

Communication from the Food Bank

November 30, 2020

Dear Partner,

I hope you and yours are doing well.

Recently, we communicated that cost-sharing expense for food would be re-introduced in January. Today, we're thrilled to announce that **we're extending our current support through June 30, 2021 and beyond**. That means we will continue to waive all shared expenses for food for another 6 months and reintroduce them in a measured way beyond that.

We've felt extremely fortunate and grateful to our donors to be able to provide this support through 2020, as you and your volunteers work tirelessly to keep food flowing into the arms of our neighbors during this difficult time. And now, thanks to the availability of CARES Act funding awarded through the Commonwealth to all seven of Virginia's food banks, we have the resources to extend this critical and timely support.

We hope you're as excited about this news as we are! 😊

Please find attached the new cost-sharing schedule and let me know if you have any questions.

As you celebrate Thanksgiving this year, I hope you know how much the Food Bank values your organization, work, commitment, and passion for our shared mission.

Hunger doesn't quit, and neither do we. Together, we can and do solve hunger!

In partnership,

Tyler Herman
Director of Partner Engagement

May 12, 2020

Dear Partner,

We hope that you, your family, volunteers, clients, and friends are all safe and healthy.

As you may have heard, the Commonwealth plans to enter Phase 1 of Governor Northam's re-opening plan on May 15th. At this time, you may be wondering what that decision means for our collective work and how operations might change within the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's network. If you haven't seen the details yet, here's a link to the Phase 1 Plan.

To put things simply, Phase 1 has no impact on our work. We should all expect and plan to stay on the current course.

Social distancing will remain in place, and so too should the safe distribution practices you've already been using, including no-touch/low-touch distributions, drive-throughs, doorstep deliveries to homebound clients, and, where possible, the use of personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves. Your health and safety remains vitally important to us. Remember to access resources you might need at this time on our website at <https://www.brafb.org/agency-resources/covid-19-planning>.

We will keep you updated on how things could change as we move into future phases of Virginia's re-opening. We look forward to those days ahead! For now, we deeply appreciate all the ways you're working to keep food assistance flowing in your communities in safe ways that protect you, your volunteers, and clients.

In all of this, one thing stands out clearer than ever - the depth and breadth of this crisis has been matched by the overwhelming compassion, care, and determination that you and your volunteers bring to your community and mission each day. We're both amazed by and grateful for your efforts, and so fortunate to call ourselves your partner during these trying times.

Please let your Partner Services Coordinator know if you have any questions. In the meantime, keep up the great work!

Warm regards,

Michelle Hesse
Director of Agency Relations and Programs

March 31, 2020

Dear Hunger Heroes:

Nutritious food is essential. So are you.

During this time of crisis our neighbors in need are counting on us to be there to provide essential food services. We could not ask for a better network to serve alongside!

We are exempt from the stay-at-home order.

Governor Ralph Northam has advised all seven Virginia food banks that, regardless of statewide mandates for sheltering in place, the charitable food assistance network is and will be exempt. Our work on the front lines to fight food insecurity across the Commonwealth is considered life-sustaining work. This includes food banks and partner agencies—pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters. Read the latest announcement from the Governor's office for all the details (March 30):

<https://governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/all-releases/2020/march/headline-855702en.html>.

We've also included a copy of a letter—in this email—explaining our exemption on our website at www.brafb.org/volunteer. It may be helpful to print this letter and carry it with you in case you need it in the coming months. The Governor's order is in place until June 10, 2020. We are also adding this to our website along with other important resources we've created for you at <https://www.brafb.org/agency-resources/covid-19planning>.

We still need your help—and will for some time.

On Wednesday we are scheduled to come together for a webinar and conference call and will further discuss the stay-at-home order additional best practices we've identified, changes coming to TEFAP, and simplifications to the Link2Feed intake. As we navigate changes almost daily, remember that we will continue to update the Food Bank's status on our website at www.brafb.org/covid-19.

We look forward to speaking with you on Wednesday!

Sincerely,

Tyler Herman
Director of Partner Engagement

March 25, 2020

Dear wonderful partners,

I hope you all are doing well. I'm writing to update you on several fronts.

Food Assistance is an “Essential Service”

I hope you all have been tracking Governor Northam’s press releases and media events that articulate the changing status of business operations in Virginia. In Monday’s message, the Governor included food banks and food pantries as essential services in his release, meaning our collective work would not be shut down or limited if the State moves toward a “shelter-in-place” mandate like many other states have in recent days. This also gives us an exception to congregate in larger groups than 10 people.

The Food Bank is working on creating a waiver template for you and your volunteers to carry with you to indicate that you are a part of the food assistance network and are an essential service. Be on the lookout for more information in the days ahead.

Best Practices

Over the last week, Food Bank staff have been working to understand and capture best practices in distribution models, as well as volunteer and client safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The attached documents reference important information on drive-through and home delivery models, as well as a pantry volunteer checklist to help keep your volunteers and clients safe. We will regularly update this document as we learn more, which you can find on the Food Bank’s COVID-19 page going forward (<https://www.brafb.org/agency-resources/covid-19-planning/>).

