

# How can Feeding America food banks and college/universities partner to address college hunger?

*This handout offers guidance for launching and sustaining effective charitable food assistance on campuses, particularly on-campus food pantries. Combined insights from food banks and campus representatives (e.g., students, administrators, pantry staff) are presented in the following sections: (1) relationships and partnerships, (2) awareness, (3) access, and (4) operations.*



## HOW CAN WE LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS TO BUILD EFFECTIVE CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE ON CAMPUSES?



### FOOD BANK PERSPECTIVES

- **Secure commitment from school leaders.** College administrators should demonstrate buy-in, readiness, commitment, and a willingness to acknowledge the reality of hunger among their student population.
- **Obtain broad engagement from departments across the campus, particularly the student life/affairs department.** These departments are thought to have high-touch relationships with students and a keen awareness of student needs.
- **Honor the expertise of those in the campus community.** Members of the campus community possess knowledge of institutional levers and infrastructure. Engaging their voices also allows individuals from across the campus to feel heard.
- **Identify a champion within the college/university** to help forge important in-roads with individuals in decision-making roles.
- **Learn from other food banks who have successfully partnered with college campuses.** Creating space for collaborative meetings and convenings provides a foundation for learning, growth, and the proliferation of effective anti-hunger practices.



### CAMPUS PERSPECTIVES

- **Build caring relationships with students and their families** characterized by trust and a willingness to share and listen.
- **Partner with student leaders** who understand the needs of the student body and who can ensure that services are ultimately responsive to diverse student needs.
- **Cast a wide net for potential partners.** Partnerships with on- and off-campus groups, businesses, and organizations foster a systemic and comprehensive approach to addressing food insecurity, as one consequence of the broader financial instability faced by students.
- **Engage in campus-wide data collection to drive requests for pantry funding and support.** Gathering data from students (commonly collected via surveys) is a powerful tool for justifying funding requests because it provides concrete information about student needs.

## HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT THOSE IN NEED ARE AWARE OF CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE ON CAMPUS?



### FOOD BANK PERSPECTIVES

- **Tailor the marketing to effectively spread awareness** of college hunger services. The use of technology (e.g., texting, apps) may help reach students. Be mindful of who is doing the marketing and outreach; someone who presents as a near-peer may offer more perceived relatability to pantry users.
- **Have a presence on campus by participating in campus events.** For example, host SNAP application workshops to boost awareness of the pantry services.



### CAMPUS PERSPECTIVES

- **Leverage campus faculty and instructors to raise awareness about pantry services.** Many students rely on instructors for support in achieving their academic goals. Given their close relationships and frequent contact with students, campus faculty should be aware of services so they can offer referrals.
- **Market the pantry campus-wide.** The more students, staff, and leaders who are aware of what is available to students, the greater likelihood that information about these services will be shared throughout the campus, and students will take advantage of services.

## HOW CAN WE ENSURE THAT THOSE IN NEED HAVE ACCESS TO CAMPUS-BASED FOOD ASSISTANCE?



### FOOD BANK PERSPECTIVES

- **Devise ways to alleviate the stigma** often associated with college hunger among students and administrators. For example, brainstorm solutions like combining college hunger services with campus events (e.g., homecoming week, health fairs) to create welcoming environments to reach students.
- **Adopt solutions to mitigate internal politics and bureaucratic red tape.** For example, plan to allot substantial time to navigate issues related to 501(c)(3) status classification and gaining access to student populations.



### CAMPUS PERSPECTIVES

- **Attend to the unique challenges faced by vulnerable student populations.** Campus pantries should prioritize improving access for particularly vulnerable groups of students (e.g., international students, transfer students) who may have unique challenges to accessing services.
- **Employ fair systems for determining who can access pantry services, and with what frequency.**
- **Place pantries in convenient locations on campus to boost student access.** Some campuses reported success with centralized locations and also dispersing snack pantries across campus.
- **Cultivate an emotionally-safe culture, free of judgement** as a way to ensure students frequent the pantry.

## HOW CAN WE OPTIMIZE THE OPERATIONS OF CHARITABLE FOOD ASSISTANCE ON CAMPUSES TO BETTER SERVE USERS?



### FOOD BANK PERSPECTIVES

- **Create formal documents**, such as manuals, to guide and replicate college hunger initiatives. This may include outlining protocols for setting up campus pantries or offering policy-related agendas.
- **Train additional on-campus personnel.** For example, trainings might include navigating SNAP applications, food safety, or ordering from the food bank.
- **Designate food bank personnel to focus on college hunger.** The reality of food insecurity on college campuses is complex and ever-growing, thus having a dedicated staff member at the food bank to stay abreast of this dynamic landscape will assist with crafting an effective response.
- **Combine forces with students, volunteers, and designated on-campus staff.** There's not one "right way" to operate a campus pantry; piloting unique models, or various iterations of a model, may prove useful given the unique context of each campus.



### CAMPUS PERSPECTIVES

- **Offer longer opening hours.** Be mindful of timeslots in which classes are usually scheduled and offer opening hours that do not conflict with popular class or activity times.
- **Provide a diversity in the food offerings** such as less expired products and more options for those with dietary restrictions (e.g., vegetarian, vegan).
- **Extend community service hours for student volunteers.** The benefits of this approach are two-fold, as pantries could secure more staff and students could fulfill their community service requirements (if required).
- **Offer an exchange program at the pantry** where students can donate unused items from their homes in exchange for other products from the pantry.



#### ABOUT THIS BRIEF

Between 2018-2020, Feeding America and the Claremont Evaluation Center (CEC) collaborated to explore the landscape of college food insecurity in the United States. **Phase 1** of the study focused on understanding the response of Feeding America network food banks in addressing food insecurity among college students. To do this, the evaluation team conducted interviews with selected food banks and administered a College Hunger Survey, open to all 200 food banks in the Feeding America network. **Phase 2** focused on capturing the voices of students who were accessing charitable food assistance on campuses, as well as the perceptions of pantry staff and campus administrators about these services. This effort involved listening sessions and campus administrator interviews at three colleges / universities in the United States.

**PHASE 1** 19 FOOD BANK INTERVIEWS  
150 RESPONSES TO THE COLLEGE HUNGER SURVEY

**PHASE 2** 5 CAMPUS LEADER INTERVIEWS  
71 STUDENTS AND PANTRY STAFF LISTENING SESSIONS



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