

What is a Food Pantry?

A food pantry is a non-profit, charitable organization that distributes staple food items to those who have difficulty accessing enough food to avoid food insecurity or hunger. Food pantries should aim to offer a variety of nutritious food products including fresh produce, sources of protein, dairy and shelf stable canned and boxed foods. Many of these food items are made available to you as a partner of the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.



Best practices tell us that the most successful pantries meet the needs of their community by opening their doors to the public, being in an easily accessible space, having some “open” hours during evenings and weekends and allowing clients to visit more than once per month. Successful pantries offer client choice, which allows clients to shop for groceries like they would at the store. Some pantries also offer educational opportunities for pantry clients to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

This checklist highlights some pantry best practices and is a tool to help us guide you in starting a pantry.

New Pantry Checklist

	Yes	No	In the Future
Eligibility For Partnership with BRAFB			
Will the pantry be a 501(c)3 incorporated to serve children, the ill, and/or needy or operated by a Church?			
Pantry Service Area and Hours			
Will your pantry be open to the public?			
Will your pantry have a limited service area?			
If yes, will you serve someone the first time even if they are out of your service area?			
Do you plan to collaborate with other food pantries in the area on hours of operation to avoid duplication of efforts?			
Will your open hours include evenings or weekends?			
Will your clients be able to visit more than once per month?			
Will your pantry provide delivery to home-bound clients in the area?			
Outreach			
Will you do outreach within the area to ensure potential clients are aware of your pantry?			
Will outreach specifically target vulnerable households with seniors and children?			
Will outreach specifically target minority populations in the area?			
Accessibility			
Will your pantry be in a space that is physically accessible to clients with a disability or other clients with limited mobility?			
Will the pantry have space for clients to sit inside while waiting for service?			
Will restrooms be available for client use?			
Will the pantry be accessible by bus and by pedestrians?			
Will the pantry have adequate, safe parking?			
Pantry Services			
Are you familiar with the Client Choice model for food pantries?			
Will your pantry utilize Client Choice to allow clients to shop for their own groceries?			
Are you familiar with The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), where free food is provided to pantries subject to specific federal regulations and limitations?			
Will your pantry offer TEFAP?			
Will your pantry provide nutrition education materials (i.e. recipes, educational handouts)?			

Food Types and Sources			
Will your pantry provide fresh fruits and veggies?			
Will your pantry provide a variety of protein (meat, beans, eggs, peanut butter)?			
Will your pantry provide dairy (milk, cheese, yogurt, etc.)?			
Will your pantry provide meal making options like pasta/sauce or rice and beans?			
Will you have multiple sources for food? (i.e. The Food Bank, donations/food drives)			
Will you have a food budget for purchasing foods that you might not get donated?			
Is your pantry interested, if available, in Partner Pick-Up, where surplus food is picked up directly by pantries from retailers on a regular basis?			
Will your pantry be able to pick up food from the BRAFB warehouse on a regular basis?			
Equipment			
Will you have refrigeration to store perishable product until your next distribution?			
Will you have freezer space to store frozen product until your next distribution?			
Will you have shelving to store your non-perishable products?			
Will your pantry have carts or trolleys for clients to utilize while collecting food?			
Will your food storage area be lockable and secure?			
Will your pantry have a computer and internet access?			
Leadership and Staffing			
Will you create a mission statement for your food pantry?			
Will you have a board of directors or advisory group supporting your pantry?			
Will you have a plan for who assumes leadership in case of emergency or leadership turnover?			
Will you have enough volunteers to operate your pantry?			
Will you have a volunteer training plan/program with volunteer roles clearly defined?			
Will you have volunteers able to do the heavy lifting that is required to load, unload and move heavy cases of food?			
Will you have volunteers who speak languages other than English to assist clients that are non-English speaking?			
Will you have volunteers able to utilize a computer program to order food, log PPU and track client information and servie?			
Does your pantry have a budget?			
Will your pantry have a fund-raising plan?			
Food Safety			
Will you have someone trained in food safety on the premises to inspect all donated food before distribution?			
Will you have regular pest control?			