

Dear Food Assistance Provider:

Thank you for your interest in partnering with the Lowcountry Food Bank in the fight to end hunger. The Lowcountry Food Bank is a non-profit food distribution center that collaborates with non-profit agencies and faith-based organizations to provide emergency food assistance to the hungry in the 10 coastal counties of South Carolina. The food resources at the Food Bank are typically surplus and salvageable products that are donated by all components of the food industry, e.g. manufacturers, retailers, food distributors and food brokers. In addition, community food drives and special promotions bring other food donations to the Food Bank. We also receive government food commodities through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and The Commodities Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), which are administered through the United States Department of Agriculture and the South Carolina Department of Social Services.

In 2009, the Lowcountry Food Bank distributed over 14 million pounds of food through our network of agencies to an estimated 190,800 individuals in need. However, it is imperative for prospective partner organizations to recognize that the Food Bank's distribution center operates with demand always exceeding supply. The inventory is not constant and availability is sometimes limited. **Therefore, the Food Bank is a supplemental source of food, and member organizations must be prepared whenever necessary to secure food and grocery items from other sources.** This circumstance also means that the Food Bank is supportive of networking among organizations committed to helping those in need of food assistance. To ensure that services are offered collaboratively within a geographic area, the Food Bank will gladly assist prospective organizations by identifying other community initiatives in which they may coordinate their outreach efforts. In addition, the Food Bank offers other resources, such as training in safe food handling methods and nutrition education workshops and a bi-annual Member Agency Conference.

The general eligibility requirements for partnership with The Lowcountry Food Bank include the following:

1. The prospective organization must be tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Federal Internal Revenue Service statutes or a Faith-Based organization in good standing with the state and/or denomination.
2. The prospective organization must provide food assistance to the ill, the needy, and/or infants without charging or asking for donations.
3. The prospective organization must be willing to contribute a shared maintenance fee that helps the Food Bank cover the overall cost to procure, store, and distribute foods.

The enclosed information packet will help you understand in greater detail what is involved in operating a food program. We welcome application requests from qualified agencies interested in establishing membership with the Food Bank. We hope that you find the enclosed information packet helpful. If you have any questions or need any additional information, please contact the Agency Services Department at (843) 747-8146, ext 107.

Yours in Service,

Agency Services Team

Starting a Food Program

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*The content of this guide is subject to change.

Lowcountry Food Bank Mission/Purpose/Culture

Our Mission

Our Mission is to feed the poor and hungry of the ten coastal counties of South Carolina by soliciting and distributing healthy food and grocery products to nonprofit agencies serving the poor, and to educate the public about the problems of and solutions to domestic hunger.

Our Purpose

To feed the hungry of the ten coastal counties of South Carolina by soliciting and distributing healthy food and grocery products to nonprofit agencies serving the poor and by educating the public about the problems of and solutions to domestic hunger.

To eliminate hunger and its causes in the Lowcountry by creating a network of food security by utilizing our hunger free zone partners, becoming the catalyst for a just social policy and collaborating with local agencies to build strong communities.

To be the key food assistance provider in case of a major natural disaster. Create a disaster plan that will involve the South Carolina Food Bank Association (SCFBA) and other key disaster relief organizations.

Our Corporate Culture

Respect
Open
Honesty
Trustworthy
Understanding
Consideration
Compromise



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Quality Agencies

To ensure that food assistance offered to the community is reliable and sustainable, the Lowcountry Food Bank strives to partner with the most dedicated and quality agencies **In addition to the general requirements for membership potential partner agencies must commit to the characteristics of Quality Agency described below: Accountability, Community Development, Customer Service, and Nutrition.**

Accountability

Quality Agencies committed to accountability are good stewards of the donated food product made available to them by the Lowcountry Food Bank. These agencies hold the responsible of providing food assistance to the community in high regard. In doing this quality agencies committed to accountability are obligated to the clients they serve, the community and the Lowcountry Food Bank by adhering to all the rules and regulations set out by the food bank including proper use of food, availability of service, storage requirements, record keeping, accounts receivable, monthly reporting, etc.

Community Development

Quality Agencies committed to community development embrace the importance of fostering community partnerships and taking advantage of community resources to sustain and grow their programs. Quality Agencies committed to community development accomplish this by networking and collaborating with other feeding programs and social service organizations to offer coordinated efforts such as mass food distributions. In addition, Quality Agencies committed to community development tap into local and national funding opportunities to build their capacity and support their programming.

