

Healthy Options Pantry Toolkit

Contents

Rationale.....	1
Explanation	2
Visit 1: The First Visit.....	2
Visit 2: Pantry Observation	2
Optional Visit: Nutrition Assessment Survey	3
Visit 3: Healthy Options Pantry Assessment.....	4
Visit 4: Identifying Nudging Strategies.....	4
Nudging Strategies and Interventions	5
Source healthy options.....	5
Encourage healthy food selection	5
Offer indirect nutrition education	7
Offer direction nutrition education.....	8
Promote healthcare and nutrition programs.....	9
Optional Visit: Pantry Coordinator and Volunteer Education	10
Visit 5: Nudging Implementation	10
Visit 6: Post-Intervention Assessment	10
Visit 7: Follow Up Assessment.....	11
Ongoing Support and Resources.....	11
Nutrition Education Resources.....	11
Information about food bank programs	12
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).....	12
Produce to People.....	13
Green Grocer.....	13
Resources	14



Rationale

According to Feeding America's Hunger in America 2014 Report for Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, thirty-two percent of households have a member with diabetes, 57 percent of households have a member with high blood pressure and 22 percent of respondents reported that they were in poor health. Diabetes and hypertension are called diet-related diseases because they can be prevented and managed through dietary intervention. Diets appropriate for the prevention and management of diet-related diseases include a variety of whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meat, beans, legumes, and low-fat dairy and limit highly processed foods that are high in added salt, sugar and saturated fat. People who are food insecure and are in poor health because of diet-related diseases are less able to manage conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, when they cannot access foods appropriate for the management of disease.

Feeding America, the nation's largest network of food banks, has conducted research on the implementation of behavioral economics and nudging strategies to encourage healthy choices in the food pantry setting. For the past several years, Feeding America has encouraged food banks and network members to incorporate nudging strategies. Nudging is a beneficial method for health promotion in the food pantry setting because it is a low-cost intervention that helps make the healthy choice the easy choice. Nudging involves a small change in the physical environment that can influence selection of healthy options, like health promotion signage or making healthy choices more accessible on pantry shelves. The Cornell University Center for Behavioral Economics found that small, low-cost nudge interventions like signage and product placement "could be effective in removing a behavioral or physical barrier which had previously made selecting healthier food more difficult." (Rivera et al., 2016, p. 3).

On average, the people we serve receive enough food for 3-5 days' worth of meals. The amount of food that they receive from food pantries accounts for 10-17% of their monthly dietary needs. Therefore, it is in the best interest of food banks and food pantries to provide foods that support the health needs of the people that they serve. Pantries can serve as partners in health promotion by encouraging selection of more healthy options during pantry visits.

Explanation

In an effort to provide foods to pantries that meet the health and dietary needs and preferences of the people we serve, pantry coordinators will be offered the opportunity to receive one-on-one support from the Food Bank's Health and Wellness team (H&W team). Support will involve consultation about the nutritional quality of the foods distributed, education about strategies for sourcing and distributing healthy food options and assistance in altering the distribution space to encourage and promote healthy options in the food pantry setting. H&W team members will implement nudging strategies to encourage and increase selection of healthy options like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat dairy.

Visit 1: The First Visit

Participating pantries are identified and/or recommended by food bank staff or pantries may 'self-select' for participation in the Healthy Options Pantry Program. During the first visit, food bank staff will present the Healthy Options Pantry Program to pantry coordinators, paid staff and/or volunteers. Pantry coordinators and volunteers will be given the opportunity to learn more about the program, the goals of the program and benefits of participation. At this time, participants can ask questions about the program and the relationship between the pantry and the H&W team. H&W team members will bring examples of nutrition education resources and other nudging tools that can be used as tools for health promotion during the pantry intervention.

