

Promising Practices for Creating Nutrition-Focused Food Shelves

The MFAN Hunger Action Team recognizes that food shelves are a major part of our food system and that they have an important role to play in improving access to healthy food for people in need. As low-income community members increasingly rely on these agencies to provide food for themselves and their families, the need for nutritious options at food shelves becomes even more critical.

The Hunger Action Team also recognizes that many food shelves across the metro are interested in creating a nutrition-focused organization that is responsive to their clients' serious chronic health issues. However, given limited capacity and budgets, it is often difficult for food shelves to make sustainable and effective changes without support and guidance from other health and hunger relief experts.

As part of MFAN's mission to "advance equitable access to healthy food for all Twin Cities metro residents", the Hunger Action Team endorses the strategies outlined in this document: "Promising Practices for Creating Nutrition-Focused Food Shelves". When used together, these five Promising Practices, and the recommended action steps that follow, provide a roadmap to help organizations create a healthier food environment for their clients. Suggested resources are also included to help food shelves identify partner organizations that can help them plan and implement each strategy. These Promising Practices align closely with the recommendations found within the Minnesota Food Charter – healthy food availability, food accessibility, and food skills sections.

The MFAN Hunger Action Team strongly encourages metro-area food shelves to focus their efforts on these Promising Practices when considering how best to improve the availability of nutritious foods for the people they serve.

Promising Practice 1: Build a healthy inventory

- Purchase from healthy food outlets (e.g. food banks that prioritize healthy foods; local farmers).
- Analyze purchasing patterns to identify highly processed items that can be reduced/eliminated in order to accommodate the purchase of healthier items (pancake syrup example).
- Increase your food storage capacity to take advantage of healthy bulk buys or donations.

Promising Practice 2: Communicate proactively with donors/suppliers

- Create a “wish list” for donors to request healthy items (and identify unwanted items).
- Host healthy food drives with local schools, businesses, and organizations.
- Use positive, client-focused language to say ‘no’ to unhealthy donations.
- Provide feedback on food bank inventory (e.g. request healthier versions of popular items).
- Stop purchasing or accepting donations of items with no nutritional value (e.g. candy, soda).
- Coordinate with other food shelves to request changes from food banks, retailers, and donors.

Promising Practice 3: Make healthy foods visible and appealing

- Create a clean, well-organized food shelf with good foot traffic flow – just like a grocery store.
- Place healthy foods in prominent, easily accessible locations.
- Use colorful posters, shelf tags, or banners to highlight healthy choices.
- Place healthy items at eye- or hip-level (the “sweet spot”) where clients are likely to look first.
- Increase shelf space devoted to healthy foods; minimize shelf space for unhealthy items.

Promising Practice 4: Increase client awareness of/demand for healthy foods

- Survey clients to gather feedback on their preferred healthy foods and health issues.
- Provide nutrition education services and programs (e.g. cooking demos, recipes, dietitian).
- Make it easy for clients to find healthy options (e.g. ‘Go, Slow, Whoa’ tags on food items).
- Train staff/volunteers to talk with clients about healthy choices, meal ideas, and nutrition.

Promising Practice 5: Adopt a nutrition-focused philosophy

- Set clear nutrition standards for food purchases and donations (e.g. US Dietary Guidelines).
- Document your commitment to healthy foods by creating a written nutrition policy, guidelines, or strategic plan; provide stakeholder orientation to the new guidelines.
- Generate excitement and buy-in for a nutrition-focused philosophy by involving staff, volunteers, and clients at the beginning of the development process.

Resources:

- **Open Your Heart grants:** <http://www.oyh.org/grant-programs/>
- **The Food Group Produce Toolkit:** <http://thefoodgroupmn.org/promote-fresh-produce-toolkit/>
- **SuperFood Drive materials:** <http://www.superfooddrive.org/healthy-food-drive/>
- **Minneapolis Healthy Food Shelf Network:** <http://www.healthyfoodshelves.org/>
- **Minneapolis Health Department:**
<http://www.minneapolismn.gov/health/living/foodshelf#resources>
- **Second Harvest Heartland Agency Zone:**
<http://agencies.2harvest.org/resources/produceandnutrition/>
- **Feeding America toolkits and resources:**
<http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/tools-and-resources/?r>
- **The Food Group. Healthy food shelf policy:** <http://thefoodgroupmn.org/agency-corner/71-2/>
- **Institute of Medicine. Nutrition Focused Food Banking:**
http://healthyfoodbankhub.feedingamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/mp/files/tool_and_resources/files/foodbanking.pdf