



# Partner Agency Handbook

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## About Us

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank Association was founded in 1982 in Providence, RI. We are a private, nonprofit organization governed by a 24-member Board of Directors elected annually by the Food Bank's Member Agencies. The Food Bank is also a member of Feeding America, the largest hunger-relief organization in the United States. The mission of Feeding America is to feed hungry people by soliciting and distributing food through its national network of 200 affiliate food banks and food-rescue programs, and to educate the public about solutions to the problem of hunger in America.

### **Our Mission**

To improve the quality of life for all Rhode Islanders by advancing solutions to the problem of hunger.

### **Our Vision**

We envision a state where no one goes hungry.

### **Our Core Values**

#### ***We believe in....***

**Compassion:** We approach our work with empathy, understanding and respect for the diverse communities we serve.

**Fostering Health:** We want all Rhode Islanders to have access to healthy food because good nutrition is essential for good health.

**Innovation:** We are flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the community. We lead by finding creative ways to prevent and reduce food insecurity.

**Collaboration:** We know we cannot end hunger alone. We succeed in partnership with others and strive to include a rich tapestry of voices in our work.

**Accountability:** We deliver outstanding service and high-quality programs, effectively and efficiently. We steward our resources with integrity and transparency.

## What We Do

The Food Bank is a food distribution center where we: solicit, collect, store, and distribute donated and purchased food, and federal commodities (TEFAP and CSFP). We channel millions of pounds of food and grocery products to qualified Member Agencies. The majority of our members are categorized as emergency food providers such as food pantries and community meal sites. Check out our **Food Assistance List** on our website: <https://rifoodbank.org/find-food/>.

## Membership Qualifications and Benefits

All Food Bank members must be non-profits with 501c3 or a church/church affiliate in Rhode Island. All emergency food programs must be open to the public and have a Rhode Island Department of Health Food Business License and someone who is Food Safety certified based on program type.

As a member of the Food Bank, your agency has access to a large variety of food products. Our inventory is a mix of donated and purchased products.

Members of the Food Bank have access to more than just food. We offer regular networking opportunities through our regional forums, the annual member agency meeting, and the annual agency conference. We also host several programs that are available to our network and/or the guests that they serve, including but not limited to the programs highlighted below.

## Programs

For more details about the following programs, please contact Community Programs and visit our online Agency Portal <https://rifoodbank.org/agency-portal> where you'll find documents, forms and toolkits on membership and food safety to help you manage your Food Bank member program.

### COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Nobody's Just Hungry. This program offers quality referral information and agency trainings regarding programs such as SNAP, WIC, LIHEAP and more.

### HEALTHY HABITS, EATING WELL ON A BUDGET NUTRITION EDUCATION PROGRAM

The nutrition education program offers workshops and trainings for staff and volunteers of food assistance programs, as well as their program participants. The program provides practical information, including the importance of balance, moderation and variety that can be used to make healthier meals choices. For community members wanting access to our program, we offer our nutrition messages and recipes virtually on the Food Bank's website, Facebook and Instagram.

## KIDS CAFE

Kids Cafe creates partnerships with community organizations that assist the Food Bank in providing supplemental evening meals to children at-risk of hunger. The Food Bank's culinary nutrition team develops a monthly menu offers a variety of wholesome foods made fresh daily by our chefs and dinners include all of the components of a healthy and well-balanced meal.

## DIRECT DELIVERY

This program delivers food orders directly to our partner agencies at no cost. Participating agencies must meet specific delivery criteria and agree to special policy requirements to qualify.

## RICFB GRANT

The Food Bank works to provide various grant opportunities to member agencies throughout the year. Grants may be for Cultural Competency, Best Practices, Shoppers Choice and Agency Capacity. Be on the lookout for these opportunities!

## TEFAP (THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM)

TEFAP is a federal program that is run through the USDA nationally, and in partnership with the RI Department of Human Services locally. Community food pantries and meal sites are eligible to participate in this program, which offers food commodities at no cost. There are specific guidelines for distribution and a special agreement must be signed.

## COOP

In addition to donated and purchased food items, the Food Bank has a small COOP program that offers non-food items at cost to help support agency needs. A RI State Tax-Exempt Form is required to participate in this program.