H&W Team resources needed for Visit 1:

- *Food bank newsletters*
- *Food bank recipe cards*
- *Food bank health promotion shelf tags*
- *Food bank Healthy Food Donation list*
- *Healthy Options Pantry Program recommended items list*

Visit 2: Pantry Observation

Following the first visit, a member of the H&W team will volunteer at one of the pantry's distributions, participating in all tasks that are completed by pantry volunteers; sorting food items, restocking pantry shelves, registration, distributing food, etc. A member of the H&W team will participate in passive observation of the pantry space (storage area, waiting area and the pantry space itself), as well as, the experience of

volunteers and the people they serve, by completing the Healthy Options Pantry Observation Tool.

The H&W team will identify areas of opportunity for health promotion using the Healthy Options Pantry Observation Tool. Recommendations will be made that are a good fit for the pantry based on the number of households served, the number of volunteers and the physical space, including mobility, distribution style and overall perceived capacity to implement and sustain changes.

H&W Team resources needed for Visit 2:

- *Healthy Options Pantry Observation Tool*

Optional Visit: Nutrition Assessment Survey

Interested pantry coordinators can choose to participate in the Food Bank's Nutrition Assessment Survey. The Nutrition Assessment Survey was developed in partnership with the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health and Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. The purpose of the survey is to develop a better understanding of the health and dietary needs and preferences of the people we serve. The survey is anonymous and has received Internal Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Pittsburgh.

H&W team members will conduct the survey, during open pantry hours. While people wait to be served at the pantry, H&W team members will conduct the survey; sharing information about the survey and assisting participants in completing the survey, as needed. Participation is optional and participants will receive a reusable grocery bag in exchange for completing the survey. Following the survey and data analysis, pantry coordinators will receive the results for their food pantry. Results can be used at the pantry coordinator's discretion to inform pantry operations and to implement nudging strategies and other best practices to support the health and wellness needs of the people they serve.

H&W Team resources needed for Optional Visit:

- *Nutrition Assessment Survey*
- *Pencils, Clipboards*
- *Reusable grocery bags*

Visit 3: Healthy Options Pantry Assessment

Following pantry observation and experiential learning, the pantry coordinator will meet with a member of the H&W team to complete the Healthy Options Pantry Assessment Tool. The assessment tool is used to determine what health promoting behaviors the pantry already employs in its distribution and what potential health promotion behaviors, actions or changes can be made to increase selection of healthy options. Pantry coordinators can complete the assessment tool independently or with assistance from a member of the H&W Team. The assessment will be scored following the scoring criteria as outlined in the Healthy Options Pantry Assessment Tool rationale and explanation. The assessment score established during Visit 3 will serve as the pantry score before intervention. The assessment will also be administered, immediately following intervention and again at 3-month follow-up.

After the assessment tool is completed, the pantry coordinator and a member of the H&W team will discuss items on the assessment and appropriate actions or changes that can be taken to encourage healthy choices. At this time, the H&W team may make recommendations based on their observations. The goal of this discussion is to determine 2-3 actionable items on the assessment that can be addressed by the pantry with the assistance of the food bank. Following the discussion, the pantry coordinator will select 2-3 items to be addressed and strategies to be implemented at the pantry.

H&W Team resources needed for Visit 3:

- *Healthy Options Pantry Assessment Tool*
- *Healthy Options Pantry Observational Tool for discussion*

Visit 4: Identifying Nudging Strategies

Based on pantry observation, completion of the Healthy Options Pantry Assessment Tool and optional participation in the Nutrition Assessment Survey, the pantry coordinator will decide which nudging strategies to implement at the pantry. H&W team members will assist pantry coordinators in the decision-making process and will facilitate the implementation process; however, the intent is for the pantry coordinator to decide which strategies are appropriate and sustainable based on the unique considerations of the food pantry. During this visit, pantry coordinators will complete the assessment. Based on the assessment and identification of nudging strategies or areas for intervention, H&W team members will make recommendations to increase choice of healthy options. Pantry coordinators will ultimately decide which strategies to

adopt in the pantry. Following Visit 4, H&W team members will develop a plan for intervention by collecting needed resources and tools like signage, recipes, display bins, nutrition resources or contact information for community partners.