Customer Service

At its core good customer service is a commitment to treat others as you would like to be treated. Quality Agencies committed to customer service treat every client served with dignity and respect, as well as strives to anticipate, meet and exceed client needs, desires and expectations. In addition, Quality Agencies committed to customer service recognize the importance of adequate training for both volunteers and staff to ensure excellence.

Nutrition

The Lowcountry Food Bank has a healthy foods initiative in place where healthy foods are defined as fruits, vegetables, fish, lean meats, poultry, low-fat dairy, whole grains and foods that do not contain excess fat and/or caloric sweeteners. Quality Agencies committed to nutrition make a concerted effort to take advantage of opportunities to receive healthy food items from the food bank as well as educate clients and the community about the importance of healthy eating. Quality Agencies committed to nutrition may also partner with experts in the field of nutrition and health to provide health screenings (i.e. blood pressure, blood glucose, etc) as well as specialized nutrition and/or health education.

Primary Program Types:

Emergency Food Pantries

Food pantries provide a supplemental source of food to individuals and families facing food emergencies and/or ongoing food needs. Pantry programs must have regularly scheduled food distribution at least twice a week, for a minimum of two hours. Lowcountry Food Bank sites are required to follow a weekly schedule throughout the year. An agency must be open during the days and hours reported to the Food Bank. Temporary changes to the days and hours of operation are permitted, but the agency must report those changes in writing as soon as possible to the Food Bank. The procedure is the same for an agency who wishes to change permanent distribution days and times.

Same Day Distribution Organizations

Same day distribution organizations do not store products, they distributed whatever items received within a 48 hour period. In order to be eligible for Same Day, your organization must have consistent distribution days at least once per month. A yearly schedule is required for membership as a same day distribution agency. Temporary changes to the days and hours of operation are permitted, but the agency must report those changes in writing as soon as possible to the Food Bank. The procedure is the same for an agency who wishes to change permanent distribution days and times.

On-Site Feeding Programs

On-Site Feeding Programs are member agencies that serve prepared food, such as shelters, meals on wheels, or residential treatment programs. On-site meal programs must be DHEC certified and have regularly scheduled meal times at least twice a week. Temporary changes to the days and hours of operation are permitted, but the agency must report those changes in writing as soon as possible to the Food Bank. The procedure is the same for an agency who wishes to change permanent distribution days and times.

Additional Programs and Services:

Childhood Feeding Programs: Scientific evidence suggests that hungry children are less likely to become productive citizens. A child who is ill equipped to learn because of hunger and poverty is more likely to be poor as an adult. As such, the existence of childhood hunger in the United States threatens future American prosperity. We address childhood hunger in our community through two national programs as follows:

Kids Café

Kids Café, an after-school feeding and tutoring program that provides free meals and snacks to low-income children through a variety of community locations where children already congregate—such as Boys & Girls Clubs, churches or public schools. In addition to providing meals to kids, Kids Café programs also offer a safe place, where under the supervision of trustworthy staff, a child can get involved in educational, recreational and social activities. In doing this Kids Cafés not only feed hungry children, but promotes good grades in school and better health in young children.

Backpack Buddies

There are children in America that rely on resources such as free or reduced-priced school lunch, during the school year. The Backpack Buddies Program is designed to meet the needs of hungry children at times when other resources are not available, such as weekends and school vacations. The program works with school personal to identify students that are experiencing food insecurity and would benefit from backpacks filled with food that children take home on weekends. The food provided is child-friendly, nonperishable and easily consumed. Backpacks are discreetly distributed to children on the last day before the weekend or holiday vacation. In addition to providing nutritious food to school children in need, the Backpack Buddies program provides extra food for younger siblings at home and some operate during the summer months when children are out of school and have limited access to free or reduced-priced meals.

Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) Program

Across the nation, millions of senior citizens are living out their dreams of retirement. After years of working hard, they are finally able to relax and spend more time with their families. At the same time, one in five of these Americans over the age of 65 live in or near poverty. Seniors are faced each year with impossible choices, such as buying food or buying needed medicine or paying for essential medical care. To meet the needs of hungry seniors the Lowcountry Food Bank in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Social Services (DSS) administers the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) which is a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) program that provides free nutritious food and nutrition information on a monthly basis to eligible participants. Eligible participants receive food items such as, cheese, evaporated and dry milk, fruit juice, cereal, canned vegetables, canned fruit, pasta, peanut butter, dry beans and canned meats. Participants qualify based on age, income and residency.

Retail Pick-Up Program

In partnership with local retailers such as Food Lion, Publix, and Bi-Lo the food bank provides partner agencies direct access to donated retail food product. This is an essential resource for partner agencies that are eligible to participate. The program provides access to a variety of quality food products including fresh produce, frozen meats, and assorted bakery items.

