sure that all staff and volunteers are properly supported with training and procedures for dealing with conflict. When the scope of a respect policy is broad, staff have more room to interpret a situation. Ultimately, staff will be able to understand the situation from multiple points of view and ensure that all involved feel heard. Everyone wins when conflict resolution is a foundation of your agency's culture.

At The Table CFC, garden participants and volunteers work side by side as garden members. This holds the space for everyone, no matter their circumstance, to take a leadership role.

NEVER UNDERESTIMATE A COAT OF PAINT: THE VALUE OF A POSITIVE SPACE

Walking into a colourful room filled with lively decor and various groups chatting around tables over coffee sends a clear message: this place is safe, you are welcome, and you are worth it.

Many municipal and provincial governments have grants that you can apply to for renovations, and donors often enjoy giving for such a purpose. But while a renovation can do wonders, improvements to physical space need not be costly undertakings. Here are a few ways to improve your space on the cheap:

- paint — use light colours like off-whites to brighten your space, use dark colours sparingly on accent walls and try to use a colour scheme that is in line with your branding or logo
- bring in plants from your gardening program or ask for donations of houseplants
- make sure your space is clean and tidy: clean up spills immediately, wipe down chairs and tables, and sweep floors regularly
- post colourful pictures of food, people, and your programs in action
- make sure all policies are posted, recipes are available, and that calendars of your programming are appealingly presented
- have a cork or dry-erase board to display inspiring quotations and relevant articles about social justice and the community

Roots CFC's dining room is colourful and brightly lit with lots of friendly touches to make it more approachable.

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Volunteers are the backbone labour force of food banks. Many programs recruit external volunteers who do not use the food bank, but why not look from within? A good way to reduce stigma in your food bank and build capacity in your community is to recruit members to volunteer in your programs. Some members find that volunteering counters the discomfort they feel in "taking" food by allowing them a chance to give back. Volunteering disrupts the giver/receiver relationship and replaces it with a feeling of "for the community, from the community."

Be conscious of people's diverse and sometimes precarious situations — avoid requiring volunteering in exchange for food as this requirement doesn't really meet people where they're at, and can often reinforce a power dynamic more than cultivate leadership.

Fostering leadership with your members can happen at many levels — within the organization's staff, board, peer leadership programs, or on advisory committees. Programs can incorporate a leadership development component that supports people taking on larger roles at your organization. In our 2016 survey of Community Food Centre programs, a full 36% of participants also became volunteers in CFC programs, 72% said that participating in programming made them think differently about issues in their community, and 54% became more active or engaged in community issues. When your community is reflected in your staff and volunteers, you've created a sense of ownership and pride. Please see the case study below to learn how one Good Food Organization brings in its members and creates engagement. We also outline a great way to cultivate leadership through peer-to-peer support with a community advocacy office in chapter one.

Lineups: Get rid of them!

Tensions tend to be high on an empty stomach and so being met with a lineup upon arrival at a food bank can cause a feeling of scarcity or anxiety as to who was there first. Here are a few ways to avoid the dreaded lineup:

- open up your food bank space earlier
- create a waiting area with tables and chairs
- provide a meal or drop-in area where tea, coffee, and water are served
- have reading material and activities for children (colouring books, board games)
- have staff present to deal with any situations or questions
- create a number system: handing out numbers before your food bank opens avoids lineups and allows people to mingle casually as they wait

RESPECTFUL FOOD DISTRIBUTION

Giving food bank members a choice in what foods they take home allows them a positive feeling of control and ownership over their meals, and a more "normal" experience of food shopping. Like all of us, people visiting food banks want healthy, delicious groceries that appropriately reflect their cultural, dietary, and health values. Offering opportunities for choice at your food bank creates a foundation of dignity and self-determination.

Preset hampers are the most common method used for food rationing. Volunteers prepare hampers in advance, based on household size and sometimes making adjustments for dietary restrictions according to inventory. Members pick up hampers during food bank hours. Some food banks require members to make appointments for pickups to minimize wait times and increase efficiency.

The main drawbacks to preset hampers are less choice, less interaction with members and therefore less opportunity for feedback on the food. If a member misses an appointment or is late, they may have to reschedule.

In a choice-based hamper model, food bank staff ration food categories and amounts per household size. A member is called up to the distribution desk and works with a volunteer to create their hamper. There is an effort to include some choice in each category. For example, the choices in the drinks category would be milk, alternative dairy, or juice, and in the produce category there could be up to 15 or more items to choose from. This model does require a bit more staff time and organizing to run smoothly, but it treats members with respect and creates bonds between members, volunteers, and staff that can spark larger engagement with food, health, and outreach.