## Agency Monitoring

The purpose of a monitoring visit is to ensure that high sanitation and safety standards are upheld throughout the Food Bank network, to increase communication between the Food Bank and its member agencies, to offer agencies technical assistance and support, and to give agencies a chance to "show off" their program.

### **Before Your Visit**

When your agency is due for a monitoring visit, you will receive a phone call or email in advance to schedule the visit. Most visits last about an hour. All Food Bank member agencies are inspected at least once every 18-24 months, as required by Feeding America, with some programs requiring annual visits. However, the Food Bank reserves the right to monitor an agency more frequently if necessary.

### **During Your Visit**

Community Programs staff will ask you for basic information about your program, and they will need to inspect the following: food storage areas, coolers & freezers (including standalone internal thermometers), Food Bank invoices, records of food distribution, donation tracking systems, Department of Health licenses/certifications, allergen awareness signs, pest control systems, appropriate fire safety precautions.

All invoices from the Food Bank need to be signed and kept on site from one monitoring visit to the next. Signing invoices is a method to ensure that donated products go to where they are intended to go. It is a safety measure that protects your agency and the Food Bank from fraud.

**It is a best practice to have all invoices triple signed, regardless of if some orders were picked up at the Food Bank or some delivered.** Copies of all invoices must be kept on file on site until the Food Bank monitors the agency.

Records of food distribution are reviewed to ensure that the agency has a system in place to keep track of where donated food is going and how it is being used. For meal sites and shelters, this includes keeping daily counts of the number of people served. For food pantries, a simple registration form for all households along with a system for tracking visits is expected.

To ensure good customer service, forms should only ask for minimal information and nothing highly personal. Information in addition to guest's name, address, phone number (for recall or emergency purposes only) and number of people in the household should be for very specific reasons, optional and not a barrier to service. Community Programs staff and resources are available to help agencies streamline the process. Check the agency portal for registration form and guest tracking templates.

### **After Your Visit**

Community Programs staff will send a follow-up letter to your agency after the monitoring visit is completed. The letter will be copied to the agency's executive director. If necessary, the letter will identify the problem(s), outline the corrections to be made, and specify a date for a follow-up assessment, when applicable. Some infractions may result in a period of suspension.

### **Suspensions, Probations and Account Closures**

Suspensions occur when there is a specific issue to correct. During the suspension period an agency may not continue to receive food or non-food items from the Food Bank. Community Programs staff will closely monitor the agency's account activity and may visit the agency, unannounced, during the suspended timeframe. An agency will remain suspended until the Community Programs department receives proper information or actions as determined. If the violation is breached, not addressed, nor corrected by the date of the follow-up visit, or even after corrections have been made,

Community Programs staff may recommend that the agency be put on probation or recommend closing their membership.

Probations are reserved for agencies that have had chronic issues. Probations are not to exceed 3-months, as determined by the department director. If the department director feels that the agency is committed to making the necessary corrections to move towards a good standing membership the 3-month limit may be lifted.

Membership accounts may be closed if it appears that the agency is consistently out of compliance and does not regularly meet the Basic Agreement requirements.

An agency may appeal actions taken by the Food Bank through the following process:

1. The agency shall present a written appeal to the Food Bank's CEO within 7 business days of the cited violation.
2. The Food Bank's CEO will notify the agency of his/her decision within 7 business days of the appeal.
3. If the agency is still dissatisfied, they have 7 days from the CEO's decision to request a review by a committee of the Board of Directors.
4. The Food Bank's Board of Directors will determine whether a meeting with the agency representative(s) is necessary and will review all the facts and provide a written response to the agency within 30 business days. The Food Bank's Board of Directors decision is final.

## Annual Recertification

All Food Bank member agencies are required to recertify their membership every January. There is no annual recertification fee. Recertification helps us to keep our files updated by verifying your program addresses and staff contact information, hours of operation, designated service areas. Annual recertification is only offered to members if the program remains in good standing and has followed the policies outlined in the Basic Agreement.

