



Supplemental Insert

A FOOD PANTRY STRATEGY: CLIENT CHOICE

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in the state of Indiana requires all member food pantries to offer client choice. If your food pantry is interested in receiving TEFAP commodities or you would like to know more about client choice, the information below may serve as a resource to you and the organization you serve.

What is client choice?

Client choice is a method of food distribution at food pantries. Clients are encouraged to select the foods they want, similar to shopping at a grocery store.

Benefits of client choice for the client

Client choice acknowledges that no two families or individuals have the same needs or preferences. Here are a few ways client choice can benefit the client:

- Enables selection of desired products
- Encourages client dig-

nity, self-esteem and builds trust and satisfaction

- Accommodates needs (ie. certain type of diet or limited cooking equipment)
- Promotes critical thinking and allows for exercise and practice of budgeting and nutrition knowledge

Benefits of client choice for the pantry

Offering client choice can benefit the pantry in several ways. Listed below are a few:

- Reduces waste and monetary losses; clients choose products they will use and want
- Allows pantry staff to control their inventory and finances by seeing which products are most popular and which are not
- Volunteer and staff time is not spent pre-bagging, but instead, engaging and aiding clients. Pantry hours may be extended to improve accessibility of pantry services to clients.

Please visit the IEFNRN website to learn more about client choice or contact your local food bank or another food pantry in your area that offers client choice. The IEFNRN food assistance directory is another great way to network with food pantries in Indiana.

Supplemental insert sources: <http://www.endhungerinamerica.org/>; <http://www.purdue.edu/indianasefrnetwork/docs/Clientchoicemanual.pdf>; <http://www.taafb.org/documents/ChoicePantryGuide.pdf>



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Implementing client choice may be a challenge, but with careful consideration and knowledge of how others have switched to client choice, your pantry can ease into the transition.

1) How will client choice affect the nutrient quality of clients' diets?

Regardless of what choices clients make, allowing choice can help meet client needs because they choose what they prefer. Client choice also presents an opportunity for nutrition education.

2) It would be difficult to change; this is the way we have always done it.

Change can be difficult, but there are many reasons to offer client choice. Client choice can reduce the stress and humiliation of asking for food by providing food in a way that promotes dignity and trust.

3) How will client choice affect our ability to maintain inventory? We may run out and not have enough for all our clients.

Client choice functions from what inventory is available and without pre-determined food boxes, pantries do not need to worry about distributing identical boxes. Using client choice, the pantry can place limits on the amount each family is allowed to take, which could be a similar amount to what was previously given in food boxes. In addition, the transition to client choice can prompt evaluation and improvement of how your pantry obtains the food that is distributed. Your pantry may apply for USDA commodities, find ways to purchase more food per dollar at the food bank, or seek other sources of food.

4) How does the role of the volunteer change?

Volunteers are not needed to pre-pack bags for clients but can facilitate a warm and welcoming atmosphere by interacting with and serving clients. Because of this interaction, the volunteer experience is also likely to be more rewarding and can promote increased volunteer participation.

5) Our pantry has limited space; how can choice work for us?

There are no space requirements to offer client choice. Space can range from large shelving areas such as are common in a grocery store setting, a small table, a small closet, and other settings--size is not important, as long as the client can select from the foods presented.

6) How will client choice affect our hours of operation?

Hours may be flexible with client choice. Hours that accommodate your clientele are recommended. The hours that were spent pre-packing bags can now be spent keeping the pantry open.

7) How does client choice work when you also give away USDA commodities?

Participants of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in the state of Indiana are required to offer client choice. Otherwise, there are no "rules" for offering client choice.

8) Client choice is new for us and we are not sure how to offer choice to clients.

There are several different methods of offering client choice. Please see page 3 for example client choice models.

Below is a brief overview of some ideas for implementing client choice. **“Pure” client choice** is an additional method that may be provided when there is no limit on the quantity or variety of foods that clients can select. Remember that the overall goal of client choice is that clients can select their own food from your inventory; there is no “one right way!”



The point system: Food items are assigned points and a color based on actual grocery store cost. Clients are permitted to select foods until they reach their total number of pre-determined points. See example to the right.

Foods that cost this much:	Receive this many points:	Get this color sticker:
\$0 - \$1.00	1	Red
\$1.01 - \$2.00	2	Blue
\$2.01 - \$3.00	3	Yellow

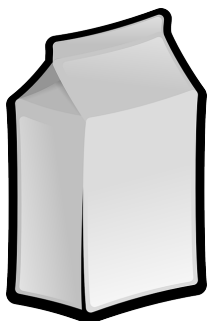
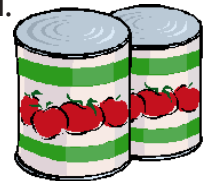
The item system: A good method for pantries new to client choice, this method allots a certain number of items per family size. See example below.