An alternative to hampers is the open-concept grocery store model which allows members some level of self-determination. This model can be put into practice in a few ways. Food is categorized by points based on nutritional value and each household gets a number of points. Members peruse the grocery aisles reading dietary labels, comparing the nutritional values (points), and choosing what works best for them.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does your physical program space look like? Can you make any improvements to your space to make it feel more welcoming?
- What stigma might food bank members face? Has your food bank made attempts to reduce stigma?
- Do you have a respect policy or code of conduct for your space that is posted publicly and includes procedures for what to do when policies are broken?
- Do you know what members say about your food bank and what your reputation is in the community? How do you know, or how might you find out?
- Are there opportunities for community members to contribute their skills and knowledge to programs? If not, are there ways to make this happen?
- When was the last time you reviewed your intake process, and has it become longer or shorter over the years? Is there anything you could change or remove from the process to make your food bank a better environment when people are waiting — e.g. by offering snacks or running food demos?
- Where do lineups form in your agency? How do you manage lineups when issues occur? What alternatives could be put in place to eliminate lineups?
- Is there a way to include some choice into your current food distribution model?

CASE STUDY:
SHARE THE WARMTH:
BUILDING COMMUNITY IN A FOOD DESERT

Begun in 1990 as a food and clothing distribution service, Montreal-based Share the Warmth (Partageons l'espoir) has remained responsive and nimble, launching new programs and services such as a school food program, tutoring and music programs for youth, a second-hand shop, and an in-house food bank to meet the community's needs.

Serving the chronically low-income neighbourhood of Point Saint-Charles in southwest Montreal, in recent years Share the Warmth has turned its attention to food insecurity. Coupling food access activities like its food bank with new programs that address food skills and community engagement has become a growing focus. Its collective kitchen program offers a welcoming space for community members to gather, socialize, and learn cooking skills while eating a healthy meal. Participants are thrilled with the program, and some find it to be the highlight of their week.

Of the 1,400 people who use the food bank every month, many find that it's an entry point to the organization's other programs like the community kitchens.

The newest addition to Share the Warmth's program mix is a community café that offers healthy, low-cost meals that are prepared for the community and by the community. By training volunteer community members in food production and customer service, Share the Warmth fosters an environment of respect and leadership where members gain valuable employment training.

> "The collective kitchen is the best thing that has happened to me in a long while. The people are very kind and warm and I have not felt ill at ease a single moment... There is always something to laugh about and a story to tell at the dinner table. I love it and can't wait to be with the group again."

Approximately 15 people are actively engaged in the community café: a supervising staff member, six or seven pre-employability participants doing kitchen prep or table service, two interns doing a work placement, and about seven community volunteers (cooks and waiters), most of whom are also members of the food bank. To maximize traffic, the café's hours are aligned with the on-site second-hand shop, which is open Monday to Saturday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. While staff have plans to grow the café's customer base, there's no doubt that in an area described as a food desert, the café offers a refreshing and affordable alternative.

Share the Warmth is working hard to develop civic engagement, which will help it address the more systemic issues that face marginalized community members. The organization welcomes presenters and discussion groups on topics such as welfare rights, housing, and legal services as a way to help the community connect with needed services. Share the Warmth is a member of the Point Sainte-Charles food security committee — one of its plans is to develop a collective vision for a neighbourhood "good food charter" that will encourage the widespread adoption of standards for good food donations to the area's food banks.

Principle 4:

Meeting people where they're at

PRINCIPLE 4:

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY'RE AT

Meeting people where they're at means recognizing and striving to meet the needs of participants at multiple levels in ways that are relevant to their actual circumstances. Food banks start to meet people where they're at by addressing a basic human need: food. How can you go further to make a member's experience more rewarding and responsive to their life circumstances?

This chapter presents ideas for developing programs and operations that are more adaptable to individual needs, that increase choice, and that are empathetic to members' lived experiences.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

Principle 1: Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement 7
Principle 2: Believing and investing in the power of good food 15
Principle 3: Creating an environment of respect and community leadership 25

Principle 4: Meeting people where they're at
Determining your community of members 34
Make volunteering easy and enjoyable 34
Hours of operation 35
Creating programs that really work 35
Discussion questions 36
Case study: The Local CFC 37

Principle 5: Aiming high for our organization and our community 39

DETERMINING YOUR COMMUNITY OF MEMBERS

Most food banks have criteria that dictate who can use their service, often restricted to a geographic catchment area. It is not possible to serve an unlimited amount of people. You want to make sure you can serve your community and not run out of food. But many food-insecure people are also vulnerably housed.[6] As a result, people

- move around frequently, stay in shelters or couch surf, and are not always able to produce a document to prove they live in a certain catchment area
- may not have had their ID changed to the new address and/or not received any mail at the new address
- lose their ID frequently and therefore do not carry it around on their person

Taking such complex realities into account, food banks can strive to meet people where they're at by removing the need for proof altogether or by giving at least three chances for someone to bring in required ID and proof of address. If the person still can't produce a document, some food banks try writing a letter to that person at their current place of residence. The individual can bring the letter back and use it as proof that they live in the catchment area.

