



# Ensuring a Dignified Experience at Emergency Food Programs: Why and How

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# This handbook is...

...the beginning of an ever-evolving discussion about how to **ensure** a dignified experience at emergency food programs (EFPs)

...created from knowledge and ideas provided by:

- 14 interviews with staff, volunteers and **guests** from three EFPs in Tucson, AZ, one large food pantry, one small food pantry, and one medium food pantry with a meal program
- **Community food security** research and stories from The Stop, an EFP/Food Centre in Toronto, Ontario in Canada

...designed for anyone involved with an EFP, putting on the program or participating in it, who would like to advocate for ensuring a dignified experience at that program .

I would like to acknowledge the expertise, lived experience and trusted sharing of individuals who have faced hunger and food insecurity who were interviewed for this project. Thank you each for your driving contribution to this handbook.

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# WHY

The United States (US) has created an emergency food system that often does not **ensure** a dignified experience for all those involved: staff, volunteers and especially **members**. At the root of the problem is individual blame and shame. Individual failure is often the result of an economic system that assigns prices to many basic human needs (food, healthcare, housing, education, etc.), while creating less opportunity to earn money, and thus survive, for populations facing **marginalization**. Overall the political system does not make up for this failure in the private market. These systems support, and are supported by, a social culture of individualism in the United States (US). Individuals are viewed as responsible for their work ability and resulting success- usually measured in wealth and social status. However, it is the systems creating these inequities that should receive shame and blame food insecurity and poverty.

EFPs and other private social services have stepped in to attempt insuring basic human needs are met despite an individual's ability to participate in the labor force and/or survive on meager social assistance, but have not succeeded. These organization's goals are to end hunger and poverty; ultimately putting themselves out of business. Unfortunately, EFPs feeding people is only temporary relief to hunger and poverty, because the systems perpetuating hunger and poverty are not being challenged. The solution is to create change within EFP culture and programming, as well as policy change in the local and national political spheres, to best support marginalized populations. This work challenges the dominant culture and systems creating and supporting individual blame. Ensuring a dignified experience involves an EFP supporting their community through dignified interactions, operations and programming. Meeting individuals' immediate basic human needs and advocating for change in society must happen at the same time to address hunger and poverty holistically. We need to "feed the line" in a dignified way and "shorten the line" at once.

## Poverty & discrimination is not an individual's doing

An emergency food box cannot begin to tackle the many social and economic determinants of poverty. Those involved with EFPs know that with hunger comes stories of external factors damaging an individuals' food security, or access to appropriate food and eating patterns. Food security can be damaged if an individual faces difficulty in their financial situation, access to transportation, access to meal preparation time and space, or health and physical/mental ability. Minority populations based on race/ethnicity, language, and nationality may face **marginalization** based on this identity thus creating additional barriers to food security. Systemic **oppression** takes the form of predatory lending, environmental racism, cultural erasure, mass incarceration, economic barriers, social exclusion, amongst other emotional and physical harm. Some people say that poor people are broke because they make bad choices, but this could not be more incorrect. There are too many outside factors and systems, including historical determinants like **generational or cyclical poverty**, to sensibly blame an individual for their physical, social or economic circumstances, and in turn their food security. Societal systems determine an individuals' opportunity to succeed and their awarded **privileges**. Oppression and marginalization imposed by these systems is not equal for anyone, and must be addressed accordingly.

*Janet Poppendieck, an anti-hunger and anti-poverty academic and advocate, views charity as society's moral safety valve, which allows people to relieve, through donations and volunteering, the discomfort that poverty evokes — at the expense of pursuing more radical solutions. As she also notes, food bank recipients report that these charity responses strip them of their dignity and do little to solve their longer-term challenges.*

*—In Every Community a Place for Food\**

\* See bibliography

# Emergency food programs should not exist

The end goal of every EFP should be to go out of business. The Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona's (CFBSA, CFB, or "we") **Social Justice** core value describes ideas and tactics that support going out of business, "We commit to addressing the root causes of hunger and advocating for social justice and the common good because we believe that access to safe, sufficient, nutritious food is a basic human right, and because we believe that empowered people and their communities thrive." Most EFP missions aim to put an end to hunger and poverty as well as promote health and **justice**. CFB acknowledges that there are root causes of hunger that are denying peoples' human right to the best food. EFPs strive to be not needed because ensuring basic human rights and a dignified life is the right thing to do.

