Food Banks Canada

Without barriers, stigma, or fear

A practical guide to accessibility and equity for food banks

November 2023

These words are from people with lived experience of using a food bank and/or of food insecurity. They were gathered as part of a Food Banks Canada Participatory Action Research project to understand peoples' barriers to food access.

Social and emotional barriers

> We have not utilized the food bank or any food services personally, especially I would say because of the social stigma.

> In my culture, my background, I wasn't ready to, let's say, almost beg for something like this.

> I experience depression and anxiety and PTSD. It can be really hard to motivate myself to get to the food bank.

> I do know people around town here that do need the help and they absolutely refuse because of everybody being able to watch them go in there.

> Feeling like we can fit in with you guys here. You don't make us feel unwelcome. You don't care that we've been addicts. You don't care about domestic violence. You don't care about our past. You're willing to talk…and you don't judge.

Acknowledgements

Food Banks Canada would like to express gratitude to the food banks, associations, and networks who shared their stories and spoke to our team, generously sharing how they are working to create more accessible and equitable services. Keep the ideas coming!

This guide was developed by Food Banks Canada staff and peer researchers in collaboration with the team at Untapped Accessibility.

A special thank you to Food Banks BC for leading this work with the publication of A Guide to Accessibility and Equity for Food Banks. This national guide builds on this excellent work done in BC.

Thank you as well to the Walmart Foundation for funding this work.

Accessibility Statement

This guide is accessible to PDF/UA standards. If you require an alternative format, contact Food Banks Canada to request one: info@foodbankscanada.ca.

A Note on Language

This guide uses both identity-first and person-first language when discussing disabilities. We will use both person-first and identity-first language as a small gesture recognizing the diversity of language preferences within disability communities.

How to Report Errors or Give Feedback

We welcome your feedback. You can contact us via email at info@foodbankscanada.ca or via our website.

Territorial Acknowledgement

As an organization that supports a network of associations spanning coast-to-coast-to-coast, Food Banks Canada recognizes that our work takes place on the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples that have cared for this land that we now call Canada since time immemorial.

We acknowledge that many of us are settlers and that these lands that we live, work, meet, and travel on are either subject to First Nations self-government under modern treaty, unceded and un-surrendered territories, or traditional territories from which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples have been displaced.

We are committed to decolonization and to dismantling the systems of oppression that have dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands, including the land on which we operate on, and denied their rights to self-determination.

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Foreword

A welcome from Dan Hillyer, Food Banks Canada Peer Researcher

It is my pleasure to share with you my passion for the work of equity, diversity, and inclusion as a member of the team that developed this guide. I have learned from personal experience just how vital it is to feel welcomed and safe at a time of crisis. This is my story.

I am married and have four daughters. At first, we believed it was just a short-term rough patch and our normal strategies would get us through. But days turned into weeks and the cupboards were bare. I wasn't able to provide for my family.

The shame and embarrassment of going to the food bank was more than I could take. It was a much harder and bigger experience than being hungry. I felt like a failure as a father and community member. I felt like I was part of the problem; that I had become a burden on society.

It was really frightening when we did not have the ability to get even the essentials.

It was really frightening when we did not have the ability to get even the essentials. It consumed all my thoughts. I was always thinking about where the next meal would come from. It really felt like struggling just to keep your head above water. Eventually I had to ask, how bad do things have to get before I ask for help? My number one priority was to shield my sweet daughters from the stress of knowing that we were out of food.

The hopelessness and anxiety I experienced devastated my mental health and I began to question whether life was still worth living. I had finally reached rock bottom. In desperation, I contacted my local community food support. It took all the courage I could muster just to show up. I sobbed for an hour before I could get out of my vehicle and approach the intake worker.

I repeated out loud to myself "please be kind, please be kind, please be kind." The worker never knew this but she was the first person on my healing journey. She set the tone for this path for me. The first words I heard were "I am so glad you are here."

This set a life altering tone for me.

I was not a burden.

I was not a problem.

I was welcomed and I was safe.

I learned that each of us is only one crisis away from experiencing food insecurity. The number one reported barrier to accessing food supports in Canada is feelings of shame, guilt, and embarrassment[1].

Thank you for taking the time to improve your ability to make people like me feel safe and welcomed. It not only saved my life but started me on a path of healing to where I am thriving today. I cannot think of a more worthy endeavour.

A word from Kirstin Beardsley, Food Banks Canada CEO

Food bankers are a special kind of people. Collectively these humble folks roll up their sleeves daily to do right by our neighbours and communities. Rarely do they seek recognition for the work and how deeply critical it is in the lives of so many people. Food bankers are smart, innovative, tough leaders right across the country.

And food banks themselves are wonderful places – hubs of activity and civic engagement. Places where people from all walks of life can join together to give back and support brighter futures.

And yet, we know that making the decision to turn to a food bank and ask for help when you need it is never an easy one. Food banks at their best not only provide food but strive daily to be places of compassion and belonging for everyone who comes to our doors.

As the need for food banks grows right across the country, and the diversity of the clients we support increases, the work of building welcoming and accessible spaces is more critical than ever. We know that food insecurity and poverty don't affect all equally. As we address these issues at the personal, community, and systemic level, part of this work must involve looking at our own organizations and affirming our commitment to inclusion in all aspects of the work that we do. Let's leverage our leadership, innovation, and commitment to doing the work outlined in this guide.

I want to thank Dan Huang-Taylor and the Food Banks BC team for their leadership in building this accessibility guide and allowing us to adapt it for a cross-Canada audience. This leadership will continue to have an impact on the work of food banks and those we serve all across the country.

I would also like to thank Dan Hillyer, Amber Summerhayes, and the peer research partners who supported this work. It's critical on this journey to centre the voices of those with lived experience of food insecurity and ensure they are at the centre of the changes we make.

I hope this guide reminds you that you are among friends and supporters.

Our vision at Food Banks Canada is a Canada where no one goes hungry. We work hard to address the root causes of food bank use and advocate for long-term social policy change. Until food banks are no longer needed, we must strive to ensure that everyone, right across the country, has access to the healthy, fresh, and culturally appropriate food they need in an environment that supports dignity and a sense of belonging. My hope is that every food banker across Canada reads this guide and commits to new ways of increasing access to their services. Whether this is new for your food bank, or you've been at this a while, I hope this guide reminds you that you are among friends and supporters on this journey and that any changes you make towards increased equity and inclusion will have positive impacts in real people's lives.

Thank you for your commitment and hard work towards a Canada where no one goes hungry.

Introduction

Who is this guide for?

This guide is a practical document that aims to help food bank operators, associations, and networks within our membership and beyond adopt more equitable and accessible practices. We've written this guide keeping in mind the people or person in your organization and/or your network or membership responsible for the day-to-day operations of your food bank. The information shared will support frontline staff and volunteers in better supporting the people who access your services, but we also hope it can support the creation of a safer environment.

How was the guide created?

This guide expands on A Guide to Accessibility and Equity for Food Banks published by Food Banks BC as a resource for BC food banks to answer the following research question:

What are food banks and other community-serving organizations doing to improve accessibility and equity internationally, nationally, and in our home province? What practices can we recommend to Food Banks BC members?

Published in May 2023, this original guide was the result of a review of promising practices in equity and accessibility at food banks and other food security organizations. Additionally, interviews were completed with food banks and community-based programs in BC to understand more about what food bank operators are already doing to make their services more welcoming, dignified, and inclusive for all community members.

The Food Banks Canada edition

Food Banks Canada was inspired to build on this resource as a foundation for this Practical Guide to Accessibility and Equity for Food Banks. With the support of Untapped Accessibility, Food Banks Canada supported its development with new and revised content.

The guide includes seven feature profiles from food banks, food banking associations, and community organizations in Canada that are practicing accessibility and equity.

You will also hear the voices of people with lived experience of accessing food banks in the opening and closing of the guide.

Accessibility and equity practices were part of developing the guide itself by using aspects of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach. Peer researchers with lived experience of disability and using food banks were core members of the team, conducting the interviews with the organizations profiled and providing content and feedback. Learn more about PAR in the Spotlight in Part Two.

We hope the revised and expanded content and especially the organizational profiles and their practical advice will further support accessibility and equity practices for food banks.

Why this work is important

In the decades food banks have existed, much has changed. Over time, we have seen shifts in how food banks understand their role in alleviating poverty and food insecurity. We've come to understand that our role includes advocacy and addressing the social injustices that cause food insecurity.

> **No one gets turned away without something at our food bank.**

Our communities themselves have also changed in many ways. Global migration patterns have brought new communities with unique cultures, languages, and dietary needs that need to be welcomed and supported. Folks who access food banks – especially those facing disproportionate discrimination, stigma, and barriers – must be at the centre of how our organizations run.

Supporting equity-deserving communities could mean stepping outside of our comfort zone to get help with what we don't know. It might look like inviting those most impacted by an organization's decisions to have power in those decisions.

"No one gets turned away without *something* at our food bank." We heard some variation of this repeatedly

during several of our conversations with food banks. Even in the face of global pandemics and supply chain issues, floods and forest fires, food bank operators amaze us with their capacity to look at what is in front of them and see it as something to work with.

We encourage anyone who is reading this guide to hold on to that spirit of abundance that you find every time a community member comes through the door and consider the suggestions in this guide for your community.

Thank you to the food bank operators and associations who shared their experiences and practices

We want to say a big thank you to the food banks and associations who took the time to speak with us. We learned so much from our conversations with the Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association's Food Bank in Montreal, Food Bank Society of the Yukon, Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak's Food Bank in Thompson, Edmonton's Food Bank, Moisson Montreal, Feed Ontario, and the AIDS Committee of Ottawa's Food Bank.

Thank you again as well to the BC food banks who hosted and spoke with us for the first edition of this guide: SHARE Family and Community Services in the Tri-Cities, Pemberton Food Bank, Surrey Food Bank, Revelstoke Community Connections Food Bank, Victoria's Mustard Seed, The Link Food Centre in Burns Lake, Chetwynd Tansi Friendship Centre Food Bank in Chetwynd, Saige Community Food Bank in Vancouver, and Surrey's Muslim Food Bank.

How to use this guide

Equity and accessibility are journeys our organizations are being called to embark upon. As we saw in our discussions with those interviewed, many organizations already have goals and practices for creating a more equitable, welcoming, and accessible food bank, and others are just beginning their journey of

asking questions like, "Who is not coming to our food bank and why?" and "What are the experiences of those who are coming?"

This guide walks you through some of the reasons why people experiencing food insecurity in your community may not be coming to your food bank and some of the barriers and experiences equity-deserving communities may be facing. We focus on what might be within your control to change.

Part One of the guide follows the experience of food bank users from the time they consider coming to pick up food for the first time, to when they arrive at your front door, and their experience receiving food.

Part Two of the guide includes leading practices organized by equity-deserving groups. For organizations that are further along their journey, this section may help you focus on a particular community you already know needs your attention.

Using the Accessibility and Equity Checklist

In the appendices, you will find a quick Accessibility and Equity Checklist that you can use to evaluate your own food bank.

Key Definitions

Below is a list of key terms to help you use this guide. Please see the glossary at the end of this guide for a longer list of key terms.

Accessibility	Accessibility is the work we do to ensure people with disabilities can access services and all aspects of society on an equal basis with others. It includes seeking ways to remove barriers to access including physical barriers, attitudes, policies, technology, and how we communicate information.
Dignified Service	Delivering service supports the self-respect of the person, recognizes their inherent value, and does nothing to undermine it.
Equity	Equity refers to achieving parity in policy, process, and outcomes for historically and/or currently underrepresented and/or marginalized people and groups while accounting for diversity. It considers power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes.

Talking About Accessibility and Equity

What does it look like when you create a welcoming and dignified space?

Our research showed us that many food banks and food security groups are asking this question, and the answers guide their work daily.

The moments when you know your food bank is offering a dignified and welcoming environment have a calm and grounded feel to them, but they are also the result of paying attention to the details of someone's experience.

Maybe you sense folks are feeling treated with dignity when some of the visitors to the food bank make eye contact, and you can greet some of them by name. Perhaps you knew it was happening the day that one of your staff brought in lilacs from home to decorate the tables, and the flowers seemed to relax everyone who paused to admire them.

Maybe you knew you'd achieved a new level of welcoming the day an Arabic-speaking volunteer greeted a Syrian family in their language for the first time, and you heard relief in their voices. Or maybe it was the day you finally got the landlord to agree to open the washroom to your clients. It might have been when a client picked up a shopping basket to shop the new choice-based model, and you saw people keenly reading labels.

Maybe it was that time a community member approached you and said, "Can I give you some feedback?"

In 2021, food security groups in Vancouver met to discuss the core elements of dignified food access. They name four key features that come alive in a dignified space in their Dignified Food Access Report**.**

01		Community members **have a voice and are engaged** in how the program runs and have a say in how to remove barriers.
02		Community members **feel safe expressing themselves** freely and without fear.
03		**Relationships start to form,** where community members socialize, share information, and show care towards each other.
04		Food choices are **fresh, comforting, and familiar.**

What do we mean when we say accessible and equitable?

Equity. Diversity. Inclusion. Belonging. Accessibility. Currently, there are many terms that help us ask, "Who isn't being appropriately supported and welcomed here, and how can that change?" For some, it feels like as soon as we get comfortable with one concept, another term gains preference.

We've included definitions of many of these terms in the glossary as we think they can all be helpful "lenses" to apply to how a food bank is set up and run.

Why equity?

While all these terms bring value to the driving question, we chose equity because it prompts us to think in two directions.

First, equity invites us to think about how an individual's identity might impact their experience of our food bank. For example, how does a client's identity as a queer person or as a person with a disability impact what they feel they can share without jeopardizing their access to your services?

Second, equity encourages us as food bank operators to think about how we can adjust the rules, opportunities, and resources at our disposal to ensure a diverse group of community members feel welcome.