Finding solutions for common occurrences among members — not providing ID or proof of address — can increase their access to programs and make the experience of using your food bank more respectful. Consider whether these barriers actually need to be in place at all.

MAKE VOLUNTEERING EASY AND ENJOYABLE

Volunteers are essential parts of a food bank — from greeting people at the door and packing hampers to taking care of the space and enforcing respect policies. Especially for those who are facing marginalization, volunteering allows community members to take leadership roles and reduce social isolation for themselves and others. No matter their background, volunteers deserve a supportive environment in which to flourish.

Here are some ideas to show your appreciation for the dedication and hard work that volunteers put into operating programs:

- offer public transportation tickets or tokens to alleviate the burden of travel costs to and from your site
- if you have an affordable market, offer vouchers that can be redeemed for food (e.g. four shifts equal x$)
- advertise and extend professional development opportunities to volunteers whenever possible — many trainings are on offer for free or at a low cost to social service agencies
- hold annual or semi-annual volunteer appreciation events

Learning new skills while making new friends are all part of what make volunteering a valuable experience.

HOURS OF OPERATION

Ideally, your food bank will be open when it's most convenient for the community. Meeting people where they're at includes keeping their schedules and obligations in mind. Whether it's shift work, picking kids up at school, medical appointments, or meeting caseworkers, members often have a lot of demands put on them. Not aligning your hours with other nearby services adds another burden to members, forcing them to travel more or interrupting their schedules.

Here are some things to consider when establishing your hours of operation:

- Food delivery — deliveries usually come between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Make sure there is someone to receive, check, and sign for them.
- Complementary programs — having more than one program running at the same time makes it convenient for members to use multiple services in one visit, e.g. come in, have a coffee, pick up a food bank hamper, and then have lunch. Overlapping complementary programs brings people together to gather around food, make friends, and feel less socially isolated.
- Access to maintenance assistance — food banks and food programs in general serve high volumes of people, which means you need to keep your facilities operational. Keep a close eye on your washrooms, fridges, freezers, heating, and air conditioning.
- Staffing — part of keeping your spaces safe is making sure you have staff around to ensure timely service, deal with conflicts, make decisions, and answer questions. Maintaining a staff presence in your program spaces gives participants the comfort of knowing there is someone to turn to if an issue arises.
- Consistency — constantly changing the days and hours of operation may impact program participation. Part of providing a reliable service is ensuring the public knows exactly when you are open.

CREATING PROGRAMS THAT REALLY WORK

How do we ensure that programs are truly meeting people where they're at? As discussed in Principle 1, establishing a breadth and depth of programming serves the diverse needs of community members. But to develop responsive programming, first you need to know what your participant populations want! Surveying participants will help you discover more about their tastes, needs, or priorities and to understand their interest in and response to programs. It's also good practice to survey the wider community as you may identify needs that are otherwise unmet or underserviced.

When you're hoping to reach out to a new community or population, try partnering with a fellow organization that already works with them. At Regent Park Community Food Centre, staff partnered with Egale Canada Human Rights Trust to offer a cooking skills program for LGBTQ youth. Egale brought its knowledge of the group's lived realities as well as another avenue for outreach to young people.

Critically examine your programs and staffing. Are your programs not hitting your target numbers and populations? It may be a sign that your programming isn't meeting your community's need. Maximize your precious resources by only offering programs that are in demand. Next, consider if your current employees are best suited to deliver this programming. If not, it may be time to make some staffing changes.

If you designed a great program but no one is coming, instead of blaming yourselves or members, look at the barriers people face — they may be trying to participate. See if you can eliminate some of those barriers by offering, for example, free child care or tickets or cash for transit, or arranging travel to a partner space outside of your food bank.

RELATED RESOURCES

Right To Food's Good Food Principles Program Reflection Guide
(Appendix A)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean for your organization to meet people where they're at?
- Do you maintain a program mix that strives for breadth and depth, to have both wide relevance and deeper impact for those who choose further involvement?
- What makes someone not eligible for your service? What can you do for someone if they are not eligible?
- What community needs do your programs meet? How can you make your programs more adaptive to community needs?
- What volunteer incentives and support do you provide?
- Are your program hours rigid or flexible? Do they allow for smooth operations?
- Do you have a strategy to reach targeted groups? Are you maximizing your opportunities for outreach?
- Does your program reach out to people with various levels of need? How can you ensure that those with the highest needs and those who have strong existing skills or competencies are both served?
- Do people have fun when they come to your program? How do you know?

