

Culturally Responsive Food Pantries

A guide for building trust and reducing barriers

At Food Bank of the Rockies and Food Bank of Wyoming, we celebrate the diversity of our service area including cultural diversity, immigrant and refugee communities and communities of color. We also recognize that societal inequities mean food pantry users from different cultures or races may experience additional barriers when accessing food services. In response, we've developed guidance for our partners on ways to reduce these barriers and become more culturally responsive.

This guidance was developed with feedback from over 700 food pantry users, 100+ food pantries and 12 community organizations through surveys, interviews and focus groups. After reviewing this material, we invite you to complete a self-reflection exercise on page 11. Whether your organization is just beginning this journey or are already well on your way, we hope you will find valuable information.

What is Culturally Responsive?

Being culturally responsive means recognizing that not everyone coming to the table faces the same barriers or challenges to get there. We must recognize that it is not our client's responsibility to change – instead, it is our responsibility to learn, collaborate and adapt to reduce these barriers.

To be culturally responsive, we must take active, ever-evolving steps to recognize and value each food pantry user's unique needs and perspectives as well as work to reduce barriers that create systemic inequities. Taking an honest look at these tough issues influences how we think about day-to-day emergency food operations and how we interact with our community.

“Cultural responsivity in food provision can manifest itself in various ways: the provision of culture-specific foods, culturally-responsive distribution methods, or even culture-specific education around food.”

- United Way

Acknowledge Power, Privilege, and Inequity

As food bank workers and volunteers, we must recognize that we are in a position of privilege and those we serve may have different levels of privilege and therefore different experiences or interpretations. Food pantry users may also come with some level of experienced trauma that may influence their interactions. We therefore must foster a culture of compassion that seeks to not pre-judge based on appearance or behavior and does not use our position of power to mandate solutions based only on our own experiences. Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment starts with committing to a level of self-reflection and awareness that may be personally challenging or uncomfortable.

Food Bank of the Rockies and Food Bank of Wyoming is here to support our partners in learning more about topics like trauma informed practice, racial inequities in food insecurity, and the immigrant experience. We are committed to working on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at all levels of programs and operations.

Recommended Reading: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

For additional reading, podcasts and webinars on equity in nonprofit organizations, we encourage you visit the NonProfit Learning Lab at <https://www.nonprofitlearninglab.org/dei>

How to Use this Guide:

The following guide provides a summary of feedback we have received through conversations with food pantry users, partners and community organizations. The guide outlines common barriers experienced when accessing emergency food assistance, however, every community is different and may experience these to different degrees or not at all. We provide practical recommendations for ways to identify and address these barriers. We encourage all partners to use this guide as a starting point for informing your organization's self-reflection.

Common Barriers

Food pantry users from different cultural backgrounds may experience additional barriers when accessing emergency food services. These may include feeling unwelcomed visiting food pantries that **don't understand their culture** or not having their **cultural or religious food preferences** met making them less likely to return. Another major barrier includes **language access**. Not being able to communicate with staff or volunteers or read information on the food pantry's website about availability can reduce their likelihood of accessing services. In addition, food pantries may use **outreach efforts that are not culturally appropriate** which are less effective at reaching certain communities.

These communities may also encounter a variety of **simple access barriers**. For example, immigrants and communities of color may be more impacted by limited transportation and be more likely to work in the service industry which may mean that hours of pantry operations are difficult to attend. Another major barrier, particularly among some immigrant communities, are concerns over immigration status and the required documentation impacting eligibility for food services.

And finally, there are some barriers that are a little less tangible but still very impactful. Those include feeling unwelcomed or stigmatized, not feeling comfortable and a **lack of trust** built up for institutions due to historic injustices.

The following sections will take a deeper look into these common barriers and provide practical recommendations on how to identify and address them. After reviewing this guide, we encourage organizations to complete our self-reflection exercise to identify where your organization is on the journey to becoming culturally responsive.