Equity helps us consider what we can do to ensure that a diversity of people, including racialized people, Indigenous peoples, trans and other gender-diverse peoples, and people living with disabilities can access our services on an equal basis to others.

Why accessibility?

While equity is about seeking parity for many communities, including people with disabilities, our research showed that the access needs of people living with disabilities are often overlooked. This is especially concerning given that people with disabilities experience poverty and food insecurity at disproportionately higher rates. Statistics Canada reports 50% of people experiencing food insecurity live with a disability[2] and this has been true for a very long time.

Over the course of our interviews, we found many practical ways that food banks have been improving access for people living with disabilities. The recommendations we make in this guide include what food banks have been doing to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

A community hub for racialized and newcomer neighbours in Montreal

Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association

Territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation

Some context

Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association (CDNBCA) has been around for an incredible 50 years. Lisa Stanisclaus, the Program Manager, talks about how they are an inter-generational organization. This is true both in their longevity, working with generations over so many decades, as well as their approach to offering programming, resources, and most of all a safe space for people of all ages from family programs, day camps, youth and teen programs, and support for seniors. As Lisa says, "we provide services that suit the needs of the community."

The organization is open to anyone with a focus on racialized English-speaking communities living in Montreal's Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood who experience language and other barriers to accessing services and supports which are often in French.

The organization's name honours its origins when Côte-des-Neiges was home to folks from the Caribbean, many of whom have moved away over time. The neighbourhood is now home to many communities including those of African, South Asian, and still many of Carribean descent.

Their staying power and deep equity and accessibility practice comes from CDNBCA's community-centred nature, prioritizing building relationships and intentionally welcoming folks in a good way through their partnership approach.

What they did

Folks across CDNBCA's program areas and those walking in for the first time can access the organization's food bank, a partnership with Moisson Montreal, also profiled in this guide. As with so many food banks, they saw way more people coming to access food – especially newcomers including refugees – over the pandemic. As emergency COVID funding disappeared, they now regularly run out of food, unable to support everyone coming through their doors.

When the funding was available, they listened to what foods were most desired, comforting, and familiar by the community. Items like plantains, yams, cassava, and ginger were purchased from a local Caribbean African market garden as was meat.

Lisa laments that they can't offer those foods anymore without this purchasing power and worries about giving people items they can't use. The food bank hopes that an emerging partnership with MultiCaf, a food security organization in the neighbourhood, will be able to get meat back on the menu.

No matter what someone is coming through the door for, even if it's something CDNBCA can't directly support they will find the right resource and connection. As Lisa reflects, "even if we don't speak the same language, people will feel your character and energy of who you are and know you're willing to help them." Lisa and her colleagues have assisted many people from different backgrounds despite language barriers.

This isn't always the approach of longstanding organizations as Lisa notes that organizations can get entrenched, become too cookie cutter, and stay in their box. CDNBCA is attuned to changing as its community has over so many years.

Partnerships are also how they intentionally keep learning about what is happening and needed in Côte-des-Neiges. Staff will regularly meet with other organizations — especially those centring racialized communities — in the neighbourhood for these exchanges and to explore new ways to partner and share what they have.

It's the staff and volunteers who are welcoming and having direct conversations with community members who also know what's going on. Folks like Robert John, Facility Operation Coordinator and key person for their food bank, have the pulse through his gift in building relationships and taking things slow. He notices how common it is for people to come back after a first visit, often with family and friends, and how powerful word of mouth is for inviting new people to their programming, including the food bank.

Lisa offers their philosophy to "never lose the I'm your neighbour" feeling when working with folks, as well as one of her favourite lines to "meet people where they're at", focusing on what someone's experience and needs are that day over anything else.

More practices to consider

CDNBCA has great accessibility and equity practices in all of what they do. They're diligent in different approaches for different groups. For example, with their seniors, they know printing material is best and so while other programs for younger folks might be shared online and through social media, flyers are printed and distributed for their seniors programming.

What Keeps Food-Insecure People Away from Food Banks?

Barrier 1: Stigma

Research from the Canadian Community Health Survey has shown that only 1 in 5 food-insecure people access a food bank[3]. Accessing food banks, and asking for help in general, comes with barriers and stigma for many. Many people facing food insecurity avoid services like food banks because of the associated stigma and the legitimate worry that a characteristic or identity of theirs will lead to discrimination.

Food bank operators recognize that the day someone comes to the food bank for the first time may be one of the most challenging days of their life. In smaller communities, the fear of being recognized by a neighbour or co-worker brings home the risk of stigma in a genuine way. Whereas people living in larger urban centres may travel to a food bank outside their neighbourhood to avoid being recognized, this is not an option in many small communities.

For racialized community members, including Indigenous people, stigma can be layered. While anyone may feel stigmatized visiting a food bank because of the value placed on individualism and self-sufficiency, Indigenous people also contend with racist narratives that suggest Indigenous communities are already too dependent or receive more help than settler and especially white Canadians. Refugees and newcomers may also feel this stigma or different stigma related to their culture of origin and how asking for help is viewed.

Reducing stigma: What are food banks doing?

Food banks are trying many things to reduce the stigma associated with accessing them. Some organizations are taking the word "food bank" out of their name in hopes that this will reduce the stigma.[4] Sometimes the renaming is a simple rebranding, and in other cases, it follows an effort to offer food alongside wrap-around supports like counselling, parenting programs, and other types of community programs.

Other food banks have aimed to reduce stigma by moving from locations like church basements, which can carry challenges for some to visit, to community spaces like neighbourhood houses and friendship centres. By locating the food bank within a building with many programs running at the same time, food bank visitors may also feel more welcomed stepping into the space.

Outdoor lineups can be very stigmatizing, as food bank users are often in view of the public, including their neighbours, and may be exposed to the elements. Some operators have taken steps to bring lineups inside or have created indoor waiting areas. Others have implemented appointment times or increased their hours of operation to reduce wait times. These efforts can help drastically reduce, or even eliminate, lineups altogether.

Some food banks are looking at how filling out paperwork increases barriers, fear, anxiety, and stigma for new members. Food bank operators have reduced the level of detail they request from community members at registration. In these cases, food banks are balancing their desire for good data practices and diligence for their funders, with the comfort and dignity of their community members.

What more can food banks do?

What actions your food bank can take to reduce stigma depends on many unique factors, but all food banks could benefit from asking for input from the community members most impacted by these practices.

In 2021, the US Institute for Hunger Research and Solutions surveyed 1,000 people about their concerns and experiences using food banks. Their report Creating a Dignified and Welcoming Environment in Food Pantries offers recommendations for addressing stigma, including how to ask community members for their perspectives.

Barrier 2: Discrimination

Discrimination is what happens when stereotypes impact the way a person is treated. Community members may have experienced discrimination because they live in poverty or because of other aspects of their identity, like their gender expression, disability status, race or cultural background, or experience with the justice system. The discrimination may have occurred at your food bank, another food bank, or another type of organization. Wherever the discrimination occurred, it may inform how a person behaves or feels when they arrive at your location if they do decide to come.

Addressing Bias

Bias happens. Much of the time it is unconscious and unintentional. While it's impossible to completely rid yourself of bias, staff and volunteers can work to ensure that bias isn't driving decisions.

Learning to recognize the types of bias can be a helpful first step. From there, there are many recommendations on how to disrupt implicit bias, namely slowing down your decision-making process, formalizing the way you make decisions, and working with your team to make automatic processes more conscious.[5]

As with the experience of discrimination, food bank clients may have been impacted by bias before, which may inform how they receive requests for personal information or how

policies are applied. A good decision-making process that can be explained or provided in writing can help build trust and assure clients that decisions are fair and unbiased.

Communication Barriers

When community members don't understand the rules and expectations at your food bank, the consequences can be harmful. They may be prevented from accessing services at all. As a reaction to this bias, they may behave in ways that may be interpreted as disrespectful by others.

Some of the most common communication barriers are related to a mismatch in the languages spoken by community members and those of your staff and/or volunteers. If your food bank relies on sharing information verbally, this can present barriers for hard of hearing and D/deaf people and for people who process written information better. For clients with anxiety or who are English language learners, taking in a lot of verbal communication can be overwhelming.

Food banks that reduce communication barriers provide a more welcoming experience and tend to run more smoothly for all.

Physical Barriers

A set of stairs, a lack of available washrooms, or a location without accessible parking are just a few of the ways that the physical location of your food bank might get in the way of food access for many.

We may default to thinking about people with mobility-related disabilities when we think about physical barriers. The design and workings of your food bank location can also welcome or discourage people who have experienced trauma or violence. Caregivers with strollers and seniors will also benefit from a space where physical barriers have been reduced.

The perceived safety level in a space may also present barriers for some food bank users. Food banks located

in commercial areas with poor lighting, or where there is unsafe behaviour, may deter community members from returning.

Transportation Barriers

Transportation barriers come up for many low-income people. In small communities with little public transit, just getting to the food bank can require carpooling, hitchhiking, or arranging with neighbours or family members to share in pick-ups. In larger communities, scheduling issues, lack of bus fare, or difficulty carrying heavy items can leave people weighing whether a visit is worth it.

Loralee Seitz, Foodbank Coordinator at Pemberton Food Bank, noted that they adjusted their opening hours to align with transit schedules so that community members living in an adjacent rural community could make the trip.

"This was to help not only with accessibility but to ensure individuals could get home quickly with fresh foods needing refrigeration. The bus only runs a few times a day between communities, so this was a priority for our open hours," Loralee reported.

The Indy Hunger Network, out of the Indianapolis area, published a Manual of Best Practices for Food Pantries which advises that the best food bank locations are easy to get to by transit, have free parking for clients, and have a good supply of bike racks.

Community-centred service over 800 kilometers

Food Bank Society of the Yukon

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and the Kwanlin Dün First Nation Territory

Some context

The Food Bank Society of the Yukon (formerly the Whitehorse Food Bank) was opened in 2009 by a group of community members concerned about the high rates of poverty in the city. The food bank was their response to helping alleviate the food access needs of people experiencing poverty.

Since the onset of the pandemic, the organization has shifted in big ways to create access for communities throughout the Yukon and Northern BC. The cost of living, including food, is much higher in these more remote and rural communities. The cost of a nutritious diet in Yukon communities outside of Whitehorse is at least 10% higher.[6]

Community members will sometimes travel into Whitehorse to shop for groceries and essentials or visit the food bank. This is only an option for some as many don't have access to the transportation or funds to make what can be a very long and expensive trip.

What they did

The organization now offers food in eight community locations across an 810-kilometer radius in addition to its Whitehorse site. Volunteers largely operate these locations and each one is purposefully different. Executive Director Dave Blottner is clear that "There is no cookie cutter approach. We need to get over the colonial mindset that everyone has to do it 'our way' according to some model from Whitehorse. This is an expression of our values that everything has to be community-led."

What this looks like in practice is that across the eight communities there is a variety of ways people can access food including choice shopping pantries, hamper pickups, and door-to-door "milk run" hamper deliveries like the program in Haines Junction where the mobile food bank covers a 200km stretch.

People who are neurodiverse are supported to volunteer as well as find employment with the food bank.

Commitments to accessibility and flexibility are of course also practiced at the Whitehorse location. The food bank recently piloted a program in Whitehorse for people without a fixed address who don't have access to storage or kitchen facilities. The food bank started doing hampers with two days of ready to eat items that folks could easily carry and use.

The Food Bank Society of the Yukon also practices its commitment to accessibility in its work with people who are neurodiverse. In partnership with Inclusion Yukon, people who are neurodiverse are supported to volunteer as well as find employment with the food bank. The food bank always sends its job postings to Inclusion Yukon first to encourage people who are neurodiverse in applying. Prospective applicants get support from Inclusion Yukon with the application process.

More practices to consider

Some other practices that bring their value of accessibility to life:

- The food bank works with organizations like Queer Yukon and groups working with newcomers, including recent arrivals from Ukraine, for tours and an intentional introduction to accessing and volunteering at the food bank.
- Board of Director positions are prioritized for people from First Nations communities across the Yukon.
- From conversation with clients, an organizational policy was developed that does not allow the government, media, or other entities access to food bank clients for interviews or photos to protect anonymity.

Getting in the Door: Creating More Inclusive and Accessible Experiences for New Food Bank Visitors

What is a disability?

All this may have you wondering about the definition of a disability. The definition of what is or isn't a disability is changing. For example, in 2017, Statistics Canada changed the definition of a disability to include mental health conditions and addiction.[7]

Then in 2019, the federal government passed the Accessible Canada Act, which includes a definition of disability that says a disability isn't just a health condition, but what happens when a person with that health condition comes up against a barrier that hinders their full and equal participation in society.[8]

This idea is known as a social model of disability. The social model recognizes that attitudes, stigma, and how we design policies and spaces are the factors that actually disable a person, not their medical condition.

You may have policies that look at disability as a medical condition that requires accommodation. For example, you may have a policy that people who can't stand in line must bring a doctor's note confirming their disability. This sort of policy doesn't align with a social model because the social model argues that people with disabilities are the authorities on their needs, not their doctors.

Food Access and Disability

The physical location of a food bank can significantly impact who can access food and who feels safe there. Changing the site itself may be within the operational control of the food bank, but it may not. In each case, food banks are taking action to improve the physical accessibility of their spaces.

Some food banks have a permanent space and others use borrowed or shared space. Some can improve their physical space, for example, by upgrading the front door with an automatic open button or adding grab bars in the washroom.

Some food banks have created policies that support people with apparent disabilities like mobility challenges or obvious frailty to avoid lining up. SHARE Family and Community

Services in the Tri-Cities area of BC reduced wait times and lines for seniors and those with physical disabilities by arranging different pickup days for these groups. SHARE has also extended its hours of operation from one to three hours, which reduces the wait time and the need for anyone to line up.

Beyond Mobility

Physical accessibility doesn't just impact visitors using mobility devices like scooters and wheelchairs. Many people can experience physical access issues. While it would occur to most people that a building entrance with stairs, but no elevator, is likely preventing some people from accessing the food bank, there are other barriers here to consider.