Family Size	Receives this many items:
3 - 4	25
5 - 6	35
6 - 8	50

The list system: From a paper list, clients select the foods they want and these items are bagged by the staff/volunteer. Pantry staff and volunteers should be sensitive to those who may have difficulty reading or may not understand the language the list is in. Keep the list up to date and use the other methods as a model for setting up the list.

Rainbow of Colors system: Developed by the Ohio State University Extension under the direction of the Butler County Feed, Educate, Empower, Deliver alliance, this system incorporates USDA MyPlate. Foods are organized on shelves according to their color-coded food group. Clients are allowed to select a certain number of items from each food group. The Rainbow of Colors system also has combination and miscellaneous sections, where items that are difficult to categorize may be placed. For more information, read “Making the Switch: A Guide for Converting to a Client Choice Food Pantry,” on our website.

The pound system: Families are allotted a particular poundage of food based on family size. A scale is recommended when using this method.



These methods are adaptable and many can be combined. If you would like to “ease into” one of these methods, you can assemble food boxes as normal, but display additional items to be taken freely or up to a certain amount. Foods that perish quickly are ideal items for this table. Another option is to assemble food boxes, but allow a swap table so they can exchange items. Incentives might be placed on some items and restrictions on others. **Client choice can be implemented anywhere with a little creativity and planning!**

Client choice in Lafayette, IN

IEFRN sat down for a question and answer session with John Stafford, the Elmwood Church of Christ food pantry coordinator in Lafayette, to provide one pantry's experience with client choice.

IEFRN: Why do you offer client choice?

JS: I think it comes down to [the fact that] we just want to serve the people that come in the best that we can. For example, I was in the pantry a couple weeks ago and met a man who was living out of a hotel. He had no stove, no refrigerator, and no way to cook things that we would normally give...His needs were so much different than the rest of the people...but he was still able to get food because we let him choose what he wanted...Just letting them get what they can use is important to us I think.



IEFRN: How do you offer client choice in your pantry?

JS: The food is categorized [by food group], and we have limits posted for each category that's based on family size. The break

downs are a family of 1-3 and 4 or more. So a household will come, check-in, and we'll get an indication of how many people are in the household. Then one of the workers will escort them through the food pantry, show them each area, and tell them, based on their family size, how many items they can choose from each area....Sometimes the pantry workers will help them with ideas about how to fix a food or what would work well with what they've already picked.

IEFRN: When you have a limited supply of a certain item, how do you deal with that?

JS: When we have a limited supply of things, we give everybody the same amount. For example, right now, we don't have much toilet paper. So we are giving only one per household.

IEFRN: When you have an over abundance of a certain item, how do you deal with that?

JS: You make it its own category. Right now we have a lot of red beans, so we have a separate category for beans and rice...If you put it by itself, then people aren't having to choose not to take something else....It's not competing with anything else in that category.

IEFRN: What would you say are your "top items?"

JS: We are always trying to find cereal. That's usually in short supply. Dry pasta is another one...lately they've had a short supply in canned vegetables...Right now there's not much of a supply, but I'm sure there will be again.

IEFRN: Are there any difficulties you have had to over-

come with offering client choice?

JS: Nothing major. From week to week, we change the signs that are posted based on supply...So if we run out of something, we put something else in that spot and put a sign out about what it is and [how much] they can have.

IEFRN: How many volunteers do you normally have working a shift?

JS: We try to have three people. One will handle the check-in process, and then two are available to escort families through the pantry. And that's really about all the room can accommodate. More than that would be overcrowded.

IEFRN: What is the size of your pantry?

JS: I think the room is probably 15 x 20 feet. We have two big freezers, and another unit that's half freezer and half refrigerator.

IEFRN: How many households do you serve and how many pounds do you distribute?

JS: Our weekly average is about 75-100 households and last year I think we distributed close to 70,000 pounds of food.



IEFRN: How do you get food for your pantry?

JS: Each week we place an order [with the food bank in town, Food Finders]. They have an inventory system that allows us to see what they've got [and] we can order donated products. You can also order what's called purchased product. These are things that they have bought because they know there's a need, and we buy them basically "at cost"...kind of like going to a grocery store. So there's donated, there's purchased, and then [there's commodities through TEFAP], and those are at no cost. We started getting commodities in 2006...We also have a program [where three or four families opt to take a month out of the year and donate food]...We have about 50 families that are doing that. We try to encourage them to donate things that we don't get from Food Finders, [like] personal items--soap, shampoo, toilet paper... [We make known what we need through our Facebook page and weekly newsletter]...A local farmer [also] brings produce to us that doesn't sell within a couple days.

IEFRN: This information has been very helpful and thank you for talking with us today.

JS: You're very welcome.

Beans or Rice	
Family size	Limit
1-3	1
4 or more	2