



Blue Ridge
AREA
FOOD
BANK

Partnering With Purpose

WINTER 2023

PRINT EDITION

A NEWSLETTER FOR FOOD BANK PARTNERS

Centering Guests for Greater Impact

For many months, the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank has been working with our partners to design a new strategic plan that places our guests at the center of our future work.

We have worked with partners and consultants to interview guests and neighbors about their lived experiences and needs; hosted listening sessions with you to hear about your challenges, opportunities, and goals; and researched local trends in food and nutrition insecurity.

As a result, we've identified three core strategies that will guide the Food Bank's investment of resources and work over the next three to five years.

Here's a preview.

STRATEGY: Eliminate disparities in access to nutritious food

Our region is rich in diversity in terms of ethnicity, age, geography, health status, dietary needs, and more.

In thinking about our current and future work and impact, a few questions come to mind:

- Who and where are the people who need food but currently aren't accessing it? What is preventing them from doing so?



- How can those who lack access to transportation get food?
- What is the experience like for non-English speakers who are food-insecure and trying to navigate charitable food assistance?
- Do we have the right types of food available to meet people's dietary and cultural needs?
- Are services available where and when our neighbors need them?

By addressing these and other questions, we can build more

responsive, inclusive, and welcoming services and ensure that everyone has access to enough nutritious food.

STRATEGY: Improve health

People experiencing food insecurity are more likely to develop chronic, diet-related diseases like obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Working together, the Food Bank and our partners can play a bigger role in improving community health by providing foods that help guests

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Centering Guests for Greater Impact

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manage existing health conditions through better nutrition.

We can also strengthen ties with the healthcare sector to improve referrals, develop in-clinic pantries, and share resources that contribute to better community health outcomes over time.

STRATEGY: Support household financial stability

Food insecurity is not about food. It's about not having enough financial resources to meet all expenses, *including* food. While benefits like SNAP are available to those who qualify, these benefits are dramatically underused in our area, especially among seniors (69% of eligible seniors in Virginia are not accessing SNAP).

Leaning into this strategy means improving referrals to services and support that contributes to financial stability and improving outreach with guests to help them navigate applying for SNAP and other benefits. To support a key feature of this effort, the Food Bank is currently hiring a Benefits Outreach Manager.

It takes a village

We expect to finalize our strategic plan this spring. When we do, we will share more detail about our path forward and how working together we can better meet the unique needs of our communities.

For now, there are 10 things your organization can do today (or strengthen what you're already doing) to advance these strategic priorities. Check the sidebar for ideas to center guests in your mission.

We are grateful for your ongoing partnership and for standing with us for our neighbors.

The future is guest-centered, collaborative, and bright!



Centering guests in your mission

- 1 Regularly survey your guests to improve your services.
- 2 Offer guests a choice on the foods they pick.
- 3 Open during evening and weekend hours.
- 4 Source more culturally familiar foods.
- 5 Translate signage and materials.
- 6 Engage guests as volunteers and/or board members.
- 7 Partner with DSS to provide SNAP outreach and enrollment.
- 8 Collaborate with and refer to other area service providers.
- 9 Launch a home delivery model to serve seniors and individuals with disabilities.
- 10 Start a mobile pantry to reach underserved areas of your county.

How Do We Reach the Missing Guests?



Margie, a nutrition educator, cooks up a recipe and tasting samples using distributed foods.

Anne Cushman, director of FISH, says, "Now that we've been doing this [a few times], we've been invited to other places." Since its start, this event has seen significant growth in households served.

What new and collaborative ways can your organization try to identify and meet the needs of missing guests? Reach out to your Partner Engagement Manager and let them know your thoughts. Maybe the Food Bank can help.

Missing guests are neighbors who could use our services, but for a variety of reasons, are not. Food is available, so how do we get it to people who need it?

A new mobile food pantry in Clarke County is one way.

The Mobile Community Table is a collaboration of FISH of Clarke County, the Clarke Department of Social Services (DSS), and the Blue Ridge Area Food Bank.

FISH provides logistical oversight, nutrition education, and a steady stream of on-site volunteers. DSS delivers benefits and resource expertise at every event. The Food Bank is the primary food provider. A Partner Impact & Innovation grant helped FISH purchase the truck, which allows volunteers to transport fresh foods from their physical pantry to new areas in the county, reaching even more people.

The food-laden truck is driven to a remote pocket of the county with a known need, then parked in a community space. Trained DSS personnel attend to help guests apply for needed services like SNAP. *Voila!* You've got an occasion where visitors get groceries and learn about

benefits they may want and need. A member of DSS told us, "We can open the door for whatever resources are available."

Clarke DSS staff know that more individuals would qualify for benefits if they applied, but many either need help getting out or don't know what's available. By bringing food and services to a central community meeting place, they are showing the possible benefits to more people. Doing this as a social gathering makes it an event and helps reduce the stigma.

When folks who need benefits receive them, household finances stabilize, health improves, and the community is stronger.



FISH Director Anne Cushman with volunteers Beth and Katie at a Mobile Community Table.



Blue Ridge Area FOOD BANK

Everyone should have enough to eat.



HEADQUARTERS | P.O. BOX 937 | VERONA, VA 24482



Our **VISION** is that everyone has enough to eat.

Our **CORE BELIEFS** are that hunger is unacceptable, that everyone deserves access to enough food, that food sustains life and nourishes health, and that we are called to serve without judgment.

Our **MISSION** is to provide nourishing food to our neighbors in need through vibrant community partnerships and passionate public support.

Snackables

Contract renewal 2023: Please sign your annual DocuSign documents if you haven't already.

Partner Impact & Innovation Grants: Request for proposal (RFP) is open until February 28. Apply now to help strengthen your organization's capacity.

The Food Bank is hiring to fill a Benefits Outreach Manager position to oversee SNAP outreach and enrollment and support our new strategic goal of helping to improve household financial stability. More details soon!

Andy Gilmer joined as the new Partner Technology Support Coordinator to

support your success with Link2Feed, Agency Express, and Meal Connect. Please reach out to Andy at agilmer@brafb.org if you have any training requests.



"I love working at the Food Bank because it brings many of my skills into a position that allows me to serve our neighbors alongside a team of wonderful people whose hearts are set on worthwhile things."

—ANDY GILMER
PARTNER TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT COORDINATOR