



# Better Together

A Guide to Engage Community Members Accessing Food Sites



Food assistance is unlike other forms of assistance. Food has so much meaning in life and is essential to continuing to live. People seeking food assistance may have complex relationships with food from disordered eating patterns, to negative associations with certain foods, to ideas about foods and health, to concerns about food allergies, or even what the picky eater in their house might be willing to eat. Food is also intimately tied to expressions of culture.

# Welcome to **Better Together: A Guide to Engage Community Members Accessing Food Sites!**

On behalf of the Network Equity and Racial Justice Team, we are delighted to join you in a journey toward building a more equitable food system.

This toolkit was created to provide:

- Conceptual grounding in trauma-informed practice
- Practical ideas that can be implemented at food assistance sites

## **Who is this toolkit for?**

This toolkit is for anyone working in the emergency food system — especially those running food pantries, meal sites, regional food banks, free food markets or mutual aid networks. Whether this is your first or thirtieth year providing food to your neighbors, we hope this toolkit will provide you with ideas to improve your work. To further enhance understanding and application of this toolkit, we will host companion workshops in the future to go deeper into each section.

## **Why is a toolkit needed?**

There is a pressing need in hunger-relief work to shift from a charity model of food distribution toward a community-engaged model. Building from the original toolkit first developed in 2019 by Johnnie Shaver, Client Experience and Community Outreach Facilitator, this updated toolkit is full of ideas to help you engage program participants. There are limits to the traditional food banking model (aka charity model), including:

- The inability to address growing hunger needs
- A mismatch between what pantry users desire and what food banks can supply
- An inherent instability in a system/supply chain largely dependent on charitable donations
- The cost to human dignity in being unable to feed one's self and family

In contrast, a community-engaged model:

- Provides nutritious, delicious food to those in need
- Addresses hunger at its root causes
- Offers the ability to serve as a community hub/be a connection point to other services
- Provides opportunities for civic engagement

**Food is nourishing, food is cultural, food is sacred.**



## What can you learn from this toolkit?

The toolkit is divided into four color-coded sections. You can read the toolkit from start to finish, you can focus on the section that most interests you or you can start at the end and work from there. Use the toolkit in whatever way makes sense for you and your program.

The first section invites you to identify why you do what you do and provides some **grounding** in the relationship between food insecurity and trauma and framing about engagement and motivation.

The second section focuses on the **physical spaces** of food assistance sites.

The third section focuses on the **social spaces** of food assistance sites.

The final section focuses on how to **develop peer programs** and offers suggestions about peer-led programming, including building power with people.

As you move forward with your work, the Network Equity and Racial Justice team would love to support your work. Please contact us at [EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org](mailto:EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org) for any needs or questions that arise.

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SECTION 1

# Framing: Food Insecurity, Engagement, Motivation and Trauma

# Cycle of Client Engagement

At the core of this toolkit is a belief that engaging clients or program participants in an ongoing way is transformative. There are many ways to engage participants in the work of a food assistance program. Client engagement is not a one-and-done process; our work must have a rhythm and cycle. To get started, we've developed a flow for how to engage clients. To effectively serve clients, we need to understand and respect their lived experience and expertise. Clients intimately know hunger and following their leadership will ensure we are on a path to end hunger for good. Whether we have developed an advisory council, or are seeking feedback on our distribution method or the foods we provide, embracing humility and deeply listening to clients is critical to ensuring positive client experiences.

**PHASE 1:** To hold clients at the center of everything we do requires that we engage our empathy and compassion for the difficult situation of needing food assistance and the stressors of being economically unstable. Whether or not you've personally experienced hunger, we have a duty to respect the dignity of our clients by practicing empathy and compassion.

**PHASE 2:** Once we are grounded in empathy and compassion, we need to consider how our pantry and/or regional food bank can best identify and center the needs of the communities we serve. While it can be difficult to obtain the level of nuanced data

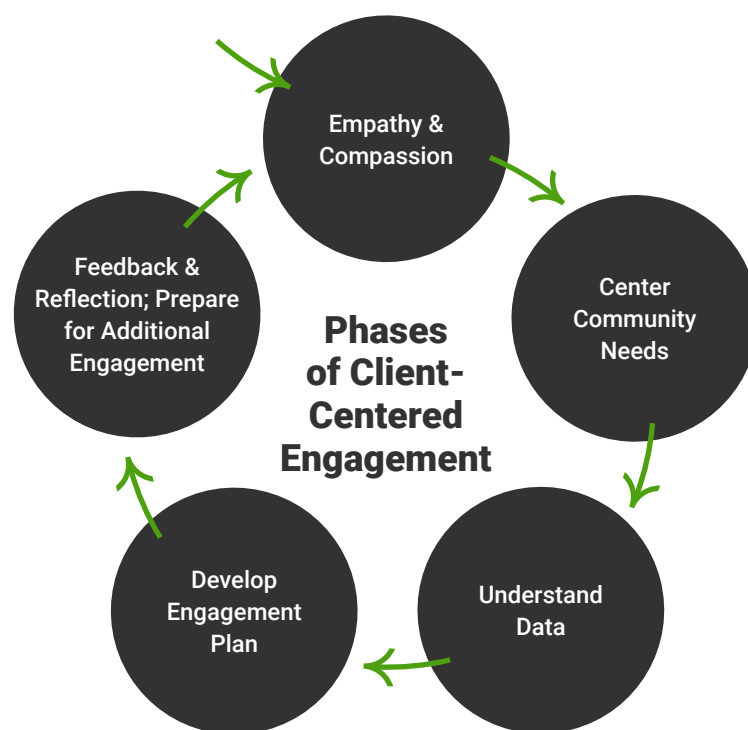
needed to fully understand the demographic complexities of our communities, **U.S. Census data** is a good place to start. It allows you to compare your service area to the state as a whole, showing variations in racial/ethnic groups and the percent of people living in poverty. School-level data can also be helpful. **Mapping the Meal Gap** is another place to begin your data journey.

**PHASE 3:** In addition to obtaining demographic information, part of serving the community is noticing who is present in our pantry or food bank and who is not. If U.S. Census data suggests that about 10% of a given service area is Latine/Latinx/Latino/Latina yet our pantry does not have foods reflective of the diverse diets and culinary traditions across Latin and South America, this may reflect *not* putting clients at the center of our work.

Even if we feel the people served are reflective of the community/service area, it is possible that our perception may be skewed. In other words, we need to rely on additional data to help us understand if we are serving our communities in the fullest ways. We can gather additional data and insights through Link2Feed (a client intake system), focus groups, client surveys, meetings with culturally-specific organizations in your area or even informal conversations with clients about their needs and preferences. Obtaining feedback via informal voting practices is another easy way to get information from clients, for example using colored dots to indicate a preference for a food item or idea.

**PHASE 4:** Equipped with empathy and data, we can center clients by directly involving them in decision-making, including operations and service delivery. Starting small with client engagement in decision-making might look like taking food suggestions and integrating them into programs and budgets. Other steps might include developing an advisory board to guide the work, increasing food choice and providing updates on advocacy efforts and opportunities to share recipes or skills with fellow clients.

**PHASE 5:** With empathy, compassion, data and engagement plans, we have a solid start to centering the needs of those experiencing hunger in our work and building greater equity in our service delivery. Because equity work is unending and new issues and strategies are continuously required, it is best to think of equity work as having cycles or iterations where the process is repeated in order to improve it.



# Brief Oregon Food Bank Overview

The Oregon Food Bank Network — through the work of 21 Regional Food Banks and 1,400 food assistance sites across Oregon and Clark County, Washington — welcomes more than a million people each year.