Nudging Strategies and Interventions

Source healthy options

- 1-6. Distribute fresh vegetables, fruit, whole grain options, low-sodium canned beans, low-sodium canned vegetables, canned fruit packed in 100% juice:** Pantries that source healthy options, like low-sodium options, low sugar options and whole grains encourage healthy choice in sourcing and distributing these options rather than standard canned food options. Alternatively, health promotion signage and nudging can be used to encourage people to drain and rinse canned foods to reduce nutrients categorized as ‘nutrients to limit’ by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- 7. Conduct Healthy Food Drives:** Pantry coordinators are more than likely very well acquainted with organizing and/or receiving food from food drives. In most cases, food drives are conducted with minimal guidelines or specific asks for food items. However, pantry coordinators can be more specific about the kinds of foods that they would like to receive. For example, a food drive could be held that requests low-sodium canned soup options or that requests donations of whole grain foods like whole oats or brown rice. This ensures that the pantry receives the foods that are most needed. Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank has developed a recommended donation list for food drives that can be used as a tool by pantries. See the Nutrition Education Resources section of this document for the ‘Most Needed Food’ list.
- 8. Adopt Nutrition Policy for food sourcing:** Pantry coordinators can choose to identify foods that they will not distribute or foods that they will not source, in order to increase healthy options. For example, the Food Bank no longer accepts donations of sugar-sweetened beverages like soda or energy drinks. Alternatively, pantry coordinators can develop a statement of sourcing practices, identifying and/or acknowledging priorities for sourcing food.

Encourage healthy food selection

- 1. Place produce at the start of distribution:** People are more likely to choose fresh produce items at the beginning of the distribution

when their cart is empty. This is why most grocery stores stage produce at the front of their stores. Shoppers are encouraged to fill their carts with the high cost and high value foods like fresh fruits and vegetables because of where the produce section is located. The people served at food pantries are also more likely to choose fresh produce when it is located at the beginning of the distribution. Reorganization of the pantry space and/or changing the flow of traffic within the distribution space can increase selection of fresh fruits and vegetables; alternatively, placing produce in a prominent location in the pantry space can also encourage selection of fruits and vegetables. While it is not always possible to reorganize the distribution space or the flow of traffic, pantries can encourage selection of more produce with signage or display.

- 2. Market-style produce distribution:** People are more likely to choose fresh produce items that they can see, than produce that is pre-bagged. By making produce easy to see, people will be more likely to choose more. Repurpose milk crates, cardboard boxes and other containers to make produce easily accessible and allow people to choose and bag their own produce, rather than pre-bagging produce. Pantries can purchase plastic, wire or wicker baskets to display fruits and vegetables in a visually pleasing manner. Alternatively, in the event that produce must be bagged prior to distribution, pantries can source translucent or mesh produce bags (both available on GPCFB inventory), which will allow people to see for themselves what is packed in the bags.
- 3. Place snack foods at end of distribution:** Placing snack foods at the end of the distribution encourages selection of healthy options like whole foods throughout the rest of the distribution. This may require reorganization of the pantry space and/or changing the flow of traffic within the distribution space. If snack foods are staged in the distribution after healthy options, people are more likely to fill their carts with the high value, high quality items before choosing snack foods in amounts appropriate for a healthy diet.
- 4. Place healthy options at eye level:** People are more likely to choose items that are located at eye level. These items will be the first thing that catches their attention in the distribution flow. Alternatively, placing unhealthy options, such as sugary cereal or snack foods above eye level will be 'out of sight and out of mind.' Placing items in the most convenient location, at eye level, lowers "the effort required to select an item" and "minimizes the distance between an item and the hands of people who could select it" (Rivera et al., 2016, p. 14).
- 5. Place healthy foods separate from less healthy:** People are more likely to choose healthy options when they are separate from other options and are identified with health promotion signage. Placing

healthy options (i.e. low-sodium & low-sugar canned foods, whole grain foods, etc.) separate from less healthy options will allow people to choose foods that are appropriate for their nutrition needs.