Some food bank visitors may have invisible or non-apparent disabilities. People with conditions like Crohn's disease, anxiety, autism, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can find lineups an insurmountable barrier.

People with less visible disabilities may have been told by people in positions of power that they are not disabled enough to qualify for an accommodation. They may have been doubted or accused of exaggerating their health condition. These past experiences may make it difficult for people with non-apparent disabilities to risk asking a food bank operator to excuse them from a lineup. They may not speak up or avoid coming again.

Non-Apparent Disabilities

Neurodivergent individuals

Neurodivergent people may process sensory information differently and find the noise level or the brightness of the food bank space overwhelming. Neurodivergent individuals may also benefit from clear signage explaining the rules and how the food service works as they may receive written information better than oral. Without these simple supports, they may feel anxious about the possibility of getting the process wrong. To understand more about how to create sensory-friendly spaces, you can watch this video.

Environmental allergies and sensitivities

Scented products, including perfumes, cleaning products, and even scented garbage bags, can create barriers for people with chemical sensitivities. Posting a scent-free policy for your facility may help. Templates are available at the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety website.

Developmental and cognitive disabilities

People with developmental disabilities or cognitive disabilities may visit the food bank with their support worker. Keep this in mind if your food bank has capacity limits on the food bank space. In such cases, some food banks have confirmed support workers can pick up on behalf of their clients.

Vision and hearing-related disabilities

The extent of a person's vision or hearing disability may determine whether a non-disabled person views it as apparent. The best way to prepare a welcoming and accessible environment for people with these types of disabilities is to offer information and greetings in both verbal and written formats.

Vision-related disabilities include folks with low vision and those without any vision who describe themselves as blind. In either case, you may find that the person uses a white cane or a service dog to help them navigate their trip to the food bank. There is guide dog legislation across Canada prohibiting discrimination towards a person with a disability accessing services with a guide dog.[9]

Blind and low-vision community members may use certain apps or assistive technologies to research community programs online. If your website is not accessible, blind and low-vision visitors may not be able to use your website to find out basic information like when the food bank opens. In fact, 96% of websites are not accessible.[10] If your website is not accessible, in the short term, you can plan for alternate ways for people to get information about your services by phone or email. And in the longer term, make sure that accessibility is addressed in your next website overhaul.

Hearing-related disabilities include people with some degree of hearing loss, others who have more "profound" hearing loss but may speak, and D/deaf people who rely on writing or American Sign Language to communicate with hearing people. Providing information in writing can reduce barriers for D/deaf and hard of hearing community members. If finding a volunteer or staff member who knows American Sign Language is not possible, staff and volunteers can learn some basic signs that will help create a welcoming environment for D/deaf visitors.

This short video covers 50 signs that can help you provide customer service in ASL. Other folks may have apps on their phone to communicate with you. Otter.ai is a dictation program that instantly transcribes a conversation. The program has a free version food bank operators can also upload to a phone or tablet.

New Home, Fresh Start

Rome wasn't built in a day, as the saying goes, and neither is an entirely accessible food bank. Several food banks we spoke to have used recent moves as a good time to prioritize accessibility. Community Connections in Revelstoke moved into a new space in 2022 and were able to renovate it to include a covered walkway and wheelchair accessible front door. Likewise, Pemberton's food bank recently moved into a new site and now has a door with an automatic open button. Shelving units are also placed and spaced in ways that are mindful of access issues for strollers and wheelchairs.

If you aren't expecting to move anytime soon, a first step is to use our Accessibility and Equity Checklist in Appendix B to assess some key issues. Including any discoveries you

make on your website or in your pamphlets is another small step you can take to ensure disabled guests are at least prepared for potential accessibility barriers. For example, Gordon Neighbourhood House in downtown Vancouver includes a list of accessibility features on its website.

If you identify accessibility improvements you want to make to your physical space, some funding is available. For federal supports, you can subscribe to receive email notifications when new grants become available.

Registration Requirements

An unclear or lengthy registration process can be a barrier for many community members. A 2017 study by the US-based Indy Hunger Network suggested that nearly 40% of people in need of food assistance will go hungry rather than submit to a poorly structured screening process.[11] The question of how a food-insecure person accesses food is a tricky subject. Food banks may feel they have solid values-driven policies. Others may feel swayed by the opinions of donors and funders which may not prioritize low-barrier registration practices.

Many food bank operators we spoke to expressed empathy for community members coming to a food bank for the first time. At Community Connections Revelstoke Society, Melissa Hemphill, Community Outreach and Development Co-Director, and Hannah Whitney, Community Food and Outreach Coordinator, told us that the organization carefully weighed the cost of a lengthy registration process against the valuable data it can provide. Ultimately, they decided that minimizing stigma and potential anxiety for food insecure people was more important than the data collection.

Now, the food program has no eligibility requirements. Instead, staff offer new food bank users an optional questionnaire. Melissa and Hannah have a long-term relationship in mind for new visitors and are committed to getting to know community members. Over time, they make inquiries about personal information to connect the individual to other resources at their centre or elsewhere that can also be helpful.

Melissa and Hannah also find more informal ways of gathering data, such as running informal surveys or posting a question of the week. These casual activities still act as conversation starters and help Community Connections understand who they are serving. They can then use this information as a qualitative data source in reports or in discussions with donors.

Most of the food banks we interviewed are putting the comfort of community members ahead of data collection to some degree. Saige Food Bank serves trans and gender-nonconforming members of the community. Saige has a barrier-free approach to its services. There is no requirement to register or provide identification.

For gender diverse and transgender community members, their identification may be outdated and no longer reflect their name and gender. Identification may also be hard to hold onto for trans and queer youth who may be experiencing homelessness and don't have a safe space to store essential documents.

The issue of ID can be complicated for other community members as well. Temporary foreign workers, refugees, and undocumented people who have migrated may not have ID to present or may find an invasive registration process triggers memories of traumatic experiences in their country of origin or in their journey to Canada.

Requiring ID and other documentation such as proof of residency and migration status can also create environments of fear and deny people access to their basic needs and rights. The Sanctuary City Movement works to create safer access to services for all people based on need rather than migration status.

There are currently seven Sanctuary Cities in the part of Turtle Island some now call Canada that have adopted Access Without Fear policies and practices. These aim to ensure access to services without fear based on migration status, although, there are many obstacles to ensuring these policies and practices are implemented even once adopted.[12]

The Sanctuary City Movement on Coast Salish Territories in Greater Vancouver has principles and practices for cities and organizations to follow:

Access to basic and essential services will be determined by need and not migration statust

Support such as education, health services, food security, dignified housing, public transit, public safety, legal aid, and municipal services are meant for everyone regardless of status. This means:

01 Not asking for proof of citizenship or information regarding immigration status when people are accessing services

02 In circumstances when identification (ID) is required, service providers will accept other forms of identification, including but not limited to, letters of reference/support, municipal ID, expired ID

03 Apply human and labour rights equally to all people regardless of migration status, and value people based upon their humanity

Access without fear

The fear of debt, deportation, and/or death should not limit people's access to services. We recognize that the responsibility of enforcing immigration law falls onto Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) alone, and is not the responsibility of service providers, health care workers, other police agencies, transit security nor the municipal government. As such service providers will:

01 Treat all information regarding other peoples' immigration status as strictly confidential, and never share it

02 Create and ensure CBSA free zones, where public spaces such as hospitals, clinics, schools, parks, community centres, neighbourhood houses, settlement services, food banks, libraries, shelters, construction sites, city hall and public transit are zones where CBSA are not called, welcomed, or allowed entry

03 Ensure that municipal and public resources will not be used to support CBSA investigations or activities

While most food banks are looking to reduce barriers related to registration, not all food banks feel they can step away from this traditional approach. Some food banks still require financial "proof" of hardship, often referred to as "means-testing", including gathering bank statements and tax information.

Some food banks said they feel a responsibility to donors who see an extensive registration process as showing diligent use of donor dollars. Others may know that the concerns about abuse of service are usually unfounded, but they feel powerless to change donor perceptions.

At a time when food bank use is climbing, some food banks holding on to means-testing may use it to limit the volume of people who access services. They may rationalize the policy as reserving limited resources for those who need them most. Unfortunately, this approach may include harmful assumptions about who needs support most and deserves

it. If your food bank still requires financial documentation, proof of address and/or ID, you may be serving those who can comply with your requirements at the exclusion of others living with a deeper level of food insecurity.

Food banks who have stepped away from financial means-testing note that such processes were administratively expensive to run, and management of private information was a burden that didn't serve their mission or their community.

In 2022, Food Banks BC's members responded to a survey on the question of means-testing. Results showed that only 10% of respondents still practice means-testing.

Community Food Centres Canada's Beyond the Emergency: How to evolve your food bank into a force for change includes the following list of questions to help you assess whether your registration process may be creating barriers for some community members:

Intake self-assessment

The following questions will help you assess if your food bank's intake process adequately conveys respect and supports people's dignity:

- Do you collect more than name and address? If so, why do you need this extra information?

- How much time do you spend determining someone's eligibility? Is that where you want to spend your time?

- Consider the perspective of someone coming to get the food. How would it feel to be asked the questions in your intake process?

- Does your organization have an undue emphasis on preventing fraud or "double dipping"?

- Do you do means-testing? If so, why is this important?

The same guide recommends that food banks looking to create a more equitable registration process collect the minimum amount of information required to distinguish households from each other.

A few additional considerations building on the intake reflection questions above.

Informed consent

Does your organization practice informed consent? When asking people for information, is the purpose clear? Do they know why they are being asked something and can they consent to answering?

For example, is it explicit whether something is being asked for registration/intake purposes and will impact their ability to access food? Can people choose not to answer certain intake questions and still know they can access food?

Are the questions being asked voluntary as part of something like a research project? For example, the Link2Feed questionnaire used in many food banks across Canada includes many voluntary questions for research purposes. The purpose in asking them is to inform social change through research and has no bearing on someone's ability to access food.

Considerations in asking for addresses

Is asking for an address truly necessary? This can be a barrier for people without a fixed address and for people who are undocumented and living in well-founded fear of authorities, as some examples.

Even if an organization has a strong commitment to confidentiality and not sharing information with police, immigration, and other bodies, it is understandable that people living with that amount of fear might be hesitant to trust organizations when there can be immense consequences when sharing their information.

Their other key piece of advice is to not overly focus on perceived "fraud". A 2018 study by a research

team at the University of British Columbia confirmed that most food bank users do need food support. Many fall into the category of severely food insecure, which means missing meals due to a lack of food. Severe food insecurity is linked to adverse health impacts.[13]

Registration requirements can create barriers to equity for some of the people experiencing the most food insecurity in our communities. Food banks need to think carefully about how they may reinforce and/or perpetuate the stigma and stereotypes that follow people living in poverty.

Community Outreach

With the growing number of community members experiencing food insecurity, your organization is probably dealing with growing numbers of community members coming to you. But it's worth asking who is finding your food bank and who is not.

Are there particular communities that are underrepresented in your food bank usership compared to what you know about your community's makeup? You can research the local groups that have strong relationships with those communities and meet with them to learn more. They may have ways to share information about your food bank hours, registration requirements, or partner in other ways.

We suggest asking what programs they offer or wish to offer and how you might support each other. Also, compare notes to ensure that your programs don't run at the same time each week, or if they do, perhaps there is an opportunity to partner and coordinate.

Language Support

Many of the food banks we spoke to are taking steps to ensure that community members can still get the information they need about how the food bank works. Signage and printed information are the first steps to improving the experience for community members. Food banks such as Edmonton's Food Bank profiled in this guide also intentionally build a team of staff and volunteers who share a language with people who visit the food bank to support their experience.

Signage

To ensure that signage is helpful to as many people as possible, try using signage that relies more on images and numbers to convey information. This type of signage can help people with learning disabilities too. Food banks using a choice model can label shelves or tables with image-based signs to show the maximum number of items available based on family size.

If you have recruited volunteers or staff who represent the language diversity of your community, they can help with signage translation.

Consider posting signage that notes the languages spoken by your volunteers and staff close to the entrance of the food bank or near your registration area. Staff and volunteers could also include what languages they speak on a nametag. To make signage accessible, use large print and high contrast between text and background.

Paperwork

For more complicated documents like a registration form or handbook, paying a professional translator may be worth the expense so you can be confident it reflects the information and the tone you wanted. Like any writing exercise, unconscious bias may impact the word choices or tone a writer uses. If you are using a volunteer or staff member to translate materials, it may be helpful to have a few proofreaders confirm that the tone and language choices work and will contribute to a welcoming and dignified environment.

Assistive Technology

Even when you have recruited multi/bilingual staff and volunteers and translated materials, there will be days when someone arrives at the food bank and there is no fluent speaker available to welcome them.

At these times, Google Translate is a free website and app you can download to a phone or tablet. While not perfect, it can help you converse in over 130 languages.

If the person is D/deaf, you can use a pen and paper or load Otter.ai on your phone. The free version transcribes what you say instantly.

Hand Talk is an app that can translate English into American Sign Language for Deaf community members.

For community members who are literate but unable to use their voice due to aphasia, nonverbal autism, stroke, or other speech and language disorders, Spoken is an app that can help them to verbalize what they type in.

Delivery Options

Food banks have developed creative strategies for welcoming community members by going to them. Mobile food markets, hamper deliveries, and partnerships with other organizations that can act as satellite pickup locations are all strategies food banks have developed to meet people closer to home.

Community Connections in Revelstoke began experimenting with home delivery options during the COVID-19 pandemic. Public health orders that limited the number of people who could come into their space at once inspired them to develop a food hamper delivery program. While the program had value for many community members, they found it especially helpful to people with disabilities. They have chosen to keep the program running as an accessibility support.