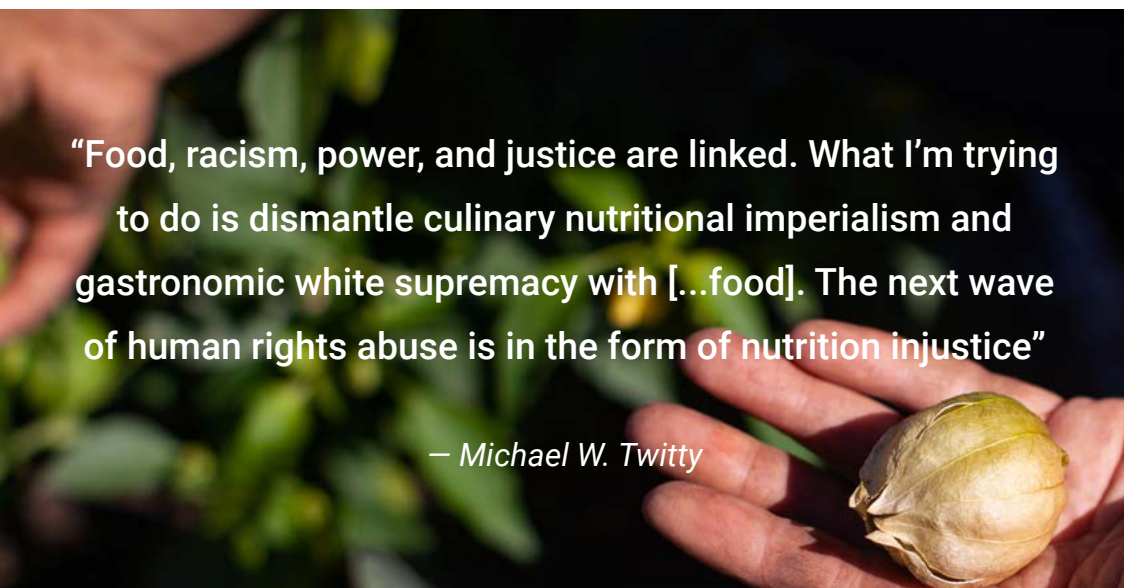
We need both food today *and* systemic solutions to eliminate hunger at the root causes. Hunger isn't just the individual experience of not having enough food. Hunger is a result of unfair systems that maintain the status quo of inequality and exploitation through systemic racism.

The main cause of hunger is poverty, which is fueled by many things, including but not limited to:

- Inadequate wages
- High costs of housing and healthcare
- Lack of access to education

We invite you to hold people experiencing hunger and food insecurity in Oregon and Southwest Washington at the center of your actions and decisions. In particular, we invite you to center those most disproportionately impacted by hunger across the communities we serve: Black, Indigenous and all People of Color (BIPOC); immigrants and refugees; trans and gender nonconforming individuals; and single caregivers.

Through community-centered partnerships, educational programming, organizing, advocacy and food distribution, OFB is your partner as we work together to eliminate hunger and its root causes.



“Food, racism, power, and justice are linked. What I’m trying to do is dismantle culinary nutritional imperialism and gastronomic white supremacy with [...food]. The next wave of human rights abuse is in the form of nutrition injustice”

— Michael W. Twitty

## Key Terms

<b>Hunger:</b>	Refers to an individual's physical sensation of discomfort due to the absence or lack of food
<b>Food Insecurity:</b>	Refers to a lack of available financial resources for food at the household level and/or the inability to access food near to where one lives
<b>Systems of Oppression:</b>	Discriminatory institutions (ex: schools), structures, norms, to name a few, that are embedded in the fabric of our society
<b>Equity Constituents:</b>	Oregon Food Bank's equity constituencies are communities most greatly impacted by hunger. The focus of OFB's work is to center the food security needs of Black, Indigenous, and all People of Color; immigrants and refugees; single caregivers; and trans and gender nonconforming people
<b>Trauma:</b>	An emotional reaction to a terrible event (ex: car accident, natural disaster, abuse, systems of oppression); exposure to an incident or series of events that are emotionally disturbing or life-threatening with lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional and/or spiritual well-being
<b>Trauma-Informed Approach:</b>	Knowledge of trauma and its effects, recognition that many people have experienced trauma, adapting programs to the reality of widespread trauma
<b>Client/Service User/Program Participant:</b>	A person who uses food pantry services

# What's your Why?

There are likely some personal reasons for why you do the work you do. Maybe you experienced food insecurity yourself. Perhaps the thought of your unhoused neighbors or families with children worrying about having enough food drives you to do this work. Maybe your faith or belief system moves you to serve others. Or, you simply hate the idea of food going to waste and want to ensure those in the community who need it, have access.

Whatever your reason, staying connected to that “why” or motivation will sustain your efforts.

Volunteer motivations can be categorized into four categories, shown below in the ABCE model<sup>1</sup>:

**A**

**Affiliation:** desire to be closer to family members, friends and community members because of a desire to socialize.

**B**

**Beliefs:** personal values, religious teaching and a desire to benefit others.

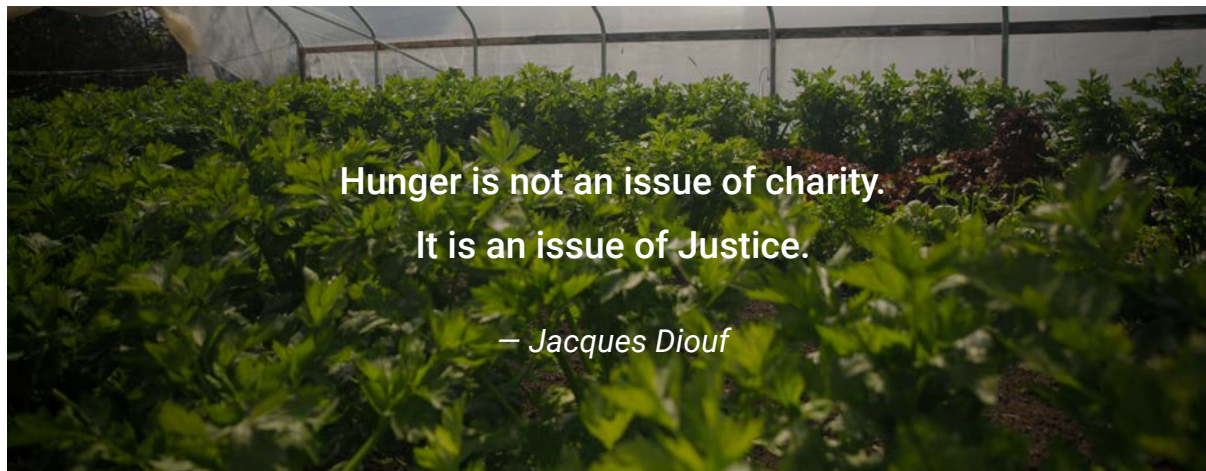
**C**

**Career Development:** contribute in ways professional work doesn't allow for, or to build up a resume as an early-career person.

**E**

**Egoistic:** to protect or enhance ego through recognition, praise or acknowledgement.

<sup>1</sup> Butt, M. U., Hou, Y., Soomro, K. A., and Acquadro Maran, D. (2017). The ABCE model of volunteer motivation. Journal of social service research, 43(5), 593-608.



## Reflection Activity

What initially motivated you to work at a food assistance site?

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When things get tough or you are tired, what draws you back into the work?

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What do you get out of working in food assistance?

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What do you imagine the work looking like in 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?

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# Impulses and Antidotes in Food Assistance Programs

Within food assistance sites, we begin to form attitudes or patterns of thought. Sometimes those attitudes can be counter to our stated intentions, goals or values. For example, we may feel stressed or overwhelmed and, as a result, are more likely to make quick judgments. Over time, those judgments become more automatic or form an impulse. As we do this work, it is important to **track** whether our thoughts and actions align with our beliefs and values.

