

PARTNER AGENCY HANDBOOK

The **BLUE RIDGE AREA FOOD BANK** exists for a few very simple reasons: Food sustains life. It restores options. It provides hope. Our partner agencies make it possible for the Food Bank to fulfill its mission to provide nourishing food to our neighbors throughout central and western Virginia.



Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK

PARTNER
FOOD BANK OF
**FEEDING
AMERICA**

Dear Partner,

We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to work directly with your organization to improve food security and nutrition security in your community.

As we work toward ensuring that everyone has enough to eat, we rely on committed hearts and hands, hard work, and the dedication of people just like you and your volunteers, who see the real difference we can make when we come together to address hunger.

As your partner in this effort, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is committed to helping you make your efforts as efficient and effective as they can be, while supporting investments in your capacity, capability, and organizational goals.

We are here to listen to your needs and determine how we can best support you in meeting the unique needs of your community and the populations you serve.

We're thrilled to welcome you to the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's family and look forward to building a lasting partnership to address hunger in your community.

In partnership and solidarity,

The Partner Engagement and Programs Team



Key Staff Contacts

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Karen Hicks, Manager of Compliance – (540) 213-8418 or khicks@brafb.org

Andy Gilmer, Partner Technology Support Coordinator – (540) 688-3235 or agilmer@brafb.org

You can also find many helpful resources at our website: www.BRAFB.org

Give us your feedback! The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank strives to create a positive and productive relationship with our partners, and we encourage you to review and evaluate your experience. Send your comments or concerns to Tyler Herman (agencies, soup kitchens, and shelters), Zach Nissen (programs), or Maria Bowman (health initiatives).

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Partner Agency Membership

As a member of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank network, your agency will appreciate:

- Access to **high-quality food** and non-food products that the Food Bank obtains from local and national donors, including community food drives, retailers, manufacturers, distributors, and farmers.
- Opportunities to participate in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and/or the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), through which the United States Department of Agriculture provides **surplus government commodities** for distribution to people experiencing food/nutrition insecurity that meet income eligibility and age guidelines. There is no cost to your agency to acquire these foods for distribution. NOTE: There are additional reporting and documentation requirements when participating in these programs.
- Availability of **low-cost purchased foods** that the Food Bank buys on behalf of agencies, using large-volume buying power to get the best deals.
- Access to **retail grocery donations** through the Partner Pick-Up Program, as availability allows.
- Access to **funding and equipment** through the Partner Impact and Innovation Grants (previously called Agency Capacity Fund).
- **Potential delivery** of food to your location (varies depending on staff availability and food quantity).
- Individual and group **training and support** on topics such as nutrition, food safety, volunteerism, grant writing and fundraising, advocacy, effective distribution methods, and developing your message for communication with the media and supporters.
- **Networking** opportunities with other partner agencies in your region and throughout the Food Bank's 25-county, 8-city service area to develop best practices and build capacity.
- Access to **service data** through Link2Feed to determine how to enhance your mission and better serve your community members.

To learn more about how the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank works, as well as the benefits and responsibilities of being a partner, please read through this Agency Handbook.

About the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank

Our mission

To improve food insecurity through equitable access to nutritious food and the resources that support health and well-being.

Our vision

Nourishing food and good health—for everyone, every day.

Our core beliefs

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 without judgment.

The Food Bank's values

Respect	Commitment
Integrity	Accountability
Passion	Diversity
Service	Stewardship
Advocacy	

Our strategic goals

Eliminate disparities in access to nutritious food

Improve health of guests

Support household financial stability

A strong and sustainable organization

How We Work

We help people experiencing food/nutrition insecurity through a mostly volunteer network of partners —food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, schools, health clinics, community centers, and other non-profit organizations. Most of these partners receive 80% or more of their food supply through the Food Bank.

How We Work



Nutrition Programs

In addition to distributing food through partner agencies, we operate the following nutrition programs for children, families, and seniors:

Child nutrition programs

- **Family Backpack Program** feeds families and children on weekends and school holidays.
- **Kids Cafe™** provides meals and snacks for children in afterschool programs.
- **Summer Food Service Program** provides meals for children gathered at summer enrichment programs.
- **Summer Kid Packs** provides food for children and families during the summer months.
- **Good Food School Market** – school-based food pantries, typically in a high school or middle school setting
- **Super Pantry**, a six-week nutrition education and cooking series, led by Virginia Cooperative Extension or specialized volunteers

Total Impact

JULY 2021 - JUNE 2022



109,500
People served
each month, on
average



165,100
Individuals
(unduplicated)
served*



20.8 million
Meals
provided



24.9 million
Pounds of food
distributed



7.2 million
Pounds of
produce
distributed

*The unduplicated number of people served is a conservative and low estimate; not all partners use the same method of data collection at this time.

Community Partners

220

Pantries, soup
kitchens, and
shelters



191

Health and
nutrition program
site partners

Senior nutrition programs

- The **Reach Program** provides nutrition to low-income seniors and individuals who are homebound, as well as those with special needs.
- **Senior Food Boxes** contain food obtained from the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), the USDA's only program that specifically targets low-income seniors.

Community nutrition programs

- **Mobile food distributions** (*Mobile Food Pantry and Neighborhood Produce Market*) provide fresh and nonperishable food delivery in rural areas and urban centers with limited access to food pantries.



Health initiatives

- **Food Pharmacy**—food offered in a health care or clinic setting, to meet specific nutritional needs
- **Emergency Food Boxes**—Boxes of nutritious foods offered at each of our warehouse locations for guests to receive before they are referred to food pantries in their community for additional support.



Learn more about our programs online at <https://www.brafb.org/about-us/how-we-work/programs/>

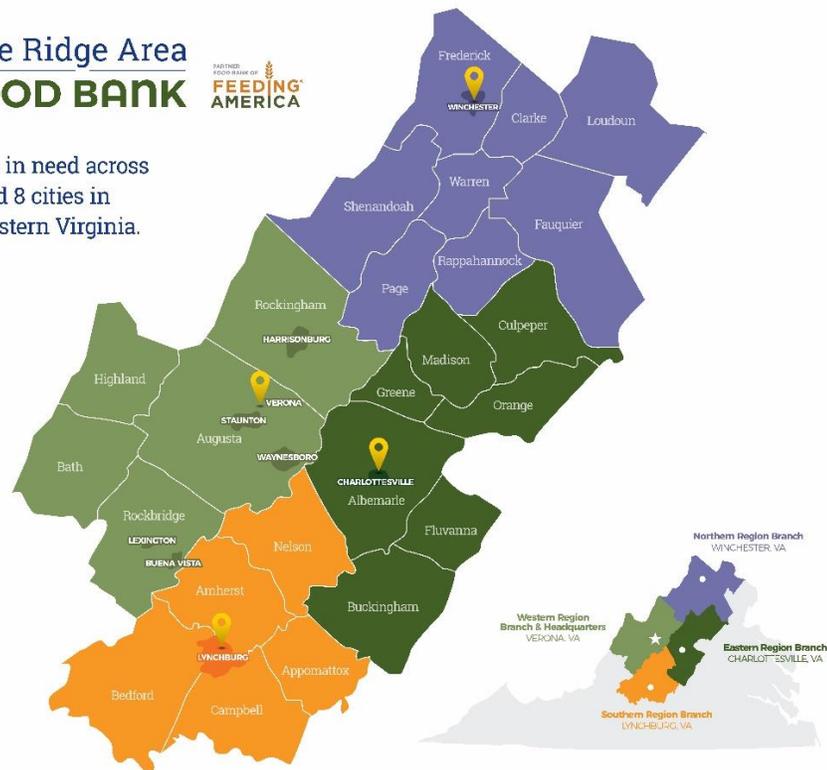
Food Bank Locations



**Blue Ridge Area
FOOD BANK**



Serving people in need across
25 counties and 8 cities in
central and western Virginia.



