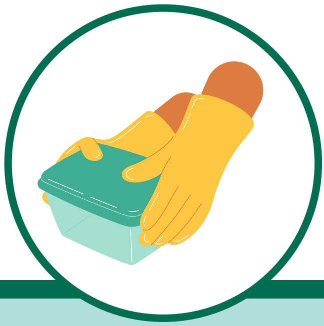
Pantry Best Practices

The Pantry Best Practices Toolkit houses information on best practices to keep in mind with your food pantry. "Best Practices" change as time continues on, and we will ensure to keep the practices updated. **Click on the Best Practice areas below to be directed to the right page.**

Social Environment

Food Safety



Client Intake Process

Volunteer Recruitment

Succession Planning

Other Toolkits

Social Environment

Customer Service is a direct take away from pantry to client. How each pantry represents themselves is key to building meaningful relationships with clients. Many pantries practice a friendly greeting to each client. They take the time to get to know the people who come to the door needing help. “One Montgomery County pantry incorporates a culture of “CPR” into everything it does – Compassion, Patience, and Respect – so that participants feel that they have come to a place where they belong and are cared for without judgment.”

Keep a Comfortable Atmosphere for Your Food Pantry

Below are some practices to think about and incorporate:

- Ask for outside perspectives from your clients. Their ideas/feedback can bring change to meet their needs.
- It's easy to judge someone's circumstances from the things they have. But remember, the cars your clients have and clothing they wear are not a clear representation of circumstances they are in. Listen to the stories from your clients.
- Language can be a barrier to food insecurity. Provide services in the language a client is most comfortable. This could require a language line, or additional volunteers to help with the translation.
- Create and post signage that clearly states the goals of your customer service. It can be very helpful to review the commitment and the expectations for both the staff, volunteers, and the community.

Communicating Customer Service Best Practices

Communicating customer service practices to your staff and volunteers is important. See below for an example of how Second Harvest communicates customer service expectations to its program.

Second Harvest Pantry Community Contract

All within the Second Harvest Pantry Community - staff, clients, volunteers, guests, and donors will treat each other with dignity, compassion, integrity, and respect.

As a member of the Second Harvest Pantry, we agree that we will:

- Welcome everyone who enters our doors;
- Treat all fairly;
- Speak to each other with kindness and empathy;
- Communicate disputes without personal attacks;
- Act in good faith to make sure people receive the help they need;
- Follow all Second Harvest employee, volunteer and/or client policies and procedures for appropriate conduct;

All programs conducted by Second Harvest will be provided with client needs and privacy at the center of our services.

Taking Care of Yourself

As rewarding as it can be to work in a food pantry it can also be stressful. It's important to take care of yourself as well. Remind your co-workers and volunteers to do a check-in with themselves.

An easy self-care tip is to simply take a few minutes to decompress, sit quietly, and take a deep breath to help gather yourself. We all have our own way to unwind and relax. Whichever way you choose, take the time to do it!

Food Safety

Food Safety is important to ensure clients are met with respect and safety. Contracting a food borne illness can be deadly and costly. See below for some best practices on food safety that your pantry should always follow. Communicating these practices to your staff and volunteers is essential. Click HERE for printouts on food safety that you can display in your pantry.

General Storage Guidelines

- Store refrigerated food at 40°F (5 °C) or lower. This includes cut produce.
- Keep frozen food solid. Required temperature is 0°F (-18 °C) or lower.
- Store food only in designated food storage areas.
- Store food at least six inches off the floor.
- Store food away from the walls.
- Store ready-to-eat food above raw meat, seafood, and poultry. Do NOT store these items on the same shelf.
- Store food only in containers made for food.
- Wrap or cover food before storing it.
- If refrigerated food cannot be distributed quickly enough, most can be frozen to extend its life.

Using the FEFO Method

- Follow the first-expired, first-out (FEFO) method if food has a use-by or expiration date.
- Check use-by or expiration date.
- Store food that will expire first in front.
- Use the food stored in front first.

Receiving Food Safe Items

- Avoid cans with rusty, bulging, or dented seams.
- Throw away any open or punctured food items.
- Throw away food items with missing labels.
- Throw away food items with mold or any signs of pest damage.