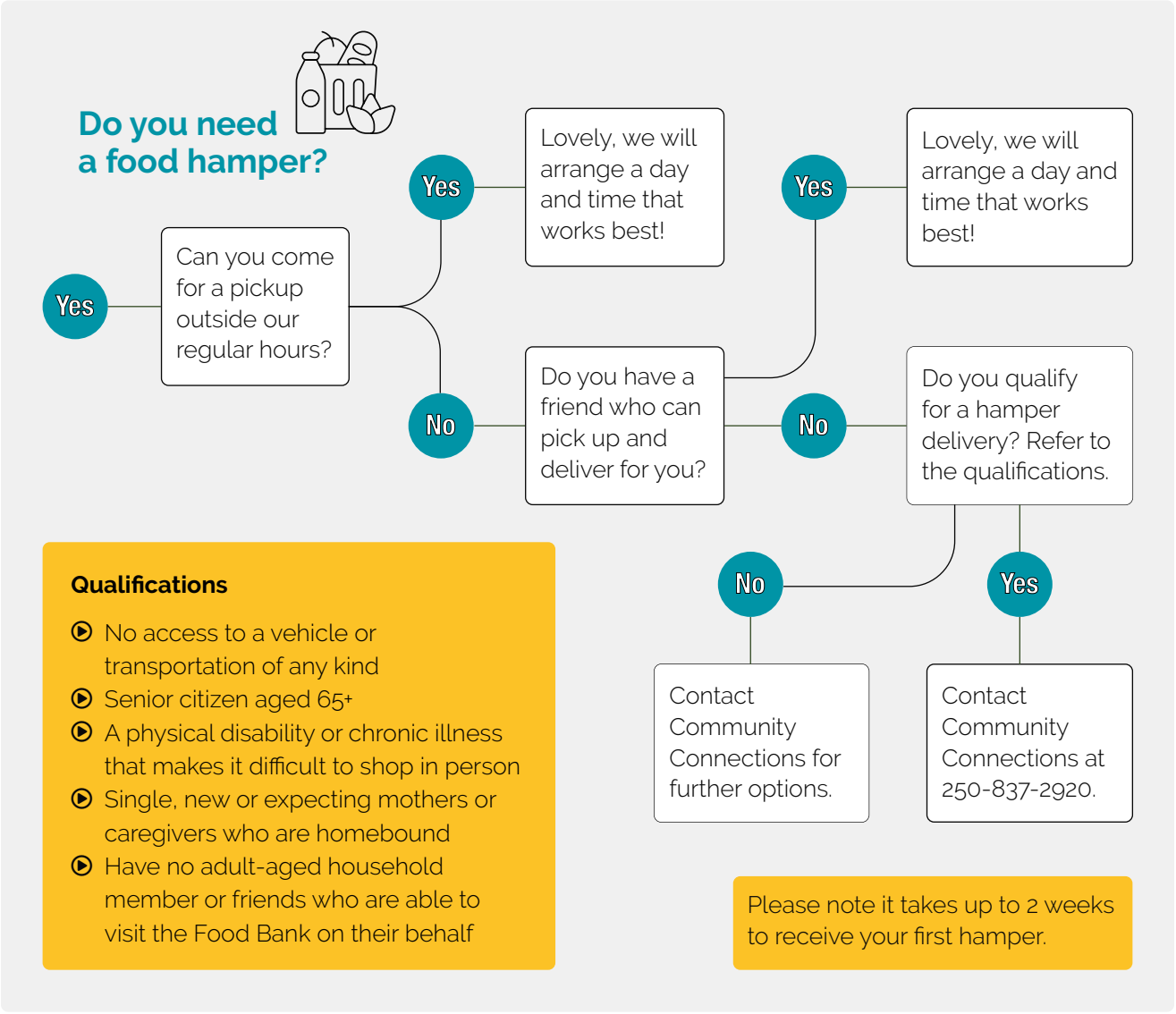
Their Food Hamper Flowchart isn't just an internal document. It is made available to the community and offers transparency about how Community Connections staff decide if someone qualifies for home delivery. While other food banks may use a similar process less formally, putting this process in writing with friendly but clear language assures a fair and consistent process.

Pemberton Food Bank makes some deliveries for people who cannot get to the food bank. Though a less formal process is applied, the concept is very similar. Since their ability to deliver hampers is limited, they have found that some community members can arrange for a friend or family member to pick up on their behalf if they know this is an option.

In Burns Lake, The Link addresses transportation barriers by running a Mobile Food Centre, which makes weekly trips to 5 outlying communities. The program is still in the pilot phase.

Mobile markets may be a better option for some community members.

Interestingly, the mobile market concept may be more appropriate for reaching certain community members, including seniors with limited mobility, wheelchair users, and some newcomer populations. Mobile markets tend to be highly visible, so in addition to shortening travel times, they may attract community members not yet aware of local community programs. This was a key finding in a 2022 study from the US, which found that mobile markets work well for reaching people aged 60 to 80 years and immigrant people of colour.[14]



Overcoming barriers and lifting up choice for Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks

Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak

Treaty 4, 5, 6 and 10 Territories

Some context

Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) started in 1981 with the purpose of being "a collective voice on issues of inherent, Treaty, Aboriginal and human rights for the citizens of the sovereign First Nations we represent [the 26 Northern Manitoba First Nations who have signed on to Treaties 4, 5, 6, and 10]."[15]

Along with working for the full restoration of First Nations' self-government in Northern Manitoba, MKO does an incredible amount of work across over a dozen portfolio areas supporting its communities with everything from traditional healing; accessing identification; housing; employment; a number of advocacy priorities, and much more.

Two years ago, a food bank became part of MKO's offerings to support Indigenous people in Thompson experiencing food insecurity. In such a short time, they've already significantly broadened who can access the food bank, reducing registration and physical barriers, and have several practices that centre autonomy and choice.

What they did

The original requirement for accessing the food bank is that folks live in Thompson and be able to present a Treaty, Inuit, or Métis status card.

MKO recognized that the requirement of living in Thompson excluded many. As Cathee Helgason, the Food Bank Supervisor explains, lots of people travel in and out of Thompson for work and school and might not be considered local residents. For example, it's common for Indigenous students to come to Thompson for high school if there's isn't one on reserve in their home community.

They opened up food bank access for transient folks in town. Some of the people they support live up to one hour away including folks in the Mystery Lake Division spanning up to Paint Lake, as well as a few people living on traditional land just outside Thompson.

Elders are always prioritized for delivery.

A grant from Harvest Manitoba allowed MKO to purchase two industrial freezers giving more capacity to store frozen food for their growing client list of 1200 folks.

Even within Thompson, infrequent public transit, very cold winters, mobility challenges, and the challenges of traveling with small children to the food bank prompted MKO to start a local delivery service.

Elders are always prioritized for delivery followed by people with mobility barriers and families with young children. Finding delivery drivers is often a challenge and the food bank team will call on other departments for delivery support. The food bank will also work with clients to find someone else who might be able to come pick up on their behalf when needed.

Cathee shares that it can also be a significant barrier for Indigenous folks to access a status card as another piece of the original registration requirement.

MKO will help community members apply for a status card where they can and are also clear that ongoing processes of colonization are reflected in laws that prohibit people from claiming status. They will get people food no matter what.

Non-Indigenous community members can now also visit the food bank. A year after MKO opened its food bank, the longstanding Salvation Army food bank in Thompson shut down. MKO responded by building more capacity to provide food support to non-Indigenous people through their partnership with Harvest Manitoba.

The process of registering non-Indigenous clients is clunkier and takes longer as folks need to contact Harvest Manitoba in Winnipeg to register. Cathee wants to improve this. Folks are still offered food support when they visit, even if their registration isn't "official". As she says, "we know that when someone is signing up [to access our food bank] it's because they need help right now, not in a week or two."

More practices to consider

Once folks are registered, there are a number of practices the MKO food bank models for autonomy and choice:

- Always offering people food on the spot no matter what.
- Asking for any allergies within a household and building food packages to accommodate these.
- Having options for multi-family and multi-generational households to access enough food for these common types of households in the community.
- Sharing a monthly staples checklist of items going into the food packages so people know what to expect and can let staff know if there's anything they don't need or would like to substitute.
- Offering a choice shelf where people can choose two additional items when they come to pick up their food.
- Working directly with workers and residents with disabilities and mobility challenges from local supportive housing focusing on residents' autonomy and choice when they visit.
- Having dedicated time just for visits from families with high needs children to give them time to freely walk around, access the snack fridge, connect with staff, and be themselves in a non-judgemental environment.

The First Two Faces You See: Creating a Welcoming Food Bank Environment for All

Tansi Friendship Centre Society in Chetwynd, BC credits their "first two friendly faces" practice as key to setting up a welcoming and dignified experience for food bank visitors. Very simply, staff and volunteers ensure that from the moment a potential food bank visitor steps inside their Centre, they are welcomed with a smile and a greeting. This starts with ensuring the right type of person staffs the front desk. This practice is shared by some of the other organizations featured in the guide like Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak and Edmonton's Food Bank.

"Tansi" is a welcoming greeting in the Cree language, and the Centre's practices are informed by an Indigenous worldview as well as principles of harm reduction.

Tansi functions as an essential service hub for the community. The Centre provides many programs to meet the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people either coming to, or currently living in Chetwynd, BC and surrounding communities.

Tansi's weekly, year-round services include a food bank, free hot lunches, elder's gatherings and mental health/addictions counselling, family support, youth activities including preschool and daycare, employment, life skills and training, and health and housing assistance. Tansi also provides cultural programs and hosts various community action and awareness events throughout the year.

Executive Director Laurelle Watson has been involved in the Centre for more than 15 years, first as a volunteer and then as Executive Director for the past three years. Jessie Solbrekken wears many hats for the organization, including Executive Assistant and Food Banks Manager.

Because the Centre offers many types of community programming alongside the food bank, they have reduced the stigma of coming to the food bank. Tansi puts in a lot of effort to create a welcoming space, offering a lunch service and a visiting circle when the food bank opens, which makes the experience of accessing food one that comes along with culture and community building.

What about your food bank?

Does your food bank have something like The First Two Friendly Faces practice to help set a welcoming environment for your guests? If not, what would it take to try this practice at your location? Who might benefit from it?

How can you do to create a more welcoming environment?

Set the tone

Community Connections in Revelstoke sets the tone for their space in extra-large font. They post their Belonging Agreement at the entrance to the food bank space. The Agreement includes guidance for conduct as well as their approach to service. The poster uses simple language and soothing colours.

The Muslim Food Bank is a national organization with a busy Surrey, BC location. Executive Director, Azim Dahya, credits their supportive and welcoming service to two things: a focus on training and a common value system. Like many faith-based organizations, Muslim Food Bank tends to attract volunteers with a common religious worldview, which can ground any discussion about what dignity or respectful service looks like.

Muslim Food Bank builds on this shared experience with a comprehensive training and orientation program for all volunteers and staff. Muslim Food Bank offers their food bank clients wrap-around services, including culturally competent and trauma-informed counselling. They also train Volunteer Community Caseworkers who support clients in breaking the cycle of poverty through their ASPIRE Community Caseworker program.

Tansi Friendship Centre's approach to setting and holding a welcoming tone also includes training for all volunteers. This initial training is reinforced daily in the opening and closing circles that bookend food bank service.

Decorate your space

Saige Community Food Bank is well-known across Vancouver as a queer and trans-friendly place to access food. Saige recognizes their program can be a haven for new arrivals to Canada, including LGBTQIA+ refugees who may have fled very unsafe situations in their country of origin. They decorate their space with pride flags, the pastel trans flag, and Black Lives Matter posters. These visual cues help set the tone of the space. Director and Co-founder Tanya Kuhn and Lead Volunteer Jessica Atari notice that these symbols seem to be universally recognized regardless of a visitor's English skills.

Staff at Mustard Seed, Vancouver Island's largest food bank, put a lot of effort into decorating their space to create a warm and welcoming environment, using tablecloths, potted plants or flowers, and a highly visible kids colouring table. Mustard Seed's Community Services Support Worker, Anita Zacker, also notes that Mustard Seed provides a free book area for families, and she finds that this is another low-cost way to set the tone of their space.

Community Food Centres Canada encourages you to "never underestimate a coat of paint." They also suggest that colourful photos of food and people can create a more welcoming environment.

In Laying the Groundwork for Trauma-informed Care, there are echoes of the benefits of some intentional decorating, including the use of artwork, murals and soft lighting to reduce stress.

Staff and volunteers reflecting the community

Mustard Seed's Director of Operations, Treska Watson, notes that a diverse group of volunteers who reflect the community's diversity is needed to maintain a welcoming space for all.

Scott Zayac, Executive Director at The Link in Burns Lake, notes that ensuring staff represent local First Nations communities is a priority, given that 30% of food bank visitors and the local population are from six neighbouring First Nations communities. The Link also looks at their board composition to ensure the overall community sees itself reflected in the organization's leadership. This practice is shared by several of the organizations profiled in this guide as well, including the Food Bank Society of the Yukon who prioritize Indigenous representation on its board.

A team and space for Edmonton's diversity

Edmonton's Food Bank

Treaty 6 Territory

Some context

Edmonton's Food Bank is perhaps most well-known as the first food bank in Canada founded in 1981. It wasn't long into their existence that diversification of their staff team became an ongoing priority starting in the 1990s.

It's important to the organization that the staff and volunteers reflect Edmonton's racial and other forms of diversity; over 40% of Edmonton's residents are from non-Indigenous racialized communities[16] and another over 6% are Indigenous.[17]

The increased demand on the food bank over the pandemic meant hiring more staff. This was a chance to keep diversifying the team and take more steps towards creating an accessible and equitable organizational culture reflected in their practices, policies, and physical spaces.

What they did

The staff team of 80 currently includes:

- Over 30 languages spoken
- 10% Indigenous employees
- Employees from several equity-deserving communities including Muslim people and 2SLGBTQIA+ folks

Executive Director Marjorie Bencz recognizes the difference it makes when someone comes to use the food bank and meets a staff person who shares their culture and language.

Edmonton's Food Bank also made an intentional decision to have an Indigenous person working at reception to welcome folks.

