HUNGER RELIEF
MINI-GUIDE

Food shelves and other hunger relief resources are vital community resources providing food to a growing number of Minnesotans. Creative partnerships and innovation can increase the availability and quality of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy food options.

SPOTLIGHT: THE FOOD GROUP

As Minnesota becomes more ethnically and culturally diverse with increasing numbers of immigrants and refugees, food needs met by the hunger relief system have changed. At The Food Group, a Twin Cities-based food bank with over 200 hunger relief partners statewide, success is linked to effectively meeting these shifting demands and ensuring the strength of the communities they serve. The Food Group now supplies culturally specific foods to its member food shelves and works with agency partners to implement additional strategies that serve the needs of these diverse communities.

“This work has only been successful by putting our own assumptions aside and listening to the needs of individuals in the community as well as partner agencies,” says Marny Xiong, Multicultural Program Coordinator at The Food Group. “Instead of learning to be ‘culturally competent’ we must learn to be ‘culturally responsive,’ which is a continuous effort to always be learning, listening, and open to what is needed. “Community engagement with organizational partners and food shelf customers is a key component of The Food Group’s success.”

The Food Group designed this toolkit to work for any food shelf, whether it’s a large urban operation or run out of a church basement.

“One thing we have learned in approaching this work is that it will always be changing,” says Marny Xiong.

Key Insights:
1. Each community is different—thoroughly examine the needs of the community. Begin by engaging diverse groups in meaningful dialogue to uncover ways, however small, to increase access to culturally significant foods.

2. Be flexible. Community demographics change over time, and food shelves must adapt to effectively meet changing needs. Maintaining clear communication with the community facilitates the delivery of effective, relevant services.

Learn more about The Food Group initiatives: thefoodgroupmn.org/agency-resources-2
The following steps, based on strategies found in the Minnesota Food Charter, provide ideas and resources for taking action in hunger relief settings in your community.

**ACTION STEP**
Incorporate gleaning and gardening initiatives into hunger relief programs to increase the availability of fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables.

**RESOURCE:** “Garden Gleaning: A Toolkit for Growers and Food Shelves,” developed by The Minnesota Project, is a comprehensive guide for sharing surplus produce. To get the toolkit, sign up here: www.mnproject.org/food-GardenGleaningForm.html

**ACTION STEP**
Coordinate existing community resources, like faith-based organizations and public housing, to increase healthy food access by hosting on-site farmers markets, community kitchens, and healthy eating education programs.

**RESOURCE:** The Channel One Regional Food Bank in Rochester partnered with two nearby churches to provide land for people to grow their own produce.
www.channel-one.org/programs/green-garden.php

**RESOURCE:** Work with the University of Minnesota Extension to host a Cooking Matters® course.
www.extension.umn.edu/family/cooking%2Dmatters/host-a-course/

**ACTION STEP**
Establish collective, consistent healthy food guidelines among food shelf networks and congregate dining sites to ensure fruits and vegetables are prioritized over less healthy options.

**RESOURCE:** Use this tool from The Food Group to develop and implement a healthy food policy.
thefoodgroupmn.org/agency-corner/71-2/
ACTION STEP
Develop active partnerships among hunger relief organizations, state and local government, retail food vendors and non-profit agencies to increase the number and quality of healthy options available in emergency food settings.

RESOURCE: Second Harvest Heartland's Retail Food Rescue Program diverts unutilized produce from markets and stores and delivers it to emergency food sites across Minnesota.
www.2harvest.org/site/PageServer?pagename=progserv_food_rescue

ACTION STEP
Seek funding for food shelves and food pantries to improve on-site facilities for the safe handling, storage, preparation and display of healthy foods.

RESOURCE: Volunteers Enlisted to Assist People (VEAP) in Bloomington used state grant funds to build a commercial kitchen used for food preservation, taste testing and cooking classes.
bloomingtonmn.gov/cityhall/dept/commserv/publheal/ship/stories/2014/veap_kitchen.htm

Though the challenges to healthy food access may differ somewhat between rural and urban settings, similar basic economic inequalities exist across Minnesota.
WHAT IS THE MINNESOTA FOOD CHARTER?

The Food Charter is a guide to planning, decision-making, and collaboration for agencies, organizations, policy-makers, and public and private entities across the state.

Developed through a broad based public process, the Minnesota Food Charter offers a shared blueprint for how all Minnesotans can have reliable access to nutritious, affordable, safe food in the places they work, learn, live, and play. In turn, this access will reduce the risk and cost of obesity and diet-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease, conserve state resources, and boost economic prosperity.

In recent decades, diet-related health issues—such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease—have surged, presenting costly, long-term challenges to Minnesota’s economy. Changes in the way Minnesotans eat—particularly high calorie, unhealthy foods and beverages—contribute to growing health care costs and lower worker productivity.

This is not sustainable.

As a state, we must work together to improve our health and support a vibrant economy. To find out more about the recommendations outlined in the Minnesota Food Charter, visit www.mnfoodcharter.com

“The Minnesota Food Charter] needs to be cross-sector....I see hunger partners, retail partners and government partners.”

Minnesota Food Charter focus group participant

mnfoodcharter.com

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