Northern Region branch (Winchester): Serving partners and guests in Winchester and the counties of Clarke, Fauquier, Frederick, Loudoun, Page, Rappahannock, Shenandoah, and Warren
 1802 Roberts Street, Winchester, VA 22601-6312
Phone: 540-665-0770
Hours: 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday

Southern Region branch (Lynchburg): Serving partners and guests in Lynchburg and the counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Campbell, and Nelson
 501 12th Street, Suite B, Lynchburg, VA 24504-2527
Phone: 434-845-4099
Hours: 8 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday

Eastern Region branch (Charlottesville): Serving partners and guests in Charlottesville and the counties of Albemarle, Buckingham, Culpeper, Fluvanna, Greene, Madison, and Orange
 1207 Harris Street, Charlottesville, VA 22903-5319
Phone: 434-296-3663
Hours: 8 a.m.—4:30 p.m. Monday to Friday

Western Region branch and Headquarters (Verona): Serving partners and guests in Buena Vista, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Staunton, Waynesboro and the counties of Augusta, Bath, Highland, Rockbridge, and Rockingham.
 96 Laurel Hill Road, Verona, VA 24482
Phone: 540-248-3663
Hours: 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday to Friday

What's the Difference Between a Food Pantry and a Food Bank?

The terms “food pantry” and “food bank” are often confused and used interchangeably.

Most food pantries are sponsored by local area churches, non-profit 501(c)3 organizations, and/or community coalitions. Their mission is to directly serve community members experiencing food insecurity and nutrition insecurity within a specified area. Community food pantries are self-governing and distribute food to their guests on a regular schedule, which varies by location.

A food bank is the storehouse for millions of pounds of food and other products that go out to the community. A food bank's daily operation consists of sourcing, gathering sorting, and inventorying nutritious food, then warehousing the inventory to be distributed to partner agencies throughout western and central Virginia. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank provides food to food pantries (as well as soup kitchens and shelters, schools, health care clinics, and community centers) for distribution into their respective communities.

Food banks and food pantries are not the same. But they share the same vision and commitment to ensuring everyone has access to enough nutritious food. At the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, we are proud of our partnership with food pantries—and many other organizations—which act with us on the belief that no one should ever go hungry.

What does it mean to be food/nutrition insecure?

The United States Department of Agriculture uses the term “food insecure” to refer to households that experience reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet and/or disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake. A household experiences food insecurity if the people in it have limited or uncertain access to adequate food. “**Food insecurity**” is the term created and used by the USDA, which defines food insecurity as “having inadequate resources to acquire enough food for a healthy, active life.”

Hunger is often a consequence of food and nutrition insecurity. That is, individuals who are living in a food-insecure circumstance may experience hunger. But someone who is food insecure is not necessarily always hungry. Rather, individuals who are food insecure may be uncertain about when or how they will be able to obtain food, may lack access to enough food, or may lack access to nutritious foods at certain times during a month or year.

The USDA has announced its commitment to advancing “**nutrition security**,” defined as “consistent access to nutritious foods that promote optimal health and well-being for all Americans, throughout all stages of life.” This focuses on diet quality and equitable access, not just having enough calories.

To learn more:

National information

USDA Economic Research Service --

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/>

[Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap](https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/virginia) - <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/overall/virginia> --

An interactive county map from Feeding America, detailing food insecurity by county. The map also illustrates food insecurity rates by race and ethnicity to highlight racial disparities in food security.

[Data USA](https://datausa.io/) - <https://datausa.io/> -- Free visualizations of public US Government data sets to inform decision-making. Visualizations, maps, and data sets include statistics on diversity, economy, education, health, housing, industry, employment, and politics.

Virginia-specific information

[Feed VA](https://feedva.org/explore/) - <https://feedva.org/explore/> -- Explore trends in hunger, food access, and health in Virginia.

Data is sourced from US Census, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Feeding America, the VA Federation of Food Banks, the Food Research & Action Center, among others.

Important research

[“Feeding America: Identifying Racism in the Drivers of Food Insecurity”](https://www.tableau.com/foundation/data-equity/economic-power/feeding-america-racism-food-insecurity). <https://www.tableau.com/foundation/data-equity/economic-power/feeding-america-racism-food-insecurity> -- A data dashboard investigating the associations between systemic racism, income, homeownership, employment, disabilities, and food.

[Child Hunger](https://nokidhungry.org/who-we-are/hunger-facts) – <https://nokidhungry.org/who-we-are/hunger-facts> -- Facts about child hunger in America from No Kid Hungry.

[Hunger and Health](https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/) - <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/> – Hosted by Feeding America, HungerandHealth.org provides resources, tools, and information regarding the social determinants of health and systemic causes of food insecurity. Find recipes, educational materials, and other resources to support your work.

Who to Contact When

You Have Questions or Concerns

Questions about operations, compliance, capacity, reporting and monitoring



Contact your
Partner Engagement Manager (PEM)

who is your liaison between the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and your agency. The PEM is the customer service representative for the agencies and programs.

Questions about financial statements you receive



Contact the
Branch Manager.

The Branch staff create the statements based on your agency orders. The Branch Assistant and Branch Manager will address your questions and concerns and will adjust invoices as needed, before sending the final invoice to the Finance Department in Verona.

* See staff contact information at the beginning of the handbook.

Questions about food or products you receive or your interactions with our warehouse staff



Contact the
Branch Manager

who is responsible for the operation of the branch and who supervises the Warehouse Assistant, Truck Driver and Branch Assistant. The Branch Manager oversees warehouse functions and distribution of all Blue Ridge Area Food Bank products.

Questions about your shopping list, delivery, your order, or billing



Contact the
Branch Assistant

who greets you when you visit one of the warehouses, answers your telephone calls, sends out shopping lists, receives orders, and invoices your order.

Additional Food Bank staff you may encounter include:

Warehouse Assistant

- Is responsible for organization and quality assurance of Food Bank products as well as working with volunteers to pull and, at times, load Agency orders. The Warehouse Assistant may also act as back-up Truck Driver.

Truck Driver

- Delivers to some agencies and programs and picks up donations as needed. The Truck Driver will also assist as needed in pulling Agency orders when time allows.