Client Intake Process

Keeping your client information in a safe place and in an organized manner, is very important to the success of a food pantry. Intake is often the client's first experience when entering the food pantry. Intake is important to ensure data is accounted for, but tedious intake may deter clients from using a food pantry or coming back to one. Intake should be efficient and confidential to optimize client experience and provide valuable data for food pantry use.

Platforms for Intake

Link2Feed

Currently Second Harvest Food Bank offers a free digital program, called Link2Feed. We encourage all Partner Agencies to take advantage of this resource due to the amount of data it collects and the streamline process of intake it creates for all our Partner Agencies. If you would like more information on Link2Feed, you can view our Data Toolkit and/or contact our Client Data Manager.

Click **HERE** to view the DATA Toolkit. This contains helpful PDF documents and a Link2Feed training.

Contact our Client Data Manager:
Katie Graham
katie.graham@secondharvestmidtn.org
(615) 627-1573

Online Spreadsheets

Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets are inexpensive options to keep your information organized. For free classes on using these platforms, check with your local library for courses and training videos.

Traditional "Pen & Paper"

Although pen and paper are useful, they may not be the most efficient method for intake. Papers can often get lost and misplaced; therefore, we recommend digitalizing your intake process.

Simplicity & Privacy of Client Intake

Privacy and simplicity are two important factors to consider with the client intake process. When asking for information from clients, always assure them that their information is private and secure.

We also want to ensure that the intake process does not become a barrier to clients accessing charitable food assistance. Try to only ask questions that are applicable to your program. Questions will look different for each pantry, depending on the communities they serve.

Before designing intake questions, it is important to ask yourself the following:

- What information must you know to best serve the client?
- What is your goal of these intake questions?
- What questions could you ask or not ask to build a better relationship with the people you serve?

Everyone Deserves Food, Regardless of the Intake Process

Keep in mind that hunger does not discriminate. Our goal as partners is to provide food to all people facing hunger in our community. Intake is important, but it should never be a barrier to someone accessing food.

For example, many immigrants (documented and undocumented) are worried that using any assistance could result in information being shared about their citizen status. It is important to educate our clients about how their information is being used, and that we don't report information collected in the intake process will not be "reported". Reassure them that private assistance programs are available to anyone in need, because everyone deserves food and nourishment.

Another example of reasons clients may have difficulty providing documentation, are because they are unhoused. It is important for us to understand how to best serve clients in our community within the circumstances they are facing.