## Tracking involves:

1. Pausing to notice the attitude without judgment or big emotions
2. Reflecting on where that attitude may have come from or identifying other times we felt this way
3. Counter the belief with one of the antidotes

Impulse	What it sounds like	Antidotes
To be numb or be desensitized to people's struggles	"People take advantage." "That person is so difficult." "If only clients would..."	Be mindful of the struggles and hardships clients face and be open to connecting to their stories  Create space for yourself to process what you see, hear and feel when working with people experiencing hunger, remembering how you are connected to other people's journeys
To be insular and create in-group dynamics amongst staff and volunteers (us vs. them)	[Silence] Prioritizing what's good for volunteers over what is good for all	Socialize broadly, invite clients into your conversations and mutually develop a sense of shared connection
To forget or never know hunger	"Clients need to learn how to stretch their food dollars." "That person is so difficult."	Reflect on your own hunger story. Remember the good, the bad and all that lives in between. Consider your past situation in today's context  Use empathy to relate to people experiencing hunger  Seek to understand or remember
To know what's best for others or to try to save or fix people (be a savior)	"If only clients would..." "Clients really need to..."	Trust that a person knows what is best for them and that they are doing the best they can with the resources they have  Offer potential solutions if prompted and avoid imposing
To be apolitical and non-controversial	"No politics here." "We don't talk about..." "We just provide food." "All are welcome to come here."	Stay rooted in the need to address hunger's root causes, which is inherently political  Focus on shared values  Welcome generative disagreement
To desire praise and acknowledgement	"Clients don't appreciate how hard we are working for them."	Provide praise and acknowledgement to yourself, versus looking for outside recognition  Create practices that affirm your drive to continue the work  Give thanks to all those involved in your local effort to end hunger

# Food Insecurity and Trauma

## What is Trauma?

According to the **American Psychological Association**, trauma is a result of events or experiences that overwhelm the internal

resources that offer individuals a sense of control, connection and meaning.

**The Center for Health Care Strategies** shares that trauma is widespread in U.S. society with roughly 62% of the population having had at least one traumatic event in their life. The number is even higher

if including adults who witnessed something traumatic and even higher still for those who inherit intergenerational traumas. Trauma can be categorized in three ways as laid out below.

## Types of Trauma

**ACUTE TRAUMA:** Results from exposure to a single traumatic event (ex: someone who has witnessed violence).

**COMPLEX TRAUMA:** Results from extended exposure to traumatic situations (ex: someone living in chronic poverty or having survived a war zone).

**INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA:** Results from trauma experienced in one generation affecting future generations (ex: someone whose ancestors survived slavery).

It's common for people to live with multiple traumas and varying degrees of severity. Just as food insecurity is typically a traumatic experience, **Cambridge University Press** reports that trauma is often associated with other poverty-related stressors, such as unstable housing or inadequate access to healthcare. It is also possible that trauma is related to living through events like war and violence. As a result, a holistic response to trauma is needed. In order to move toward repair and healing from

traumatic events and experiences, people deserve to have *all* of their needs met.

## Trauma and Racism

**Mental Health America** defines racial trauma as the mental and emotional injury caused by encounters with racial bias, through ethnic discrimination, racism and hate crimes. The effects of racial trauma are both individual and collective. Folks who have been the targets of racism and White Supremacy suffer, and communities that live with the effects of racial trauma are also impacted.

Trauma can also manifest in many different ways, and often in ways we don't expect. People with trauma may experience:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Flashbacks
- Memory and concentration difficulties
- Disconnection from feelings
- Challenges with controlling emotions
- Sleep troubles
- Physical illnesses like heart disease or autoimmune disorders

Often people with trauma may not consciously engage in any of the above. Trauma has long-lasting effects, well past the point of when a negative experience or event has occurred. Since we cannot know every person's story and our interactions with clients are usually brief, assuming that everyone has experienced trauma may be a good idea.

Trauma-informed approaches realize that trauma is widespread. There are 4 R's in a trauma-informed approach: Realize, Recognize, Respond and Avoid Re-traumatization. Trauma-informed approaches **realize** that trauma is widespread, **recognize** how trauma affects people and **respond** by promoting resilience through policies, procedures, practices and programs — and can be a way to treat everyone as though they have experienced trauma. All of these efforts to using a trauma-informed approach are about **avoiding re-traumatizing** program participants. See "Section 3: Affirming Social Spaces" for more on this topic.

“One cannot think well,  
love well, sleep well, if one  
has not dined well.”

—Virginia Woolf



SECTION 2

# Physical Spaces

Whether temporary or permanent, indoor or outdoor, pantries are physical spaces. The basics of good design apply. (See “Section 3: Affirming Social Spaces” for more on that topic). A good team-building activity for volunteers can involve them shopping the pantry and recording their observations of what went well and what can be improved upon.

When planning your distributions, keep the following guidance in mind to create warm, welcoming spaces.

## Use Bright and Warm Lighting

Changing a light bulb can be a game changer for spaces. Selecting a warm, white color is a good idea. Increasing lighting in darker spaces can also help. Diffused or filtered light can be warmer and more inviting. Lights should not buzz, hum or flicker.

If you are outdoors, **consider adding string lights under tents** if it is safe/ possible to do so. Solar lights might be a good alternative. Consider adding an indoor/outdoor rug to create a homey feel.

For basement locations, consider swapping traditional fluorescent lights for full-spectrum lights. In any space, use lamps to create warmer light and further illuminate areas that are still a bit dark.

## Utilize Spacious Layouts

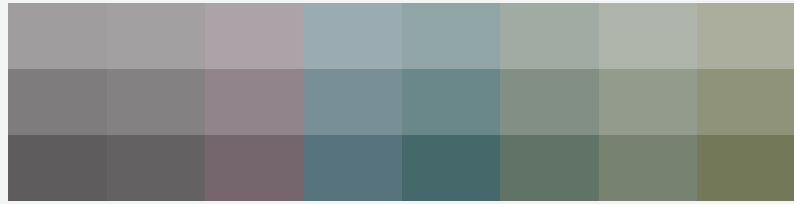
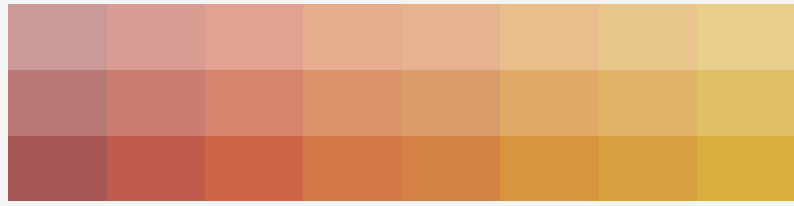
**Try to maintain uncluttered areas.** This is especially important in smaller spaces where we should try to keep things tidy and neat. Be mindful of the flow of the space. Where “traffic jams” arise, consider ways to adjust and reconfigure the space. Wider aisles and space in between shelves will create a feeling of openness. Also be aware of sightlines and ensure exits are properly identified.

In temporary spaces and spaces you don’t control, try pushing all furniture to the edges of the room. Stack excess items and cover them, if possible. Create as good of a flow as you can in spaces you don’t control.

## Implement an Easy-to-Navigate Layout

To ensure visitors can find their way around, utilize tape on the floor, signs and/ or arrows to help point people in the correct direction/flow of traffic through your site and having volunteers to help direct traffic can remove confusion and anxiety.





## Make Warm Color Choices

When choosing the colors you plan to use in your space, aim for **warmer colors like lighter earthy reds, oranges or yellows** to paint the walls. Avoid deep hues of reds, orange or yellow as they can stir up negative emotions. Consider selecting warmer whites for your space. If you are unable to paint – say in a school or church – or do not have walls at your location, consider integrating color on signage, table coverings, rugs, baskets and containers. **Calming colors like blue, green, purple or gray in warmer tones** are also great choices. The same colors in a cool tone can feel sterile or institutional, so try to avoid those if possible. If you are outdoors, integrate warm colors with tents and table fabrics.

## Offer Comforting Textures and Seating

If you have textures in your space, aim for softer and comforting textures as opposed to geometric shapes. Knit fabrics, wool, velvet and linen are all good choices. If possible, having some chairs for folks to sit in while they wait is nice and increases accessibility.

If you are in a school, consider inviting youth to create artwork that can be displayed in the space, and think about **bringing some pillows or blankets** to make the furniture more comfy looking.

