

## Peer Learning

We asked several food banks who have already developed and implemented a nutrition policy about their experience. Grab a cup of coffee or tea and read through their processes, joys, challenges, and outcomes.

### Interview

#### How many shoppers does your food pantry serve, on average, on a weekly basis?

As a food bank we serve almost 300 food programs, including over 100 food pantries

#### How did you begin the process of adopting a nutrition policy?

We had conversations with multiple departments throughout the food bank and talked with food donors. We discussed the strong link between food insecurity and chronic disease risk, and the value of increasing the supply and demand for healthy food in our network.

#### Please share about the process of developing your policy. What were some of the key challenges and successes? How, if at all, was your board involved? How, if at all, were your volunteers involved? How, if at all, were your shoppers involved?

We reviewed other food bank policies so we didn't re-create the wheel. We worked closely with staff members who order food for the food bank and staff who work closely with our food donors. It took a few months to develop the policy. Having these conversations and getting feedback about what was feasible and reasonable was helpful. We involved our board members first through our strategic planning committee, and then as a full board to let them know of our process. By the time it went for a full vote, the board was ready and the policy passed unanimously.

#### Please share about the process of implementing your policy. What were some of the key challenges and successes? How did you overcome your challenges?

We created an implementation guide that spells out more of the specific details involved with implementing the policy. We went through several iterations to determine which staff members are responsible for ranking food nutritionally, and for tracking our inventory every month.

#### Do you restrict or refuse any donations according to your policy? How did you approach this?

We created a list of food with limited nutritional value that we will reduce, but we do not strictly refuse any food.



**Did you develop any tools or borrow any tools from others that you would recommend?**

We developed the SWAP (Supporting Wellness at Pantries) stoplight system to rank food nutritionally. It is a great tool for both food pantries and food banks to determine the nutritional quality of food into green (choose often), yellow (sometimes) and red (choose rarely).

Check out the SWAP tool here: <https://foodshare.org/swap>

**How, if at all, do you track your policy?**

We run reports to determine the percentage of our food inventory that is green, yellow and red with SWAP. We use the data to set benchmarks to increase the amount of green and yellow food, and to work with food donors to encourage them to donate healthy food.

**Have you employed any ways to measure or evaluate the impact of your policy on food offered or on your shoppers' health?**

We have evaluated changes to our food bank inventory, changes to food pantry inventory, and selections by food pantry guests in pantries that use SWAP. We have consistent data showing that when food banks and pantries use SWAP they improve the nutritional quality of their food and guests select healthier options. We have a few published articles, and a few in press and under review.

**How, if at all, has your policy impacted the variety, quality, or type of food available?**

Increased the amount of green and yellow food and decreased the amount of red food.

**How, if at all, has your policy impacted your donor base? Have you lost any donors or brought on any new donors because of your policy?**

We have decided to remove a few donors that were predominantly donating all red food, for example, a dairy company that only donated ice cream. For most of our other donors, we have conversations to describe our nutrition policy, our SWAP system, and our emphasis on providing healthy food for the people we serve. We have not lost any donors due to our policy.



**Is there anything else you would like to share with someone who is just beginning the process of adoption a nutrition policy?**

Start with the “why”. There is a tremendous amount of research showing that people who are food insecure are at the highest risk for food-related chronic diseases. People who are food insecure tend to live in communities where it is very easy and cheap to purchase calorie-dense, unhealthy food. Then it is easier to describe the “what and how” – we want to create a nutrition policy and rank our food nutritionally to help increase the supply and demand for healthy food. A nutrition policy in a food pantry and food bank places an emphasis on food and social justice by making it easier for households struggling with food insecurity to access healthy food.