CASE STUDY:
THE LOCAL CFC:
GROWING MENTAL HEALTH

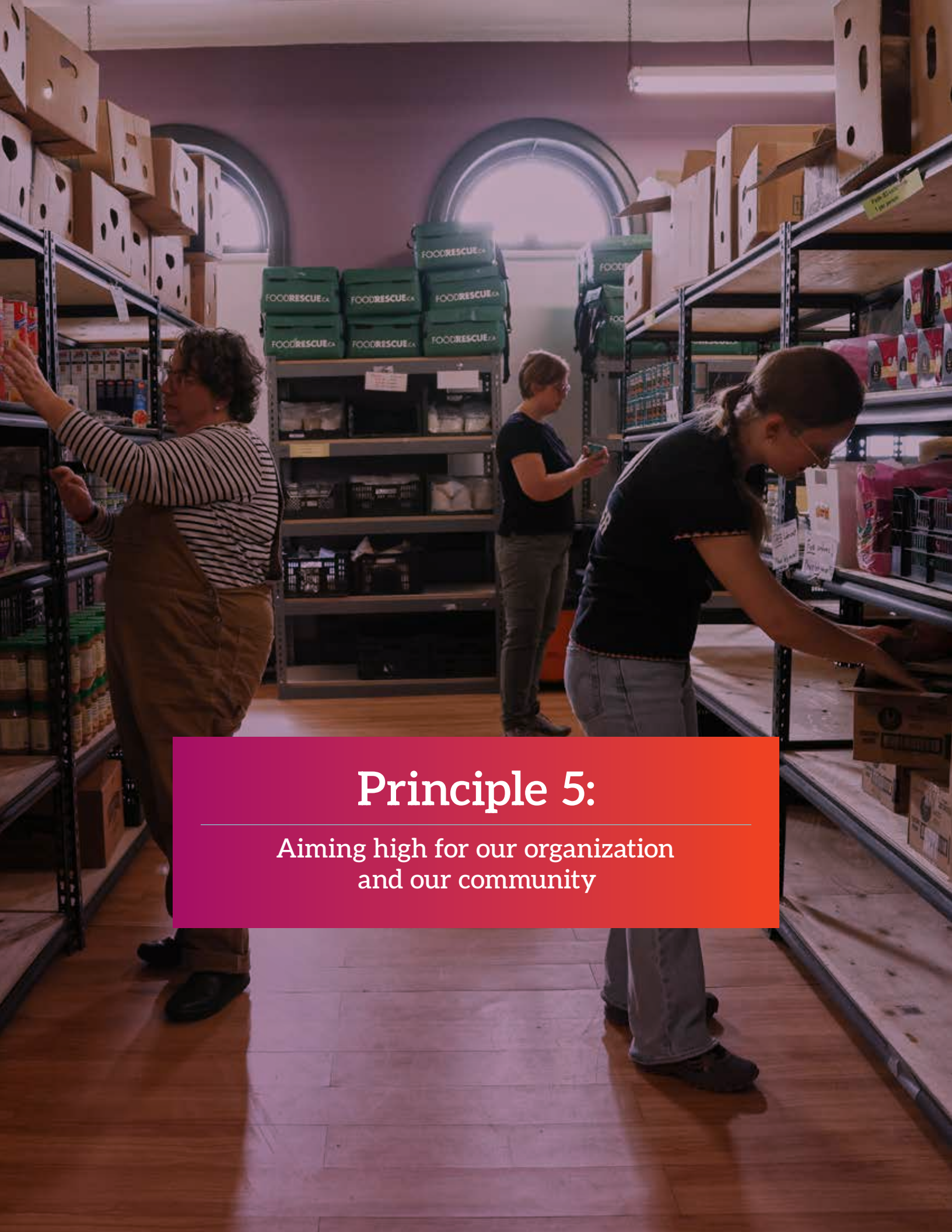
Gardens are central to Community Food Centre programming — they're a fantastic space to meet people where they're at. Not only do they provide a source of produce, CFC gardens ensure that everyone in the community has a place to learn, experience self-growth, and see life in action. As people get their hands in the soil and their faces in the sun, they also come together and build important connections that reduce social isolation.

People who come to food banks are dealing with poverty, and may also struggle with their physical or mental health. Gardens offer a way to make friends, engage in light exercise, grow good food, and calm the nerves. They are relaxing, therapeutic spaces that encourage a sense of belonging, which is particularly beneficial for community members with a range of mental health needs.

At The Local CFC in Stratford, Ontario, there was a community need for mental health support services. Staff heard from member surveys that men in particular needed a supportive place to gather and improve their mental health. In response, The Local set up a vibrant program for that explicit purpose, targeting a group that might not usually come out. The program has made a huge difference in how the men see themselves and their place in the community. Whether it's weeding, watering plants, or harvesting the beautiful produce they help grow, participants respond positively to being responsible for a specific task. A program that sprouted from a direct need is giving members a sense of purpose.

