



Setting Up a Food Bank: The HOW

Introduction

The levels of food insecurity are higher in London than the national average. Those living on the lowest incomes and insecure employment are most likely to live in food insecurity in the capital after housing costs are taken out. This situation has been worsened by the Covid-19 pandemic with many job losses.

In its 2021 London Poverty Profile, Trust for London has reported that food banks across the capital have increased the number of packages provided by 128% over the course of the last year. There is a general recognition that offering someone food parcels does not resolve the problem and so many food banks have made efforts to integrate the provision of information, advice and some time employment support for a more holistic approach to help address the underlying causes that push people to food banks in the first place.

Besides that, the food pantry model has grown in recent years as an alternative model which at the same time enable people to access surplus food they can afford, at a fraction of the market prices, usually around £5 for a shopping basket worth between £15 to £20 and give people choice. Reality shows that when crisis hits, some households might not even have that regular £5 coming in and so need to access the help offered by food banks before they can transition to a food pantry as their situation improves or when the support from the foodbank ceases. Therefore, this guidance includes links to guidance documents on setting up a food pantry and food cooperative as well.

1. Assessment

What is the need?

Here you will need to define what the needs are in the geographical area covered by your parish. Who is hungry and why? Where are they? Are there other food programmes in your area? Where are they located and when do they operate? Evaluating the needs versus the current provision will help you identify gaps in the provision and help determine priorities.

What do you have?

You should think about what you have available to you such as food donations and storage, equipment, funding and volunteers. You must also ensure that you are operating legally and following appropriate guidance:

- Safeguarding. A foundation course could be beneficial for volunteers working in a food bank. So, if someone makes a disclosure, they will know how to handle it. The training is available online through the [website](#) of the Diocese and takes around one hour to complete.
- Food safety (see the Volunteer Training factsheet)
- Manual handling (see the Volunteer Training factsheet)

2. Planning

Gathering your team

You can't do this alone: you need at least one or two other people on board to help, encourage, support, and take on some of the work. In an ideal world, you would have the following capacity in your team:

- Experience of engaging with the local community;
- Time to attend meetings with local stakeholders;
- Able to research and apply for funding opportunities.

You might also want to identify a small budget to pay any volunteer expenses associated with attending meetings or other activity.

Engaging stakeholders

Talk to your local authority, community leaders, including your MP, Councillors, faith leaders and local organisations (Jobcentre Plus, Citizens Advice, GP surgeries) when you are designing your project. They can contribute with their knowledge of local needs and opportunities. They are also key in helping to spread the word in neighbourhoods and to identifying and referring clients. Invite all those leaders to your launch event but also encourage them to invite residents to come as well.

Ask for advice

If you can, this is a good time to chat to someone else who already runs a food bank. Together Southwark can help to put you in touch with someone in the Diocese who will be happy to talk about their experiences.

3. Operation***Engaging with Local Authority***

Every Local Authority (LA) is different so you will need to check whether you need to register your food bank. The Public Health team is likely to be a good place to start. You will also want to engage with the Benefits team who will be one of your referral partners.

Opening times

You will need to open for a regular slot and advertise when this will be. Experience from existing food banks suggest that once or twice a week for a couple of hours is a common model.

You may also be able to work with other food banks in your community. For example, you could open on a different day and/or timeslot from your neighbouring service.

Access

You need to consider access arrangements. Is there space for wheelchairs and buggies to manoeuvre? Can you provide secure and dry storage for buggies if there isn't space for them to be brought inside?

Volunteers

In the beginning, you are likely to need a small team of volunteers at opening times. You may want to encourage all volunteers to commit to volunteering regularly for at least six months to minimise any loss of institutional learning. As a minimum, you will need people to:

- collect food from donation points and/or be present to receive donations
- store food and check best before dates
- prepare food packs in advance for distribution
- welcome people and distribute food
- tidy up afterwards.

Apart from the traditional church notice board, other useful places to advertise your volunteer roles are local newspapers, social media, food networks, other churches and faith organisations, your local Volunteer Centre, universities and charityjob.co.uk.