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Understand your Community

You may recognize that some of your food pantry users speak Arabic. But that does not mean they share the same culture, religion or food preferences. Around the world, there are over 25 countries and/or cultural groups that speak Arabic including in North Africa, the Middle East, Central and Western Asia and parts of China.¹

As you can see, having the same race or language does not necessarily imply the same culture or religion. Even two people from the same country may have very different food preferences based off regional or religious differences. In addition, immigrants that have lived in the United States for several years may be more accustomed to western food.

Therefore, it is important to not only understand your community from a broad demographic perspective but also to understand the nuances within your community. In the following section, we highlight ways to find both types of information.

¹ <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/how-many-people-speak-arabic#:~:text=There%20are%2025%20countries%20that,United%20Arab%20Emirates%20and%20Yemen.>

Basic Demographic Information:

Understanding basic demographic information about your community and food pantry users will help you gain perspective on who you are reaching and who are not. Examples of basic demographic information include race, country of origin and language. Many local and state governments already have public databases with this information based-off census data. You can search census data by zip code by visiting the following websites:

- Colorado: <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Colorado/Overview>
- Wyoming: <https://statisticalatlas.com/state/Wyoming/Overview>

Once you understand the demographics of your surrounding area, you should compare that with your food pantry user demographics. One way to collect that information, is to survey your clients asking them to voluntarily share basic demographic information on a one-time basis. A sample survey can be found in the appendix. In addition, you can also include demographic questions during your client intake process. Food Bank of the Rockies offers a Link2Feed intake system that can help you efficiently collect this information during intake. For more information about setting up Link2Feed at your site, contact partner support.

Please recognize that some clients may not feel comfortable sharing this type of information or have language barriers that prevent them from understanding what you are asking for.

Comparing Census Data with Client Usage:

The demographics of your surrounding community may be very different than the demographics of who actually uses your food pantry. Immigrants and communities of color are statistically more likely to experience food insecurity because of inequities in society.² You may see this reflected in your food pantry usage. For example, the census data may indicate that only 10% of the population is African American but you may see that 30% of your food pantry users are African American.

However, some communities, particularly immigrant communities, may be experiencing barriers that prevent them from utilizing your services. In these cases, you'll likely see the opposite trend. For example, the census data may indicate that 30% of the population is Hispanic but you may see that only 10% of your food pantry users are Hispanic. Remember, just because they are not utilizing your food pantry does not mean their needs are being fully met. Instead, this trend may indicate that this group is experiencing barriers for accessing your services. Comparing census data with your user data may help you understand who you are reaching and, most importantly, who you are not.

Engage on a Deeper Level:

Once you know the basic demographic information, the next step is to learn about the nuances for your particular clients. This includes learning about specific food preferences, cultural holidays and unique barriers that your community may be experiencing. There are several ways to do this and they all include an element of human connection.

- **Engage with your Clients:**

The best way to understand your clients is to get to know them on a personal level. Build a relationship with them so they feel comfortable sharing more about themselves. Try asking them what food they like or dislike and if there are any foods they need for holidays. Recognize that some clients may not be comfortable sharing this type of information or have language barriers.

- **Establish Client Advisory Boards:**

Some partners have established client advisory boards to receive guidance directly from the clients on a regular basis. These advisory boards can advise on a wide-range of topics from type of food and quantity as well as outreach methods. You can also give your advisory board voting rights so your clients have a voice during important decisions.

²<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2661461/#:~:text=Newly%20arrived%20immigrants%20were%20at,status%20and%20poor%20child%20health>.