Manager of Compliance

- Serves as a resource to program volunteers and Blue Ridge staff to ensure all applicable local, state and federal regulations are met. Particular attention is required for food safety and documentation.

Chief Collaboration Officer

- Maintains oversight of the Food Bank's Partner Engagement and Programs Team. The CCO is a member of the Food Bank leadership team and represents agencies and program interests and concerns in the strategic planning process and implementation.

Funding 101: How We Share the Cost

Acquiring, storing, and distributing food, even food that has been donated, has a financial cost. The Food Bank turns to foundations, businesses, and individuals to generate donations to cover most of the costs for packaging, transportation, facilities, and staff. Most of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's funding (70%) comes from monetary donations.

Prior to 2020, partner agencies shared the cost of handling each pound of **donated** food (\$0.05 per pound). However, thanks to the generosity of our donors, the Food Bank has since eliminated all shared maintenance fees, and now provides all donated food items at no cost to our partners. During this time, we also eliminated all fees/costs associated with deliveries to our partners to help eliminate financial barriers so that they can more easily source and distribute food.

When a partner agency chooses **purchased** food items from our inventory (high quality foods we buy directly from manufacturers at a cheaper cost than partners can source from a retailer), the Food Bank uses monetary donations to cover 25% of your cost. This added benefit means partner agencies only pay 75% of the actual cost, allowing them to stretch their monetary donations to source and distribute more food.

We believe in transparency and accountability. If you have questions about the Food Bank's funding model, please contact Linda Baker, Chief Financial Officer, at (540) 213-8410 or email lbaker@BRAFB.org or review our financial statements on our website at www.BRAFB.org under *About Us*.

Membership Fee

Each partner agency of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank pays an annual fee of \$50.00.

Payment is due each year in February, after invoices are sent in January.

Partner Agency Responsibilities

Each Blue Ridge Area Food Bank partner signs an annual Partner Agency Contract. Among other responsibilities outlined in the Contract, the agency agrees to:

- At all times maintain **exemption from taxation under Section 501(c)(3)** of the Internal Revenue Code. The Agency represents that it either (a) possesses an IRS Letter of Determination of 501(c)(3) status, or (b) is a church within the meaning of the Internal Revenue Code. The PEM will verify the agency's 501(c)(3) status by checking the IRS site annually.
- Conduct **regularly scheduled distributions** of food to the public at least once per month. Distribution times should be publicized in advance to the general public using methods such as a sign visible from the public road, social media, listing on the Food Bank website, and/or on agency lists distributed at the respective Branch warehouse.
- **Obtain food from a Blue Ridge Area Food Bank** warehouse for distribution at least every 90 days.
- **Provide food and non-food products free-of-charge** without requiring attendance, membership, or participation in any religion or organization. The agency may not require guests to provide payment or volunteer services to receive food or non-food products.
- The agency shall **not sell, barter or exchange food**, provide food to any other group or organization or use food for fundraising activity of any kind. Agency staff members and/or volunteers may receive food only if they are eligible based on the agency's requirements, and they must be treated in a manner that does not provide them with priority over other recipients.
- Maintain **safe and secure transport, storage, and handling of food**. See food safety section below for more details.
- Follow *all* Food Bank **reporting requirements**.
- **Be prepared for Blue Ridge Area Food Bank staff to visit** the agency at any reasonable time, announced or unannounced.
- **Communicate with the Food Bank** when your hours or location change and let us know when there are changes in staffing or volunteer leadership contacts.

Monitoring Visits

As a partner agency of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank, your site will be monitored at least once every two years by a Food Bank staff member. The Food Bank reserves the right to monitor any partner agency more frequently.

The purposes of these visits are to:

- Maintain communication between the Food Bank and partner agency.
- Discuss opportunities for growth.
- Identify opportunities for training and assist with record-keeping requirements.
- Ensure that high sanitation and food safety standards are upheld.

Food Bank staff will look for the following:

- Product is kept in a clean and organized environment in compliance with the *Food Storage Guidelines, on page 18*.
- All Food Bank paperwork—such as temperature logs for freezers and coolers and/or Partner Pickup, sub-distribution logs, etc.--are up to date and available for review. Agencies must retain paperwork for one year.

Record Keeping and Reporting

Pantry Guest Registration with Link2Feed: The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank and our agency partners use a shared digital intake system called [Link2Feed](#). This system standardizes how guest information is collected, analyzed, and reported at our agency partner sites. In addition to providing a uniform, one-time intake for guests, Link2Feed's reporting features allow partner agencies, and the Food Bank, to gain a deeper insight into the individuals and families we collectively serve so that we can tailor our work to best meet their needs.

As a Food Bank partner, your agency is required to use Link2Feed to record guest information. BRAFB will provide the training, tools, and support needed for your organization to successfully use Link2Feed. TEFAP and CSFP agencies are required to use Link2Feed to verify eligibility of guests.

Retail Food Donations with MealConnect: In addition to information about pantry guests, the Food Bank is responsible for keeping track of all food donations from retail donors participating in a program called "Partner Pick-Up". Agencies use an online system called [MealConnect](#) to track these donations. All agencies participating in the Partner Pick-Up program must weigh food donations and submit a weekly report in MealConnect. If your organization participates in this program, you will receive all of the tools, training, and support to successfully use MealConnect. Please reference Partner Pick Up Program section below for more information about this program.

TEFAP, CSFP, and the Reach Program have additional reporting requirements. If your pantry chooses to participate in any of these programs, please reference their respective Handbook(s) to review the requirements.

TEFAP

Please see the EFO addendum, the BRAFB addendum, the Link 2 Feed addendum (Appendix page #), and the TEFAP manual for additional information. The requirements of the above documents spell out all reporting, retention, and record keeping obligations, along with civil rights compliance and food safety.

Food Available at the Food Bank

Donated products: The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank receives perishable and nonperishable donations from local and national donors including distributors, warehouses, transportation companies, food processors, and retailers. Donations could be the result of overproduction, over-ordering, cosmetic damage, because food is approaching its “sell-by” date, or simply because a company chooses to support our work. Whatever the case may be, we ensure that donated food is still safe to eat. The Food Bank also receives food from local food drives, local community members, and local farmers. Donated foods are always provided free of charge to our agency partners.

USDA products: The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank receives USDA-funded foods to support The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP). This can include a wide variety of fresh, frozen, and nonperishable items. USDA food is available free of charge to participating agencies. By federal law, all agencies that participate in USDA programs sign additional agreements and adhere to federal and state requirements, including inventory recordkeeping and annual USDA training. Furthermore, eligibility requirements must be met by households to receive USDA food. Please contact your regional Partner Engagement Manager if you are interested in distributing this food.

Purchased products: The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank purchases products and offers them to partner agencies at a discounted cost. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank strives to provide a variety of wholesome items such as peanut butter, shelf-stable milk, canned fruits and vegetables, proteins, whole grains, flour, and legumes. The Food Bank's purchase costs are typically lower than local supermarkets, due to the scale at which we purchase from wholesalers.