Fee Structure

The Food Bank deeply values your partnership and the essential services you are providing to so many in need across our region. After thoughtful consideration, **we have decided to no longer charge any fees associated with deliveries, shared maintenance on donated product (regularly \$0.05 per pound), or on any of our purchased product in our inventory through June 30, 2020.** The last thing we want you to worry about is having to source money to acquire food. We hope this support will allow you to strengthen your mission and services in your community in the weeks and months ahead to best serve your neighbors in need. The value of the food will still show up on your invoice, but you will not be charged for anything.

Please note: At this time, these changes do not apply to our programs, including the Community Supported Backpack Program.

TEFAP Changes

I want to give you a heads up that changes are likely coming to The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP – aka “USDA commodities”). The Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS) has applied for a waiver with the USDA to eliminate income eligibility requirements for TEFAP during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will communicate more about this change if and when it gets approved through another webinar. Be on the lookout for details in the days ahead.

Link2Feed during COVID-19

The Food Bank plans to continue to use Link2Feed during this time. For existing clients, pantries can take down first name, last name, and DOB during the distribution and log the service after the distribution.

If someone is new to your pantry, and not currently in Link2Feed, you should proceed with Link2Feed intake. If you cannot do the Link2Feed intake at the time of the distribution, you may take the client’s phone number and add the information to Link2Feed over the phone. If you are doing the intake after providing the food, you are required, at a minimum, to record first and last name, address, and number of people on your log at the time of food distribution.

Also, during this crisis, I want to emphasize that **signatures are no longer required for TEFAP and/or CSFP (senior boxes) certification or services**. In lieu of collecting signatures for intake or certification, intake workers can type the client’s signature in Link2Feed (select “Use Typed Signature” from the drop-down menu for signature type). If your pantry is registering clients using the old SDOI forms, the intake worker can complete the form and leave the signature line blank.

The Food Bank is also working to try and streamline the intake process by removing the education/employment and dietary considerations tabs. This, in addition to other potential changes to Link2Feed that will help make intake easier will be communicated in the upcoming webinar (to be announced once we receive more information on the State’s plans).

Thank You

The effort, planning, and work that you and your volunteers are pouring into modifying your mission to safely serve your clients means that thousands in need across our region will have sustenance, hope, and comfort during this time. I can’t tell you how grateful we are to be able to partner and engage with a legion of hunger heroes like

yourselves who make all of this work possible. We're all in this together and have your back!! Thank you for warming our hearts with your actions!

Please let me know if you have any questions or feedback.

Warm regards,

Tyler Herman
Director of Partner Engagement

March 18, 2020

Dear wonderful partners,

I hope you and yours are doing well and are staying safe and healthy.

We appreciate many of you attending the recent webinar that outlined the Food Bank's planning and response to COVID-19. As you know, things are moving at light speed, so we share advanced thanks for your flexibility and attention to ongoing, more regular communication from and with the Food Bank during this time. We love hearing your voices anyways, so it's a boon for us!

As a follow-up to the information shared during the webinar, or if you weren't able to attend, I want to provide the PowerPoint presentation and reiterate some of the key resources—websites and information—that you can access to stay up to date on our evolving collective work. The PowerPoint will also be available on the Agency Resources COVID-19 page.

- **The Food Bank's overall response to COVID-19:** www.brafb.org/covid-19
- **Agency Resources COVID-19 page (resources and information specific for partners):** www.brafb.org/agency-resources/covid-19-planning.
- **Trustworthy and reliable sites for updates on COVID-19 at State and National level:**
 - **Center For Disease Control-**
www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019ncov/index.html
 - **Virginia Department of Health -** www.vdh.virginia.gov/

- The Food Bank appreciates your timeliness in keeping us regularly up to date on how your operations are changing and/or shifting. **Please send all changes to hours or days of distribution** to me through e-mail, including cancellations, or feel free to call your Partner Services Coordinator.
- For questions related to **logistics, food availability, deliveries, or changes to the Partner Pickup Program**, please send those inquiries and updates to your Branch Manager.
- **Tampering anxiety** – At the end of the presentation, we shared a brief breathing technique to help with calming anxiety during these times of uncertainty. Just remember the numbers 4, 7, and 8. Breathe in your nose to a count of 4, hold your breath for a count of 7, and exhale through your mouth to a count of 8. Repeat three or four times to feel grounded again. As much as we're focused on caring for others, we need some self-care, too.

I can't tell you how reassuring it is during this time to be able to partner with so many compassion-driven, giving, engaging individuals who care so deeply about the wellbeing, health, and nutritional needs of our neighbors. Keep up the good work—we're all in this together!

Warm regards,

Tyler Herman
Director of Partner Engagement

March 13, 2020

Over the next few weeks, Food Banks from around the country learn more about how we need to adapt to maintain our services. We will do our best to provide timely communication as updates or changes emerge.

A primary communication mode to our agencies and programs will be through email. We will occasionally announce conference calls and/or webinars. In addition, general updates and developments from the Food Bank in response to the COVID-19 pandemic will be posted here: www.brafb.org/covid-19.

We have also created a COVID-19 portal to house important updates and information specific to our network partners. You can find it here: www.brafb.org/agencyresources.

Recordings of the webinars/conference calls scheduled for March 16 will be posted in this location as soon as possible after they occur, for those who are unable to join.