Through relationships and conversation with Muslim staff, the organization began providing prayer rugs that could be used wherever staff and volunteers feel most comfortable to practice salat; the daily ritual Muslim prayer.

Edmonton's Food Bank is also engaged in ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities and ensuring their spaces are culturally welcoming. Towards this, they named their second building *Ni-so*, which means "two" in Cree. The building's opening ceremony was in collaboration with Indigenous staff.

More Practices to Consider

Some other practices from Edmonton's Food Bank to consider that support accessibility and equity for their team and visitors:

- Removing candidate names from job and volunteer applications to avoid bias when reviewing them.
- Ongoing – not "one and done" – staff training with diversity and equity educator Erin Davis on respectful and inclusive culture, addressing stereotypes, and microaggressions.
- Staff also take conflict de-escalation and workplace harassment and nonviolent training.
- Introducing a new policy supporting vacation and time off accommodation for holidays staff observe that aren't recognized statutory holidays such as Ramadan.

Choice models that create dignified and healthier environments

Choice for health or dignity?

Choice models, or food banks laid out to allow clients to "shop," have gained popularity in recent years. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, many food banks were experimenting with choice models to improve experiences for clients with dietary restrictions, increase opportunities for social connection and, very practically, to reduce waste.

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma developed a Client Choice Workbook, which describes the many benefits of this style of food bank layout. The workbook also provides schematics that offer a spectrum of choice options to suit any size of space. They list four key benefits of a client choice model:

01 **Reduced volunteer labour:** Creating hampers is more labour-intensive than packing items onto a shelf in a grocery store-like setting. It can also be more engaging for volunteers. If you doubt the labour savings, be prepared to be convinced by the time study provided by the authors.

02 **Increased interaction:** Volunteers and staff can be reallocated to engaging with clients, which results in a more meaningful interaction for all.

03 **Less waste:** Food banks that have not yet made a switch to a choice model may find that the check-out area or parking lot becomes a dumping ground for the items that a client cannot use.

04 **Choice provides dignity:** Clients who have the freedom to choose their food items experience a positive impact on their self-esteem and are more likely to come back to access food or other services.

The Client Choice Workbook details four versions of a choice model, providing different levels of choice that are progressively closer to a supermarket layout. A supermarket model requires shelving and advanced planning to lay food out in food groups but frees up staff and volunteers for interacting with shoppers and allows for a high volume of clients. For food banks with small spaces, there are alternative approaches that allow clients to "window shop" and request the items they need or provide an inventory list to order from.

Scott Zayac, Executive Director of The Link in Burns Lake, and Roni Larsen, who runs their Food Centre, shared they had made good strides in creating a choice model. The pandemic disrupted the new choice model at The Link, but they hope to reinstate some hybrid version in the future. While they like the dignity and choice in a shopping model, they observed that some clients valued the return of hampers as safe and quick ways to pick up food. The Link's mobile food market programs also became a valuable way to respect clients by helping to reduce their need for travel time.

Is a choice model really better?

A 2021 study of Ottawa area food banks looked at the benefits of different models including the choice model. The study found that the choice model was particularly helpful for people avoiding certain foods for medical reasons, such as following a diabetic-friendly diet or managing a gluten allergy, as well as cultural and religious reasons. Peoples' access to fruits and vegetables also increased in the choice model as did a more dignified experience.[18]

In another report published by a coalition of food organizations in the King County area of Washington State, food banks using a shopper choice model saw benefits such as an improvement in food quality, a more pleasant experience and reduced crowding, and people choosing items like fresh produce.[19] Their Behavioral Economics Workbook includes photos and plans for putting into action the key principles behind the shopper model.

Labour savings with a choice model

The Food Bank of Oklahoma developed an analysis of the labour required to offer the choice model and confirmed the choice model doesn't require more volunteer labour.[20] Instead, your volunteers or staff perform different roles. The time study graphic below shows the comparison between a traditional food bank (pantry) model and a client choice model:

	Volunteer Slots 8 am – 12 pm	**Volunteer Slots** 12 pm – 4 pm	**Volunteer Slots** 4 pm – 6 pm	**Total volunteer hours per day**
In a Traditional Pantry	**2** volunteers to pre-make boxes **3** volunteers to distribute boxes (20 hours)	**2** volunteers to pre-make boxes **3** volunteers to distribute boxes (20 hours)	None	20+20 = **40**
In a Client Choice Pantry	**4** volunteers to help clients shop for food **(16 hours)**	**4** volunteers to help clients shop for food **(16 hours)**	**4** volunteers to help clients shop for food **(8 hours)**	16+16+8 = **40**

Looking to make the move to a choice model?

There are so many great resources to help you explore or start switching to a choice-based model. In addition to the Client Choice Workbook and Food Shopper Equity website from King County, you can also gain much from reading Community Food Centres Canada's Beyond the Emergency: How to evolve your food bank into a force for change.

Gift cards: The ultimate in choice models?

Several food banks we spoke with are experimenting with offering grocery store gift cards to their clients, recognizing that this option allows for the fullest experience of dignity and choice.

Tansi Friendship Centre is piloting gift cards from a local grocery store. The program started after a donation of gift cards, but it also has the potential to solve some logistics issues for the food bank. While Tansi aims to provide fresh, nutritious foods to their clients, they have found that purchasing 30 to 40 units of a particular item, such as milk or a bag of apples, can be challenging. They buy off the shelf at grocery stores and availability at that

volume can be tough to depend on. During the pilot period, the food bank provided clients with dry goods and a gift card for fresh food purchases.

Because each family receives the same dollar value, staff see this as a fair initiative. The staff notes it also aligns with principles of harm reduction, which affirm that individuals are the authorities on their own needs. Tansi staff acknowledge that they don't know everyone's stories and realize it's not their job to become authorities on each client's situation. It's also saving staff time as they are no longer heading out to shop for fresh foods before each food bank.

Mustard Seed staff also noted that they use gift cards to enhance client choice and offer flexibility if a family arrives with special dietary needs that they can't satisfy with what the food bank has on hand.

A 2022 study from the University of Calgary and Calgary-based nonprofit I Can for Kids (IC4K) found that grocery store gift cards provided to food-insecure families promoted a sense of autonomy and dignity among program recipients. The study also found that recipients developed improved dietary patterns.[21]

Time vs choice

Food bank users may have different preferences or competing priorities. Some community members may still want the convenience and time-savings a hamper provides. Some clients may value a short visit over a choice-based model while others appreciate the time to browse, visit, or ask questions while at the food bank.

Some food banks offer appointment times to reduce wait times. SHARE Community Services in the Tri-Cities offers appointment times for seniors. SHARE Community Services also will schedule a unique pickup time for people who exhibit behaviour that may pose a risk for other food bank users.

In several cases, food banks have extended their open hours to minimize lineups and wait times. A longer

open period allows people to come when they feel it works best with their schedule and can result in reduced lineups. However, SHARE and other high-volume food banks have to keep in mind that being open longer only reduces the lineup if food bank users are sure that the same food will be available later in the service. This may require that staff and volunteers hold back some inventory of especially high-demand items and restock throughout the service.

The layout of the space can also reduce lineups. While the shopping model may encourage browsing and socializing, an open environment that places food options at circular "islands" throughout the space can allow people to shop the table from several directions, reducing lines at each station. The buffet approach, which places tables in a line but allows community members to travel down either side of the tables, can double the volume of people who can access the space in the same amount of time.

Ultimately, a dignified space is one where people feel that their opinions and feelings are considered and that they can speak up about their needs without fear. By asking your members what is most important to them, you can be sure you are infusing dignity into whatever design you land on.

On the Menu: Flexibility that Supports Dignity

Flexibility is one of the ways we show community members that they matter as individuals. It's also true that there can be tension between providing flexibility and offering service to a whole community. While some aspects of flexibility may be more challenging to offer, there are many ways to practice flexibility.

Culturally Appropriate Foods

Many food banks have found ways to shift their menus to be more flexible for culturally relevant foods. In Montreal, Moisson Montreal and Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association's food bank make a point of understanding what culturally appropriate foods would support the organizations and communities it distributes to and works to source these. Food banks that provide fresh foods may find that certain foods are more "universal."

In the Cultural Food Guide for Pantries, published in 2022 by Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana, they name ten foods that are commonly eaten across cultures:

- Rice (white or whole grain)
- Beans (dried over canned)
- Onions
- Garlic
- Tomatoes
- Oil
- Potatoes
- Flour
- Lentils
- Fish

This list may or may not ring true for your community. Maybe you've found that eggs are a popular item, or that yogurt is always a crowd-pleaser. Testing this list with your food bank users would be a helpful way to spark conversation and help you service the widest number of people well.

Setting Family and Individual Limits

Some food banks using a choice model have found creative ways to maximize flexibility by creating a points system, where each available food is assigned a value and community members can "shop" for a maximum number of points. In this kind of system, a shopper can double up on items they use frequently and leave other items for others. The Ohio Association of Food Banks detail this option and others in their guide Making the Switch: A Guide to Converting to a Client Choice Food Pantry.

Restricted Diets

There can be an overlap between culturally relevant foods and diets restricted by preference or health issues. Offering flexibility to people who are gluten intolerant, avoid dairy products, or follow a vegetarian diet can be very meaningful to some community members.

We all make food choices for a variety of reasons, and the amount of choice that a person has in choosing their food is often a reflection of how much choice they have over many aspects of their life. Thinking back again to what we mean by dignity, being able to ask for food that lines up with their preferred diet without fear of judgement or penalty is at the core of dignified access.

Food banks that use recovered foods or have no purchasing budget find ways to support restricted diets. Food bank operators will sometimes reserve select items that work for restricted diets instead of putting them out on distribution day so they have something for a particular person's next visit.

Moisson Montreal made changes to its operations in order to increase access to these types of choices. Learn about some of the practices they tried out in their feature profile.

Takeaway Foods and Meal Services

For people without access to kitchen facilities, a food bank that allows for some flexibility from the usual hamper or allotment can be critical.

While larger food banks may have special offerings for community members with limited kitchen facilities or who are experiencing homelessness, smaller food banks may again hold certain items behind the counter or in a back room for people dealing with these challenges. Ready-to-eat foods, canned goods with pop tops, and sugary snacks are good options to keep on hand. Bottled water and juice are also helpful choices. The Food Bank Society of the Yukon is piloting a program specifically with these kinds of items for people experiencing homelessness.

Of course, if your food bank can offer meal services or hot drinks in a hospitality area, these are great ways to provide flexibility. If you don't offer these options, you can make sure you have information about other programs that are available at other service providers.

Adapting a regional distribution network towards accessibility

Moisson Montreal

Territory of the Kanien'kehá:ka Nation

Some context

Moisson Montreal – moisson meaning "harvest" in English – redistributes food to a network of over 300 organizations on the island of Montreal. About a third of the organizations they support are food banks who do hamper-type distribution. The other two thirds are organizations that gather people around food in some way such as women's shelters, youth programs, and meal programs for people experiencing homelessness.

Such a broad and varied distribution network means there is a diversity of food needs and preferences Moisson Montreal is responding to. Some key relationship building efforts and initiatives by the organization have led to practices that centre their accessibility and equity values in providing food support.

What they did

Catherine Boyer, Director of IT and Administration, tells the story of when their Executive Director first started back in 2016, they started something called "Les Grands Exchanges" – directly translated to "the Big Exchanges" – to facilitate dialogue with their partner organizations.

Moisson Montreal gathers its partners twice a year for les Grand Exchanges, along with a biannual survey, to build their relationships and discuss an important topic like the annual Hunger Count or upcoming holiday basket distribution.

Out of one of the biannual discussions, Moisson Montreal heard that its distribution network was looking for food that could better meet the health, dietary, cultural, and religious needs of their communities. They responded by looking for procurement and other operational changes they could make to accommodate these needs. Some of these were:

- Beginning a practice of sorting meat donations from grocery stores at the source. They now separate the chicken, beef, and pork to make it easier to support

organizations and communities who might not use all of these animal proteins for cultural or religious reasons.

- As part of their annual holiday basket program, Moisson Montreal now does a special diabetes-friendly basket.
- Efforts are made to specifically source Kosher and Halal foods.

More practices to consider

Some of the many other accessibility and equity practices to consider from Moisson Montreal:

- Participating in "tables de concertation" – roundtables or working groups – alongside other organizations to coordinate efforts on a particular social issue. This connects Moisson Montreal directly to community concerns and needs and led them to opening a second distribution hub in east Montreal, creating access for 13 partner organizations.
- The organization intentionally hires newcomers to give them a first job experience in Canada.
- Performing a review of their employee manual as part of the Food Banks Canada National Standards Pilot, Moisson Montreal recognized and made a commitment to put tangible policies and actions in the manual that meet its values of accessibility and equity – not just talk about them.

Beyond Food, What Else Have You Got?

As we heard from Tansi Friendship Centre, SHARE Community Services, the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, and Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak, placing a food bank as part of an overall suite of services can reduce the stigma for food bank users. When the food bank is part of a broader group of services, community members entering the building could be accessing any number of offerings.

This approach can also save time for community members by creating a one-stop shop for relevant support services. For example, Surrey Food Bank hosts a community librarian every week, which allows food bank users to develop a relationship with the service provider.

Some food banks also offer "pop-up" support services such as seasonal voter registration information tables and tax clinics.

Some food banks offer emergency food as part of a much bigger group of community services as you'll read about in the AIDS Committee of Ottawa profile. The Muslim Food Bank and Community Services reflect this broader view right in their organization's name.

As Azim Dahya, Executive Director of the Muslim Food Bank and Community Services Society (MFBCS), noted in our interview, "food insecurity doesn't happen in isolation." While the immediate need for anyone coming through the doors is for food, it's likely tied to other issues. This holistic perspective is why Muslim Food Bank and Community Services offers support in employment, housing, medical/dental and mental health in addition to their food bank and meal services. Muslim Food Bank and Community Services serves many vulnerable newcomer and refugee populations. A recognition of trauma and mental well-being is at the centre of their programs. Volunteers and staff receive training on the ASPIRE counselling model, which is trauma-informed and culturally appropriate to Muslim culture and values.