Donated retail products: Agencies may be able to source food through the Food Bank's **Partner Pick-Up Program**. This initiative connects Food Bank agencies with local grocery stores and other retailers, enabling agencies to pick-up donated foods directly from participating businesses. This includes food that has been over-ordered, mis-ordered, or overproduced, is nearing its “sell-by” date, or that the retailer has otherwise deemed unfit for sale. Retailers follow donation protocols set by Feeding America to ensure that while food may not be fit for sale, it is still safe for consumption.

Opportunities for participation in Partner Pick-Up are limited and are based on the schedules and availability of local participating donors. Please consult with your regional Partner Engagement Manager or Branch Manager if you would like to take part in this program. However, please be aware that we cannot guarantee participation for all agencies. Please see our Partner Pick-Up Handbook for detailed information about this program.

Culturally familiar foods: The nutrition security of immigrant and refugee populations in our region is a priority for the Food Bank. We are currently sourcing masa harina (corn flour), cooking oil, and an assortment of spices informed by food traditions among Hispanic communities across our region. The Food Bank offers these products free of charge to our agency partners in order to ensure that we are providing food that best meets the needs of the families we serve. We aim to source nutrient-dense foods that are relevant across cultural traditions, with an emphasis on fresh produce, whole grains, beans and legumes, meat, and dairy items. For more information about culturally responsive food banking, please see the [Nutrition in Food Banking Tool Kit](https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Nutrition-in-Food-Banking-Toolkit-FINAL-3-22-21.pdf) (https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Nutrition-in-Food-Banking-Toolkit-FINAL-3-22-21.pdf)

Nutrition: All food acquired and distributed by the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank is subject to our Nutrition Policy. We procure and distribute nutrient-dense, fresh foods whenever possible. The Food Bank follows a set of recommendations known as the Healthy Eating Research (HER) guidelines (https://healthyeatingresearch.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Nutrition-Guideline-Expert-Panel_one-pager2.pdf) for all food we distribute. HER guidelines sort food into a 3-tier ranking system based on saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar content. Food products are ranked as “choose often” (green), “choose sometimes” (yellow), or “choose rarely” (red) based on the nutritional content of each item. Most products in the Food Bank’s inventory system, Agency Express, are ranked by color to make choosing nutrient-dense foods the easy option when placing your agency’s order. To see the color ranking of the food item in Agency Express, click on the item card.

How to Acquire Food from the Food Bank

Ordering Food: Agencies acquire food from the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank through **Agency Express** (<https://www.agencyexpress3.org/AgencyExpress30/NewLogin.aspx>), which can be found on the “Agency Resources” (<https://www.brafb.org/agency-resources/>) section of our website. Agency Express provides up-to-date information about what food is available in our warehouse, allows agencies to schedule a day and time for pickups and deliveries, and allows agencies to place custom orders.

- The Food Bank will provide agencies with log-in credentials for Agency Express. This includes a username, program code, and password.
- Food Bank staff will provide an Agency Express system training to your agency’s “shopper”, or the person who will most often order food from the Food Bank.
- Orders can be placed up to two weeks in advance but must be placed at least two business days before the pickup time. Inventory is never 100% guaranteed due to high turnover and limited shelf life on perishable products.

Picking up your order: After you’ve placed your order, visit your regional branch at your scheduled pick-up time.

- Plan for up to 30 minutes for order load time.
- Check in with the Branch Assistant or Branch Manager **when you arrive** to receive your invoice. As you are loading your vehicle, please check your invoice to make sure that you are receiving your entire order.
- What to bring with you:
 - Volunteers to load your order into your vehicle(s).
 - Enough vehicles to transport the *entire order in one trip*.
 - Tarps for open trucks and trailers.
 - Tie-downs and ratchet straps if needed.
 - Appropriate containers and supplies for transporting perishable frozen and chilled items.
- Agency volunteers and staff are not permitted full access to Food Bank warehouses due to insurance policy restrictions.

- If you are unable to keep a Food Bank pickup appointment, you must call the Branch Assistant as soon as possible to reschedule.
- Agencies are responsible for securing their loads before leaving the Food Bank. Any product lost or damaged during transportation is the responsibility of the agency.

Order Deliveries: Delivery services may be available depending on the quantity of food you order and availability of these services in your area. Please contact your regional Food Bank branch staff if you are interested in receiving a delivery.

- An agency representative **must** be on site to accept and sign for your order.
- Be sure to have enough volunteers on hand to unload the truck. Our staff will assist in removing food from our truck but cannot move food into your building due to scheduling constraints.
- If you are unable to keep a Food Bank pickup appointment, you must call the Branch Assistant as soon as possible to reschedule.
- Our Operations team works hard to maintain a consistent delivery schedule for our partners that require deliveries, but we cannot always guarantee availability throughout the week. Please work directly with your regional Branch Assistant to discuss your agency's delivery needs.

Food Safety Guidelines

Agencies must agree to adhere to the food safety guidelines below prior to partnering with the Food Bank.

Food and other items distributed by the Food Bank are routinely checked to ensure quality and safety. Nevertheless, we encourage agencies to inspect all items, whether they come from the Food Bank or not, before distribution or meal service.

Below are some guidelines for determining whether you should keep a donated product. Whenever you have trouble deciding, it is best to discard it — **“When in doubt, throw it out!”**

First look for any problems in, on, and around containers:

- Contaminations such as spills and/or leaks
- Pest infestation (gnaw marks, droppings)
- Significant damage (rips, fractures, sharp dents)
- Deterioration (rotten odors, discoloration)

If any of these problems are present, throw the product out.

The following items should also be thrown away:

- Cans with bulging end or body or with pitted rust that cannot be rubbed off.

- Cans where the end of can moves in and out when pressed, or sharp, deep dents in cans, especially at seams.
- Homemade items, including canned products.
- Infant formulas and infant food **beyond the date** printed on container.
- Unlabeled ammonia, bleach or other household chemicals
- Leaking personal care items such as shampoo, hand lotion or liquid soap
- Aerosol container missing the outer lid and/or the inner button, unless these pieces can be replaced.
- Cans, jars, bottles, and packages without the manufacturer's name and ingredients
- Food service items such as paper plates, napkins, cups, foil, etc. in torn packaging
- Food items that are mixed in boxes with non-food items (ex: crackers in box with bleach)

Dry storage guidelines:

- All food must be stored indoors and protected from exposure to the elements.
- Keep storage floor clean of dust build-up, cobwebs, and soil.
- Keep all food products 6 inches or more off the floor and 4 inches away from walls by means of shelving, pallets, or other platforms.
- Target storage temperature is between 50F and 70F
- Follow "First In, First Out" process – distribute food with oldest or closest sell-by, use-by, or best-by date first.
- Rotate stock every 2-3 months and avoid stockpiling.
- Keep food, paper products, and chemicals all separate, at least 4-6 feet apart and preferably in a separate room. If stored in the same area as food, chemicals should be kept on the lowest level.
- Have a pest control plan, either professional or in-house.