At the end of each gardening session, the gardening coordinator facilitates a peer support group with the men, in which they have the space to talk about what's going on in their lives. In one participant's experience, it "takes a short time for everyone to feel comfortable talking openly about their mental health struggles. What comes first is the connection to each other and being outside together." The shared work of growing and caring for the garden as a team facilitates this connection.

> "My presence at The Local is part of my prescription for mental health from my doctor!"



Principle 5:

Aiming high for our organization and our community

PRINCIPLE 5:

AIMING HIGH FOR OUR ORGANIZATION AND OUR COMMUNITY

As we have discussed throughout this manual, many people who run food banks feel trapped in the daily grind of "food in, food out." When we work in emergency mode, moments to come up for air are sparse. Yet there is tremendous value in doing so, especially since taking a fresh look at your organization's approach and daily operations may help you identify ways to be more effective or streamlined. In making a conscious effort to aim high for your organization and community — be it by investing in fundraising to grow capacity, seeking and acting on feedback, or striving to improve communications and your work culture — the effects will surely be felt among your members, volunteers, and staff.

Reaching the "top shelf" doesn't happen by accident. It takes commitment and focused attention, from high-level strategic planning to a detailed operations plan. It also means committing to a cycle of self-reflection (informal and formal evaluation), further planning, and action.

CHAPTER CONTENTS

Principle 1: Taking action from the individual to the systemic — food access, food skills, and civic engagement 7
Principle 2: Believing and investing in the power of good food 15
Principle 3: Creating an environment of respect and community leadership 25
Principle 4: Meeting people where they're at 33

Principle 5: Aiming high for our organization and our community
Fundraising 40
Evaluation 40
Communications 41
HR policies and workplace culture 42
Programs and operations 42
Create fair food bank systems and enforce policies 43
Discussion questions 43
Case study: Nelson Food Cupboard 44

FUNDRAISING

Fundraising is the oxygen of our work — we can't grow programming, serve healthier food, or invest in space improvements without money. For smaller organizations, it can be hard at first to justify the investment in fundraising. But a robust fundraising plan with dedicated staff or time to pursue it can reap major rewards. Aside from the much-needed money, good fundraising raises the profile and reach of your organization. An effective campaign engages current and future donors, as well as the general public, and keeps the issue of hunger and its causes on the radar.

Fundraising is most effective when you can tell a story of change from a personal perspective. Right To Food produced a video series called Good Food Changes Lives, which you can find on our YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/aplaceforfood). For Deborah Dickey, manager of Dartmouth North CFC, "Showing the impact of our work on people's lives has been a powerful tool for outreach and fundraising."

EVALUATION

Asking your members for their feedback about the services you provide gives them a voice. You may feel nervous or worried about receiving feedback as some of it will be negative. It is nevertheless important to make the connection between your services and the community you're serving. Here are a few things you could learn from community feedback:

- issues that community members face
- ways that your services are making a difference for community members (a.k.a. "program outcomes")
- what you are doing well, and therefore what to keep doing and do more of
- areas for strengthening services
- changes that your community wants, some of which you might be able to implement right away with little to no extra cost (e.g. getting rid of junk food), and some of which might not be possible to achieve at the moment (e.g. more fruits and vegetables in food hampers), but can be planned for

The information you collect can be inspiring and take you away from the oftentimes repetitive service-based work, giving you a moment to look at the generalized issues facing food bank recipients. Putting the work you do into perspective helps prevent unrealistic expectations (e.g. food banks end hunger by giving out food). Listening openly to community feedback can help you establish realistic program outcomes and continuously strengthen programs.

Being responsive to community needs means seeking out new ideas and different points of view, thereby creating dynamic programs. Mechanisms for listening to members' voices — be it via complaints or formal evaluations — have to be built into your service so information is collected regularly.

CREATE A COMPLAINTS POLICY

Call it feedback, constructive criticism, or respectful challenging — in order to make improvements to food banks, we need to be open to receiving complaints. Hearing about what is not working allows us to make service improvements. And we need to create an environment where we value participant feedback and are willing, when possible, to adapt our programs accordingly. A good way to start is by creating a policy to deal with complaints and posting it in your program area, along with a few ways for people to raise their concerns or issues.

Have a clearly marked "comments and suggestions" box in a prominent program area, with pens and cue cards on the side for people to write on. This feedback method gives participants an anonymous way to ask questions and get things off their mind. Make sure a staff member regularly goes through the cards and posts them on a board, along with organizational responses about what will be done to address the comment or suggestion. Even if a suggestion is made that is not possible to address, it is still important to have a conversation about why not. For example, resources might be too tight, or the suggestion might go against organizational policy.

Have a staff member available during program hours to hear complaints or answer questions. Oftentimes participants need simple clarification about your program policies and procedures, and if someone is able to answer or listen to a concern the situation can usually be rectified. A participant may not always like the answer to the question but will appreciate that someone took the time to hear and validate their issue.

