



FEDERATION OF  
VIRGINIA FOOD BANKS

# The Healthy Pantry Initiative

A health-focused, neighbor-centered transformation of  
Virginia's pantry network

## Background

Virginia's food banks and their network of nearly 1,000 pantry partners are committed to not just providing food, but also promoting health for the 900,000 neighbors they reach each year.

We can all play a greater role in providing the services and supports for neighbors to reach their desired level of health, and remove barriers for the 3 out of 5 neighbors facing food insecurity who are not accessing the pantry network but could be. The Healthy Pantry Initiative is our vision for how to get there.

## Healthy Pantry Initiative

The Healthy Pantry Initiative is a movement guiding all interested pantries to implement more health-focused and neighbor-centered practices (*see back for list of practices*).

**Purpose:** All pantries in Virginia, regardless of their size or capacity, can implement healthy pantry practices to better support the health and nutrition of neighbors facing hunger.

**Vision:** Neighbors facing hunger can achieve their desired level of health

## Healthy Pantry Practices

Pantries that opt in to the Healthy Pantry Initiative are committed to implementing select practices related to the following four categories:

<b>Food Availability</b>	Foods offered through the pantry network meet the unique dietary needs of neighbors facing hunger.
<b>Community Connection</b>	Community partners work in collaboration to connect neighbors with additional resources and supports to help them thrive.
<b>Health Education</b>	Neighbors are empowered with the tools and self-efficacy to make healthy choices.
<b>Neighbor Centered</b>	Barriers are removed so that neighbors facing hunger can access the foods they need to thrive.

## The Strategy

A design team of neighbors, pantry partners, food bank staff, and health partners created the Healthy Pantry Initiative and the following three tools to guide its implementation. (1) An online survey tool for pantries to assess which healthy pantry practices they are currently doing, their desire and willingness to implement more practices and what they need to do so; (2) A neighbor survey to measure the impact of these changes for neighbors; (3) A website with resources to support pantries in implementing more healthy pantry practices. Pantries that opt into the movement will receive tools, trainings, and be eligible to receive targeted grant funding.

# Healthy Pantry Practices

## Food Availability

*Foods offered through the pantry network meet the unique dietary needs of neighbors facing hunger.*

1. Offer items from each of the five food groups (fruits, vegetables, protein, grains and dairy)
2. Offer fresh fruits and vegetables
3. Offer food choices that address specific chronic disease or dietary needs
4. Offer foods to meet cultural/religious needs of neighbors

## Neighbor Centered

*Barriers are removed so that neighbors can access the foods they need to thrive.*

1. Enable neighbors to choose which types of food they would like from the pantry
2. Collect neighbor feedback on pantry services and utilize when making organizational decisions
3. Serve neighbors on evenings and/or weekends
4. Address transportation barriers in at least one way
5. Have materials, resources or processes for serving non-English speakers
6. Serve anyone in need of food assistance, regardless of location, etc.
7. Make accommodations for people with all physical and mental abilities
8. Support a culturally inclusive and welcoming environment

## Health Education

*Neighbors are empowered with the tools and self-efficacy to make healthy choices.*

1. Offer healthy, product specific, recipe cards
2. Use a visual system to highlight the location of healthy items within the pantry
3. Offer nutrition and health education materials/resources
4. Someone who regularly works with the food pantry is trained on MyPlate or a formal nutrition education curriculum
5. Food demonstrations and tastings, cooking classes, or nutrition education sessions are offered on site

## Community Connection

*Community partners work together to connect neighbors with resources & supports to help them thrive.*

1. Provide information or additional resources on benefits, health, and other social needs
2. Provide and/or receive neighbor referrals to community health or social benefit services
3. Offer health services or social supports on site