**Providing umbrellas or tents** in rainy weather to protect visitors from the elements is a thoughtful touch.

## Be Aware of Aromas

Scents and aromas need to be mild, since certain smells can be triggers for folks. Certain smells can be inviting, though. For example, freshly brewed coffee can be a welcome food scent, and lavender is a calming fragrance.

If you are outside, integrating new aromas might not be feasible, but something like a bubble machine can create a little fun and draw people in.

## Consider Playing Music

Creating a playlist to run the length of your pantry hours can make adding music an easy task. There are a number of existing lists on streaming services like Spotify and Pandora. Make sure you are including songs that may be culturally significant for the communities you serve and avoid songs that contain derogatory or discriminatory language.



# Accessible Physical Spaces

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.<sup>1</sup>



## Principle 1: Equitable Use

The design is useful for people with a wide range of abilities

### IDEAS:

- Products are at a level everyone can reach
- Wheelchair users do not need to use special entrance
- Bathrooms provide similar levels of privacy



## Principle 2: Flexibility in Use

Accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities

### IDEAS:

- Data can be entered on a tablet or written document and in their primary language
- Easy-to-use door handles are found throughout the space
- Areas are not overcrowded
- There are no time limits for people accessing services



## Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use

The process is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level

### IDEAS:

- Open baskets are provided
- Doors open in expected directions
- Photos and text translated in multiple languages are used
- The website is accessible with large font, **contrasting colors** and clear information, such as pantry hours and how to access the building/location
- Inform visitors on how to complete a task
- Use arrows to demonstrate flow



## Principle 4: Perceptible Information

Communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities

### IDEAS:

- Utilize pictures of food items
- Ensure high contrast with text and background images/color (**test your text and color contrast here**)
- Use accessible fonts (for a larger guide on accessibility, see **the University of North Carolina's website**)
- Provide verbal and written instructions or directions about the process of using the pantry (ex: first you will check-in, then we will...")
- Use image descriptions on websites
- Offer written and verbal instructions



### Principle 5: Tolerance for Error

Minimizes hazards/consequences of accidental or unintended actions

#### IDEAS:

- Secure cleaning and other hazardous products in a locked cabinet
- Place foods in an order that makes it easy to load and avoid damage, for example, placing heaving items on the bottom of bags or boxes
- Place caution signage if a walkway is slippery when wet or apply gritty paint to reduce slipperiness



### Principle 6: Low Physical Effort

Can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue

#### IDEAS:

- Place foods close to the edge of the table
- Install push buttons on heavy doors
- Minimize repetitive lifting of items
- Minimize having to stand for a long time or stand for intake



### Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use

Provided space allows for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of user's body size, posture or mobility

#### IDEAS:

- Displays are tilted to allow seated users visibility
- Place items at a height usable by both seated and standing visitors
- Offer a variety of pens at sign-in
- Implement wide aisles and doorways where possible

Universal Design is Good Design.

<sup>1</sup> National Disability Authority's Universal Design Principles,  
from [UniversalDesign.ie](http://UniversalDesign.ie)

# Trauma-Informed Design Principles from the University of Denver Center for Housing and Homelessness Research<sup>1</sup>

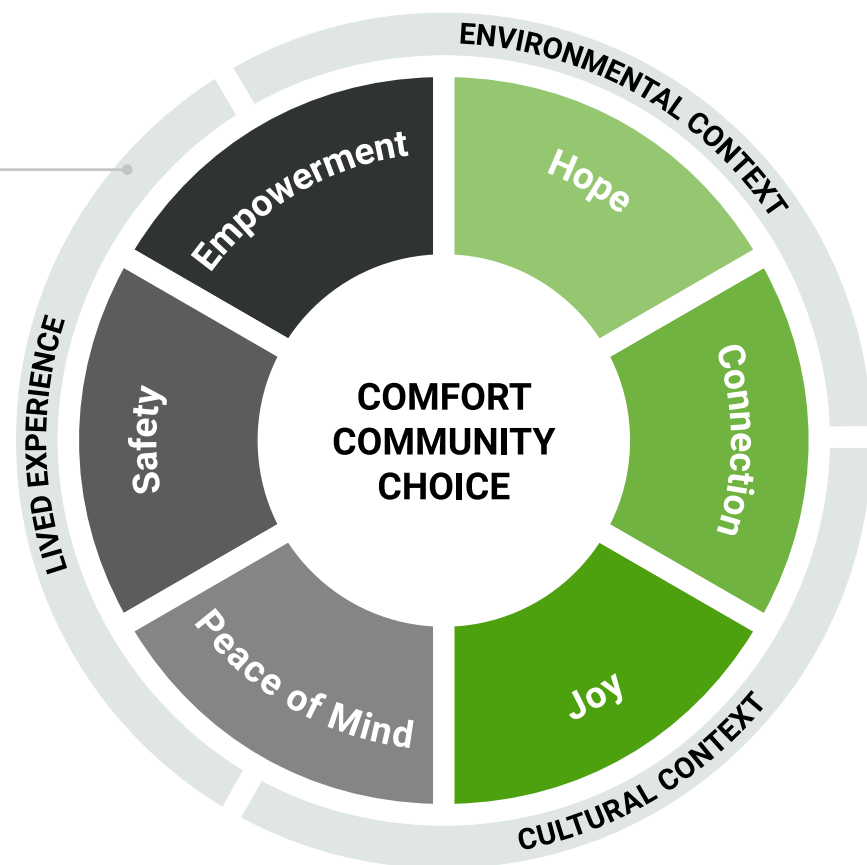
Trauma-informed design aims to promote healing and improved physical health, mental health and overall well-being of individuals and their communities.

## Trauma-Informed Design Framework

Given what was shared about food insecurity and trauma, we know we should plan for and create trauma-informed spaces. One way to do that is with the Trauma-Informed Design framework. Before we even begin to design the space, we must think about the environmental and cultural context as well as the lived experiences of our service users. Consider the climate, land and broader environment as you make changes (ex: is it hot or rainy in your area?). How can you design with that all in mind?

## Core Values

Informed by Pable's "six human qualities that most people desire for physical and mental health in the places they inhabit"<sup>2</sup> as well as our work with residents and practitioners in affordable housing, we have arrived at a set of core values that must be prioritized during the design process by all members of the housing team.



- 1 HOPE, DIGNITY AND SELF-ESTEEM:** We celebrate each individual's inherent worth, communicating positivity, emphasizing strengths, and maximizing potential.
- 2 CONNECTION AND COMMUNITY:** We create spaces that encourage camaraderie and collaboration – among residents as well as between residents and staff – and offer the opportunity to belong, helping residents to rebuild relationships built on trust.
- 3 JOY, BEAUTY, AND MEANING:** We honor culture and identity while creating spaces that spark and nurture imagination, hope and aspiration.
- 4 PEACE OF MIND:** We cultivate a comfortable, calm ambiance that supports relaxation, self-soothing, stress management and coping through design details such as lighting, sound mitigation, natural elements and access to nature.

- 5 EMPOWERMENT AND PERSONAL CONTROL:** We encourage individual agency, welcome self-expression and offer choices for residents.
- 6 SAFETY, SECURITY, AND PRIVACY:** We understand that residents' perceived safety is just as important as actual safety. We prioritize clear wayfinding, sight lines and boundaries; minimize negative triggers; offer vantages of both prospect and refuge and paths of retreat; and recognize the role of program staff in creating a sense of safety and security.



## The 3 C's of Designing for Health and Healing

When designing your space for the health, well-being and healing of your community, keep these three c's in mind.