## Customer Service

The Basic Agreement outlines a number of expectations regarding your program's service to your guests. As a member of the RI Community Food Bank, it's important that all partners offer exceptional customer service to provide the most dignified experience possible. This is demonstrated in a number of ways including:

- Offering Shoppers Choice distribution at food pantries
- Surveying guests regarding their food preferences to avoid making assumptions
- Highlighting diversity, equity and inclusion and recognizing cultural practices and preferences of the community you serve

- Being intentional with language, including using welcoming terms like guest, shopper, neighbor, etc.

The Community Programs team offers a wide range of resources and trainings to help support and develop your program's customer service practices. Contact us, check the Agency Portal, and read the weekly Agency Newsletter for more information.

Additionally, we will be transparent with your program should we receive a guest complaint about the service you've provided and work with you and the guest to fairly remedy the situation and help you modify your customer service practices going forward.

## Agency Membership Card

In order to pick up food at the Food Bank, you must have an active agency card. These plastic key cards are required for entrance through the side agency entrance door which is locked for security purposes. This card shows your agency's name and account number. Cards are renewed yearly upon successful recertification. Cards may be made temporarily inactive based on Basic Agreement infractions. Membership cards are not photo IDs, therefore not all individuals at your program are required to have one. If your program needs multiple cards, the Program Contact or Executive Director must contact the Community Programs department to request a new or additional card. A fee of \$5 will be charged to your account for each additional card requested.

## Agency Case Limits

The Food Bank uses an internal system to establish case limits for product based on a program's average number of people served each month. Case limits are subject to change based on current inventory availability and program status. Programs may also qualify for TEFAP, COOP, or cooler and freezer items. Cooler and freezer limits are based on cold storage capacity. COOP products do not typically carry limits.

## Ordering from the Food Bank

Members can order from the Food Bank by placing an online order.

You must place your online order at <https://rifoodbank.org/agency-portal> at least 4 business days, but not more than 9 business days, prior to the pickup or delivery date. After your order has been submitted, it is then picked by our warehouse staff. For assistance with ordering, call our Customer Service Coordinator at 230-1730. See our *Agency Express Ordering Guide* for full details.

**How to make a shopping appointment for produce:**

If your agency has a pickup order appointment scheduled, using the shopping area will be automatically offered as a part of the one-hour visit. If you'd prefer to request produce via your order rather than coming in to shop, you can still do this.

If your agency wants to come in for produce shopping only, you will always need to call Customer Service at 230-1730 to make an appointment because our online ordering system no longer accommodates shopping-only appointments. Shopping-only appointments will not require scheduling a minimum of 3 days in advance, like pickup orders do.

**Pick Up Appointment Times:**

Monday, Wednesday, Friday:	8:00 AM – 12:00 PM
Tuesday & Thursday:	8:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Regardless of your arrival time to the Food Bank, appointments cannot go past the top of the next hour. You have one hour to pick up. The one hour starts at the top of the hour.

If you want to cancel or reschedule an order, call Customer Service as soon as possible.

If you want to reschedule an order that has already been picked, you have 48 hours to reschedule or the order will be put back to inventory, and the agency will have to place a new order. Please note that you have 48 hours to reschedule – not pick up. Your agency may pick up several days later, as long as you reschedule within 48 hours and there are no time sensitive items (perishable) on the order.

## Inclement Weather and Holiday Closures

Agencies should check in with the Food Bank when the weather seems unsafe before you come to our facility for a meeting or to shop or pick up your food order.

Food Bank closings and/or delays as a result of inclement weather will be posted on social media by 6:30 AM. Our outgoing phone message on our main line (401-942-6325) will also be updated by 6:30 AM.

If the Food Bank announces a delay, you will need to call Customer Service to determine a new pick-up time. You may be able to reschedule to come in at a different time on the same day as the delay or you may be assigned a new day and time.

It is important that emergency food provider members develop their own Inclement Weather Policies so that guests know how to find out if your program will be open or closed.

1. At a minimum, programs should contact 2-1-1 to let them know if they will be closed.
2. Other options include:
  - a) Changing your outgoing phone message to alert guests of changes
  - b) Posting on your agency's social media outlets
  - c) And/or contacting the RI Broadcasters Association business and school cancellation system: <http://www.ribroadcasters.com/business-school-cancellation-system>

Be sure to let guests know what your system is so that no one unnecessarily ventures out just to find out that you are closed.