Here is a list of some of the possible resources and services that your food bank users might find helpful:

- Job search supports

- Agencies that can help with applying for ID or disability benefits

- Voter registration or awareness info

- Housing referrals

- Haircuts

- Community librarians and free book programs

- Vaccination clinics

- Peer advocacy clinics

Unsure what services would be welcome by your community members?

What resources would be welcomed by your members is a great topic for a survey. Consider posting an open-ended question on a whiteboard or poster board and providing markers or offering a more formal ballot and ballot box to community members. This is also a great time to start translating materials so that everyone can participate.

Who is at the Centre of Your Food Bank?

While it may seem like a safe assumption that food banks all operate with a priority focus on the people who access them, they can often be places where those who are most impacted by the services are denied a say or participation in shaping them.

The disability rights movement explains the difference between "doing for" and "doing with" the people most impacted by an issue. It's the principle "nothing about us without us."[22] This principle works for many issues, including food insecurity. At its core, it acknowledges that the people who are being affected by an issue must be at the centre of the solution. Any work that doesn't centre the people most impacted and prioritize their voice risks becoming more about the "helpers" than the community it says it serves. This is sometimes called "saviourism" which shows up a lot in food security work.[23]

A member-centred food bank not only cares about the community that needs the service but seeks to find ways to solve the issues with the community, not for them.

Member-Centred Services

Who started your food bank? Some food banks may still have a living memory of how and why they first got started. But given that the first food banks started in the early 1980s,[24] it's likely that the original founders who know that story have moved on, retired, or become ancestors to your current leaders.

As many food banks genuinely hoped they were a temporary solution to an economic downturn, it's possible that the stories of founders and their rationale were not well preserved. The food bank may have felt like a solution *from the community for the community* at some point, but it's a good exercise to revisit the question to see if you have held on to a community-centred approach. Food banks have in many cases become very large, corporate, and industrialized as well-documented by authors like Graham Riches[25] and Andy Fisher.[26]

As such, food banks may find that other goals have become a priority. If your food bank has existed on a limited budget for decades, if staff and volunteers have cycled through, or if donors with strong voices and values have had their say, you may find clients are not at the centre of your decisions.

For example, you may have a registration policy that makes your donors feel comfortable, even if it means some community members can't meet the requirements. Or you may be setting early opening hours based on what works for your current volunteers, even if you know that community members need later hours to work around after-school pickups.

What does it look like to centre the voices of those most impacted?

Simply, it means uplifting, trusting, and valuing the voices of people most impacted by food insecurity.[27] In practice, it means that the people most impacted are a part of leading, identifying solutions, and setting priorities.

A 2021 study by Institute for Hunger Research and Solutions at Connecticut Foodshare, which surveyed over 1,000 people accessing emergency food, suggests you can create a more member-centric food bank by:

- Engaging with food bank users to create a culture where all voices are heard and respected and use their input to inform program changes.

- Committing to prioritizing member experience over volunteer tradition or convenience.

- Setting up a committee of diverse staff, volunteers, and food bank users to offer input on how service is offered.

Starting the Work of Centring or Recentring members

The work to centre or recentre food bank users is about starting a conversation. Many food banks use surveys to get the conversation going. As in any good conversation, you need to listen and respond.

Survey your food bank users

Not sure what to ask? The Oregon Food Bank's Client Engagement Best Practices Handbook offers advice on how to adopt a member-centric approach. They recommend you start by surveying community members about what they want to see at the food bank. The handbook includes a client satisfaction survey template with basic questions about how people experience your service. The Food Shopper Equity project from Northwest Harvest offers two alternative shopper survey templates.

Informal surveys

Running a "dotmocracy board," where a question of the week is posted on poster board or a whiteboard and people "vote" with a coloured dot or a checkmark on their preferred choice, can be a fun way to start asking questions about your menu. Though it may only work for some folks who can read and write English or see a board, having supports in place like translation, someone to offer a verbal guide to the exercise, and using images instead of words can help increase access.

A comment box may offer folks a bit more privacy to share their feedback anonymously.

Plan an observation day

If directly engaging community members is an overwhelming idea, a less public first step might be to hold an observation day. The Behavioural Economics Workbook includes a suggested template you can use to evaluate your food bank in action by immersing yourself in the food bank space to observe the flow, layout, and how people are experiencing the space.

Create a member advisory council

Northwest Harvest in Washington describes its Participant Advisory Council as an invaluable resource because it has given them better relationships and communication with community members. The council provides feedback on whether Northwest Harvest's services are working or not. The members of the council are compensated for their time and are provided reimbursement for transportation and childcare costs.

Include community members at leadership tables

Larger food banks with governance bodies like boards of directors might also consider how member representation can be included. Many of the food banks interviewed for this guide prioritize holding board seats for people from equity-deserving communities and those who use their services. For example, the Food Bank Society of the Yukon prioritizes board positions for people from First Nations communities across the Yukon.

Stateside, there are several initiatives that will support food banks that wish to create a community member advisory or leadership council. Virginia's Capital Area Food Bank shares its Client Leadership Council model and offers a curriculum to other food banks that want to use this model.

Equitable compensation and other supports

Centring the leadership and participation of those who use food banks also requires thinking about compensation and other supports to make these opportunities accessible.

If your organization is asking community members, including those who use your food bank, to participate in advisory groups and other initiatives, are you providing them an equitable honorarium for this work? How about providing transportation supports like bus

tickets or cab fare, childcare, and food at meetings and other types of events and initiatives?

It's important that when people with lived experience are invited to participate and collaborate in these ways, care is put into thinking about power dynamics. How will their experience, expertise, and participation be at the centre of the work without people being tokenized, dismissed, or made to feel unsafe?

Accessibility and equity also involve hiring people with various forms of lived experience as paid staff and in other types of compensated roles such as consultants, facilitators, and translators. Equity-deserving folks and people with lived experience of using food banks are often brought into volunteer and/or offered more entry-level or "junior" positions. Is there also a commitment and practice of hiring folks for more senior and leadership positions?

Several of the organizations featured in this guide prioritize hiring people with different kinds of lived experience. For example, over 85% of the AIDS Committee of Ottawa's staff team is composed of key populations it's mandated to serve. At Moisson Montreal, they purposefully hire newcomers to give them their first job in Canada.

The Participatory Action Research Approach Spotlight in Part Two also gives some ideas about hiring people with lived experience into research roles.

Working upstream

Food banks alongside a growing number of food security organizations are recognizing that food banking is not the solution to food insecurity. They are getting involved in speaking up about the root causes and importantly doing it alongside those most impacted.

Working upstream may involve supporting research, public policy advocacy and education, participation in coalitions, and collective and/or political action.

The feature profile from Feed Ontario shares how they are supporting disability advocacy in partnership with people with disabilities. Along with Food Banks Canada, these organizations are examples of food bank networks that have public policy calls for different levels of government. Read about Feed Ontario's policy recommendations below and Food Banks Canada's policy work here.

Working upstream on the root causes of food insecurity can also look like setting up a peer advocacy office or program like the one at the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre in Nunavut.[28] Staffed by peer advocates, community members can get support from someone with lived experience navigating housing, government benefits, and health care.

Food banks can also be supporting and partnering with other food security organizations and networks who are acting on issues that affect food access, justice, and security. At a more local level, Vancouver's Neighbourhood Food Networks and FoodShare Toronto have been organizing campaigns on issues like the Right to Food, migrant labour, municipal budgeting, and protecting cultural food assets.

There are also a number of larger networks and communities of practice and learning food banks can get involved with to support upstream work such as Closing the Hunger Gap and the Global Solidarity Alliance for Food, Health, and Social Justice.

A provincial association takes on anti-oppression learning and disability advocacy

Feed Ontario

Traditional territories of many First Nations, Inuit and Métis people across so-called Ontario

Some context

Feed Ontario describes itself as the province's largest collective of hunger-relief organizations. They work to support a network of 140 member organizations and over 1100 affiliate organizations. Although Feed Ontario is a large network, it is not inclusive of all food banks and hunger-relief organizations in the province.

Feed Ontario provides food support to its member food banks, offers other types of community food programs and capacity building supports, as well as advocacy and collective action work.

They are in an ongoing process of bringing a deeper focus on accessibility and equity into their work exemplified in the types of resources, capacity building initiatives, and advocacy work they are prioritizing.

What they did

One of the early projects Feed Ontario did towards supporting equity within its network of organizations was offer a four-part weekly training series. It was outstandingly well attended hitting the 100-person capacity every week.

The four sessions covered: Fundamentals of Anti-Oppression, Inclusive Language and Anti-Oppression Communication, Disrupting Unconscious Bias, and Introduction to Racial Justice. They intentionally worked with diversity, equity, and inclusion consultants at Bakau Consulting on the training, tailoring the content to food bank contexts so it was relevant and applicable.

Feed Ontario was able to identify some supporting resources requested by its members out of the training to help implement some of the learning.

One of these resources which Bakau Consulting also supported was an example intake script for food banks to use when registering new clients that uses inclusive language and options, ensuring questions are asked in a safer way.

As Amanda King, Senior Director Network Services, put it, "People are trusting food banks and their intake workers that they will be received safely and kindly. It's our responsibility to make sure we are creating those kinds of spaces."

Feed Ontario also clearly recognizes that the support food banks offer isn't the solution to poverty and food insecurity – good public policy and support programs are needed to ensure people have the income they need.

They act on their responsibility to this reality through their advocacy work, centring and working alongside those who are most impacted by inadequate public policy and programs. For example, Feed Ontario works alongside people with disabilities as a member of the Defend Disability and Ontario Disability Support Programs Action Groups.

This is an important place for Feed Ontario to show up as a third of people who access food banks in Ontario have a disability.[29] Feed Ontario members also consult with people with disabilities on their own organizational accessibility practices like their physical space layouts and communications materials.

Feed Ontario is putting lived experience at the centre with their current development of an online tool that takes website visitors through a selection of budgetary choices based on a selected profile and the associated income. Through these choices, visitors will have the opportunity to choose their living space, the amount of groceries they need, and other basic expenses. The goal is to put visitors in the shoes of someone who has a limited income and gain an understanding as to why someone may ultimately need to visit a food bank.

More practices to consider

- Feed Ontario has a number of public policy recommendations they're calling for.
- A partnership with the Ontario Federation of Friendship Centres supports listening relationships where Feed Ontario can learn about the experiences of Indigenous community members accessing food banks or where there are barriers to access.
- Feed Ontario has a public commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, the 94 Calls to Action, and Indigenous Food Sovereignty, recognizing the connections between colonialism and food security, and is beginning to develop their strategy to tangibly support this commitment.

Who's Missing at Your Food Bank?

You may already know that some groups overrepresented in food insecurity statistics are not coming to access your food bank. If you don't have a good sense of who is missing at your food bank, you could ask other community organizations that work with equity-deserving community members.

Direct Service to Underrepresented Communities

If you know that some communities are underrepresented in your food bank clientele, the tip sheets in Part Two will provide you with some practices you can consider adopting to make your services more welcoming.

Connecting Through Community Partners

Many food banks shared that they know there are communities they are not reaching directly. Partnerships with other community agencies working directly with equity-deserving communities extend the reach of a food bank to communities who may not be aware of your services.

In Northwest Harvest's Anti-Racist Assessment Tool for Food Banks, they recommend you look to create relationships that are authentic and values-based. The most equitable partnerships allow both organizations to see value in continuing the relationship.

It may make sense to have a written agreement that details how you will support each others' work. This kind of agreement could also include expectations

about equitable service to all community members and note how often you will discuss how the relationship is going for everyone. Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association profiled earlier are remarkable in their approach to partnership.

Considerations in Partnerships

As food banks look toward offering wraparound supports and programs, there's even more reason to look at partnering with other community groups. Urban Institute's 2020 report Effective Programs and Policies for Promoting Economic Well-Being offers advice to food banks about the opportunities and challenges that come with partnerships.

They report that setting up partnerships should include deciding what data and information may be shared. It's also important for organizations to be self-aware and clear on which parts of a partnership they're best suited to lead or own, and which ones they are better suited to be supporting others' leadership of.[30]

Wraparound support for people living with HIV

AIDS Committee of Ottawa

Territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation

Some context

Food is just part of the work at the AIDS Committee of Ottawa (ACO). People living with HIV are at the centre of everything at ACO. About 70% of the people who come through their doors are racialized and also include high representation of immigrants, refugees, men who have sex with men, people who use substances, and women who have been made vulnerable.

Folks coming to ACO are supported by both an Education/Prevention and Support Services team offering everything from counselling and psychosocial support to advocacy and peer support; immigration support; community kitchen and cooking programs; and a variety of HIV-related education, prevention, and health promotion programs.

The organization also operates a weekly food bank that prioritizes people living with HIV but is open to anyone to access. It is very much embedded in the organization alongside the many wraparound supports and resources for the community.

What they did

Clients are at the centre of the ACO food bank's operational choices. For example, the food bank is on Fridays to intentionally set people up with food before the weekend – a time when many food and social support services are closed.

Fridays are also a chance for people coming for the food bank to connect in with the many offerings at ACO and vice versa; for people coming for other programs to also access food. Cory Wong, Manager of Support Services, gives the examples of people who come for their HIV injectable treatment on Fridays so they can also access the food bank in one trip. He also shares how ACO provides pet food and pet supplies through the weekly food bank program and make referrals to veterinary clinics, recognizing the important role pets play in their clients' health and well-being.

The food bank is held within the organization's drop-in centre, giving people a chance to sit down and relax while they wait. There's no need to line up as someone will call your

name when it's your turn to pick up your food. People are encouraged to stay and chat in the drop-in as long as they like to socialize with each other, the staff, and volunteers. It's a time when lots of peer support is available.