### CHOICE

**CHOICE:** focus on individual agency, personalization and choice around forms of engagement and be sure to:

- Increase choice amongst food items
- Allow for customization or personalization based on preferences in prepared boxes
- Read body language to determine level of engagement in social interactions

**COMMUNITY:** arrange space in ways that can create connections and community:

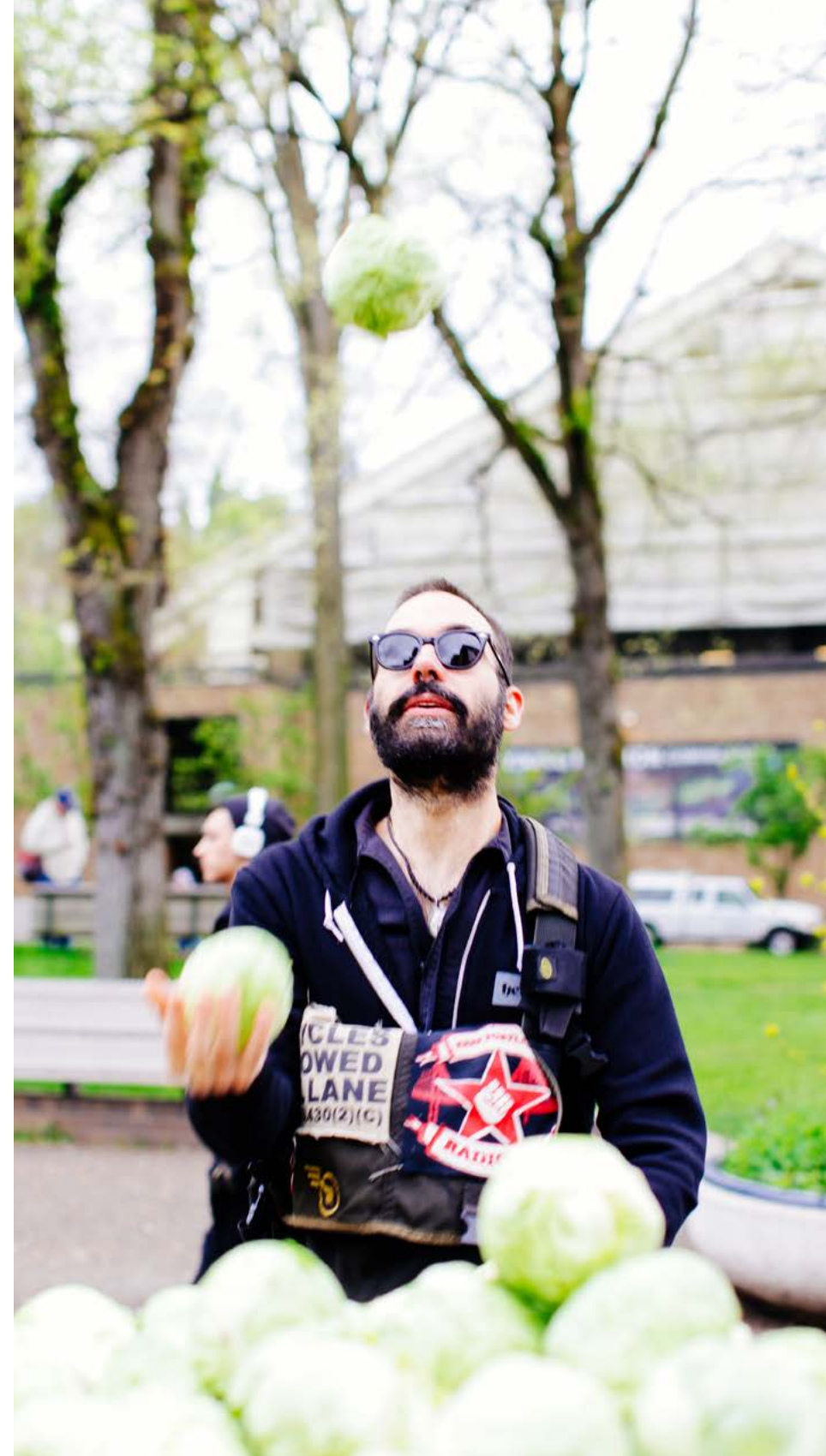
- Offer space with chairs and snacks
- Ensure a volunteer/staff person is present to greet people
- Have a table people can gather around while they wait and maybe play a quick game

**COMFORT:** quality of materials, sensory experiences of light, sound, smell and elements that spark joy:

- Display artwork created by the community
- Play soft music
- Post riddles, jokes or funny memes in the space
- Place fresh flowers or plants around the space
- Ensure you give physical distance to people and don't hover
- Provide magazines (food ones!) or recipes — especially ones that utilize items being offered in the pantry

<sup>1</sup> From **Designing for Healing, Dignity, and Joy** from the UD Center for Housing and Homelessness Research.

<sup>2</sup> Design Resources for Homelessness, n.d., p.1



**“Food is not rational. Food is culture, habit, craving, and identity.”**

– Jonathan Safran Foer

# Practical Resources and Tips for Making Physical Spaces More Welcoming and Functional





SECTION 3

# Affirming Social Spaces



“Food Justice is the belief that what is lacking is not food, but the political will to fairly distribute food regardless of ability to pay.”

– Unknown

Pantries are more than physical spaces — they are social spaces as well. Principles of inclusion and welcoming are important to making a social space that is warm and inviting. In creating the social space within a pantry, the experience should be one of dignity above all else. We don't need to know why someone is visiting a pantry, however as we covered earlier, we should assume they are coming to us with lived trauma. It is vital that we treat all guests with dignity and respect. The aspiration to do this and the everyday practice of it can be more challenging. Consistent, open, respectful and compassionate communication makes for welcoming social spaces.

As mentioned earlier, there is often shame and stigma attached to not being able to provide for oneself and/or one's family. In response, we can create welcoming spaces, honoring our shared humanity and sense of community.

# Trauma-Informed Principles

These principles are widely used in a number of settings, but may require translation to our work. See some ideas in the list below to begin thinking about how to use these principles in food assistance sites.

## Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care<sup>1</sup>

**SAFETY:** Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve feel physically and psychologically safe.

**TRUSTWORTHINESS AND TRANSPARENCY:** Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency and the goal of building and maintaining trust among staff, clients and family members of those receiving services.

**PEER SUPPORT AND MUTUAL SELF-HELP:** These are integral to the organizational and service delivery approach and are understood as a key vehicle for building trust and establishing safety and empowerment.

**COLLABORATION AND MUTUALITY:** There is recognition that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. One does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.

**EMPOWERMENT, VOICE AND CHOICE:** Organization aims to strengthen the staff, client and family members' experience of choice and recognizes that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach. This builds on what clients, staff and communities have to offer, rather than responding to perceived deficits.

**CULTURAL, HISTORICAL AND GENDER ISSUES:** The organization actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases, offers culturally responsive services, leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections and recognize and addresses historical trauma.

Principle	Plain Language Meaning	How it Looks in Practice
Safety	This is not a lack of scary things, but rather the presence of connection	Destigmatizing food insecurity and food choices Creating safer physical and social spaces Reducing stress and chaos
Trustworthiness and Transparency	Operations are transparent with the goal of building and maintaining trust Being reliable and consistent	Clear expectations of clients and staff Build trust with community, address harm, be clear about who makes decisions and why decisions were made the way they were
Peer Support and Mutual Self-Help	People experiencing hunger support each other	Develop large and small ways for clients to support each other
Collaboration and Mutuality	Staff and clients work together to ensure we reach food security Reducing power differences between staff and clients	Build advisory councils Eliminate us-them dynamics
Empowerment, Voice and Choice	Creating space for clients to provide feedback and make choices about their food, and supporting client confidence	Use a shopping model Obtain feedback using a suggestion box Support client confidence
Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues	Being mindful about histories of oppression and discrimination	Increase self-knowledge of histories of cultural groups Offer culturally-sustaining food choices

<sup>1</sup> From a presentation by Trauma Informed Oregon, and from SAMHSA's **Concept of Trauma and a Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach**, 2014

Creating a social space rooted in community care and love ensures that guests at pantries feel respected and cared for. A unique challenge for social spaces is that concepts like warmth, welcoming and dignity are somewhat subjective concepts and can be varied across cultural or religious contexts. Most importantly, creating a social space that community members want to return to is a good indicator of having been successful in making the social space welcoming.