Cold storage guidelines:

- Keep refrigerators (coolers) and freezers clean and odor free.
- Do not overcrowd cold storage with food.
- Keep all food products 6 inches or more off the floor and 4 inches away from walls by means of shelving, pallets, or other platforms.
- Make sure door seals are tight.
- Maintain temperatures below 40F in cooler and below 0F in freezers.
- Store raw meat products **BELOW** produce, ready to eat foods, and prepared foods.
- Equip each refrigerator with an internal thermometer.
- Record temperatures on log sheets as frequently as possible, **at minimum three times a week**. Check temperatures when refrigerator is not being opened and closed continuously.

- Label the receiving date of each item or case of items.
- Follow “First in, First Out” process – distribute food with oldest or closest container date first.
- Rotate stock at least every 1-2 months.
- No refrigerated or freezer items should sit out for more than 30 minutes, as those items will spend some time in transit with the person who takes them home.

Safe distribution guidelines:

- Keep the distribution area clean.
- Keep all products off the ground or floor by means of pallets, cardboard, or tarps.
- Target storage temperatures between 50F and 70F. Use blankets and/or awnings to keep refrigerated or frozen items cool. Best practice is for refrigerated or freezer items to sit out for no more than 30 minutes, as those items will spend some time in transit with the person who takes them home.
- Pack raw meat products separate from produce, ready to eat foods, and prepared foods.

Per Feeding America policy, only service animals are allowed in agencies and/or branch warehouses, and only under controlled circumstances—no food preparation, packaging, food processing equipment, or exposed food can be present. All other animals are prohibited where food is being received, handled, and stored.

Distributing Food

All items which the Food Bank receives are provided with the understanding that they will be used for the intended purpose of feeding people experiencing food insecurity. All Blue Ridge Area Food Bank partner agencies must abide by this intent in order to maintain the trust of our community, including donors and food program participants.

The Feeding America Network is compliant with the IRS regulation 170(e)3. Because our collective mission is to serve the ill, needy, and infants, all member food banks and agencies operate in a non-profit status.

Client eligibility criteria

For products *other than* TEFAP and CSFP commodities, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank allows partner agencies to determine their own eligibility criteria; however, our recommendation is to serve all who come seeking food assistance.

If the agency implements eligibility criteria, all criteria must be applied consistently to all guests. Agencies are encouraged to serve all first-time visitors, regardless of eligibility, while informing them of their policy. Documentation of eligibility policies should be maintained, and the criteria should be included in outreach materials for the agency.

Agencies must inform their branch Partner Engagement Manager of any eligibility criteria specific to the organization beyond TEFAP and CSFP requirements. Additional criteria at agencies are listed on the Food Bank’s web-based Food Finder tool.

Example of additional eligibility criteria: *Clients must show proof of address and live within X County to receive food.*

How much food to distribute

The quantity of food to be provided to an individual/household is determined by the partner agency based on inventory capacity and the guests' needs. Factors to consider include household size and how frequently clients are allowed to visit the pantry.

Historically, food banks and pantries were thought of as sources of "emergency" food only. Now, we are seeing more families rely on our programs for most or even all their nutritional needs. We encourage partners to make as much food as possible available to guests, and to consider providing items that can be used together in order to create whole meals.

Guest Choice Model of Distribution

The Food Bank encourages partners to allow guests as much choice as possible.

All agencies should focus on preserving the dignity of their guests. This includes establishing hours of operation that are convenient for as many people as possible, and ensuring that all staff and volunteers show respect for every person at the agency or program site.

The concept of **guest choice** (formerly known as "client choice") gives visitors the option of choosing the foods and supplies that are most needed by their families.

Many food pantries follow the practice of pre-bagging groceries for clients. While this ensures consistency of items distributed and may seem to be the most convenient practice for their agency, pre-bagging food boxes does not account for the specific needs of individuals who visit the pantry. Pre-assembled grocery bags may contain items the household already has, is culturally unfamiliar with, is allergic to, is unable to consume because of dietary or religious restrictions, or can get from other sources such as WIC. Providing undesired or unusable food to guests wastes food and other resources.

In contrast, guest choice helps establish a welcoming environment, promotes relationship-building between guests and volunteers, and ensures that all resources go to those who can best use them. It also creates opportunities for agency staff and volunteers to discuss nutrition and healthy eating with guests. Guest choice also helps agencies better understand and respond to the needs of their guests.

The Partner Engagement Managers have helped many pantries transition successfully from distribution of pre-bagged groceries to a guest choice model. If you are interested in implementing guest choice at your pantry, talk to your Partner Engagement Manager.

Additional Information

Communication and Education

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's newsletter, *Harvest*, will be mailed to your agency twice each year, along with the *Partnering with Purpose* publication designed specifically for partner agencies. These will be mailed to the site coordinator at your location. Please let your Partner Engagement Manager know if you need additional copies or would like to add names to the mailing list.

You can also subscribe to the quarterly digital version of *Partnering with Purpose* at www.BRAFB.org/subscription-home.

The Food Bank is continually searching for and collecting guest stories to share through our newsletters, website, annual report, and social media channels to educate the public about our mission and impact. If you know of individuals or families willing to tell their stories, please contact our Communications Office (communications@brafb.org) or notify your Partner Engagement Manager.

Please be sure to keep your PEM up to date on changes in volunteers, hours/days of operation and contact information. We use this information to update the Food Finder web tool continuously.

Your PEM will publicize opportunities for workshops and seminars in your area. We hope you will take advantage of these educational sessions where you can learn from outside professionals, Food Bank staff, and partner organizations.

You can also find many helpful resources on our website. Please visit brafb.org/agency-resources to familiarize yourself with what is available.

Complaint Procedures

The Food Bank is committed to providing excellent customer service and responsiveness to every concern and/or complaint brought to our attention. If you have a concern or complaint, please contact your local Branch Operations Manager and/or Partner Engagement Manager first (see page 2 for contact information).

If the issue cannot be addressed at the Branch level, you may contact the Director of Partner Engagement.

Equal Opportunity

According to the Food Bank's contract with Feeding America:

Agencies will not engage in discrimination in the provision of services against persons of any race, color, citizenship, religion, gender, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation including gender identity or expression, unfavorable discharge from the military or status as a protected veteran.

Inclement Weather

In cases of extreme weather, the Food Bank may close some or all of its facilities. If you have a pick-up or delivery scheduled on a day affected by inclement weather, please call your Food Bank Branch Assistant for further information (see page 2).

Agency Statements and Payments

Statements of agency charges are mailed by the 8th of the subsequent month, with payment due by the 25th of the month that the bill is received. Payments received on account will be applied to specific amounts indicated on the payment documentation. If amounts paid cannot be specifically identified,

payments will be applied to the older charges first. Failure to pay amounts due may result in the agency being deactivated for future shopping.

Questions about agency statements or amounts due should be directed first to the Branch Manager. If the issue cannot be addressed at the branch level, you may contact Sarah Eadie, Senior Accountant at seadie@brafb.org or 540-213-8409, or Linda Baker, CFO, at lbaker@brafb.org or 540-213-8410

Thank you again for your partnership and again, if you have any questions, concerns, needs, or stories to tell, we're here to help!