EFPs should not exist because they were not designed to be a long-term solution to hunger. Food only fills an empty stomach until the next mealtime, while there are many other aspects of an individual's life that influence their food security or access to safe, nutritionally and culturally appropriate food. These aspects of life are mainly influenced by systems in society outside of an individual's control. Therefore, just giving food is inherently not a long term solution. This ineffectiveness is reflected in food bank history. The first food bank was created in 1967 in Phoenix, AZ\* with the design to support other EFPs temporarily, until hunger was eliminated. People with food to spare make a "deposit" and those who have feeding programs make "withdrawals". This process can be more streamlined than EFPs sourcing the food themselves. Despite "working to go out of business", food banks have spread to every state in the U.S. and increasingly across the world. EFPs and other private social services have spread in response to a rising population of individuals of low socio-economic status (low SES) who are having their basic needs denied through societal systemic failure. A weak government social safety net and labor protection has contributed to this severe **inequity**. Hunger and poverty are complex problems that cannot be solved with emergency food boxes alone. Therefore "feeding the line" through EFPs is a necessary component for ending hunger, but will not sufficiently end hunger alone. Social, economic and political systems must be changed to ensure all can prosper.

## Feelings matter

What is dignity? Feeling worth it. Feeling worthy creates pride and confidence for oneself, which is healthy for success. As stated before, we believe every individual is worthy of their basic needs being met, so they can prosper. However, social systems exclude minority and women populations on an emotional and systemic level. The economic system bases worth on an individual's ability to produce income or capital. Our political system does not support individuals unable to fully participate economically, often due to their social identity, to support themselves or their dependents. These systems, and the dominant culture that support them, influence pride to be based on individual's worth and success in the economic and political systems. If inequity in these systems forces someone to seek help with basic human needs, they might feel individually responsible, or not worthy, since they are unable to independently meet these needs. This is unacceptable and **unjust** to those unable to make ends meet, because their existence makes them worthy to have their needs met and for them to prosper.

EFPs can directly oppose this damaging and unrealistic sense of worth by providing everyone seeking help with dignified access to quality food, other basic human needs, and advocacy opportunities to change systemic problems no matter the individual's identity or their ability to pay the bills. Advocating for and ensuring individuals' have basic needs met, with opportunities to succeed, creates positive impacts for the common good. When individuals are able to reach their full potential, society thrives. Everyone deserves to feel worthy, dignified and proud of their role in society. This dignified feeling can be cultivated at EFPs through interpersonal interactions as well as operational practices. The remainder of this handbook contains guidelines for these interactions and operations.

The entire EFP community, including members, volunteers and staff, should be involved in creating intentional healing spaces. The moods and attitudes of those putting on the EFP greatly impact the interactions in the EFP community and effectiveness of the EFP. Interactions between all EFP community members can impact an individuals' emotional health, feelings of worthiness, dedication to and participation in the EFP community and personal success. The financial, physical and emotional injustice created by the economic and political systems in society cause harm to everyone in society. Trauma experienced through systemic injustice can be brought to the EFP with the individual and shared with others through peaceful or not peaceful ways. Therefore volunteers and staff must intentionally practice self-care, individually and in community, and encourage it with EFP members where possible and appropriate. Individual self-care includes treating one's body well, doing stress relieving activities, doing any activity that brings you joy, reflecting in a journal, or any other way to mentally and physically refresh, heal and rejuvenate. Community centered healing spaces can be fostered through story telling, creative spaces (art, music, dancing, etc.), cultural spaces, support groups and other community building groups doing activities they enjoy while building relationships. It is important to understand the injustices created by these systems are felt in different amounts and ways depending on one's experienced privilege and access to opportunities. Therefore, those with experience of **systemic privilege and power in society** must remain exceptionally compassionate in the EFP environment, and conscious not to exhibit behavior that is prejudice, unknowingly prejudice or could be interpreted as prejudice. By creating and practicing in healing spaces at EFP programming, as well as in informal ways, the EFP community should become stronger, more connected and more compassionate.



# HOW

Systemic determinants of poverty and their potentially **disempowering “Band-Aid solutions”** (like EFPs) have been in place (and power) for decades. Therefore, making the personal attitude changes and operational enhancements for a dignified experience is going to take effort and time. These processes include: trust and respect being openly practiced in EFP interactions, capacity building to create both an efficient and personalized experience at EFP, and **community food security** programming. It is important to view this process as continuous and steady with small changes being tested and made over time. A potential initial concern among EFP community members is the need to balance operational efficiency with community building opportunities offered through operational flexibility. It is also important to balance investment in dignified infrastructure with the inherent need to ultimately go out of business and not institutionalize poverty. All EFP community members should be included in the development (where possible) and be aware of the basic ideals and protocols designed to **ensure** a dignified experience at the EFP. This means communicating through trainings for staff and volunteers, as well as signage for and verbal communication between staff, volunteers and members about protocols, expectations and invitations. This handbook is the beginning of a continuous conversation and process to ensure a dignified experience at EFPs that will need the support and participation from all EFP community members.