Eligibility Requirements for Membership

Please review the following information to ensure your program meets all the Lowcountry Food Bank's requirements for membership.

- The agency must be located in one of the 10 coastal counties of South Carolina with an established need for a food program. (*Berkeley, Beaufort, Charleston, Colleton, Dorchester, Georgetown, Hampton, Horry, Jasper, and Williamsburg*).
- In order to qualify for membership the organization must be *ONE* of the following and provide appropriate documentation:
 - **A 501(c)3 non-profit organization that is not a private foundation or a municipality.** A copy of the organization's Letter of Determination of Tax-exempt Status from the IRS (501 (c) (3)) is required as documentation.
 - **A faith-based organization that is part of a larger denomination.** Denominational faith-based organizations must have a letter from their denominational headquarters stating that the organization is a member in good standing.
 - **A non-denominational faith-based organization.** Non-denominational faith-based organizations must submit:
 - A letter on organizational letterhead signed by the Chief Executive Officer stating the following: *"We are in fact a faith based organization and have not applied for non-profit status, have been denied, or had our 501 (c) (3) status revoked."*
 - A copy of the organization's Certificate of Incorporation issued by the South Carolina Secretary of State Office.

Proper Use of Food

Any food obtained from the Food Bank regardless of the program type must be used for the approved food program only. It may not be used for other purposes (church anniversaries, barbeques for fundraising etc). In addition, under no circumstances can the food program require fees for food, nor can the agency require individuals to work or volunteer in order to receive food from the program.

Criteria for Client Eligibility

- Each food program must have written guidelines for food program participation which states requirements for participation, as well as guidelines for refusing service to clients.
- All partners must practice a non-discrimination policy. No matter what type of food program is established, the expectation is that individuals will be served regardless of race, color, ethnicity, national origin, ancestry, creed, religion, sexual orientation, physical appearance, disability status, age, pregnancy, or any group affiliations.
- Agencies that serve specific populations such as children, battered women, seniors, etc may do so. However these organizations are expected to adhere to all other aspects of the non-discrimination policy. Agencies that serve specific populations must indicate this on the membership application.

Food Safety Certifications

Food Pantries or Same Day Distribution Organizations are required to have at least one volunteer and/or staff member certified in safe food handling. On-site feeding programs must be DHEC certified and this certification must be posted. The Lowcountry Food Bank also requires on-site feeding programs to have two certified safe food handlers in case the primary certified safe food handler is unable to supervise food preparation and meal service due to illness, vacation, or other unforeseen circumstances. Safe food handling certificated must post in the food pantry or dining area.

Additional Requirements

- The agency must have operated an On-Site feeding or Food Pantry program for at least six months immediately prior to applying for membership.
- The agency must have an adequate budget to support a sustainable food program.
- The agency must have an effective record-keeping system.
- Emergency Food Pantry programs must be open a minimum of two hours twice a week.
- On-Site programs must have meal times that occur at least twice a week.
- Same day distribution programs must distribute consistently at least once per month and Coalitions at least once per quarter.
- The agency must post signs that indicate both the presence of the food program as well as the days and hours of operation of the program.
- Agencies cannot operate the food program out of a personal residence.
- The Lowcountry Food Bank recommends that an agency have at least two staff members or volunteers to manage and operate the food program.
- The agency must have a means of transportation to and from the Lowcountry Food Bank to pick up food orders.

Equipment and Storage Requirements:

- The agency must have at least 18 cubic feet of refrigerator space and 18 cubic feet of freezer space that is designated for the food program. (*18 cubic feet equates to one standard residential unit*).
- A thermometer that is designated for cold storage units must be in each refrigerator and/or freezer.
- Temperatures must be maintained between 35 and 40 degrees for refrigerators and between -10 and 0 degrees for freezers.

- Dry foods must be stored 6” off the floor in a room that is between 50 and 70 degrees and with humidity levels between 50% and 60%.
- The agency must have a working telephone at the food program site.
- The agency must have a pest control plan and contract with a professional exterminator.
- The storage space must be secure and access limited to food program staff.
- A hand washing sink must be accessible by food program staff and volunteers. (*The hand washing sink does not have to be in the same room with the food for food pantry programs.*)
- The agency should have containers with tight fitting lids, called pest-proof containers. These containers are used to aid in the prevention of pest infestations for items such as beans, rice, grains, etc. You may use any clean closed container, such as a large plastic garbage can or a metal cabinet.