- Develop a Promotora Model:**
Promotoras, or community representatives, are trusted community members who receive special training to act as a liaison with the community, communicating in their native language and with a deep understanding of the culture. Promotoras provide valuable insight and should be compensated fairly. The model was first developed among the Hispanic/Latino community but a similar model could be used with other cultures. For an example of an effective Promotora, visit: <https://www.revision.coop/promotora-model>
- Hire staff or recruit volunteers from bicultural backgrounds:**
Bicultural staff and volunteers will be able to give you valuable insight into their community. It can also show your commitment to being inclusive which can build trust within your community.
- Connect with cultural community organizations:**
If language is an issue, you may consider reaching out to a local community group for guidance. The ideal community group should have a focus on the cultural group you are trying to serve and have staff or volunteers with heritage from that cultural group that can give you candid insight. Recognize that their time is valuable and their engagement with you is optional.
- Connect with other partners serving similar clients:**
There are likely other partners within the Food Bank of the Rockies and Food Bank of Wyoming network that serves a similar client base. You can connect with these partners by attending one of our Lunch & Learns or reach out to our Culturally Responsive Food Initiative team at CRFI@foodbankrockies.org. You can also search for other pantries to connect with in your area by using our pantry locator:
Colorado Pantry Locator: <https://www.foodbankrockies.org/find-food/>
Wyoming Pantry Locator: <https://wyomingfoodbank.org/find-food/>

“We order with Promotoras and community volunteers [guidance] every day in the system. So, they cherry pick what they believe the community will be receptive [to] very well.” – Thai, Kaizen

Cultural & Religious Food Preferences

Imagine that you are living abroad and you want to celebrate Thanksgiving with your family. You go to the grocery store but they give you a chicken instead of a turkey. While a chicken will feed your family, it does not have the same meaning as having turkey for Thanksgiving.

The food we eat is more than just sustenance. It is linked with our cultural identity and is an integral part of what brings us joy and togetherness. Immigrants are statistically more likely to experience food insecurity in the United States and yet food pantries generally only offer western-style food.³ Even making small changes in what types of foods you offer can go a long way for creating a meaningful connection with your cultural clients as well as ensuring them dignity in the food experience.

Diversifying food options can be more than just a matter of taste. Many cultures have religious or dietary restrictions that may make some food unusable. For example, the Vietnamese culture often avoids the use of dairy, so including shredded cheese with their food box will be less useful for them and may go to waste. Understanding these differences can help identify alternative foods.

³<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2661461/#:~:text=Newly%20arrived%20immigrants%20were%20at,status%20and%20poor%20child%20health.>

Six Tips for Culturally Responsive Food

Offering culturally responsive foods may seem overwhelming, but small changes can make a big impact in the inclusivity of your food. Here are some trends that are common across cultures.

- **Customize by culture when you can.** We have developed a suggested food list for common cultures in our service area. While you may not be able to provide all these foods, having a better understanding of food preferences can help you make informed choices when you are ordering food. You can view this resource at <https://tinyurl.com/CRFIFoodList>
- **Focus on fresh produce.** The number one requested food category is fresh produce.
- **Avoid canned foods** (in most cases). Many immigrant families may not have had canned foods in their home country and therefore consider them unhealthy and will not use them.
- **Avoid pre-seasoned or pre-packaged meats or pastas.** This will allow more flexibility to customize the flavor of the meals to fit with cultural preferences.
- **Provide whole foods.** An example of a whole food would be offering a fresh tomato instead of a pasta sauce. By offering whole ingredients, it provides more flexibility on how that item can be used or seasoned.
- **Holidays may change food preferences.** A seasonal or religious holiday may change what foods are used and the quantity needed. A western example would be serving turkey for Thanksgiving. Please see our [Holiday Calendar](#) resource for more information about holidays that may impact your client's food needs. <https://tinyurl.com/HolidayFood2021>

Tips for Sourcing Culturally Responsive Foods

Food Bank of the Rockies and Food Bank of Wyoming are committed to increasing the availability of culturally responsive food in Partner Express and in some cases, offering food credits to supplement the cost of these foods. Our Sourcing team works with multiple local and international vendors to source cultural foods in bulk to make it easier on our partners.