### **Additional items to be considerate of include:**

**POWER:** As staff and volunteers running food assistance sites, we have the power to grant or withhold access to basic needs. That is a serious responsibility. We should reduce and eliminate barriers to access to ensure we have fair, equitable policies.

**WRAP-AROUND SERVICES:** You are an important point of contact with your community. While your primary role is to ensure food is provided, having working knowledge of other resources is important. Instead of trying to refer every client to a service, you could focus on particular services each month or week. For example, September/October is open enrollment for health insurance with many employers. You could ask folks if they need help with healthcare during that time.

Additionally, we can suggest that people who are Supplement Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants visit pantries at the beginning of the month. While this can feel counterintuitive

and is the opposite of what most people do, we would like to enable SNAP participants to make the most of their allotments by visiting a pantry for the staples they need first and use their EBT funds for the things we cannot provide or were unavailable.

We hope this will eliminate the scarcity near the end – and oftentimes the middle – of the month when funds are exhausted before additional funds are loaded. We can also share information on how to apply for SNAP by referring people to our how-to guide on the Oregon Food Bank website at [OregonFoodBank.org/SNAP](https://OregonFoodBank.org/SNAP)

**EYE CONTACT:** In the U.S. and Western Europe, eye contact is a sign of engagement. However, in some cultures, particularly for people from Asian, African and Latin American nations, extended eye contact can be insulting, disrespectful or seen as a challenge to authority.

Guidance provided here is not absolute but may help in understanding the subtleties and nuances of eye contact.

For example, in China, eye contact may be used when someone is angry. In Japan, extended eye contact might be seen as rude. In Iran, eye contact may be welcomed amongst friends and family, but not with an unknown person of another gender. In urban areas in Kenya, eye contact may be expected. In rural areas, using eye contact can be used as a way to show respect for an elder or community leader. When a person emigrates from one of these countries, they may struggle to adjust to U.S. expectations, which prioritizes and rewards direct eye contact.

Because we do not know everyone's cultural traditions, following the lead of the person you are interacting with is a good strategy.

**PHYSICAL TOUCH:** Be mindful of how close you stand to people and whether you are directly facing the person or not. It can be intimidating to some to stand too close or directly in front of someone, and not everyone wants or likes to be touched. Always ask for consent.

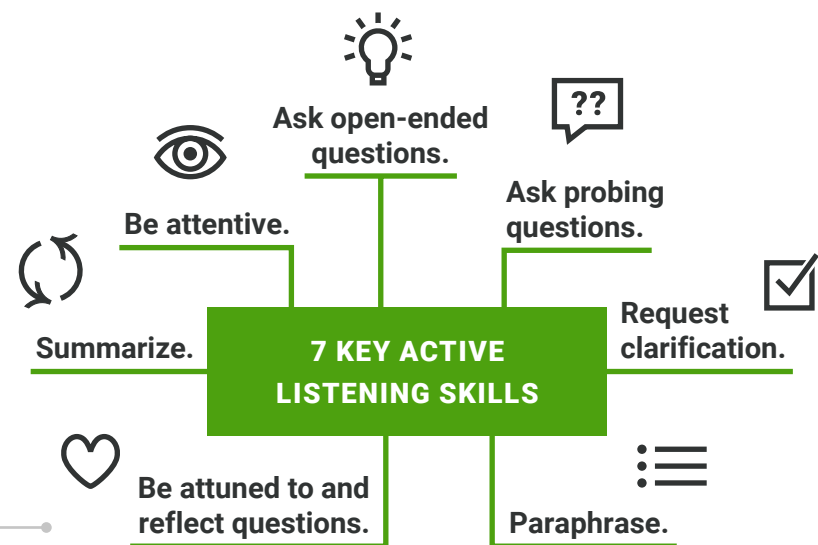
**WELCOMING WORDS:** Be mindful of the words you use to welcome someone. Greet every person you can with confidence, a smile and warmth. Ask the genuine version of "how are you?" if you're able. Tell folks you are glad to see them. If it's someone you've seen before, say "It's so good to see you again! How have you been?"



Food keeps us connected.

**USING QUESTIONS TO CONNECT:** Given that pantry participants are having a hard time, it may feel disrespectful or invasive to ask too many questions. Questions can serve as an opening, however, and can uplift client choice. Be mindful of the questions you pose, and refer to this list of questions if needed to better connect with clients.

Feel free to pick **one to two questions from the list** rather than asking all of them, and allow people to share at whatever level feels right to them. You might also consider having a question of the week that everyone responds to. The most important part of asking these questions is to actively listen. **This graphic** provides a great overview for the skills needed to better engage in active listening.



From **Center for Creative Leadership**

## Pantry Participant Engagement Questions

**INTAKE QUESTIONS:** When greeting or engaging with people during intake, consider these additional questions to accompany the standard required inquiries:

- What are some of your favorite foods? Comfort food?
- What's your day been like so far?
- What movie or TV show title best describes your week?
- Do you have any food allergies we should be aware of?
- Do you have any food combinations you enjoy?
- What are your favorite snacks?
- What's your favorite sandwich?
- How long have you lived in this community? What's your favorite part of living here?
- What kinds of challenges are you facing lately?

**PANTRY NAVIGATION QUESTIONS:** When helping folks shop your pantry, consider using questions like:

- What looks good to you today?
- What do you need?
- How can I help you today?
- What kinds of foods do you enjoy?
- Do you like to eat \_\_\_?
- Have you ever tried \_\_\_?
- I like to make \_\_\_ with \_\_\_. Have you ever tried that?
- Do you have a sweet tooth?

**LOADING/PACKING QUESTIONS:** When loading up food or bagging items, consider questions like:

- Is it alright for me to put these items together?
- Did you get some food you are looking forward to eating?
- Any big plans for the rest of your day?
- Is there anything you are looking forward to right now?
- Do you have any pets?
- Are you more of a cat person or a dog person?
- What is something that is giving you energy lately?

**FEEDBACK QUESTIONS:** When seeking feedback, consider verbal or written questions like:

- What did you like best about your experience today?
- What could we do better in the future?
- Did you find what you were looking for today?
- How would you describe your experience to others?
- Would you recommend us to a person who needed food?
- Did we have enough variety of food for you?
- What foods would you like to see here when you come back?
- How helpful were staff and volunteers?
- How convenient are our hours?
- Did you have to wait a long time to get served?
- How did you hear about us?

*Whenever we ask folks for information, we should make good use of that information. Don't promise to have items available, if you can't ensure the food will be there.*



“Food brings people together on many different levels. It’s nourishment of the soul and body; it’s truly love.”

– Giada De Laurentiis

**INSIDER AND OUTSIDER DYNAMICS:** Many pantries are staffed by volunteers who, over time, have come to know one another. It can be easy to focus conversations amongst volunteers, but this can have a chilling effect on interactions and conversations between volunteers and clients. Make sure you are friendly with clients and do not talk badly or vent about clients in front of other clients.

### Supporting Clients Through Challenges

Everyone deserves food, even or especially if they are experiencing significant stress or crisis. Clients with significant mental health symptoms need to eat, even if their symptoms make it difficult to work with them. Here are some ideas to support your work:

- Find a strength of the person and focus on that strength
- Actively listen to what they share, reflect back what you heard. “What I heard you say was...”
- Develop a calm, steady voice
- Separate behavior from the person. For example, you can share the message that they are always welcome, but certain activities and behaviors are not tolerated for the safety of others
- Along those same lines, state boundaries: “I am unable to help you if you continue yelling.” Reinforce boundaries or pose questions like, “What would it take for you to stop yelling?”
- Provide written and visual guidelines for client behavior. Be mindful that whatever guidelines you offer must be enforced with all clients and be fair, equitable and reasonable for the population you serve. The focus should be on safety
- Avoid calling the police or 911, unless the person in crisis or a harmed party is asking for that. Police presence can be re-traumatizing. For a few alternatives in the Portland area, please refer to [DontCallThePolice.com/Portland](https://www.dontcallthepolice.com/portland). In Eugene, calling **CAHOOTS** is an option
- Offer assistance and be patient. Wait for the person to decide if they want your help and help as you’re able. It is also the case that most folks will de-escalate if given food, water and some time





SECTION 4

# Peer-Led Programs

# Peer-Led Support and Programs

Once you've engaged clients in a variety of ways, you may want to restructure your program to be more community-driven and led by people with lived experience of hunger.