Food Finder & Community Outreach

When operating a food pantry or other feeding program, it is important to consider how your community will learn about the availability of your services. The best way to get more visitors at your agency, as well as attract volunteers to your mission, is to build awareness in the community, and develop trust and a good reputation among those you serve.

Food Finder

One way we promote our partners and provide information for individuals seeking food assistance is through the Food Finder tool on our website (<https://www.brafb.org/find-help/>). Anyone can search by address or zip code to find a food distribution. It is very important that the information is kept up to date. Please contact your local Partner Engagement Manager with any changes to your hours and days of operation. Your PEM can also provide you with flyers and business cards to promote the Food Finder tool.

A printable Food Finder flyer is available for download in various languages. <https://www.brafb.org/agency-resources/how-to-find-food-flyers-printable/>



Community Outreach Strategies*

- Ask staff, volunteers, and guests to share agency information with their networks. Word of mouth** is the most effective outreach strategy.
- Place ads in local newspapers and other publications, on the radio, or on TV.
- Post on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok
- Speak at or share information with local churches and other organizations.
- Install roadside signage directing guests to your location.
- Become listed on 211, findhelp.org, and/or Unite Virginia
- Post detailed flyers at high traffic locations such as corner stores, coffee shops, etc.
- Connect with other service providers (food-related and non-food related) in your area to strengthen referral channels.

**When developing outreach strategies, consider which languages are most commonly spoken among the people you are trying to reach. There are several translation services that can help to produce outreach materials in languages other than English.*

***Word of mouth is still the most common way potential guests learn about food assistance services. One bad experience shared by a former visitor can discourage others from trying to seek help at your agency, while good experiences will encourage guests to refer their friends, family, and neighbors to you. In a recent survey, 80% of respondents reported hearing about and deciding to access services after hearing about them from a friend or neighbor.*



Centering Guests and Uplifting Civil Rights

Successful food pantries and meal programs meet the needs of their communities by implementing a *guest-centric* approach to their work. A guest-centric approach to food distribution means that the

organization keeps the experiences and perspectives of their guests top of mind in all operations and strategic decision-making. A guest-centric approach is guided by the principle of *equity* – accommodating guests based on their unique needs and avoiding a “one-size-fits-all” approach to food service. It is also guided by the principle of *equality* – ensuring that services are welcoming and available to all despite any perceived differences among guests, volunteers, or staff. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank champions this approach as a means of preserving guests’ dignity and ensuring the protection of civil rights.

Your organization is on the front lines of addressing food insecurity. Families accessing charitable food assistance services do so out of economic necessity and might feel uneasy asking for assistance. Many live with multiple traumatic experiences from both childhood and adulthood that contribute to their circumstances. Often, they must navigate complicated and confusing government and nonprofit rules, schedules, requirements, and intake processes to have basic needs met. We expect our agency partners to approach guests with empathy, compassion, and solidarity. Further, we encourage you to welcome your guests as collaborators who can guide your organization to best meet the nutritional needs of your community.

Below are questions that the Food Bank asks when considering new partnerships and that your organization can consider as you work toward providing accommodating, welcoming, and equitable services in your community.

Accessibility

- Is your organization open during the weekend or evenings to accommodate guests that are unable to access services during normal business hours?
- Does your organization provide delivery to home-bound residents in your area?
- Is your space and are your services designed to be accommodating to visitors with disabilities?
- Does your organization have staff or volunteers that speak languages other than English?
- Is your organization accessible by public transit or by walking? If it is necessary for guests to drive, is there safe and adequate parking?
- How much information do you require of your guests in order to receive services? How do you collect this information? Do you absolutely need to collect all the information that you collect from guests? Where can it be minimized?

Equitable Food Services

- Are people able to visit your organization as often as necessary to achieve food security for their family?
- Does your organization allow guests to choose their own variety and quantity of food?
- Do you provide a variety of fresh foods, produce, proteins, and dairy to meet guests’ nutritional needs?
- Do you have adequate cold and dry storage options to accommodate your guests’ needs and preferences?

Understanding Community Needs

- Does your organization conduct outreach tailored to communities in your area that are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity?

- Do you build connections with other local organizations to conduct outreach, provide referrals, or otherwise work together to respond to needs in your community?
- Do you take your guests' unique needs and preferences into account when sourcing food?
- Do you have a process in place for collecting guest feedback, comments, questions, and concerns? Do you put their input into action?
- Do guests have a seat at the decision-making table? Do you offer avenues for the communities you serve to help make decisions in your organization?

Guest Experience

- Does your space offer a welcoming environment where guests can comfortably and safely wait for food assistance?
- Does your organization provide restrooms for guest use?
- Do you display and serve food in a way that is attractive and respectful of your guests?
- Do you train your volunteers and staff to approach services through an equitable and guest-centric lens?
- Do you strive to make guests feel comfortable, to build relationships, and to ensure that everyone that visits your organization walks away having had a positive experience?

Link2Feed - Understanding Your Impact

Link2Feed is web-based case management software used by food banks, food pantries, and community-based meal programs across the United States and Canada. The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank adopted this software in 2018 to ensure that agency partners across our network are utilizing an accessible, secure, and shared platform to document food services. Link2Feed use is a requirement for all our agency partners.

What does Link2Feed do, and why do we use it?

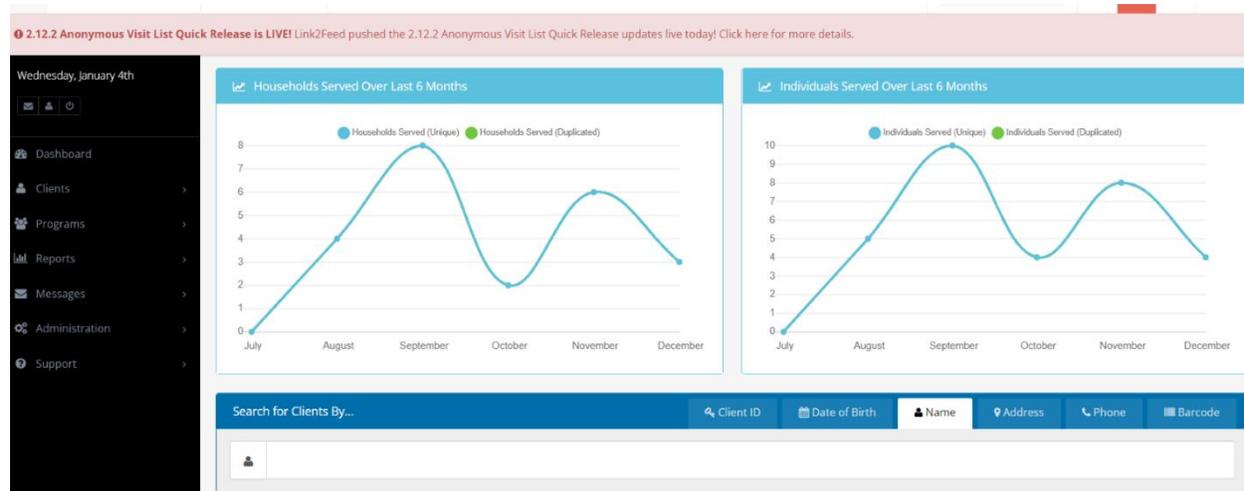
Link2Feed allows our agency users to accurately track their programs, including food pantry, meal services, and USDA services, and generates reports to monitor and evaluate services over time. Link2Feed offers detailed guest intake features that allow agencies to build robust profiles for each individual and household served. Profiles include important details like demographic information, languages spoken, ages of household members, historical record of visits to your agency, and eligibility for USDA food programming. Unique profiles are accessible at any agency location in the system, meaning guests only need to register once and can visit any pantry in our network without registering again.