However, there may be foods that your clients request that we do not currently carry. In these cases, you may want to source these items locally from international markets. International markets refer to any stores that cater their products towards a specific culture, for example, Hispanic food or middle-eastern food. These types of stores are often operated by persons with heritage from that culture and carry brands, spices and products that are not offered at a traditional American grocery store. International markets are most common in large urban areas such as Denver and less common in rural communities.

While you could do an internet search for these types of stores, you may have more success asking your cultural clients where they are currently shopping for food from their culture. If you only need a few items you can visit the store and purchase the items as needed. Some partners have also explored offering their cultural clients a gift card to a local international market in lieu of sourcing the products.

Advantages of Sourcing through Food Bank of the Rockies/Food Bank of Wyoming

Sourcing from international markets can have many logistical challenges; such as language barriers, higher cost, time-consuming negotiations and lack of bulk options. That is why our Sourcing team works to identify commonly requested cultural foods so we can use our economy of scale to make these items available to partners. That is why it is very important that we receive your feedback. Is there a food item that your clients are repeatedly asking for? Please submit suggestions on new cultural foods you would like us to offer here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CRFIFeedback>

“Their face literally lights up and we know we're doing the right thing when that happens. Even if you only do it for one person, it's well worth it, when you see their smile and their eyes light up because you have something they recognize.” Diana, Colorado Health Network Denver

Overcoming Language Barriers

In a 2020 partner survey, language barriers were the most reported challenge of partners when serving food pantry users from different cultures. We recognize that partners have a wide range of resources so we have gathered a variety of recommendations that can help you address language barriers.

“I think that there's a sense of respect there that we're making an effort to communicate to our families in their own language.” Carolina, Children's Hospital Colorado

Practice patience and be kind.

- This person has come for help and they may be worried that their language skills will prevent them from receiving help. Recognize that seeking help can be a difficult experience especially when you have additional barriers.

Focus on building a relationship rather than being efficient.

- When there are language barriers, it may seem easier to focus on the transaction rather than the human connection, for example, asking for their ID rather than asking about their day. This transactional approach may make them feel rushed and confused especially if they do not understand why you are asking for specific information. Find non-verbal ways to create a relationship like taking the time to share a warm smile. These small gestures may make them feel more comfortable with asking questions – even if they have limited English skills.

Offer written translations of important information.

- Many partners have found it helpful to offer translated materials such as a welcome statement, FAQ sheets, important forms, or cheat sheets of common words. In some cases, partners have even laminated these translated forms and included an English version on the back page as a reference for volunteers when pointing out information on the translated version. While you can use google translate, the translation may not be accurate. Using a native speaker, such as a bi-lingual volunteer or professional translator, will produce a more accurate document. The average cost for a professional translation is 12-20 cents per translated word but it can vary depending on the language. *See language resources for details.*

Use descriptive images and simple text.

- Some clients may not be able to read in any language. Using described images and simple text will help them understand what is needed. Try to avoid using jargon or colloquial sayings that may not translate well and cause confusion.

Actively recruit bi-lingual volunteers/staff.

- If you do not already have bi-lingual volunteers/staff, you may need to actively recruit them. Consider recruiting from your bi-lingual food pantry users, local high school or local community groups or religious organizations that serve a culture with the language you are seeking. You may also consider posting a bi-lingual volunteer request directly on social media/website. Some partners have also had success using an on-call subscription to a live interpreter. *See language resources for details.*

Place bi-lingual volunteers/staff in public facing roles.

- If you have bi-lingual volunteers/staff, assign them roles that are public facing; for example, the check-in table. You may also consider giving them a name tag identifying the language they

speak. Having a bi-lingual volunteer readily available rather than having to locate them in the back, will make food pantry users feel more welcomed and less alienated.

Consider your online presence.

- Clients with language barriers may find it difficult to learn about resources if your website or social media does not offer translation. Consider dedicating a page on your website to key information translated into the language of the community you are seeking to reach. Information may include the hours of operation, what services you provide, what information they should bring and what to expect when they arrive. Make sure to highlight this page prevalently on your website and link to it often on social media. Larger organizations may also choose to install a live translation tool through Google Cloud Translation API or establish a translated sister site dedicated to that community.