Before moving forward with that work, it is best to establish policies, procedures and practices that best support people with lived experience in taking on increased responsibility within a food assistance program. In particular, having conversations with your current volunteers about any discomfort or concerns they might have with peer-led programs is a good place to start. Training and providing support are two strategies that can help reduce or eliminate concerns current volunteers might have about peer-led efforts.

## Continuum of Client/Peer Engagement

Before we get into program models, understanding that there are a variety of ways that peers can be engaged might be helpful. Regardless of the kinds of programs you develop, clients can be engaged in a variety of ways to support the initial development or rebuilding of programs. Program development isn't the only way to engage clients. Clients can be engaged around many things like policy change, types of food in the pantry, determining hours of operation and providing ongoing consultation for programs. Clients should also be involved in the creation and revision of the organization's mission and vision.

Whether your food site is six-months old or has been around for over 20 years, our program offerings and the clients we serve are constants. Engaging clients and building strong programs can go together. Peer-led programs are gaining traction across social services. Developing programs that engage peers can feel challenging, but we've gathered a bunch of ideas to support you shifting towards peer-led programming. From Peer Navigator programs, to building power with people, to Community Health Workers, this section offers innovative ways to develop or re-develop food programs in ways that are more peer-led. In the opening section of this toolkit, we described a cycle of client engagement. Pair that cycle with the ideas in this section about how to develop meaningful programs. In this section, we use people with lived experience or peers to refer to folks who have lived experience with hunger.

Lower engagement

Moderate Engagement

High Engagement

Type of Engagement	Client Feedback	Consultation	Partnership/ Advisory Leadership	Staff	Organizational Leadership
Sample Activities	Interviews Focus Groups Surveys	Occasional consultation about policies, procedures, practices	Advisory group Leadership council Ongoing consultation	Employees develop, implement and evaluate programs and services	Serving as Board and/or Staff Direct the organization

## Shifting Organizational Culture to Welcome Lived Experience

The Goal: A welcoming environment that allows professional, educational and personal experience of program participants to be integrated into guiding and delivering programs.

Strategies may include:

- Listening to people with lived experience, understanding their stories
- Create pathways to increased leadership responsibilities
- Provide leadership development opportunities and opportunities with different levels of engagement
- Actively recruit people with lived experience for volunteer and staff roles
- Provide supports like child-care to assist lived experience volunteers in fulfilling their roles
- Asking about the impact of potential policy/procedure/program changes for people with lived experience
- Space and encouragement to share lived experiences
- Respecting confidentiality of disclosures, not sharing someone else's story
- Asking for feedback from people with lived experience about marketing materials, annual reports and the physical environment
- Give credit to lived experience leaders for their work
- Distribute and share decision-making opportunities
- Co-design programs with lived experience leaders
- Practice transparency and accountability with lived experience leaders

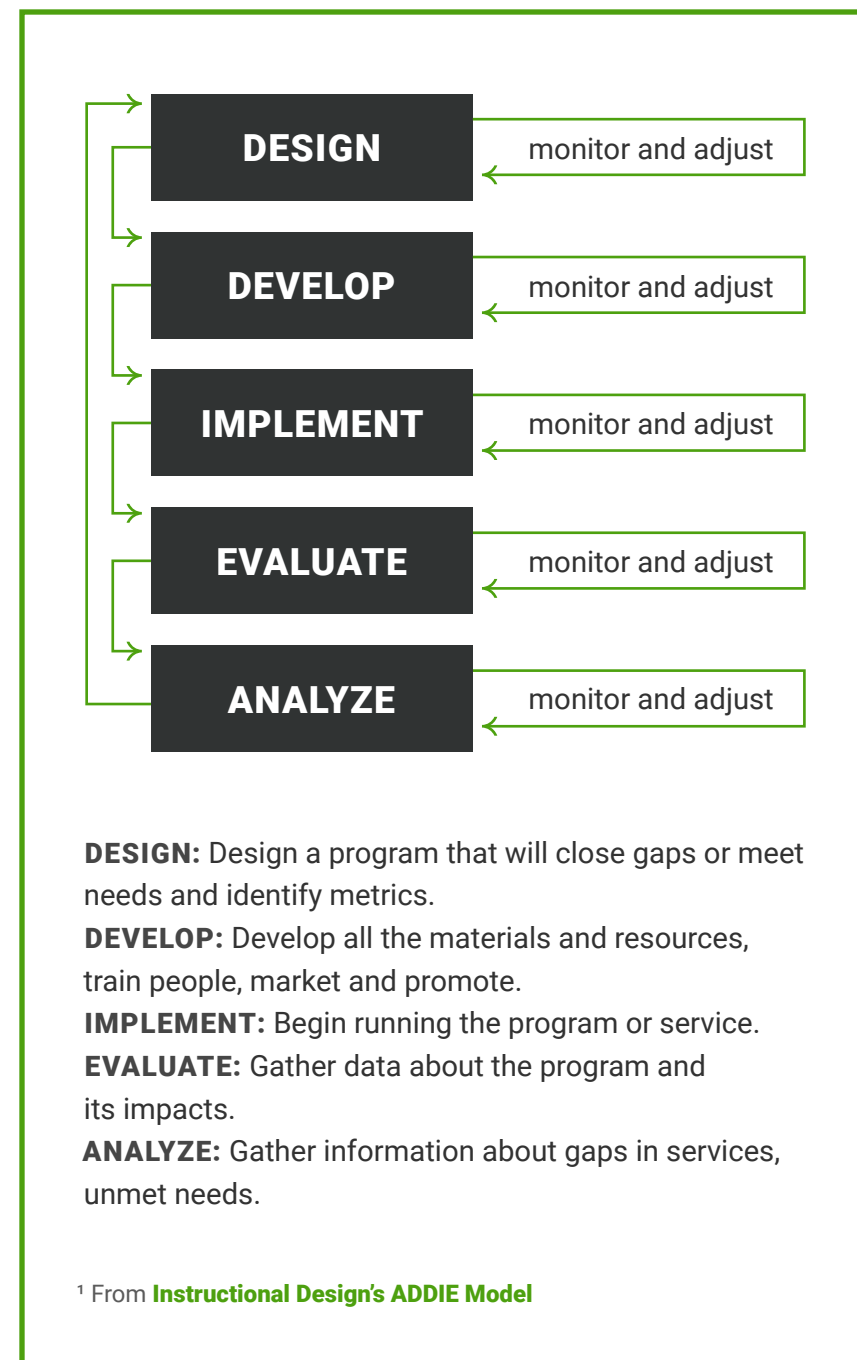
See Lived Experience Leadership's **Rebooting the DNA of Leadership Report** for details about the lived experience leadership movement.

## Peer Navigator Program Development

There are many models for developing programs. We introduce two here: ADDIE and Roots Up. High-quality programs have intentional designs and analysis of whether the program meets the needs of the community. Regardless of what model you use, the goal is to be mindful in building programs. Even if you have an existing program, these models can be used for program improvement in much the same way if you were starting fresh.

## Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate (ADDIE)<sup>1</sup>

ADDIE is often used for learning programs, but can be applied to any type of program. ADDIE embeds evaluation within program design. You can start at any spot in the cycle (ex: use evaluation data to design or redesign a program) and continue working your way through the process.



## Indigenous Program Design: Roots Up Program Development<sup>2</sup>

Developing programs from the roots up is another approach to program development. Drawing from the work of the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, this model begins with values and practices before moving into action and developing supports. The Roots Up Program Development model centers Indigenous communities and program development or redevelopment begins with understanding the root causes for the needed services.

**ROOTS:** Program development begins with developing the program's root system, focused on values and practices. This may include attention to mission and philosophy, understanding of the root causes of a problem and purpose of our work, and the theoretical foundation of our approach and methods.