Case management: Link2Feed's primary purpose is to standardize guest intake across the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank's 220+ partner locations and 180+ nutrition programs. The system provides your organization with a form to create profiles for each individual and household that you serve. Intake information includes Name, DOB, Gender Identity, Marital Status, Address, Contact Information, Languages, Race/Ethnicity, Disability Status, Veteran Status, and how the individual was referred to your organization. Once a profile has been created, a unique Client ID is generated, and the profile can be accessed at any food pantry visited by the individual in the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank service region.

Eligibility for TEFAP and/or CSFP programming is automatically determined by qualifying intake questions regarding monthly household income and/or participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or participation in other federal household benefits programs (Medicaid, TANF, SSI, etc.). Link2Feed will recognize whether the household is eligible for TEFAP or CSFP, allow you to certify the household for participation in the program, and log the TEFAP/CSFP and/or food pantry visit. No paperwork is required.

Self-registration: With a tool called [CNCT](#), pantry guests can register for Link2Feed on a computer, tablet, or smartphone without needing a volunteer intake worker or agency staff member to record their information. This feature can be accessed in all languages available to Google and allows for a personalized and private guest intake process. Guests receive a client ID, username (email or phone number) and a password to edit their account as needed. Once an account has been created on CNCT, the individual just needs to provide your agency with their name or client ID to certify for participation TEFAP and/or log a visit. We encourage use of this tool as a way to overcome language barriers and privacy concerns during the intake process.

Dashboard: The Link2Feed Dashboard is the first screen you will see upon logging into Client Intake. This screen shows information about the latest service activity of your agency and will provide you with any important announcements and/or updates for Link2Feed users. You will see a live daily count of the individuals and households served by your agency. You will also see graphs showing the number of individuals and households served each month over the last six months for a snapshot of the most recent trends at your agency. These numbers are both displayed as *unique* (households/individuals counted once, regardless of the number of visits) and *duplicated* (households/individuals counted every visit).



Reporting: Link2Feed reporting provides your agency with data to better understand who accesses your services so that you can better meet their needs. In turn, Link2Feed allows the Food Bank to view intake data across locations in order to inform how we can best meet the needs of our agencies. The level of robust and standardized recordkeeping provided by Link2Feed gives agencies and the Food Bank accurate information to report back to funders, apply for grants, communicate activities to supporters, and evaluate services over time. Reports include:

- **Agency Reports** – Basic information about the number of individuals and households served over a customizable date range. This report includes a *unique* count of individuals and

household served (an individual is only counted once, regardless of how many times they visited), as well as a *duplicate* count (an individual is counted every time they visited).

- **Statistics Reports** – Aggregated demographic information about guests served over a customizable date range. This includes information like race and ethnicity, gender identity, age groups, family sizes, geographic information, and number of visits. Information is presented in tables and downloadable spreadsheets, and visualized through graphs.
- **Interactive Household Report** – The most customizable statistics reports available on Link2Feed. These reports allow you to compare demographics and track information based on specific data points of your choice. These reports allow you to answer specific questions about your guests, like: “what ethnicities are the children served by my agency?”; “how many seniors do we serve that live by themselves?”; and “how does the community served in our zip code differ from the community we serve from our neighboring zip code?” The interactive report allows you to learn more about the families that visit your location.

Reporting helps agencies understand the broader impact of their day-to-day work, it helps agencies tell their story, and it helps all of us better understand the communities that we serve. We strongly encourage agencies to take advantage of reporting features in Link2Feed.

Barcode intake: Registration can be streamlined with the barcode scanner function in Link2Feed. Guests’ unique client IDs are converted to barcodes that can simply be scanned to access profiles and log visits. A simple, low-cost USB barcode scanner is all that is needed. Simply plug it in and use the barcode functionality on Link2Feed to make intake more efficient for your guests and volunteers.

Anonymous distributions and meal programs: There are certain programs and distributions that do not need to be tracked via full guest intake. Soup kitchen services, backpack programs, holiday boxes, anonymous food distributions, meal deliveries, and other initiatives can be tracked by logging the numbers of individuals served and numbers of households served. The only information that the system requires is an age breakdown. Numbers are reported in four categories: number of children served, number of adults served, number of seniors served, and number of households served. With this type of data tracking, guests can be assured that their visits remain anonymous, and your agency can be assured that your distributions are not slowed down by a detailed intake process. This type of data tracking is not available for TEFAP or CSFP agencies and is only available for food pantries on a case-by-case basis. Please speak with your regional Partner Engagement Manager if you have food service that should be tracked anonymously.

Non-food services: Many Food Bank agency partners offer services in addition to hot meals or groceries. This includes financial assistance services, clothing, personal care items, baby items, household goods, among other social services and material necessities. With Link2Feed, your agency can track your food services, in addition to your other services, all in one system.

Add-on volunteer management: Your agency has the option of adding Link2Feed’s Volunteer Management module to your account. This additional tool is not purchased by the Food Bank, but your agency has the option of purchasing it directly from Link2Feed. With Volunteer Management, you have tools to recruit and manage volunteers, schedule volunteer shifts, and communicate with your volunteers by text or email, all using the same system you use to log your services. Please contact Link2Feed customer support for more information: <https://www.link2feed.com/contact-sales/>

Add-on inventory management: Your agency also has the option of purchasing the Inventory module directly from Link2Feed. This tool allows you to keep track of donated and purchased foods, document

when an inventoried item is distributed to a guest, and access a real-time inventory of your food pantry or kitchen. Please contact Link2Feed customer support for more information:

<https://www.link2feed.com/contact-sales/>

Compliance

Blue Ridge Area Food Bank works with agencies in partnership and with a unity of purpose: “Everyone should have enough to eat.” While agencies do maintain autonomy in their work, requirements of partnership are outlined in the Partner Agency Contract, and the Food Bank expects agencies to comply in all areas of the Contract. Feeding America, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS), and United States Department of Agriculture have similar contracts and addendums that the Food Bank and our partner agencies must also comply with.

In those cases where partner agencies find themselves in minor violation of the Partner Agency Contract, it is usually through a misunderstanding of the Contract requirements. Our intention with monitoring visits and reference to the Partner Agency Contract is to educate and inform partners about best practices around food handling and distribution. Whenever possible, we will work with partner agencies to assist them with coming into compliance without an interruption in service to them and, by extension, their communities.