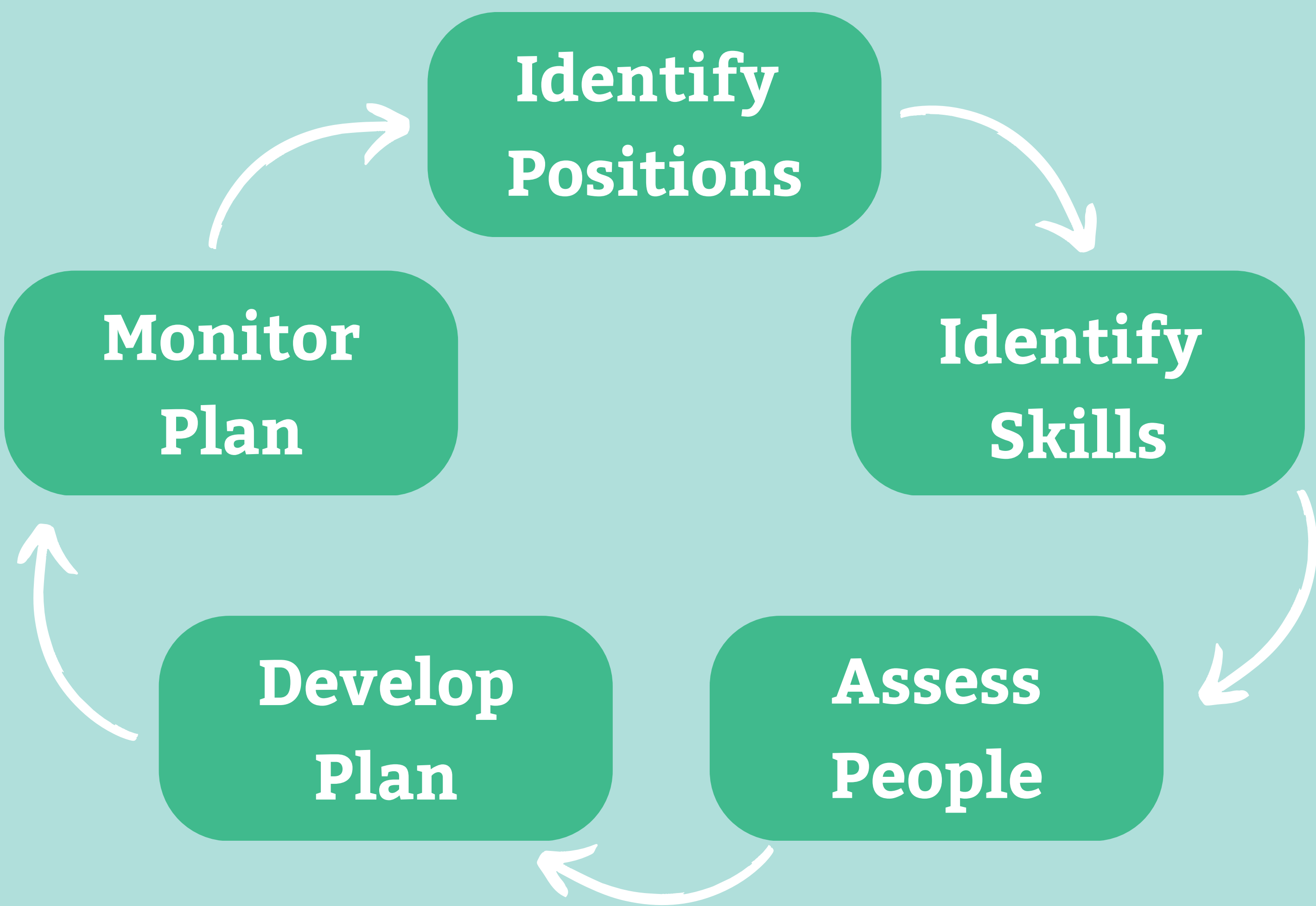
Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers are the backbone of every non-profit organization. If an organization lacks volunteer help, it can reduce the reach and potential of the organization in the community. See below for best practices in volunteer recruitment. For an extensive list of volunteer best practices, click HERE to view a resource created by Philabundance.

- Your greatest advocate is those already invested in your mission —your volunteers! Encouraging current volunteers to invite a group, club, organization, or workplace they are involved in is a quick way to engage additional people.
- Set up booths at community events with volunteer information and appropriate staff contacts to distribute. Don't forget that non-profit organizations can use Canva Pro for free, to create branded flyers, one-sheets, brochures, or cards. Click HERE for Canva Pro for non-profits.
- Use your local newspaper or community board in your city and post flyers in high traffic areas (local schools, churches, community centers, libraries, etc..) to get word out about your organization.
- Social media is an incredible tool for non-profit organizations to recruit volunteers. Posting on Instagram, LinkedIn, and Facebook is an easy (and free!) way for you to get the word out to a large audience. Don't forget to encourage your staff and volunteers to share your posts to their pages as well.
- Most high schools/universities require students to volunteer for credit. Connect with teachers and professors in your community and ask they recommend your organization as a place for students to volunteer.
- Communicate year-round opportunities to individuals that serve during peak volunteer seasons (Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years, Easter, etc.) and encourage them to come back! While we love the extra help around the holidays, it's important to remind people that there are opportunities to help all year.

Succession Planning

The topic of succession planning is one that most non-profits put off or do not think about until it is too late. Planning for the future is not on our minds, when so many other immediate challenges are demanding our time. However, it is always important to have a plan. Take the time to update job descriptions and duties for the pantry coordinator and volunteers. What would you want your successors to know, and how can you prepare now to ensure your organization is successful in the future and continues to make an impact? See below on ways you can start.



Click HERE for a resource created by Feeding America for more information about succession planning.

Toolkits

Operations	Choice Pantries
Resource Library	Federal Programs
Grant Writing	Innovative Resources
Client Care & Experience	Community Engagement
Marketing	Fundraising
Data	Pantry Best Practices

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK of MIDDLE TENNESSEE