Offer indirect nutrition education

- 1. Label fresh produce items:** When people know what kinds of fresh fruits and vegetables are available, they are more likely to choose them during the distribution. Labels on or near fresh produce items serve as a nudge at the point of decision. Additionally, if the pantry has a waiting area, a bulletin board or chalkboard listing the available fresh produce items can increase selection. When pantry coordinators tell people about the fresh produce available during the distribution, people are more likely to make the decision to choose fresh fruits and vegetables before they are faced with the choice in the distribution line.
- 2. Label unfamiliar and healthy food items:** People are more likely to choose an unfamiliar item if the item is identified. Labeling with signage can increase selection. Pantries can also stage volunteers near unfamiliar or new foods to educate and encourage selection of that item. People are more likely to try a new food if they see that someone like them, perhaps a volunteer, has eaten and enjoyed the new food.
- 3. Identify healthy choices with shelf tags:** Shelf tags, commonly called 'shelf talkers,' help promote healthy options by providing short and simple nutrition facts that can increase choice at the point of decision. Shelf talkers are available from the food bank and use the food bank's Nutrition Badges to explain simple nutrition concepts, such as identifying low-sodium options, high fiber options, low sugar options or encouraging people to take steps to improve the nutrition quality of canned foods like draining and rinsing canned food. See the Nutrition Education Resources section of this document for health promotion signage.
- 4. Provide Food Bank recipe cards:** Recipe cards are available to pantries for no cost on GPCFB inventory. The food bank's full color recipe cards are designed for low vision, low reading level and ESL readers. Recipes are developed following the food bank's nutrition criteria: low in fat, low in salt and limited added sugar. Recipe cards can be used as tools in health promotion by cross-marketing the recipe cards with ingredients for the recipe can help encourage selection of those ingredients.
- 5. Provide CAN Newsletter:** The food bank's Cooking, Activity and Nutrition Newsletter is added to every pantry's first order of the month (pick up or delivery). The newsletter includes health

promotion articles and healthy recipes using food bank products like fresh fruits and vegetables and shelf-stable foods. The recipes included in the newsletter meet the food bank's nutrition criteria, and therefore, meet the health and dietary needs of the people that we serve. Newsletters can be used as tools in health promotion by cross-marketing newsletters with ingredients from the included recipes. They can also be shared with people as they wait to be served.

- 6. Provide add'l recipes for distributed foods:** In the event that the pantry receives a product for which there is not a food bank developed resource, we encourage pantries to print their own recipe cards. A useful recipe on a plain sheet of 8½ x 11 white paper is incredibly useful when the need is immediate. Here are a few helpful websites with a variety of recipes appropriate for individuals with diet-related diseases:

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's Healthy Recipes
<https://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/get-help/healthy-eating/recipes/>

American Diabetes Association's Diabetes Food Hub
<https://www.diabetesfoodhub.org>

American Heart Association's Recipe Collections
<https://recipes.heart.org/en>

Offer direction nutrition education

- 1. Volunteers promote healthy options:** People are more likely to choose healthy options if they are encouraged by pantry volunteers and staff. Pantry volunteers can serve as health promoters at the pantry by encouraging people to select fresh produce items. Volunteers can share nutrition information at the point of selection in the distribution line; for example, encouraging volunteers to highlight or promote low sodium canned vegetables or to identify whole grain food items can help make people make the healthy choice.
- 2. Provide food sampling, food demonstration:** People will be more likely to choose healthy options and/or a new food item, if the choice is believed to be less risky. In some cases, people will not choose a new food item, if they are concerned that the food may go to waste. By allowing people to taste healthy options, they will be able to make a decision about choosing the food before they are faced with the decision in the distribution line. Food sampling can involve something as simple as providing a taste of a food or

providing samples of a recipe that is being distributed. Food sampling allows educators to have short, point-of-service interactions with people about nutrition education topics. Food demonstrations are more involved and require additional cooking equipment; however, educators can have pre-prepared food to sample, while cooking from scratch. Food demonstrations allow for longer engagement opportunities. Educators can talk about food preparation, cooking techniques and food safety topics because of the longer format. Food sampling and food demonstration can be conducted by food bank staff, community partners and qualified volunteers with appropriate food safety certification (ServSafe Food Handler or ServSafe Food Manager).