EVALUATE YOUR WORK

In addition to gathering ongoing feedback from your members, it is important to schedule at least one formal program evaluation every year. This evaluation gathers information in a structured and consistent manner from a number of participants at a single point in time. It involves using an evaluation tool such as a verbal interview process, a written survey, or a focus group. Questions will vary depending on your information needs, but could include queries about program outcomes for participants, requests for feedback on specific areas of activity, and information about the most pressing issues community members face.

Our partner Community Food Centres follow an annual cycle of planning, evaluating, and assessing to ensure we are fully achieving our goals and serving the community. Staff evaluate their programs by tracking things like number of participants or pounds of food harvested and measuring new knowledge or skills gained. Once a year, CFCs also survey a participant sample group from across programs to evaluate the impact of the organization overall.

Weaving evaluation into the fabric of your organization makes it a natural part of the yearly cycle. Only by formally evaluating can you track your impact and gauge progress from year to year.

COMMUNICATIONS

A communications strategy is the glue that binds fundraising and evaluation. It tells your story, showcases your outcomes and bolsters your fundraising pitch. Prospective donors want to know what kind of impact their money will have in your hands. Gather those powerful stats and quotations from your evaluations and put them to work.

> "People's stories don't just fall from trees. Stories only emerge in places that are committed to building relationships and connection with people."
>
> — Nick Saul, **Right To Food** President & CEO

Dartmouth North CFC showcases participants' stories and makes the numbers real by showing how many meals each $10 donation will serve.

Eden Food for Change put together a visually arresting case for support that emphasizes how monetary donations help them buy fresh produce.

Busting food bank myths

You can use your website to help people understand who is availing of food banks and why. It's a good way to respond to accusations that people are taking advantage of the system, or that poor people don't want to eat healthy food. The Nelson Food Cupboard, a BC-based Good Food Organization, did just that. Here's an excerpt:

MYTH: Food banks are a long-standing Canadian institution.
FACT: The first Canadian food bank was established in 1981. While they began as an emergency measure, food banks have become mainstream.

MYTH: Hunger isn't an issue in Nelson.
FACT: Hunger is a serious issue in Nelson. Each month the Nelson Food Cupboard serves an average of 1,234 customers. Food Cupboard usage in 2014 is 46% higher than before the recession of 2008.

MYTH: Able-bodied adults are the Food Cupboard's main customers.
FACT: Of our customers, 35% have a disability that prevents them from working and they receive income assistance. Approximately 20% of our customers are children. Only 3% work full-time, and for low wages.

MYTH: Food Cupboard customers are mostly newcomers and transient people.
FACT: Our 2014 customer survey revealed that 99% of our customers live in the Nelson area, and 61% have lived here for more than a decade.

MYTH: Hungry people don't care what they eat.
FACT: Our 2014 customer survey showed that eating fresh produce regularly is important to 97% of our respondents. Fresh produce and quality, protein-rich foods are the most requested items at the Nelson Food Cupboard.

HR POLICIES AND WORKPLACE CULTURE

Fundraising and developing sufficient resources will enable your food bank to fairly compensate workers. As we say in the Good Food Principles, volunteers are an important part of our work but cannot sustain the entire sector — private philanthropy and government need to play a role in supporting our organizations so we are properly staffed and funded to do our work.

Beyond compensation, there are many aspects to a desirable workplace. Benefits and flexible work arrangements encourage a high calibre of staff who feel loyalty toward an employer that respects them and their lifestyles. For Lila Knox, manager of NorWest Co-op CFC in Winnipeg, Manitoba, these values are enshrined in policy, but they come to life with people: "To create an intentional culture of professionalism and caring, we start on day one — with staff orientation and training."

PROGRAMS AND OPERATIONS

It cannot be said often enough that running a highly functioning agency will positively affect your program participants. People facing food insecurity deserve to be treated with respect and take part in dignified programs.

MAINTAINING ADEQUATE OVERSIGHT OF VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers most likely make up a big part of your organization and are a critical part of service delivery. Volunteers need to be managed alongside staff, treated well, and expected to work collaboratively and respectfully. Effective management includes supervising your team of volunteers and clearly communicating expectations, policies, and procedures. Orient your volunteers with an introduction to your programs and a tour of your facility. Asking your volunteers to sign a code of conduct is a good way to start the relationship. It is also important for your volunteers to know who the staff supervisor is for their program. Following this procedure helps to create a professional environment, sets appropriate boundaries, and provides clarity for volunteers about their role. In the end you want your volunteers to be successful, feel fulfilled, and enjoy the time they spend at your agency.

CREATE FAIR FOOD BANK SYSTEMS AND ENFORCE POLICIES

The goal is to run efficient, highly organized programming and spaces. Your reputation depends on demonstrating that your food bank is fair, consistent, transparent, follows policies, and makes appropriate exceptions. If you give bigger or better hampers to select people, members may become upset and distrustful of your service. Post your policies and procedures for your members, and have staff and volunteers on hand to prevent and deal with issues as they arise.