For infractions of the Partner Agency Contract, the Food Bank may place a short-term suspension on the agency’s ability to access food from our warehouse or a retail location until the agency comes into compliance. Food Bank staff will work with the partner agency to establish an action plan and timeline. If remediation practices are not prioritized and abided by an agency, the Food Bank may need to determine whether to terminate a partnership.

Please refer to the Partner Agency Contract and TEFAP Manual for more specific compliance guidelines and resources. If you have additional questions, please contact your Partner Engagement Manager.

Alternative Distribution Models and Best Practices

Food distribution looks a little different at every food pantry. Factors such as physical layout and location, storage capacity, volunteers, volume of food distributed and people served, and health precautions can all affect how a food pantry might want to handle its distributions. We encourage you to be creative and see what works best in your situation in order to meet the needs and expectations of your guests.

Things to keep in mind when planning your distribution include the guest experience, volunteer skillsets, equitable food distribution, and how much time you are able to spend working with each guest. You will also want to consider how the intake process (Link2Feed) will be integrated into the flow of your distribution.

Below is a list of options you may want to incorporate into your distributions:

Guest Choice (for more information, see page 21)

- Full guest choice: Some pantries structure their distribution much like a grocery store where guests can come in and select the items, including quantities, they need that are most relevant to cultural preferences and dietary needs.

- Partial guest choice/hybrid: Some pantries will provide a box of basic food staples and allow guests to choose additional items, including fresh produce, frozen meat, bakery items, snacks, cooking oil, spices, and/or nonfood items such as hygiene and cleaning products.
- Shopping list: Particularly for agencies offering guest choice with a drive-through distribution model, providing a shopping list of available items for guests to select from can be a great way to combine the dignity of choice with the efficiency and privacy of the drive-through model.

Drive-through distributions

- During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many food pantries adapted by moving their distributions outdoors and giving their guests the option to stay in their car and drive through to pick up food. This reduced close contact between guests and volunteers/staff, limiting the risk of viral spread. Now, even as many pandemic restrictions have been lifted, many pantries continue to operate in a drive-through fashion due to benefits enjoyed by both guests and volunteers/staff.
- Drive-through distributions tend to be more efficient than traditional, indoor pantry distributions. You can serve more guests more quickly when guests do not have to get out of their car and navigate your pantry on foot. Some guests also prefer drive-through because it allows them to remain in their own familiar, private space while waiting for services. Guests with disabilities and/or mobility issues also benefit from drive-through.
- While these benefits are considerable, keep in mind that the drive-through distribution method can make it difficult to build close relationships with your guests and provide additional services such as nutrition education or referrals.

Pick-up appointments

- Some pantries have had success with offering scheduled food pickup appointments. This requires a guest to call ahead and arrange for a time to visit the pantry. Appointments allow for the same, or greater, level of personalized attention that a guest might receive at a traditional, indoor food distribution, while also allowing for a greater degree of privacy and eliminating the need to wait in a lengthy line to receive food.

Order-ahead apps

- Some pantries have incorporated smartphone apps that allow guests to place food orders remotely and then come in person to pick them up. This is an efficient way to offer guest choice but requires some forethought in developing a system for receiving, packing, and dispersing orders, which may or may not have to work alongside a more traditional distribution model.

Mobile pantries and home delivery

- To support equitable food access for homebound individuals and underserved communities, many partners have expanded beyond the walls of their pantry to offer mobile distributions and/or home delivery. This requires having a vehicle—either a van or truck owned by the pantry, or volunteer/staff members' personal transportation—to bring the food to the distribution location. It also requires work upfront to determine delivery routes, drop-off locations, eligibility requirements and/or lists of home delivery recipients, and staff or volunteers who are willing and capable of supporting this distribution method.

Incorporating Language Access Strategies at Your Food Pantry

As we work to better meet the basic needs of immigrants and refugees, it is important that we all work toward creating welcoming, inclusive spaces for all. One such effort is considering language accommodations within pantry spaces for those who may not speak or read English as their first language.

There are several strategies to consider when thinking about language access:

1. Determine the primary languages spoken among your guests.
2. Recruit volunteers who speak those languages to assist with Link2Feed intake and help with guiding guests through the pantry process. Some pantries directly engage guests as volunteers in their mission.
 - a. If volunteers are not available, consider technology solutions like Google Translate on a phone or tablet to communicate with your guests.
3. Translate documentation, signs, forms, and outreach materials into those languages. **Please note:** The Food Bank has Link2Feed and Food Finder forms and [resources available on our website](https://www.brafb.org/find-help/) (<https://www.brafb.org/find-help/>) for your use.
4. Translate a survey to get feedback from your guests on how you can tailor your services to best meet their needs, including providing culturally familiar food items.
5. Offer fun activities at your pantry to engage with your guests and build community and trust.
6. Cultivate relationships with guests who may be able to build connections within their community to invite others to your pantry. Surveys have shown that 80% of people who come to pantries hear about the services by word of mouth. Building trust is essential.

Together, we can ensure that all those who may need our help have safe, welcoming places to turn to in times of need.



Welcome sign in English, Spanish, and Arabic outside of Sterling Park Baptist Church in Loudoun County

Partner Innovation and Impact Grants

(Formerly known as Agency Capacity Fund)

The Blue Ridge Area Food Bank makes every effort to support the needs of our partners. We know that for you to best address the need for food assistance in your community, it may require:

- Increasing refrigeration or freezer space
- Adding technology support for intake
- Adding shelving to incorporate guest choice
- Acquiring a vehicle to maximize retail donation pickups, start a mobile pantry, or do home deliveries
- Adding signage to encourage a welcoming space for your guests
- Working with a consultant to develop a strategic plan
- Transitioning from a faith-based organization to a 501(c)3 non-profit to attract more donations and community engagement

To help meet your organization's needs, the Food Bank offers Partner Impact and Innovation Grants.

Since 2016, the Food Bank, **with the support of our generous donors**, has been investing in the resilience and capacity of our partners through these grants. Our aim is to help partners source the equipment and materials they need to strengthen their mission, better serve their guests, and reach underserved populations in their community.

We offer this funding opportunity in February of each year through an application process. Each year, all partners will be notified of the funding opportunity, and the Food Bank will host information sessions to share our plans and answer any questions. Awardees are required to report on the impact of the funding at the end of the grant period.

Please note: This is a competitive grant application. The total amount of requested funds is often greater than the pool of funding available to invest. As a result, not all applicants will be awarded.

To date, more than \$4 million worth of equipment and awards has been distributed.

Thank you

The Food Bank is grateful to partner with you to extend our collective reach and impact, supporting individuals' and families' nutrition, health, and financial stability across central and western Virginia. Together, we can eliminate disparities in access to food assistance across our region, ensure individuals and families have access to nutritious foods that meet their cultural and dietary needs, contribute to improved health, and support overall household financial stability. Together, we can and do help ensure everyone has enough to eat.