ACO also ensures the food bank is as accessible as possible by not having limits on how many times people can visit and pick up food. They also try to eliminate transportation barriers by providing bus tickets for clients; a program for which funding has been cut, but ACO remains committed to finding a way to still offer this support.

Beyond the food bank, food is core within many other programs. They are often cooking for their support groups providing lunch and dinner, an important health support for people living with HIV or at risk of HIV. ACO also hosts dinner pickup events for holidays such as Ramadan where the entire community, not just those living with HIV, are invited to participate.

Cory states that ACO is taking a panoramic approach to the many supports and services they offer: "Our mandate is not limited to the medical or education parts of people living with HIV – it is also about anti-racism and anti-oppression work. We are an AIDS service organization as well as a social justice organization."

He asks, "What does anti-racism mean when it comes to the actual work? You can say you respect diversity but how does that translate into actual practice?"

Some of the practices at ACO he offers in response to this question include:

- Offering Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression training to staff, board members, volunteers, and community members.
- Working with the local African-Caribbean and Black community by joining the Black Lives Matter movement and participating in Ottawa's BLM protests in 2020.
- Making organizational purchases from racialized business owners and services, for example, hiring an Indigenous graphic designer, shopping from ethno-cultural grocery stores.

More practices to consider

ACO also has strong accessibility and equity practices in other areas of its work including its hiring:

- There has been an intentional effort especially over COVID to diversify the team with most of the staff now coming from racialized communities whereas just a few years ago the staff were mostly white.
- Staff are also intentionally hired who have languages spoken within the broader community. ACO also hires people who started as volunteers, and people who are living with HIV.
- Four seats on the board of directors are dedicated to people living with HIV – a quota that has been far surpassed.

Conclusion

The Question of Equity and Access is Ever Evolving

From Food Banks Canada

There is still work to be done. As food banks and food security organizations, we care for people. This care must extend to all individuals. These efforts must also be ongoing and open to change, which will require continued learning, humility, investment, collaboration, and trying new methods while holding the people who use food banks at the centre of it all.

This guide will provide some understanding and the first steps to service with fewer barriers, and with attention to the fear and discrimination people often experience when accessing services like food banks. It was designed in collaboration with people with lived experience of using food banks. The guide isn't meant to stand alone; rather, we hope it will be used in conjunction with available grants and tools to help improve accessibility and equity for all. For members of Food Banks Canada, keep an eye out on Workplace and the Fork and Spoon Newsletter for the new granting initiatives coming your way.

Our shared vision where no one goes hungry means a future where food banks are no longer needed.

Food Banks Canada's and our members' shared vision where no one goes hungry will only be achieved if we fearlessly tackle the root causes of hunger. Our policy recommendations should be delivered alongside ongoing support to improve accessibility and equity for food banks. Our shared vision where no one goes hungry means a future where food banks are no longer needed. Where the cost of living, poverty, and systemic racism – especially ongoing settler colonialism, anti-Indigenous, and anti-Black racism – no longer exist.

Food Banks Canada remains accountable for constantly re-assessing for possible barriers that impede easy access to food, both within our organization and the greater network, and encouraging all food security organizations to follow. The right to food is a right for all, and it will be achieved by ensuring that barriers to access are noticed, acted upon, and eliminated.

Our neighbours are in crisis, and we need everyone to join us as we work to relieve hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow.

SPOTLIGHT

Spotlight on

- Welcoming People with Disabilities
- Welcoming 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Members
- Participatory Action Research
- Welcoming Newcomers to Canada
- Welcoming Indigenous Communities
- Welcoming Racialized Communities

Spotlight on

Welcoming People with Disabilities

Know the facts

22%

22% of Canadians aged 15 years and older **have a disability.**[31]

40%

Over 40% of people with disabilities **experience barriers to communicating** via phone, in-person, or when accessing written materials.[32]

1 in **10**

Nearly 1 in 10 Canadians aged 15 and older has a **mobility-related disability,** making it one of the most common disability types.[33]

Action tips

Assess the barriers at your food bank

- Complete the Accessibility and Equity Checklist in Appendix 2 to get a sense of some of the access issues your members may be facing.

Stay updated on respectful language choices

- Some terms that used to be considered acceptable, including "handicapped" and "wheelchair-bound," are no longer acceptable. It's better to use terms like "a disabled person" or "person who uses a wheelchair." This focus on dignity of the person includes talking about people who have mental illnesses and who are living with an addiction.
- Preferences can change from person to person, so ask each person when possible and take the person's lead.

Review your current policies

- If your supports for people with disabilities only apply to people who use mobility aids like wheelchairs and canes, you might be creating barriers for people with less evident disabilities. Folks with pain-related disabilities, fatiguing conditions, anxiety, or with neurosensory disorders can find line ups and limited pick-up times a barrier.
- Do you require a doctor's note confirming a disability before a member can access home delivery or other supports? This type of policy can be a barrier for community members who cannot afford the cost of a doctor's note and/or who may experience additional barriers in acquiring one.

Learn more

Visit the University of British Columbia's Equity and Inclusion Office website for a look at their Inclusive Language Resources for more advice on current language choices.

Learn more now

Spotlight on

Welcoming 2SLGBTQIA+ Community Members

Know the facts

27%

US-based data shows that 2SLGBTQIA+ people face **food insecurity rates** of 27%, which is more than double the national rate for the general population.[34]

68%

The 2015 US Transgender Survey revealed that 68% of transgender and gender non-conforming individuals had **no identity documents** with their correct name and gender.[35]

40%

Canadian 2SLGBTQIA+ youth are over-represented in poverty statistics, with between 25 and 40% of **homeless youth identifying as LGBTQ+.**[36]

Action tips

Offer visual cues of a safer space for 2SLGBTQIA+ visitors

- Rainbow flags and welcoming statements can help attendees feel welcomed.
- If your food bank posts a code of conduct or belonging agreement, ensure that it specifically welcomes this community. Be specific and state that homophobic and transphobic language and behaviour is not acceptable.
- If your food bank displays religious symbols or is in a faith-based facility, some 2SLGBTQIA+ may not feel comfortable visiting. Consider minimizing religious symbols or providing food to a community partner known as a safe space for 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Make space for pronouns	◉ Educate your volunteers on gender identity and the significance of making space for pronouns. ◉ Add a pronoun field to your registration forms and offer options like she, he, and they. ◉ If staff and volunteers wear nametags, include a place for their pronouns. This creates a space for all to self-identify. Adding pronouns to your nametag normalizes asking and helps prevent incorrect guesses.
Be considerate around family assumptions	◉ Choose family terms that leave space for all families. Start with gender-neutral terms like spouse, partner, child, and parent, and follow the guest's language choices. ◉ Be mindful that 2SLGBTQIA+ youth and adults may have been rejected or estranged from their family of origin, and food insecurity or homelessness may be a direct result of this.
Be flexible with ID requirements	◉ Transgender and non-binary people may not have ID that matches their current name or gender. Processes for correcting ID may be onerous, expensive, or emotionally difficult. If your registration process requires the presentation of ID, this may exclude trans and gender-nonconforming folks from accessing food.

Learn more

BC's Qmunity offers an affordable self-guided course "Foundations of 2SLGBTQIA+ Inclusivity" which covers the importance of advocacy and allyship, key terminology, the history of 2SLGBTQIA+ peoples across the globe and more.

Learn more now

Spotlight on

Participatory Action Research

Know the facts

What is Participatory Action Research

- Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a form of community-based research involving participation from those most impacted by the research. PAR involves ongoing engagement and involvement of people with lived experience throughout the research process, often in a peer researcher role, and is grounded in collaboration.

Why Participatory Action Research

- Participatory Action Research offers people with lived experience the chance to conduct research on their own behalf. When applied to food insecurity, PAR can be highly effective in supporting those most impacted in leading solutions.

Action tips

Building relationships of trust and valuing diversity

PAR recognizes the significance of building trusting relationships. Trust is essential for meaningful collaboration and participation and can be built by:

- Creating a safer space for community members to share and reflect on their experiences and perspectives by actively listening, demonstrating empathy, and being transparent about the research process and objectives.
- Actively seeking out and including diverse voices in the research process. This includes engaging people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, cultural groups, age groups, and genders.

Co-Creation and Collaboration

PAR emphasizes the importance of co-creating knowledge and solutions within the community of stakeholders by:

- Involving people with lived experience in collaborative decision-making and promoting shared ownership throughout the process.
- Welcoming peer researchers to work together to develop the vision and goals of the project. Peer researchers engage in ongoing meetings, data collection and analysis.
- Providing honoraria/compensation for work completed by peer researchers as well as other barrier-reducing supports like childcare, transportation, and food.

Sharing power

PAR seeks to challenge power imbalances and promote social justice by supporting equity-deserving groups to actively participate in decision-making processes. Do this by:

- Supporting people with lived experience to meaningfully engage in all aspects of the research process from research design to sharing of findings.
- This might involve making space for peer researchers to discuss expectations and what they need to feel included and supported.

Learn more

Students as co-researchers: Using participatory action research to address college food insecurity is an example of a study that used a participatory action research approach.

Learn more now

Spotlight on

Welcoming Newcomers to Canada

Know the facts

Newcomers, including immigrants and refugees, disproportionately experience **food insecurity and poverty** which can lead to health challenges.[37]

Newcomers can also experience **cultural food insecurity** as a dimension of the food insecurity they might face by not having access to foods that are culturally appropriate.[38]

Newcomers may be from countries where emergency **food distribution looked very different.** Not understanding how food banks operate can create barriers. Some may face a language barrier and be unaware of when food banks are open, how to qualify, or how their confidentiality will be protected.[39]

Clients who do not yet have permanent status in Canada, may **fear risking their status** by using assistance programs.[40]

Action tips

Offer the right language

- If your existing staff and volunteer team don't speak the languages spoken by newcomer communities, recruit staff and volunteers with these skills.
- You can also create partnerships with community organizations serving newcomer populations to support language access and translation.

Offer culturally appropriate foods	◉ Poll your food bank users to ask what foods are most welcomed. ◉ Purchase items that support cultural and dietary needs.
Be flexible on registration requirements	◉ Be especially mindful of registration requirements and other requests for documentation and personal information that could pose risks for people without permanent status and/or documentation. ◉ Consider developing and implementing Access Without Fear policies and practices that ensure access to services and basic needs for people regardless of their migration status.

Learn more

The Centre for Race and Culture, an Alberta based organization, has developed this free open-access resource for service providers and the general public. Unmasking Micro-inequities encourages readers to learn ways to hold themselves and others accountable when faced with everyday moments of discrimination in their own lives and workplaces.

Learn more now

Spotlight on

Welcoming Indigenous Communities

Know the facts

Both historically and today, Indigenous communities are **denied access to the traditional, healthy foods** that were their normal diet before colonization as a result of ongoing settler colonialism, theft of land and culture, anti-Indigenous racism, and government-mandated poverty.[41]

Data from 2022 found that over 33% of off-reserve Indigenous Peoples in the ten provinces were **food insecure.**[42] The most recent data for the territories found that 46% of people in Nunavut, 23% in the Northwest Territories, and 15% in the Yukon **lived with moderate or severe food insecurity.**[43]

Canada's Food Guide, what many non-Indigenous Canadians may consider a significant and ethical document, was informed by research conducted on malnourished children at Indian Residential Schools. These **studies were not consensual** and left some children in a prolonged state of malnourishment to benefit the study.[44]

It's important for food bank operators to have a critical perspective on the **impacts of using colonial documents** like the Canada Food Guide. Also important is understanding the ways in which food has been and continues to be weaponized and the ongoing long-term systemic impacts anti-Indigenous racism and colonization has on sovereign food access for Indigenous communities.

Action tips

Get to know the traditional territory where you operate and live

- Start by doing the research to find out whose traditional and ancestral territory your food bank is located on. Online maps like native-land.ca can help.
- Finding out whose land you're on is just a very first step in an anti-colonial journey. Committing to learn and work in anti-colonial ways that build respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous People, Nations, communities, and Indigenous-led and centred organizations is lifelong work.

Practices to consider for implementing Indigenous-focused programming.

With thanks to Sarah Buffett an Indigenous Peer Researcher with Food Banks Canada for sharing these practices.

- Partner with Indigenous community organizations to collaboratively develop programs and projects that support Indigenous community members.
- Consider setting up and supporting programs within Indigenous community organizations such as Friendship Centres and Band Offices.
- Be intentional about welcoming folks from Indigenous communities to programs and be mindful about how and through whom the information is given—ideally this is someone who knows both the food bank and the community members well.
- Consult Indigenous community organizations about whether a designated time for Indigenous folks to access the food bank might be appropriate.
- Prioritize culturally safe spaces. This includes spiritual safety, noting that while some may feel comfortable in spaces such as churches and other faith-based spaces food banks often operate from, this isn't true for everyone, including Indigenous people who may have had traumatic experiences in these types of spaces and institutions.

Don't let stereotypes slide

- If your volunteers or food bank members say things about Indigenous people that lean on stereotypes and perpetuate anti-Indigenous racism, don't tolerate it. To make a safer space for all, you need to learn how to address anti-Indigenous stereotypes. Learn about methods to disrupt bias when you see it impacting how people are treating each other.

Make space for all types of families

- The definition of family changes from culture to culture. In Indigenous communities, family members and neighbours may play significant roles in each others' lives, helping and sharing resources in ways that reach beyond what is expected in Westernized family units. Acknowledge these differences when you set policies.

Learn more

Indigenous Perspectives Society (IPS) offers a 3-hour workshop called Building Local Relationships. This training shares Indigenous cultural perspectives and promotes allyship. In this workshop, participants explore ways both organizations and individuals can build strengths in areas that impact relationships with Indigenous individuals, organizations, and communities.

Learn more now

IndigenEYEZ offers learning for settlers through its kinSHIFT workshops, an Indigenous-led initiative for non-Indigenous learners wishing to cultivate meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples but unsure where to begin.

