



Blue Ridge
AREA
**FOOD
BANK**

Partnering With Purpose

FALL 2020

PRINT EDITION

A NEWSLETTER FOR FOOD BANK PARTNERS

Pivoting in a Pandemic

Rockbridge Area Relief Agency Embraces Innovation

For years, most food pantries in our network have organized their spaces and volunteers in a way that empowers clients to pick the most appropriate products for their unique needs. Not only does client choice help reduce food waste, but it celebrates and preserves client dignity.

When COVID-19 hit, pantries had to quickly pivot to pre-packing food for no- and low-touch distributions. For good reason, client choice was put on hold to ensure the safety of food distributors and recipients. But the Food Bank hopes to respark this important model when the pandemic ends.

Using technology to preserve client choice

Some pantries like Rockbridge Area Relief Agency (RARA) in Lexington are using technology to innovate and maintain client choice at their pantry, even during this unprecedented time.

“We’ve added a Google Form to our website that allows clients to indicate any dietary restrictions [they may have] and choose some of the

items in our inventory,” explained Jen Handy, RARA’s Executive Director. “Volunteers pre-pack [bags] around these choices, and when clients arrive, volunteers load the food into their vehicles.”

So far, the community response has been excellent. “Sometimes we forget that a single approach doesn’t work for everyone,” said Handy. “While some families would prefer to talk to us face to face, others are more comfortable ordering online. This new process allows clients to sign up on their own time and schedule appointments by email.”

Easing data collection

RARA’s recent innovations extend beyond preserving client choice. They’re also using a Google Form to collect information for Link2Feed before clients visit the pantry. “All of the household information downloads into a nice spreadsheet for volunteers to enter into Link2Feed,” said Handy.

RARA’s Impact Monthly Averages



Volunteer Chuck Smith unloads a food pallet in the RARA warehouse, where other volunteers will pre-pack bags to honor client choices.

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Meet Tyler Herman

New Director of Partner Engagement

Tyler has been bringing his passion for and dedication to our shared mission at the Food Bank for 10 years—first as a grants manager, then as a manager in Partner Engagement and Programs, and now as the director of Partner Engagement. To reintroduce him to our partners, Food Bank staff asked him a few questions.

What inspires you about your new role as Director of Partner Engagement?

I see opportunities for all of us to better understand the strengths and vulnerabilities of our network, as well as our clients' own challenges and unique assets. That starts with the Food Bank learning more about our partners' and clients' needs; developing trainings and resources to expand agencies' capacity to serve; and providing opportunities for pantries to share ideas, observations, and solutions. Together, we can write a new chapter in the fight to end hunger.

How did you get into food banking?

I was raised overseas and witnessed abject poverty from a young age. This left a deep impression on my heart and fostered in me a drive to work toward solutions that better the lives of others. I studied international development in college and wanted to manage international aid projects, but I soon realized how staggering the need was in my own backyard. I felt called to this mission because it's a core belief of mine that no one should ever go hungry and that access to food is a basic human right.

What do you love about food banking?

Seeing service and humanity in action fills my cup! I believe we all have unique capabilities to share that can build a better world. When I witness our partners extend a nonjudgmental hand to someone in need and work tirelessly to keep food flowing into neighbors' arms—even during a global pandemic—my faith in humankind is renewed. Thank you for being a difference maker!

What gives you hope for the future?

I deeply believe that our society will come out on the other side of the pandemic with new priorities: strengthening communities; expanding compassion, empathy, and care; and constructing a more equitable future for all. I am excited and grateful to pave the way with you. The future is collaborative and bright!

If our paths haven't crossed, I'd love to connect and learn more about your mission in action. Please email me at therman@brafb.org.

Pivoting in a Pandemic

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This approach has made the transition from completing intake to providing food easy and efficient, while simultaneously freeing up time and space for RARA's staff and volunteers to connect with clients and meet their needs.

Fostering a client-focused mission

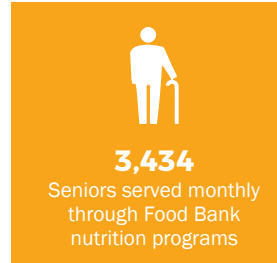
"What I love most is that we've been able to keep clients at the center of how we make decisions here," Handy said. "With all that's going on around us, that feels so important in this moment."

To Jen and her crew of innovators, thank you for thinking outside the box to keep your mission strong and for keeping clients at the heart of all you do!