RELATED RESOURCES

Public Health Agency of Canada's Evaluating Outcomes of Community Food Actions: A Guide (2012)
(http://www.cdpac.ca/content.php?doc=257)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you deal with complaints — from members, staff, and volunteers?
- How does your programming stay relevant to the community it serves? Do your evaluation findings reflect that relevance?
- Are the programs and services you are providing sustainable? Do you have enough staff and volunteers to run the programs you currently operate?
- Do you have a communications plan that reflects the values of your organizations and shares your members' stories?
- How do you orient your staff and volunteers?
- What is your biggest issue when it comes to staffing? Do you have procedures in place to deal with common challenges?
- What are other examples of aiming highly for your organization, and your community?

CASE STUDY:
NELSON FOOD CUPBOARD: EVOLVING TO SERVE THE COMMUNITY

Aiming high has led to an exciting evolution for this flourishing food bank in the West Kootenays. To revitalize its funding strategy, the Nelson Food Cupboard board and management worked with a fundraising consultant to create a fund development plan and received training to become more confident asking the community for financial support. Implementing a dynamic fundraising plan hasn't always been easy, as it requires more staff time and enhanced skills. But the Food Cupboard's investment in training and support recently paid off with a significant grant from a local foundation to help plan its next stage of growth.

Nelson Food Cupboard's goals also included evaluating its core food bank program. Staff created a survey for members who use the food bank and members who use other social services but not the food bank. The results of both internal and external surveys showed the organization what people like best about the food bank and what changes they'd like to see happen. Surveys also confirmed a stigma to using food banks that has deterred many low-income community members from using their services. Members' responses were overwhelmingly positive about the Food Cupboard's vision for a new location and a low-cost market as an alternative to a food bank.

Showing, not just telling, also took on greater meaning for the organization's communications efforts. It hired a professional photographer to spend mornings on site and at their nearby garden throughout the year, capturing programs in action. The lovely pictures are far beyond what staff could take on their own. The photos will continue to be used in the organization's communication with donors, online, in the newsletter, and on public signage. Nelson Food Cupboard looks forward to hiring a fundraising and communications coordinator who can raise its profile even further.

Evaluation fed into its communications and outreach strategies since Nelson Food Cupboard was able to report on the positive changes that people made due participating in its programs. In 2016 they evaluated each program, gleaning critical data: 74% of respondents were eating more fruits and vegetables as a result of participating in food skills programming, 96% learned new cooking skills they will use in the future, and 96% felt more confident preparing healthy meals at home. Overall, program evaluation has allowed Food Cupboard staff to feel confident that they are meeting the needs of their members.

The organization is charting a course for an even bigger organizational evolution. Committed to a formal audit of their food bank, staff hope to diversify food accessibility and grow more of their own produce. Aiming even higher, they will be collaborating with other local organizations to find a new location with a welcoming space and greater capacity for additional programs and staff. "The end result is so much more than just food," says Marya Skrypiczajko, Nelson Food Cupboard's coordinator. "We want to engage people so they don't feel any stigma and offer vulnerable community members educational and social activities that really count!"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our sincerest thanks go out to the staff from Community Food Centres and Good Food Organizations across Canada who shared their wisdom and offered up their stories in the making of this manual. In particular, thank you to The Stop Community Food Centre, The Table Community Food Centre, Eden Food for Change, Share the Warmth (Partageons l'espoir), and Nelson Food Cupboard for reaching out with their experience. Special thanks to Rekha Cherian who researched and wrote the manual as a consultant to Right To Food while on secondment from The Stop Community Food Centre.

PHOTO CREDITS

Thank you to the wonderful photographers whose images appear in this manual:

Chloe Brown and **Jason van Bruggen (Dot Dot Dash)** (for Right To Food)
Colin Payne and **Adrian Wagner** (for Nelson Food Cupboard)
Carolyn Clark and **Terry Manzo** (for The Local Community Food Centre)
David Zimmerly (for The Table Community Food Centre)
Janine Kropla and **Niki Trosky** (for NorWest Co-op Community Food Centre)
Matt O'Sullivan and **Zoe Alexopoulos** (for The Stop Community Food Centre)
Snickerdoodle Photography (for Dartmouth North Community Food Centre)
Laura Paxton (for Roots Community Food Centre)
Jessica Imrie (for Hope House Guelph Community Food Centre)
Valerie Guerriat (for Carrefour Solidiare Community Food Centre)
James Barrington (for The Depot Community Food Centre)
Jon Evans (for Hamilton Community Food Centre)
Photo credits by page, listed from top left to bottom right:

Cover: Barrington, Wagner, Paxton, Payne, Payne
6: van Bruggen
9: Guerriat
10: Kropla
11: Snickerdoodle Photography, The Stop Community Food Centre
14: van Bruggen
19: van Bruggen
24: van Bruggen
27: Zimmerly
28: Paxton
31: Share the Warmth
32: van Bruggen
34: Evans
37: Clark
38: Imrie
44: Payne, Payne

REFERENCES

[1] PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research, University of Toronto. (2016). *Food Insecurity Fact Sheets*. Retrieved from: http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/fact-sheets; Food Banks Canada (2015). *Hunger Count 2015*. Retrieved from: http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/Hunger-in-Canada.aspx

[2] Statistics Canada. (2015). *Farm families, average total income, by province*. Retrieved from: http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/agri119a-eng.htm

[3] Canadian Council for Refugees. (2016, March). *Migrant workers: precarious and unsupported. A Canada-wide study on access to services for migrant workers*. Retrieved from: http://ccrweb.ca/sites/ccrweb.ca/files/migrant-workers-2016.pdf

[4] Hassan, A. (2017). *Food Insecurity and Disease: Prevalence, Policy, and Politics*. Oakville, ON: Apple Academic Press.

[5] Daily Bread Food Bank. (2012). *Who's Hungry, 2012 Portrait of Hunger in the GTA*. Retrieved from: http://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/WhosHungryReport2012LowRes.pdf

[6] Food Banks Canada. (2016). *Hunger Count 2016*. Retrieved from: https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/hungercount2016

GOOD FOOD PRINCIPLES: PROGRAM REFLECTION GUIDE

The following questions are intended as a guide for managers and program coordinators to think about how well each program is reflecting the Good Food Principles. You can consider these questions on a six-month or annual basis, while examining the program's logic model and developing the coming year's work plan. Not every question will be relevant to every program every time — they are simply meant to spur reflection and set goals for improvement.

PRINCIPLE 1
TAKING ACTION FROM INDIVIDUAL TO SYSTEMIC
(OFFERING MULTI-DIMENSIONAL PROGRAMMING AT A VARIETY OF SCALES)

1. Is this program aimed at producing individual change, community change, or systems change? Is it possible to deepen or expand the type of change we are seeking?

2. Is this program collaborating with others and does it integrate well with other programs?

3. Are we educating people about the broader issues that affect them and our community and/or helping them to understand them through their own experiences?

4. Are we empowering people to influence these systemic issues or the policies that create them, either through our own policy actions or by connecting them to other initiatives?

Reflections:	
Goals:	What's required to make this happen:

PRINCIPLE 2
THE POWER OF GOOD FOOD

1. Is the food we are serving in this program nutritious and delicious? How do we know?
2. Does the food that we serve or promote support our local, sustainable food economy?
3. Are we doing everything possible to maximize participants' ability to access quality food?

Reflections:	
Goals:	What's required to make this happen:

PRINCIPLE 3
RESPECT AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

1. Do the policies and procedures of this program contribute to a welcoming and respectful environment? Do we clearly communicate these policies to participants?
2. What is the quality of the physical space in which we offer the program? Does our space reflect that we respect and value participants?
3. Does this program recognize and reflect the cultural diversity of the community?
4. What are we doing to recognize and promote the assets, skills, and leadership of participants?

Reflections:	
Goals:	What's required to make this happen:

PRINCIPLE 4

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY'RE AT

1. Do we have an outreach strategy to reach targeted groups? Are we maximizing our opportunities to reach the existing participant base?

2. Does our program reach out to people with various levels of need? How can we ensure that those with the highest needs and those who have strong existing skills or competencies are both served?

3. Are our target outcomes for participants at an appropriate "distance" from existing attitudes or practices? Are our outcomes set up to create a realistic possibility of success?

4. Is this program providing the material supports necessary to involve the target group ? What other types of supports might be required

5. Do people have fun when they come to this program, and how do we know?

Reflections:	
Goals:	What's required to make this happen:

PRINCIPLE 5

AIMING HIGH

1. How much does this program cost us per participant? How does the cost and value of outcome compare to other programs, and are our resources being used as efficiently as possible?

2. Are we evaluating everything we could be in this program? Have we considered all the information we have in order to improve the program?

3. What fundraising opportunities are available and viable for this program?

4. Are we taking advantage of any opportunities to communicate this program's value to the media, funders, or the broader public?

Reflections:	
Goals:	What's required to make this happen:

Community Leaders
How to build a thriving volunteer program

Originally published in 2017 by Community Food Centres Canada, now known as Right To Food. Revised in 2025.

Contact Us

- 340 Gerrard Street East, Toronto, ON M5A 2G7
- Tel: 416-531-8826
- www.righttofood.ca
- info@righttofood.ca

RIGHT TO FOOD

RIGHTTOFOOD.CA