Learn more now

Spotlight on

Welcoming Racialized Communities

Know the facts

28.9%

Racialized communities, sometimes called Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), experience **higher rates of food insecurity** than white Canadians. In 2022, 39.2% of Black households were living in food insecurity.[45] Black communities are 3.5 times more likely to experience food insecurity relative to white people in Canada.[46]

2021

Canada's main data source for understanding the income levels and food security for Canadians **only started tracking race-based data in 2021.**[47] As a result, the Canadian Income Survey is missing a lot detail about how different racialized communities experience food insecurity.

1 in **4**

In the US, where more detailed data is available, nearly 1 in 4 Black and Hispanic families **faced food insecurity during the pandemic.**[48]

Action tips

Show your support for racialized communities

- Make it a regular practice to talk about how racialized communities might be hit hard by what's going on in the news or your community. Local issues like transit strikes and global issues like civil war can be impacting some communities more directly than others. Talk about how you can show support and who might need extra care or patience at the next service.

Learn when to call in and when to call out	Learn when you need to respond immediately and when coming back to the person might have a better effect. This is the difference between calling people out and calling people in.
Don't let racial stereotypes slide	If you hear team members or community members using racial stereotypes, make sure to talk to them about it. Plan how you will interrupt racist comments when you hear them.
Reflect the racial diversity of your community	Review the current diversity of your volunteers and staff team. If needed, do outreach to community organizations that work with racialized communities to recruit staff and volunteers to your food bank and for any leadership tables at your organization. Community members are more likely to trust the safety of your space if they see people like them working the food bank.

Learn more

Northwest Harvest's Anti-Racist Assessment Tool for Food Banks helps food bank managers and other staff in decision-making roles assess where they are in their anti-racism journey and where they want to be.

Learn more now

Organizations can also learn about and support work like Toronto's Black Food Sovereignty Plan that focuses on recommendations by and for the Black community.

Learn more now

There are also resources on equitable HR practices for safer workplaces for racialized and other equity-deserving team members. The Ontario Non-Profit Network has a webinar and podcast with Paul Taylor of FoodShare on Decent Work Practices to get you started.

Learn more now

Appendix 1

Glossary

Accessibility	Accessibility is the work we do to ensure people with disabilities can access services and all aspects of society on an equal basis with others. It includes seeking ways to remove barriers to access including physical barriers, attitudes, policies, technology, and how we communicate information.
Culturally Safe Environment	Describes an environment that is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people. It is a space where there is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity of who they are and what they need.
Dignified Service	Delivering service supports the self-respect of the person, recognizes their inherent value, and does nothing to undermine it.
Discrimination	Discrimination occurs when a person is treated unfairly by either imposing a burden on them or denying them a privilege, benefit, or opportunity enjoyed by others, based on characteristics or differences protected by human rights legislation. Protected characteristics include Indigenous identity, race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age of that person, or because that person has been convicted of a crime or a summary conviction offence that is unrelated to the employment or to the intended employment of that person.

Diversity	Describes the differences in the lived experiences and perspectives of people including race, ethnicity, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, disability status, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, age, class, and socio-economic situations.
Equity	Equity refers to achieving parity in policy, process, and outcomes for historically and/or currently underrepresented and/or marginalized people and groups while accounting for diversity. It considers power, access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes.
Equity-deserving	Equity-deserving groups or communities are those facing significant barriers to participating in dominant society. These barriers could be attitudinal, barriers based on age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, Indigeneity, gender identity and expression, nationality, race, sexual orientation, among others.
Food insecurity	Food insecurity exists when factors outside an individual's control negatively impact their access to enough foods that promote wellbeing. Economic, social, environmental, and geographical factors influence this access. Food insecurity is most acutely felt by those who experience the negative impacts of structural inequities, such as discrimination and on-going colonial practices.[49]
Food security	Food security means that everyone has equitable access to food that is affordable, culturally preferable, nutritious, and safe; everyone has the agency to participate in, and influence food systems; and that food systems are resilient, ecologically sustainable, socially just, and honour Indigenous Food Sovereignty.[50]

Inclusion	Inclusion is an active, intentional, and continuous process to address inequities in power and privilege and build a respectful and diverse community that ensures welcoming spaces and opportunities to flourish for all.
2SLGBTQIA+	An acronym that stands for Two-Spirit (2S), Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and Aromantic identities. The plus sign recognizes that not all identities within the community are reflected in the acronym.
Microaggression	Often subtle comments or actions that express prejudice towards a certain, often racialized, group or person.
Racialized	Previously called "visible minorities" in Canada, this term refers to people who are non-white in Canada. Racialized people experience discrimination and racism at an individual and institutional level.

Appendix 2

Accessibility and Equity Checklist for Food Banks

Category	Item	No	Somewhat	Yes
Accessible Communication	Does the food bank have signage or other materials that explain how the food bank runs and what to expect?	○	○	○
Accessible Communication	Does the food bank offer options for non-verbal communication?	○	○	○
Parking	Is there an area where a HandyDart vehicle or accessible taxi can safely drop off a member?	○	○	○
Emergency Response	Does the food bank communicate sudden changes to service to members?	○	○	○
Emergency Response	Do food bank operators have an emergency evacuation plan for the food bank site?	○	○	○
Emergency Response	Does the food bank display signage to indicate that naloxone is available?	○	○	○
Entrance	Is the path from the entryway to the food bank accessible to users of wheelchairs, walkers, and strollers?	○	○	○
Entrance and interior doors	Is there an automatic door at all doorways and washrooms?	○	○	○

Entrance and interior doors	Are non-automatic doors adjusted to be free swinging or have properly adjusted door-closer mechanisms so they're easy to open and stay open longer?	○	○	○
Entrance and interior doors	Are non-automatic doors equipped with lever-style handles?	○	○	○
Equity	Does the food bank provide signage or information in languages other than English?	○	○	○
Equity	Do food bank operators have the language diversity needed to service the membership?	○	○	○
Equity	Does the food bank display signage that reassures 2SLGBTQIA+ community members they are welcome?	○	○	○
Food Quality	Does the food bank accommodate food allergies or other dietary restrictions?	○	○	○
Hours of Operation	Are service hours sufficient to reduce wait times and crowding?	○	○	○
Lighting	Is there sufficient lighting to allow someone with low vision to navigate the space?	○	○	○
Location	Is the food bank near public transit?	○	○	○
Parking	Is there designated accessible parking available?	○	○	○

Policy	Does the food bank have the authority or influence to make changes to the building (i.e., to improve doorways or washrooms)?	○	○	○
Policy	Does the food bank communicate how a member can request accommodation of their disability (i.e., reduced wait times and home delivery)?	○	○	○
Policy	Does the food bank communicate a complaint process or how to report an accessibility issue?	○	○	○
Policy	Is a code of conduct posted or communicated to members and operators?	○	○	◉
Policy	Are food bank operators trained in de-escalation or other methods for holding safer space?	○	○	○
Waiting area	Is there a rest area available to members with health conditions that limit their ability to stand or wait for extended periods of time?	○	○	○
Waiting area	Is there an area to wait protected from weather and the elements?	○	○	○
Washroom facilities	Is there a washroom available for member use when the food bank is in operation?	○	○	○
Washroom facilities	Does the washroom have grab bars and easy-to-use accessories such as sensor-controlled faucets and hand dryers? Do they have change tables and other child and family-friendly features?	○	○	○

Washroom facilities	Are the washrooms welcoming to trans and gender-diverse visitors? Is there a universal single-stall washroom option and/or welcoming language and images on multi-stall washrooms?	○	○	○
Wayfinding	Are floors and walls colour contrasting with no busy patterns?	○	○	○
Welcoming Environment	Do food bank operators greet members as they enter the space?	○	○	○
Welcoming Environment	Do members have a degree of choice when engaging with the food menu?	○	○	○
Welcoming Environment	Are serving or cooking suggestions available for items that may be unfamiliar to members?	○	○	○

Notes

Appendix 3

Recognizing Traditional Indigenous Territories

Several of the organizations profiled in this guide work across many Indigenous territories in addition to their main locations acknowledged in their profiles. All these nations' territories are recognized here.

The Food Bank Society of the Yukon

The Food Bank Society of the Yukon works across the territories of the following communities:

- Carcross/Tagish First Nation
- Champagne and Aishihik First Nations
- First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun
- Kluane First Nation
- Kwanlin Dün First Nation
- Liard First Nation
- Little Salmon/Carmacks First Nation
- Ross River Dena Council
- Selkirk First Nation
- Ta'an Kwäch'än Council
- Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in
- Teslin Tlingit Council
- Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation
- White River First Nation

Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak

Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak represents citizens of 26 First Nations who are signatories to Treaties 4, 5, 5 and 10 which are:

- Barren Lands First Nation, Brochet
- Bunibonibee Cree Nation, Oxford House
- Chemawawin Cree Nation, Easterville
- Fox Lake Cree Nation, Gillam
- God's Lake First Nation, God's Lake Narrows
- Granville Lake, Leaf Rapids
- Manto Sipi Cree Nation, God's River
- Marcel Colomb First Nation, Lynn Lake
- Mathias Colomb Cree Nation, Pukatawagan
- Misipawistik Cree Nation, Grand Rapids
- Mosakahiken First Nation, Moose Lake
- Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation, Nelson House
- Northlands First Nation, Lac Brochet
- Norway House Cree Nation
- Opaskwayak Cree Nation
- O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, South Indian Lake
- Pimicikamak Cree Nation, Cross Lake
- Sapotaweyak Cree Nation, Pelican Rapids
- Sayisi Dene Denesuline Nation, Tadoule Lake
- Shamattawa First Nation
- Sherridon
- Tataskweyak Cree Nation, Split Lake
- York Factory First Nation, York Landing
- War Lake First Nation, Ilford
- White Water Reserve, Saskatchewan
- Wuskwi Sipihk Cree Nation

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Team Biographies

Sarah Buffett
she/her/hers

Indigenous Peer Researcher, Food Banks Canada

Sarah Buffett is an Indigenous community-based researcher and scholar whose work is primarily focused on Indigenous food systems reclamation work. Sarah currently supports both academic and non-institutional efforts to promote community-engaged solutions to various forms of food insecurity for Indigenous communities across Turtle Island.

Sarah Faubert
she/her/hers

Manager of Community-Based Research, Food Banks Canada

Sarah is passionate about research and mobilizing change. She is a social worker with experience working in multiple practice domains including community outreach, and program development, implementation, and evaluation.

Dan Hillyer
he/him/his

Peer Researcher, Food Banks Canada

Dan has lived experience with food insecurity and a passion for community connection. He has served as a volunteer firefighter, Lions Club President, Chamber of Commerce President, church minister, ASL interpreter, business owner, and is currently employed as a victim services program coordinator and advocate while finishing up his psychology degree. In his spare time, he orchestrates pyromusical fireworks and plays drums in a garage band aptly named "The Best of What's Left".

He loves collaborating with people that challenge his perspective and enlighten his understanding. He has a big heart and is happy to share that with the world.

Zsuzsi Fodor

she/her/hers

Consultant

Zsuzsi is a white settler of French and Hungarian Jewish ancestry uninvitedly occupying Snuneymuxw First Nation territory. She's also a radical planner with a purpose of working and living in ways that hold justice, anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and abolition at the centre.

Rooted in food justice communities and practice, she's woven in and out of working in and with grassroots organizing, non-profits, education, and public health over the past 15+ years in so-called BC.

Zsuzsi is a facilitation nerd who loves co-creating a great process, doing strategic work with folks who are tired of typical strategic planning, and supporting communities of practice for radical learning and change.

Trish Kelly

she/her/hers

Managing Director, Untapped Accessibility

Trish is a purpose-driven leader with over two decades of experience helping organizations operationalize their social goals. A food security advocate, she was part of the senior leadership team at Greater Vancouver Food Bank and Co-Chair of the Vancouver Food Policy Council.

As an accessibility subject matter expert, she has supported Canadian organizations to operationalize accessibility and inclusion.

Her knowledge of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility is informed by her lived experience of food insecurity, and as a queer woman and child of a disabled parent. She is a citizen of the Métis Nation of BC.

Richard Matern

he/him/his

Director of Research, Food Banks Canada

Richard Matern is the Director of Research at Food Banks Canada. His past work includes leading large scale community based research projects which helped to inform the income security review process in Ontario. Richard and his colleagues at Food Banks Canada conduct research that amplifies the driving forces behind food bank use in Canada, and recommend solutions to address them.

The research also assists our advocacy efforts to inform the government, policy makers, and the general public about what is ultimately needed to achieve our goal of a Canada where no one goes hungry. Richard was also part of the research team that developed the Ontario Deprivation Index, the first poverty measure of its kind in Canada.

Amber Summerhayes

she/her/hers

Peer Researcher, Food Banks Canada

Amber's background is in brain injury rehabilitation. She lives in BC with her partner and three children on a small-scale family farm committed to ethical livestock husbandry and sustainable production methods.

As a director and volunteer at her local food bank, she is passionate about food recovery and farmer-led waste reduction programs. Working as a grant coordinator, raising money and awareness of food banking in her community, Amber draws from her lived experience of trauma, disability, and food insecurity, to make connections and provide insight on various projects surrounding food supports and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

These words are from people with lived experience of using a food bank and/or of food insecurity. They were gathered as part of a Food Banks Canada Participatory Action Research project to understand peoples' barriers to food access.

Physical and process barriers

> By the time we reach there, due to the lack of transportation, they never have enough food. I had to commute 3 buses. About 1.5 – 2 hours to the closest food bank.

> With my son's disability, he could only take home items he could fit in a backpack.

> I'd leave at 12 o'clock at night, I'd walk all night and get there by 10 in the morning and I'd get home just as it was getting dark out.

> It can be a lot of work sometimes, especially when you have as many humans as I do. It can be stressful and then having to make sure it's updated every couple of months. (Talking about means testing)

> I think the drive thru has made it so people feel so much happier and so much more comfortable, they feel like the vehicle is a bit of a protection for them.