- 3. Provide cooking classes on-site:** People will be more likely to choose healthy options if they know how to cook with healthy options. There are many organizations in our service area that conduct cooking classes for low-income individuals and families. Penn State Cooperative Extension provides nutrition and food education in the eleven counties in our service area. Additionally, private and public organizations like Share our Strength's Cooking Matters and Common Threads provide cooking classes for low-income individuals. By partnering with these organizations, pantries can provide cooking classes on a regular basis.

Promote healthcare and nutrition programs

- 1. Provide information about other nutrition programs:** Pantries can share information with people about federal nutrition programs and other food bank programs by displaying flyers on a community information board, wall displays or in brochure holders. Additionally, pantries can partner with a SNAP Outreach Coordinator from the food bank or local health department to offer SNAP assistance during open pantry hours.
- 2. Distribute affordable healthcare information:** Many healthcare providers have staff specifically trained to provide outreach to low-income individuals. Staff from healthcare companies can set up an information table and answer questions during pantry hours. This is ideal for pantries with high volume and high capacity, particularly pantries that have a waiting area separate from the pantry space. Additionally, pantries can provide information about local 211 and other community service organizations that provide healthcare information and guidance to low-income individuals.
- 3. Partner with healthcare to offer screenings:** Many healthcare providers and local county health departments will provide blood pressure screenings, BMI and blood sugar checks. This is ideal for pantries with high volume and high capacity, particularly pantries

that have a waiting area or additional room(s) separate from the pantry space. Additionally, when considering this strategy be aware that healthcare providers require private rooms or portable room dividers to provide privacy for health screening.

Optional Visit: Pantry Coordinator and Volunteer Education

At some food pantries, it may be useful for a member of the H&W team to have a conversation with pantry staff and volunteers about the health and nutrition needs of the people they serve. H&W team members can present formal or informal presentations on the relationship between diet and diet-related diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity, including how the food pantry can serve as the food bank's partner in health promotion.

Visit 5: Nudging Implementation

Nudging strategies will be implemented by H&W team members, pantry coordinators and volunteers, if they so choose. Working with pantry coordinators and volunteers to implement nudges will increase participation and therefore ownership of the changes going forward, ultimately increasing the sustainability of the intervention. Participation in implementing changes will also increase pantry coordinator and volunteer understanding of the health needs of the people that they serve, as well as, why subtle changes in the pantry environment can increase selection of healthy options.

Visit 6: Post-Intervention Assessment

Following implementation of health promotion and nudging strategies, the H&W team will administer the Healthy Pantry Assessment Tool. A member of the H&W team will volunteer at the pantry during the distribution. Following the distribution, they will administer the Healthy Pantry Assessment to identify which strategies were implemented. Successful implementation will be determined if the score of the Healthy Options Pantry Assessment increased from the pre-intervention and post-intervention assessment.

Visit 7: Follow Up Assessment

The H&W team will administer the Healthy Pantry Assessment at three-month follow up to determine if the implemented strategies were successful and if changes made were sustainable without one-on-one support from the food bank or its partners. A member of the H&W team will volunteer at the pantry during the distribution. Following the distribution, they will administer the Healthy Pantry Assessment to identify which strategies. Successful intervention, overall, will be determined if the score of the Healthy Options Pantry Assessment remains unchanged from the post-intervention assessment to the follow up assessment.