Language Resources:

Please see below for a list of recommended vendors for translation, interpretation and language grants.

Community Language Cooperative: <https://communitylanguagecoop.com/> Denver based organization that offers written translation services as well as live interpreters for events and zoom calls. Can source most major languages within 48-hour notice and prices average about 20 cents per translated word.

Voiance: <https://interpret.voiance.com/language-services/> A subscription service that offers on-call live interpretation with staff who speak over 240 languages through their video app. Pricing begins at .99 cents per minute with the first 25 minutes included with the \$25 monthly subscription fee.

Language Justice Grants: Many local, state or federal governments offer small grants for translation or interpretation services. We often include notices about these opportunities in our partner newsletter.

Ensuring Simple Access

Immigrants and refugees as well as communities of color are more likely to encounter a variety of simple access barriers. A simple access barrier impacts the practicality of receiving services and is often physical or procedural in nature. You may be able to recognize a simple access barrier if you see trends on who is successful in applying and receiving services and who is not. However, sometimes, these barriers may not be so easy to recognize. Some partners have been successful in recognizing barriers through focus groups, surveys or simply asking your food pantry users if there is anything else you can do to make it easier.

Once you identify these types of barriers, they can often be resolved by implementing simple changes that can have a significant impact on who is successful in receiving services. In the following section, we outline some common simple access barriers but each community is unique so the solutions to these barriers may vary.

Accessible Hours of Operation:

- Immigrants and communities of color are more likely to be employed in the service industry with non-traditional hours which may make certain hours of operation difficult for them to attend. It is important to consult with your food pantry users on what the best hours of operation would be and place a priority on accessibility.

Transportation:

- Many communities may experience transportation issues that make it difficult to travel to your pantry. These issues include having limited access to a car, being unsure how to navigate the US public transit system or having extremely long commute times. Some approaches to solve transportation issues include offering a delivery option, checking that the hours of operation fall

during non-work hours, ensuring your pantry is near a bus stop or setting up a pop-up pantry at more accessible locations.

Equal access to information:

- Pantry users may not have equal access to learning about what resources you offer. Some key questions to ask: Are your hours of operation and resources translated on your website? Are you posting this information in locations that are accessible to all community members? *Refer to the culturally responsive outreach section for more information.*

Situational awareness of unwelcoming external factors:

- Police presence: If you use police officers for traffic control or your neighborhood is near a police presence, please be aware that this may make some immigrants or communities of color uncomfortable due to the current climate of police violence as well as previous ICE immigration practices. If you find that this is the case, you may consider moving your pantry to a more neutral location, using plain clothes traffic control volunteers or communicating to pantry users that your location is a safe space regardless of immigration status.
- Religious presence: If you are a religious organization, communities who practice a different religion may not feel comfortable coming to your pantry. If you find that this is the case, you may consider moving your pantry to a non-religious location or prominently displaying inclusive messages. Requiring prayer or other proselytizing efforts is in violation of Food Bank of the Rockies and Feeding America partner agreements.

Less invasive intake methods

- Immigrant communities may be uncomfortable sharing identifiable information because of fears that it can impact their immigration status. While some government food assistance programs still require identification documentation, your organization may have other programs that do not have as strict regulations. When possible, try and collect as little identifiable information as possible. For example, for eligible programs, you may consider not requiring an ID, proof of income, current address or asking for immigration status. It is also important to make sure your clients know who and when their information might be shared.

Immigration Status and Food Access

Have you heard of Public Charge? Some immigrants applying for a green card or a visa are required to pass a Public Charge test of whether they are likely to utilize certain government services.

Under the Trump Administration, the list of restricted government services was expanded extensively and some immigrant communities became worried that seeking food assistance would negatively impact their immigration status. In March 2021, the Public Charge rule was rolled back to the 1999 level and the number of government services that are restricted is much narrower in scope. However, many immigrant families in need may not yet be aware of this change and are still afraid to seek food assistance.