**TRUNK:** Supports include identifying needs, resources and barriers, as well as the kinds of support that will be offered. These elements contribute to the growth and strength of the program.

**BRANCHES:** Extending from the program to the larger social and cultural shifts, the branches advance goals like sovereignty and meeting basic needs. The branches are the response and describe the programming and activities. The branches are connected to the roots.

[See the full booklet here.](#)



"Food for us [Indigenous and Native people] comes from our relatives, whether they have wings or fins or roots. That is how we consider food. Food has a culture. It has a history. It has a story. It has relationships."

– Winona LaDuke



## Community Health Worker: Types and Roles

A Community Health Worker (CHW), or sometimes called a traditional health worker, is a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served.<sup>1</sup>

- CHWs support people to adopt healthy behaviors and navigate the health system
- CHWs usually share ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status or life experience with those they serve
- CHWs work for their local hospitals and clinics or Coordinated Care Organization to deliver culturally appropriate health education

- CHWs promote, maintain, and improve individual and community health
- CHWs may provide information on available resources, connect people to social supports, provide informal counseling, advocate for individual and community health needs and provide services such as blood pressure screening or other health prevention screenings

In addition to using a program model like ADDIE or Roots Up, you could borrow from the Community Health Worker Model.

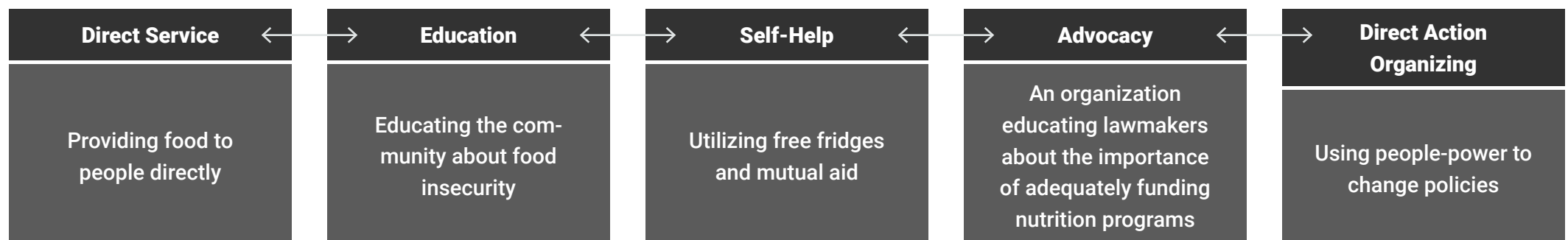
### Type of Community Health Workers<sup>2</sup>

	Promotor o Promotora de Salud/ Community Health Worker Model	Navigator Model	Community Organizer and Capacity Builder Model
Typical Roles and Titles	Client advocate, Educator, Mentor, Outreach worker, Translator	Conduct intake, Support referrals to other programs, Support client navigation, Conduct outreach	Identify community needs, Advocate for policy change, Build partnerships, Participate in/develop coalitions, Build power
Notes/ Considerations	Recruit people from within the community for this role	For this role, having a clear role description, integrating this position into program functions, and the person in the role having knowledge of community and social services are important considerations	These people need to have extensive knowledge of the community, social services and local and state government

## Building Power with People

Within your food sites, there is an opportunity to integrate direct service and systemic change. There is a continuum of social change depicted below. There

are many ways to address hunger along this continuum and we will need all of these strategies to end hunger for good.



<sup>1</sup> From [APHA's CHW Section](#)

<sup>2</sup> For more details see [Rural Health Information Hub's Community Health Worker Toolkit](#).

In our efforts to end hunger for good, we must make systemic change. That means building political power to drive change in a movement led by those impacted by food insecurity. Change can vary from a focus on state or local policy, increasing public awareness or conducting advocacy-focused research.

To give you a sense of what building power might look like, consider the following organizing principles used at Oregon Food Bank:

- Creating a shared story: creating a story of self that connects to a shared story and pushes folks to take action
- Create a shared relational commitment: building relationships and making mutual commitments to change something
- Creating leadership teams: creating a structure to support moving strategy and policy forward
- Creating a shared strategy: taking shared values and developing a clear, focused objective
- Creating shared action: creating clear, measurable and specific outcomes that move toward the long-term goal

To learn more about how you can integrate advocacy and organizing into your food site, please get in touch with a member of the Advocacy, Volunteers and Organizing team at [Advocacy@OregonFoodBank.org](mailto:Advocacy@OregonFoodBank.org)

## Power Dynamics and Ethics

Whenever a volunteer or staff member at a food bank or pantry engages with the community, there will be a power differential. Power differential refers to uneven levels of power between persons in positions of authority and individuals without authority. A common example of this is gatekeeping. In peer-led services and programs, it is important to recognize that staff and volunteers do hold power – even if it doesn't feel that way. It is also important to acknowledge that power difference, discuss it openly and work to avoid doing harm to people with relatively less power.

Gatekeeping means controlling access to something. Most people would agree that it is unethical to withhold food from people. Gatekeeping can take other forms, however, including the false belief that people are “gaming the system” or lying about their needs to access free food. Believing this false idea can lead to limiting the amount of food individuals and families receive. Gatekeeping can also show up as judgment, wanting people to prove they are really poor or turning people away for nonviolent behavioral or hygiene issues.

## Barrier Mitigation

In order to welcome peer leaders into a program, it may be necessary to eliminate or reduce barriers to participation. The most common barriers are time, child care, transportation, and food. To reduce or eliminate these barriers, consider how your program may need to shift to include free food, child care, or bus passes or gas cards. For details on how OFB addresses these barriers, email [EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org](mailto:EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org).

## Ideas to Support Fair Treatment of Peers:

As you work with your community, here are several ideas to ensure fair, equitable relationships between peers:

- Define peer roles and review with peer providers
- Provide appropriate training for the task – especially around boundaries, confidentiality and dual relationships
- Focus on relationship building before work tasks
- Offer peer leadership by creating space to give and receive feedback about programs
- Provide recognition for people's time
- Create opportunities to share one's story but not require personal disclosures outside of the peer's boundaries

# Client Engagement Plan Ideas

To aid in further building relationships with clients, consider some of the following activities:

- Recruit volunteers from current and previous clients
- Develop an advisory board to support client-informed decision making
- Create an **ambassador program** to develop the leadership of people experiencing hunger to advocate for change or provide direct services
- Work with Oregon Food Bank's Network Equity and Racial Justice (NERJ) team to conduct a community food needs assessment
- To learn how other organizations engage with clients, try observing a free food market like **Lift Up's program**, a culturally-specific pantry like **Centro Cultural de Washington County's market** or other food assistance programs
- Offer a suggestion box or other way to gather feedback during pantry hours.
- Compare internal data gathered via surveys, interviews/focus groups or intake with other forms of data
- Conduct quality control visits to pantries

And that's the toolkit! Congratulations for making it through. Our hope is that something within the pages of this toolkit resonated with you. As you move forward with your work, the Network Equity and Racial Justice (NERJ) team would love to support your work. Please contact us at [EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org](mailto:EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org)

## More Resources

### Community Tool Box

Offers short, step-by-step instructions for guiding, supporting and evaluating community and system change work

### How to Create a Logic Model



**“If you really want to make a friend, go to someone’s house and eat with them... The people who give you their food give you their heart.”**

*– César Chávez*



**[OregonFoodBank.org](http://OregonFoodBank.org)**  
**[EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org](mailto:EquitySupport@OregonFoodBank.org)**

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The Network Equity and Racial Justice (NERJ) Team at the Oregon Food Bank partners with regional food banks, partner agencies and food distribution sites to advance equity and racial justice throughout Oregon and Southwest Washington. By working closely with food assistance partners, local communities and program participants, our team develops and supports the implementation of strategies that address root causes of food insecurity.

Together, we develop workshops, strategies and tools to advance equity. The NERJ Team also responds to client concerns and develops client-centered solutions.