

Promising Practices for Creating a Healthy Food Shelf

A Healthy Foods Policy is an internal document that outlines your organization’s practices, priorities and guidelines for the foods you purchase, receive, and distribute to the community. **The checklist below includes a number of promising practices that can be part of a healthy foods policy and help you create a healthy food shelf.** These promising practices were identified through various discussions with stakeholders including food shelves, food banks, hunger relief organizations, and public health departments.

Within each section of the checklist, those promising practices with the “highest potential impact on healthy food availability” are listed first. These rankings were based on stakeholder feedback and on the experience of subject matter experts in the hunger relief and public health fields. **It is recommended that your organization focus on the promising practices highlighted in yellow whenever possible as these are the activities most likely to have a significant impact on the availability of and demand for healthy foods,** while also being low-cost and feasible for most food shelves to implement.

Use this checklist to assess what your organization is already doing/starting, what practices you are hoping to implement in the future, and what practices may not be applicable to your food shelf. These promising practices can serve as a start to developing your Healthy Foods Policy and creating an environment where high quality, healthy foods are consistently available for clients.



In Place	In Progress	Will Consider	Not Applicable	<h1>Promising Practices</h1>
Sourcing Healthy Foods – Purchasing Strategies				
				Re-evaluate your inventory list to see where you can make adjustments that will allow you to purchase healthy items more consistently and in larger quantities
				Prioritize purchasing healthy items when allocating your budget; commit to choosing fresh produce, whole grains, and low-sodium/sugar/fat options when available
				Buy healthier versions/alternatives of snacks (e.g. popcorn, whole grain crackers versus chips) instead of eliminating a category of food
				Buy healthier items in bulk to reduce cost (e.g. dried beans, rice)
				Purchase frozen or canned produce to supplement fresh items to stretch dollars
				Join a food bank to purchase healthy foods at a lower-than-retail price
				Establish arrangements to buy bulk produce from a farmers market or local farmer at a wholesale price
				Negotiate discounted CSA shares with local growers
Sourcing Healthy Foods – Donation Strategies				
				Partner with local organizations, schools, businesses, and places of worship to host a healthy food drive or a targeted food drive for specific healthy items
				Arrange to glean/collect surplus fresh produce or other healthy items from a local farmers market or farm on a regular basis
				Collect fresh produce donations from community and backyard gardeners
				Join a food bank to receive free donated foods
				Develop a “retail rescue” relationship with a local grocery store to receive seconds and donated food items
				Solicit financial or food donations from customers at grocery stores (e.g. Seward Co-op’s “Round Up” program)
				Set up an on-site garden and engage food shelf staff, volunteers, and clients in growing produce for the food shelf
				Ask people to sponsor a CSA shares for your food shelf or match sponsors up with specific food shelf clients/families



In Place	In Progress	Will Consider	Not Applicable	<h2>Promising Practices</h2>
Increasing Client Demand – Education				
				Use a visual cue system to promote healthy choices and discourage unhealthy choices (e.g. 1, 2, 3 stars or Go, Slow, Whoa rating system)
				Offer taste-testing and cooking demonstrations to allow clients to sample unfamiliar healthy foods before they select their items to take home
				Provide simple recipe cards or cooking instructions for healthy foods (including recipes that are quick and don't require much equipment to prepare); ensure that written materials meet basic reading levels
				Train volunteers and staff on the importance of healthy eating, what healthy foods to promote, and how they can help clients select healthy foods as part of their customer service
				Partner with University of MN Extension services or another health education resource to provide nutrition information, classes, and food demonstrations
				Include a teaching kitchen at food shelf where clients can prepare and make meals or watch demonstrations
				Host produce-only distributions to help raise awareness about fresh fruits and vegetables
				Designate healthy items as bonus/free items and place in a highly visible location
				Stock shelves with culturally appropriate healthy foods that are familiar to clients
Merchandizing Healthy Foods				
				Arrange physical space like a grocery store: 1) put healthy options in high visibility/high traffic areas; 2) place healthy items at eye level on shelves and "front and face" all packages; 3) organize items into natural categories to make shopping easier
				Make healthy foods visually appealing using baskets, bins, shelving, and colorful signage (keep everything clean, fresh, and easy to sort through)
				Group healthy items together that clients can use to make a meal or snack; add a healthy recipe card
				Use coolers or refrigerators/freezers with glass doors so that clients can see healthy items without having to open the door
				Set up a (no-limit) fresh produce table in the client waiting area
				Find donors or other experts who have retail merchandising expertise and can help you enhance your food shelf space (e.g. paint, move shelving, hang signs)

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Communications with Donors, Staff, Volunteers, and Clients				
				Create written materials of desired foods and those you don't need; be proactive in your communications
				Educate donors, staff, and volunteers on the need for healthy foods and the health problems that can arise when food shelf clients don't have access to sufficient healthy options
				Make "healthy" part of your food shelf's brand; incorporate messaging into all of your communications materials
				Ask donors to make financial donations that can be used to purchase healthy food at wholesale prices from food banks or other sources (emphasize that food shelves can stretch their dollars better than an individual purchasing food items)
				Conduct client surveys to identify desired items and demonstrate needs to donors, staff, and volunteers
				Develop a healthy food donation campaign in collaboration with other food shelves to pool resources and share a consistent message (use social media, email, listservs, newsletters, and other channels to promote key messages)
				Humanize the effort through personal stories (don't focus just on facts)
				Emphasize a message of choice – we provide most expensive items to free up clients' budgets to purchase what they want
				Give Cub/Rainbow feedback on pre-packed bags; ask for healthier items
				Provide resources to clients so they can easily find healthy food outlets and other health resources in their community
General Strategies				
				Develop a healthy foods policy to guide organizational decision-making around sourcing, donations, and distribution of healthy foods
				Invest in energy efficient refrigerators and coolers to increase storage capacity for healthy, perishable food items
				Coordinate with an on-site or nearby meal program to help them serve healthy foods using surplus produce from the food shelf