Space Considerations

The Food Bank does not have a specific square footage that is required for a food program to be considered for membership. However, when planning for your food program space should be considered. Is the space you want to use able to reasonably accommodate the amount of food that would need to be stored? Does the space allow for an area to complete the client intake process? Is the space large enough to accommodate all of your volunteers? Is the space suitable to engage the media? Your program may grow, you may see and increase in clients, food products or volunteers? Does the space support growth?

In addition to the equipment listed above, On-Site Feeding programs are also required to have the following:

- A stove with a hood (vent) to ensure proper air ventilation.
- A separate hand-washing sink.
- A one dial stem thermometer to measure the temperatures of refrigerated, frozen and reheated foods.
- DHEC certification.

Obtaining Food Safety Certification

The Lowcountry Food Bank offers safe food handling training through its training and education program. Classes are offered throughout the year. For more information, please contact the Agency Services staff a (843) 747-8146, extension 114. Certification classes may also be offered by various local colleges and private institutions.

Record keeping: Record keeping is a very important part of operating a food program. All agencies are required to provide certain information to the Food Bank. The following is information that we need you to keep on file:

Food Pantries/ Same Day Distribution Organizations:

- Name and address of recipient
- Date of service
- Number in the household
- Number of children
- Number of adults over 65
- Number of pounds given to each household
- Keep copy of records for at least 3 years
- Number of pounds received from other donations

On-Site Programs:

- Dates meals were served
- The number of meals
- Number of persons served
- Keep copy of records for at least 3 years
- Number of pounds received from other donations

Staff and Staff Responsibilities

A solid staff is vital to operating a good food program. The staff could be comprised of paid employees and volunteers. Regardless of who operates the food program, there are many responsibilities involved. The list that follows describes the duties involved with food program administration. While the Food Bank understands that many agencies may not have a different person to fulfill each responsibility, we recommend that each agency have at least two people to manage the food program.

Food Program Management: The person who manages the food program serves as the liaison between the agency and the Food Bank. This person is the primary contact for the Food Bank.

Client Service Coordination: The person who coordinates client services works with clients and the community to determine how the pantry can effectively meet clients needs, address client concerns and improve its services. If clients have other needs that are not directly related to food, then the Client Service Coordinator should do his/her best to refer them to the appropriate resource.

Food Resource Management: Managing the food that a program distributes or prepares for clients is a large task. The person who manages food resources should always know how much and what kind of food the program needs. This includes securing as many food resources for the program as possible and ensuring that food is picked up and arrives at the food program.

Intake Coordination: Many clients are intimidated by or uncomfortable with the thought of going to food programs for assistance. The person who coordinates the intake process for the food program greets new clients and explains how the pantry works. The Intake Coordinator also records client information such as name, address and the number of individuals in the household.

Financial Management and Accounting: There are various costs associated with operating a food program. A food program must be financially responsible. All food programs are required to keep written budgets to account for purchases, donations, services and other expenses. Accurate budget keeping is important because it enables agencies to make more cost effective

decisions about food resources and related purchases. The person that manages the finances and accounting ensure the program makes timely and in full payments.

Transportation Management: This person coordinates the transportation of the food from the Food Bank and other donors to the food program. The person who manages transportation must help maintain a budget for gas, maintenance, rentals and other transportation-related costs.

Facility Management: The building or space that a food program occupies needs to be safe, secure and pest free. The person who is in charge of facility management ensures this by conducting thorough and regular check-ups.

Pest Control Management: Pests tend to find food wherever it is stored. The person in charge of pest control management ensures that a licensed Pest Control company inspects the premises where the food program is located.

Volunteer Recruitment: Almost every food program that partners with the Food Bank is operated by volunteers from the community. The person in charge of volunteer recruitment finds volunteers to assist the food program with tasks such as unloading food from trucks, stocking shelves with food, preparing bags and distributing bags to clients. The person who manages the volunteers keeps their contact information on file and schedules them for specific shifts and tasks. The volunteer manager also logs volunteer hours and accomplishments so that the food program remains aware of volunteer contributions and thanks volunteers appropriately for their contribution to the program.

Best Practices

Fundraising: Funding is essential for food programs to be sustainable reliable sources of food for people in need. Programs can seek funds from various sources including individual donors, businesses, churches or grantors. In addition, many food programs host or participate in various fundraising events to supplement their food program budgets. (i.e. car washes, bake sales, pot luck dinners, etc.) The best financial resources a food program can use are monetary grants from donors and foundations. We encourage all of our partners to seek out grant opportunities. If your agency needs help planning fundraisers, identifying potential grantors or writing grants, the Food Bank's training and education program can assist you.