Therefore, it is important that your clients understand the changes to the Public Charge law and understand which government services are restricted and which are not. The State of Colorado has released a helpful fact sheet, translated into several languages, to explain the changes to the Public Charge rule. Consider training your staff on this rule and having translated printed copies available during check-in.

View Colorado State Guidance Here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1RNWDCmLzQbNKDUQ7rK2iu3v6a05uCaAF>

Culturally Responsive Outreach

Imagine you are in another country and you get sick. You are not sure if your insurance will be accepted and all the information about the doctor is in a language you don't understand. You decide to not go to the doctor. After you return home, you learn that the country you were in has a free health care system and you could have registered for it at any government building.

Many immigrants or refugees experience similar hurdles for receiving emergency food services. They may be unaware that food pantries are available in the US because they were not available in their home country. They may have difficulty searching for resources online because of language barriers or because they do not have easy access to the internet or personal email addresses. They may not visit the same types of locations as the rest of the community – and therefore miss physical flyers or pamphlets about resources. And once they learn about resources, they still may think they are not eligible because of their immigration status.

In the following section, we'll discuss ways to develop culturally responsive outreach not only for your online presence but also for identifying alternative channels for reaching communities.

Communicate through the right channels

It is important to understand where your neighbors receive their information. It may not be the same place that you would receive information. While many immigrant communities have access to the internet, they may still get their information from their community through word of mouth. In these cases, it is important to **meet them where they are**. If you know they use laundromats try posting translated flyers at that location or have a bilingual staff do outreach at that location. You could also post flyers in local international markets or corner stores. You may be able to find these locations by doing a google search, however, a more effective way to identify these locations would be to ask your cultural clients where they recommend.

Another way to reach these communities, is to **find organizations or groups that are already trusted by the community** that you are looking to connect with. Examples may be partnering with a community organization, cultural center or religious organization that specifically serves that community. Partnering with these organizations may take many forms but it could be as simple as having an informational meeting to share what resources you offer so they can better communicate that to their community. You could ask them to post a printed flyer at their location or share information about the resources on their Facebook.

Another outreach alternative is doing **radio, podcast or newspaper outreach in the native language** of the community. Many migrant communities listen to radio stations in their native language. Some radio stations will agree to share information about resources at no cost if it serves a public good. If radio stations are not available, some immigrant communities have developed local podcasts in their native language to share local news and information. You could ask your cultural clients if they are aware of any of these types of podcasts in your local area. Similarly, there may be a local newspaper written in the native language. You may be able to find the newspaper distributed at a local international market.

And finally, some communities may use **social media platforms** like Facebook as their primary source of information and communication. However, they may not be following your Facebook specifically. It is therefore important to identify and partner with trusted community organizations, groups or religious organizations that already have a strong social media presence with the community that you want to connect with. Ask if they can share information about your food pantry with their followers, preferably in their native language.

Each community is unique and it may take some time to identify the right channels for reaching your neighbors. However, reducing information barriers can help increase food equity and make sure that everyone in your community has equal access to resources.

Ways to create a welcoming online presence

Your website and social media are still good places to share information with the wider community. However, it is important to make sure that it is a welcoming and inclusive experience to help build trust and reduce access barriers. Is your website and social media friendly and accessible to community members from all backgrounds? Here are some helpful considerations.

Offer translations of important information

- Do you have important information translated into the common languages of your pantry users? You may consider dedicating a page on your website to include translations of key information. Information may include the hours of operation, what services you provide, what information they should bring and what to expect when they arrive. Make sure to highlight this page prevalently on your website and link to it often on social media.

Use descriptive images

- Some community members may have limited English language skills. Having descriptive images of the food you distribute as well as accurate photos of how your distribution works can help people understand what to expect when they come to your pantry. If you have already started offering customized food options make sure you highlight them on your website! Additionally, you should make sure to choose inclusive photos that show the diversity of your staff, volunteers and clients.