Example 1

St George The Martyr's Borough Food Cooperative grew the number of its volunteers by using several different methods, such as setting up accounts on Neighbourly, Instagram and NextDoor. The team also set up ties with community organisations like GoodGym (who send volunteers to them three times a week) and larger establishments like London South Bank University and Kings College London (here the Food Cooperative more specifically advertises its volunteering opportunities through the LSBU and KCL Students Unions). In addition, word of mouth has also played a significant role in attracting new volunteers to the project as well as the team's own shop itself. They have a handful of regular customers who have become volunteers with the Food Cooperative.

Example 2

St Matthew's, Redhill, works closely with a local mosque as their food bank is accessed by a few refugee women. So, volunteers from the mosque community help at the food bank, including with interpretation and signposting.

At least one person, preferably the manager, should receive Food Hygiene and Safety training. This can be accessed online for a fee of between £10 to £30 per person and take a couple of hours to complete. There is a wide selection of providers, such as [High Speed Training](#), [Health Safety Quality Environment](#) (HSQE), to list a few.

Food supply

Schools, churches, businesses and parishioners tend to donate non-perishable food. If your parish has a local market, that could be an opportunity to partner with farmers and other sellers of fresh fruits and vegetable as well to offer more nutritionally balanced food parcels.

Example 3

Lingfield Larder, co-established by Lingfield and Dormansland United Benefice, partners with its local primary school and collects food left over from school lunches to distribute to the local community on a Saturday morning. Because it is billed as reducing food waste, it is used by a wide range of people, thereby removing the stigma that can be associated with food bank use.

There are also several surplus food redistribution charities with whom you could partner: see the Partner Charities factsheet for more details.

Insurance

You need to check that your insurance covers use of the premises for a food bank. Ecclesiastical is keen to support churches who want to offer this service to people in their community and you can call them for [advice](#).

Food distribution

It is worth considering how to deal with food preferences, intolerances and cultural and religious requirements. There is anecdotal evidence that some people will accept food they are offered even if they know they can't or won't eat it. You should think about how to ask people what they need and what they want, while being realistic about what is available.

Signposting and referrals

When operating a food bank, you might sometimes come across difficult and complex situations where you think that professional help is needed. Make sure that your volunteers are aware of this possibility and know where to refer people as necessary. It would be a good idea to have a list of phone numbers available for referrals (social services, domestic violence support, Citizens Advice Bureau, debt relief charities such as Christians Against Poverty). You can find details of these and other services in our [signposting document](#).

Welcoming the whole person

While people visit a food bank to collect food, they will often have other needs that can be met by a friendly face, an offer of tea or coffee, and a chat. If you have enough space and volunteers to offer more than a simply transactional service, this would be welcomed by many of your visitors and will show Christ's love to them in a very real way.

4. Expansion

There will be various things to consider as your food bank expands. You might want to consider applying for funding and creating a separate charity or Community Interest Company which would require proper governance structures. Together Southwark can assist in finding suitable advice organisations which can help you with the above when you reach this stage.

If you change the type of food bank you run (e.g. changing from providing only packaged foods to prepared foods) then you might need to update your local authority registration: check with the Public Health team.

As you expand, you might want to consider the following roles:

- Food Bank Manager
- Food Bank Support Assistant
- Food Bank Logistics Coordinator
- Volunteer Voucher Coordinator
- Volunteer Customer Service Assistants.

There is more detailed information available in a set of linked annexes and factsheets.

- [Annexe 1](#) – Food Bank one pager
- [Annexe 2](#) – If You Are Going To Serve Meals
- [Factsheet 1](#) – Volunteer training
- [Factsheet 2](#) – The Client Experience
- [Factsheet 3](#) - Voucher Schemes
- [Factsheet 4](#) - Potential funders
- [Factsheet 5](#) - Partner Charities

Disclaimer: The information in this document is intended only to help you consider what is needed. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are operating legally, and the Diocese of Southwark takes no responsibility for the operation of any individual service.