The Network's Impact: FY20

July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2020

Your pantry or program site is part of a strong network that makes a tremendous difference in addressing food insecurity in the Blue Ridge area.



Fall Forecast: A Heavy Shower of USDA Supply

This fall, the Food Bank's shelves and cold-storage spaces will be packed with nutritious USDA food items. Between October and December, we're expecting more than 3 million pounds of USDA food. (The typical average is 4.2 million pounds *per year*. Talk about volume!)

With recent changes to Virginia's TEFAP plan, pantries can now provide USDA food to clients up to once a week, with no limits on the number of items households may receive. And, because we're now using Link2Feed, TEFAP administration and compliance are easier to manage.

We encourage any non-TEFAP pantries to take advantage of this free, healthy food supply and for current TEFAP pantries to distribute more food per household if possible. Please reach out to your Partner Engagement Coordinator to learn more.

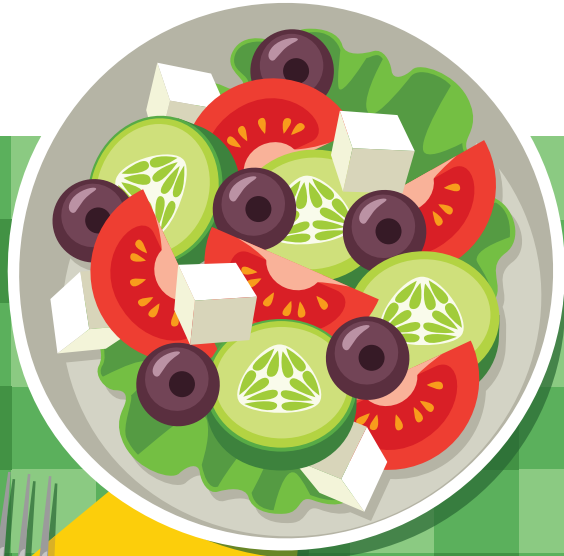
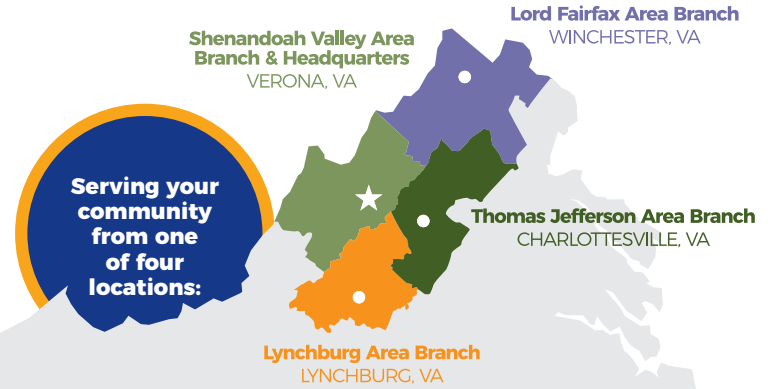


Blue Ridge Area FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



HEADQUARTERS | P.O. BOX 937 | VERONA, VA 24482



Our **VISION** is that everyone has enough to eat.

Our **CORE BELIEFS** are that hunger is unacceptable, that everyone deserves access to enough food, that food sustains life and nourishes health, and that we are called to serve neighbors in need without judgment.

Our **MISSION** is to provide nourishing food to our neighbors in need through vibrant community partnerships and passionate public support.

Snackables

Heads Up: Contract Renewal Is Right Around the Corner

Annual contracts will be mailed in early January 2021. We appreciate your prompt response as we collect all documents needed for compliance with Feeding America's and the Virginia Department of Agriculture's standards.

Agency Capacity Fund Turns Five

The next grant cycle launches in February 2021. Please start thinking about what equipment, technology, and/or pantry enhancements you need to strengthen your ability to fulfill your mission. We're thrilled to continue investing in your *foodprint!*

Share Your Impact

Client stories help raise awareness of hunger and drive community engagement, fundraising, and volunteerism. If you have a story to share, please reach out to Tyler Herman at therman@brafb.org.

Resources to Drive Your Mission

For healthy recipes, COVID-19 updates, current forms, Link2Feed instructional aids, an archive of past newsletters, and contact information for your Partner Engagement Coordinator, check out www.brafb.org/agency-resources. Have ideas about other helpful resources we could share? Please email therman@brafb.org.

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