Recognize important holidays across cultures

- Recognizing important holidays across cultures and religions is a wonderful way to make your neighbors feel welcomed and included. To help you with this, we've developed an annual holiday calendar of important dates across many cultures to help you plan your social media content. <https://tinyurl.com/HolidayFood2021> As always, you'll still want to make sure to do your own research to ensure your post is culturally appropriate. Additionally, if you offer special foods during certain holidays make sure to share that information too.

Explain what information you will collect and why

- Some immigrant communities may be uncomfortable sharing identifiable information because of their immigration status. For this reason, it is important to share and explain your policy about what information is needed to receive services so they understand your policy before they arrive. If your pantry requires an ID or collects other personal information, consider adding language that explains why it is necessary and exactly how it will and won't be used to alleviate safety and privacy concerns. Additionally, if you have food assistance options that do not require an ID or proof of income, make sure to explain that option as well.

Be explicit about the steps you are taking to be more culturally responsive!

- Promoting your efforts to be culturally responsive on your website and social media is a great way to show your commitment to creating a welcoming and safe environment for all. For example, have you brought in new cultural food options? Share some photos. Do you have new bi-lingual staff? Introduce them on social media!

Trust and Respect

Many immigrant and refugee communities, in addition to communities of color, experience distrust for institutions or other communities. It is important to remember, that feelings of distrust among some communities towards institutions have been built up over many centuries due to historic injustices and discrimination. These feelings of distrust are justified and it is our responsibility to demonstrate our commitment to equity while also acknowledging the impact of previous injustices. Building this trust will take time and require consistently demonstrating respect and accountability.

Implementing best practices from the previous sections will show a commitment to accountability and a genuine desire to connect in inclusive ways that can help break down the emotional barrier of feeling unwelcomed or stigmatized. In addition, your organization can take a number of steps to empower your neighbors to not only feel good about the food they receive but also exercise autonomy and choice so that the food that is taken is culturally and dietarily appropriate for that individual.

Client Choice Model:

To create a dignified experience, many pantries have adopted a client-choice model. A client-choice model is often similar to a grocery store, where pantry users can select the food items that they prefer instead of offering pre-sorted boxes. This allows pantry users to choose more of the foods they like and avoid the foods they will not use. This model is especially helpful when catering to cultural clients that may have different food preferences. Client choice models sometimes implement a point system for ensuring all pantry users receive the same amount of food but how they choose to “spend” those points is up to the pantry user.

While the grocery store style is most common, the client choice model can be implemented in other ways as well. For example, some food pantries may still offer pre-sorted boxes but also offer a client choice table where clients can select additional items of their choosing. Additionally, some food pantries offer different types of pre-sorted boxes that pantry users can choose from, for example, a box with a Hispanic-food theme.

Tips for creating positive food pantry experiences:

There are several techniques your organization can use to empower pantry users during visits. We've summarized some great examples from Dani Gilmour's article on “Ensuring a Dignified Experience at Emergency Food Programs.”

- 1) Allow community members to choose what they need and decline what they don't. Trust that your clients know what is best for them and their families.
- 2) Allow participants to physically choose their food rather than have volunteers select and hand out food on their behalf.
- 3) Avoid phrases like, “You can have X amount of X.” Instead, choose language and tone that promote autonomy such as, “Please choose X amount of X.”
- 4) Describe and explain food products if asked, but do not seek to sway choice. Ideas over what is healthy, safe, and quality vary widely across cultures.
- 5) Consider offering recipes or translated ingredient labels for items you commonly distribute but are unfamiliar to community members.

For more examples and training exercises from the Gilmour article, visit:

<https://www.hungercenter.org/publications/ensuring-a-dignified-experience-at-emergency-food-programs-why-and-how/>

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Training:

Are your volunteers and staff offering the same level of hospitality and kindness to all community members? Unconscious biases, power dynamics, and lack of awareness of cultural norms can all drastically impact how comfortable someone feels at your pantry. Even if you think you are doing a good job at serving all clients equitably, you and your staff may still have unconscious bias.