Ongoing Support and Resources

Following intervention and implementation, pantries that participate in the Healthy Options Pantry program will continue to receive support from the food bank in the form of nutrition education resources and a monthly email newsletter highlighting topics such as health promotion and food education. New recipes will be shared with Healthy Options Pantries ahead of their arrival on GPCFB inventory, so that pantry coordinators can make preparations to use nutrition education resources as tools for health promotion.

Pantries can also continue to engage with the H&W team, in the event that they are interested in taking additional efforts to increase choice of healthy options. The Health and Wellness team will serve as an additional point of contact at the food bank for pantry coordinators, concerning topics related to the Healthy Options Pantry program.

Nutrition Education Resources

Food bank nutrition education materials including newsletters and recipe cards are available to pantries at no cost through GPCFB inventory. The Cooking, Activity and Nutrition newsletter is delivered to food pantries with the first delivery or pick up every month. Pantries are allotted a specific number of newsletters based on reporting statistics.

Recipes in newsletters and recipe cards are written using food items that are common in the food pantry setting as well as a variety of fresh produce items that are available to pantries throughout the year. Per the United States Department of Agriculture, the food bank publishes monthly newsletters for the Commodity Supplement Food Program

(CSFP), commonly known as the senior box program. The recipes and health-related articles included in the CSFP newsletter are written for individuals age 60 and older and include information about the changing health and dietary needs of senior citizens and include recipes for commodity food items provided in the senior box.

Recipe cards and newsletters are also available on the food bank website: <https://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/get-help/healthy-eating/recipes/>

Information about food bank programs

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

To learn more about the SNAP or to organize a sign-up event at a food pantry in your area, please contact the SNAP Outreach Coordinators from Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank or our community partners in outlying counties:

Allegheny County

SNAP Outreach Coordinator in Allegheny County
John Cooper
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
jcooper@pittsburghfoodbank.org
(412) 460-3663 ext. 482

Just Harvest
(412) 431-8960

Urban League Hunger Services
(866) 395-3663

Armstrong County

Armstrong County Community Action Agency
(724) 548-5764

Beaver, Butler, Lawrence, Greene and Washington County

Urban League Hunger Services
(866) 395-3663

Cambria and Indiana County

SNAP Outreach Coordinator in Cambria County
Chelsy Novak
Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
cnovak@pittsburghfoodbank.org

(814) 889-5831

Fayette County

Fayette Community Action Agency Inc.

(724) 437-6050 ext. 3147

(724) 437-6050 ext. 3233

Somerset County

Family Health Council of Central PA

(814) 443-1901 ext. 2905

Produce to People

Produce to People is the food bank's large-scale produce distribution program. Each month 8,000 households receive 30-50 pounds of produce at 17 distributions throughout southwestern Pennsylvania.

If a pantry you are supporting is located close to a Produce to People distribution site, you can provide information about the program at the food pantry. In pantries that struggle to provide a variety of fresh produce, Produce to People can help bridge the gap.

For more information and an up-to-date calendar of distributions, visit:

<https://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/what-we-do/food-to-people/produce-people-p2p/>

Green Grocer

Green Grocer is the food bank's mobile farmers' market. The Green Grocer truck is designed to travel into food desert communities to provide the fresh food options that are currently missing from the landscape. By selling fresh, healthy foods at an affordable price Green Grocer will help to alleviate food inequity by creating access. Everyone is welcome to shop at Green Grocer; the truck accepts cash, credit, SNAP/EBT and Farmers Market Nutrition Program checks.

Green Grocer makes 14 market stops every week in 14 different neighborhoods in Allegheny County. If a pantry you are supporting is located close to a Green Grocer stop, you can provide information about the program at the food pantry.

For more information about Green Grocer, visit:

<https://www.pittsburghfoodbank.org/what-we-do/food-to-people/green-grocer/>

Resources

Feeding America. Food Pantries can make the healthy choice the easy choice. Retrieved from http://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/mp/files/tool_and_resources/files/fea-16-002-fea-nudges-quickstart-rd4.v1.pdf

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