### HOLIDAY CLOSURES

All Food Bank holiday closures will be posted on the Agency Express login page on our website, as well as posted on the doors of the Food Bank and Customer Service at least a week in advance of the holiday. If your agency has a regularly scheduled delivery that falls on a holiday, we will not reschedule it. Instead, you should plan ahead and order more product for your regular delivery prior to or after the holiday.

## Sustaining Your Program & Maximizing Your Membership

Although the Food Bank has a goal of being a major contributor to our member agency's food supply, we cannot guarantee to provide 100% of your program's needs. Agencies will still need to raise food and funds to continue to assist community members in need. Additionally, food pantry programs are designed to assist guests in stretching their food resources; they are not designed to fully supply a household's total food needs. A sustainable pantry gives between 15-25 pounds of food per person, per month. This range includes food received by the Food Bank and other sources.

### FUND DRIVES

Because your agency can access food at the Food Bank, the cost effectiveness of fund drives over food drives is self-evident. Seek out funding to help your agency supplement the items you are not able to get at the Food Bank.

Consider creating an acquisitions calendar to help you organize events and procure food year-round. Event ideas include asking schools and other local community businesses and organizations to sponsor a Dress Down Day, yard sale, race or car wash on your agency's behalf.

### FOOD DRIVES

Food drives serve as a tool for raising awareness and building community support around the issue of hunger. Sponsoring a food drive is also a good way to secure a variety of items for your pantry while simultaneously cultivating community awareness

about hunger. It is best to combine community fund drives with community food drives and keep the public informed about their donating options. These tried-and-true creative ideas from our network include:

1. Create a “Top 10 or 20” of the most desired or needed products for your agency.
2. Choose a theme, such as a pasta dinner food drive and ask for donations of the themed meal ingredients (ex: spaghetti, sauce).

## GRANTS

Grants are another way that your agency can raise money to cover operating costs, purchase additional food for distribution or a special purchase, such as a new freezer or computer. We suggest that your agency explores the following grant funders:

1. Rhode Island Foundation’s Basic Human Needs Grant [www.rifoundation.org](http://www.rifoundation.org).
2. United Way Grant Opportunities at [www.uwri.org](http://www.uwri.org).
3. Annual grant opportunities through the Food Bank, as announced.

## ADVOCACY

The Food Bank, in partnership with our member agencies and community organizations has successfully advocated for legislative policy that has reduced hunger in Rhode Island. See our annual Hunger Status Report for our most recent advocacy agenda. This can be found on our website at [www.rifoodbank.org](http://www.rifoodbank.org).

Ways to help gain support for your agency and its program guests:

1. Send a copy of your monthly Food Bank statistics to your local state legislators to keep them up-to-date with the struggles that you face daily in helping to meet the needs of your community.
2. When the time comes, pick up the phone and call your legislators, asking them to support anti-hunger legislation. Follow up your call with a letter.
3. Check out the Food Bank’s website regularly at [www.rifoodbank.org](http://www.rifoodbank.org) for recent advocacy updates.

## VOLUNTEERS

Most programs can benefit from the use of volunteers. The United Way of Rhode Island, connects people and volunteer opportunities: <https://volunteer.uwri.org/need/>. The Food Bank also offers free advertising for members on our website. Contact Jeanne Hebert at [jhebert@rifoodbank.org](mailto:jhebert@rifoodbank.org) for next steps and check out our volunteer page: [rifoodbank.org/volunteer/](http://rifoodbank.org/volunteer/).

Volunteers can also be recruited through churches, schools and other business or community organizations. Using brief but clear volunteer job descriptions helps to ensure that you hire the right volunteers. It is also critical the volunteers be trained in both their job assignment and how your agency works in general. Contact a member of

the Community Programs team if you want help with job descriptions and volunteer trainings at your agency.

For more details about these programs, please contact Community Programs and visit our online Agency Portal [rifoodbank.org/agency-portal/](http://rifoodbank.org/agency-portal/) where you'll find documents, forms and toolkits on membership and food safety to help you manage your Food Bank member program.