In addition to completing this culturally responsive training, we encourage organizations to invest in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training. These trainings are often conducted by a third-party professional and may include webinars, readings or helpful exercises which can help you and your staff identify unconscious biases and understand power dynamics.

For more information and resources on DEI training, visit <https://www.nonprofitlearninglab.org/dei>

A final thought:

The most important thing you and your organization can do is to listen with empathy and be willing to continually grow and make changes. No organization is going to have the perfect solutions every time because the questions you are seeking to answer are inherently human. Even with the best of intentions, there will still be things you don't consider or people you don't reach because the variables are complex and change over time. However, that should not discourage you from this work. Even imperfect solutions can have enormously positive impacts on people's lives and can bring us closer to a more equitable world. We look forward to continuing to be partners on our shared journey of becoming inclusive and culturally responsive organizations.

For this reason, Food Bank of the Rockies would like to set an example by requesting continued feedback on this training. Are there things we did not consider? Are there elements that we should revisit? Please let us know by emailing CRFI@foodbankrockies.org

Self-Reflection Exercise

Now that you have a better understanding of the additional barriers experienced by your cultural clients, we encourage you to self-reflect on where your organization is on the journey of cultural responsiveness. Take a moment to document your plan for how to address these barriers within your own organization.

Please write a brief reflection of where your organization is on the following:

- After reading this document, where do you think your organization is on the journey to becoming culturally responsive? Are you just beginning or have you already started implementing some of these ideas? If so, what are you already doing in this area?

- What cultures are in your community and are they reflected in your food pantry? If you are unsure, how will you learn more about your neighbors and pantry users?

- How well do you think the food that you offer aligns with what families in your community want? What steps have you already taken or plan to take to make your food more inclusive?

- To what degree is your food pantry impacted by language barriers with your clients? What are some steps you can take or are already taking to overcome these language barriers?

- After learning about simple access barriers, do you think there are any simple access barriers at your pantry? If so, what are they and how can you address them?

- Is your outreach efforts to your neighbors culturally responsive? What are some ways that you can learn about and engage with your cultural neighbors and clients?

- Why is trust building so important with your cultural clients? How will you continue to build trust?

- How will you share this information with your staff and volunteers?

Please submit this form to our Culturally Responsive Food Initiative team at CRFI@foodbankrockies.org

Recommended Reading

Interested in additional resources on this topic? We have collected an assortment of additional readings. These readings are from third-party organizations sharing their own opinions.

Have you found additional helpful resources that you would like to share with partners? Feel free to share these resources at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/CRFIFeedback> and we will review to incorporate them in future versions of this training.

Denver Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs (DOIRA). 2019. Denver Immigrant and Refugee Community Neighborhood Assessment Report. <https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/643/documents/Office%20of%20Immigrant%20and%20Refugee%20Affairs/2020/2019%20Neighborhood%20Assessment.pdf>

Gilmour, Dani. (2016) Ensuring a Dignified Experience at Emergency Food Programs: Why and How. Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona. <https://www.hungercenter.org/publications/ensuring-a-dignified-experience-at-emergency-food-programs-why-and-how/>

NonProfit Learning Lab: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion <https://www.nonprofitlearninglab.org/dei>

Trauma-Informed Nutrition. Leah's Pantry.

1) <https://www.leahspantry.org/what-we-offer/inform-policy-at-all-levels/resilience-building-nutrition-education/>

2) <https://www.dropbox.com/s/69sjqimh0fqsuda/Trauma-Informed%20Nutrition.pdf?dl=0>

Sample Client Demographic Survey

- 1) Do you identify with a country or culture outside of the United States?
- 2) Is there food specific to that culture that you would like us to offer?
- 3) Are there any important holidays that have special food that you would like us to carry?
- 4) What ingredients are most important in your kitchen?