Food Drives: Many agencies host food drives to supplement food inventory. Food Drives are a great way to supplement your food as well as engage the community. Schools, churches, or businesses are great food drive hosts. To make sure that a food drive is effective, tell the hosting group exactly what products you need. To engage the group, invite them to tour your facility, or volunteer. When they drop off or you pick up the food that they collect, offer to take a picture with the group with the donation. Send thank you's and let the group know how their donation helped (did it allow you to serve more people? or serve more food?) Lastly, make food drives annual or monthly if the group is willing and able to support an ongoing effort. If your agency has questions about organizing food drives, the Food Bank's training and education program can assist you.

Volunteer Engagement & Recruitment: Volunteers are very valuable to the operation of a food program. Effective volunteer recruitment and retention is very important. To recruit volunteers seek out diversity (in age, ability, etc), engage schools or youth groups to recruit youth volunteers, local businesses or churches are also good places to recruit volunteers. Take advantage of free advertising opportunities online, with your local united way or local publications. Once your volunteers are recruited provided appropriate training and match volunteers with tasks that are appropriate for their ability and ties the volunteer to the organization's mission. To retain volunteers recognize and appreciate their efforts. If your agency needs help developing a volunteer program, the Food Bank's training and education program can assist you.

Coalition Building: A coalition is a diverse group of individuals or organizations who work together to reach a common goal. Coalition Building is at the heart of food banking, working together allows us accomplish together what we cannot accomplish alone. Identify potential coalition member to empower the community and address an urgent issue, host meetings to engage potential members, overcome barriers to working together. Coalitions have been very effective has Same Day Distribution Organizations. If your agency wants to learn more about starting a coalition, , the Food Bank's training and education program can assist you.

Media Relations: In order for a food program to be most effective engaging local and even national media is essential. Media provides the community access to your message and your mission. Effective media relations will help you engage potential donors or volunteers that may not have learned about your organization otherwise. So, always send out press releases if your organization is hosting a special event. Contact local newspapers, radio or television stations and invite them to your events or to tour your facility. If your agency needs help crafting a message or drafting a press release, the Food Bank's training and education program can assist you.

Lowcountry Food Bank Operations

Regional Food Centers

To meet the needs of partner agencies throughout the Food Bank's ten county service area the Lowcountry Food Bank operations three regional food centers as follows:

Charleston Regional Food Center (*Paul Hulse Community Food and Nutrition Center*)

2864 Azalea Drive, Charleston, SC 29405.

Serves agencies in Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester and Williamsburg counties

Myrtle Beach Regional Food Center

200 South Broadway, Unit A, Myrtle Beach, SC 29577.

Serves agencies in Georgetown and Horry counties

Yemassee Regional Food Center

1 Guess Rd, Yemassee, SC 29945.

Serves agencies in Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton and Jasper Counties

Hours of Operation

The Lowcountry Food Bank's standard office hours are Monday through Friday 8am to 4pm. Distribution hours are Monday through Friday 8:30am to 3:30pm. Each Regional Food Center also closes daily for lunch. The Food Bank is closed for national holidays and periodically for inventory. Notice of closings are made in advance.

Application Process

1. Application Request

To receive an application for membership the enclosed application request form must be submitted via mail with the applicable supporting documentation. *All* requested documentation must be submitted to ensure timely processing.

2. Application Submission

An application form will be provided once an application request form is received with the requested documentation and it is determined that an organization meets the minimum requirements for membership.

3. Application Consideration

Community Need

There must be an established need in your community for a new food program to be established. The Lowcountry Food Bank reserves the right to review the concentration of agencies in your community. If a food program already exists in your neighborhood, then it may be more beneficial to collaborate with them. Upon request, the Food Bank will provide a list of other agencies in your area that you may contact to discuss community-specific needs. These agencies may also offer opportunities for you to learn about food program activities in your community via coalition meetings and future partnerships.

A Basic Business Plan

To evaluate the overall soundness and sustainability of a program's operations, a basic business plan should be in place. This plan should include:

- **Mission Statement:** An agency must have a written, clearly defined mission statement. The statement should explain your intentions and it should support the need for a food program in your community- Here is an example of a basic mission statement: "The mission of "Sample Food Pantry" is to distribute food to the needy and refer them to community organizations for social services."
- **Food Program Budget:** Given that there are food costs, staffing costs, rent, etc, Lowcountry Food Bank partner agencies must have a current budget for their food program that will support and sustain their programs.

4. On-site Visit

Once all application materials are received and evaluated an on-site visit will be conducted. The purpose of this visit is to allow food bank staff the opportunity to learn more about the program, allow potential partners to address any questions or concerns, as well as inspect the storage facility. Once a site visit is complete the Director of Agencies Services will make the final recommendation for approval of membership.