## Trust & respect

How can we begin to tackle the many problems within our society's systems? A small but impactful place to start is with interpersonal interactions within EFPs, and in the world. When a society is sending messages that an individual is not worthy, it must be combatted with honest trust and respect towards that individual. CFB defines the core value *Respect*, "We recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every person and treat all with **equity** and compassion", and *Integrity*, "We act with honesty, trust, and transparency – and deliver on our commitments". Applying these values to our interactions within EFPs, especially between one person without the experience of **food insecurity** and someone else with the experience, is essential for assuring a dignified experience.

Every interaction at an EFP should begin with, and embody, full trust. This starts with a warm greeting and ends with a caring farewell. Individuals running the program must trust the participants to know their own needs and solutions, and not doubt them or pass condescension. They must also build trust with participants, since social services, to this point in time, have left many individuals distrustful. The goal is for participants to trust they will be respected at the program before participating or right at the start. Respect is a display of trust through compassionate actions. For community to be built between individuals who have experienced food insecurity and individuals who have not, those without experience must defy the messages from society telling them they are more worthy of their basic needs being met, and treat participants as equals, and the experts of their own experience. EFP staff/volunteers must not interact with a participant, no matter how short the interaction, indifferently, sourly or in a condescending manner for any reason, including their appearance, behavior (keeping the EFP space safe), or any aspect of their identity. Every participant is worthy of full trust and respect from the start, which must be reflected in staff/volunteer expressions, demeanor, language, tone and actions.

It must be the goal of the EFP to foster as much community as possible. Community interaction and relationship building is often a need for EFP members; especially elderly folks or people who live on their own. Volunteers and staff should have the flexibility in their working position to engage in conversation with members when invited. If needed, create back up volunteer roles to assure various positions are filled while conversation happens between members and volunteers. It is also important that the physical space and program operation process promotes positive interaction within the EFP community composed of members, volunteers, and staff. Community building is essential for trust formation and program success. The following operational practices describe multiple approaches to ensuring a dignified experience at EFPs in an attempt to accommodate the many different capacity levels and characteristics of EFPs and their communities

## Operational practices

EFPs should strive to serve fresh and high-quality food in a dignified way, while improving access to local food. When EFPs are in their early development, it is good to focus on balancing efficiency with creating a personalized experience for each member. These goals can be achieved through cultural competency training within the EFP community, effective food sourcing and distribution, simple access to the EFP, member **autonomy** and choice, and building a strong volunteer community. Every part of the emergency food chain from the donors and drivers to the sorters, volunteers and members, influences if the EFP **ensures** a dignified experience.

The following food sourcing recommendations will most likely be challenging because the current food system is not necessarily set up to support them. The EFP should promote and seek nutritious, local, sustainably grown, culturally, and otherwise, appropriate for the members. This effort must be balanced with reality of hunger and **food insecurity** and the reality of the emergency food chain. It can be condescending and elitist to only praise the foods listed above, if one does not address that those foods are still widely inaccessible to low SES people if they are not donated or purchased and distributed through the emergency food system. The solution is not to make food cheaper, but to assure everyone has sufficient means to obtain food at its true “cost”. The emergency food system has largely functioned as a resource to grocers and food manufacturers to avoid disposal costs, and is therefore at the whim of the donator. Therefore EFPs should support an alternative and **just** food system whenever possible to assure better sources in the future, and an end to their existence.

Internal practices ensuring a dignified experience as well as programming should be more in the EFP’s control. Therefore the following operational guidelines regarding cultural competency, interpersonal interactions, and community building will be unique to each EFP. This handbook communicates some shared values and practices that can be adapted to each EFP accordingly, and at the appropriate pace.

## **Practice cultural competency**

Cultural competency is a continuous process that takes research, reflection, dialogue and action. EFPs should seek information from their members regarding cultural heritage and traditions regarding food and community building in general. Food choices that are known and used by the EFP member population are essential for ensuring dignity and minimizing waste. Language accessibility, based on community needs, for all signage, communications and in-person conversations is needed at EFP programs. To practice and develop cultural competency at the individual level there needs to be group work as well as individual research and reflection. Group work through the EFP can take the form of required cultural competency workshops based on the EFP community demographics, as well as anti-discrimination policies and training. Spaces for creativity and action should also be fostered through culturally specific cooking classes, craft workshops, advocacy groups and other active groups. It is essential that after group work individuals do personal research on their identity, culture and related position in society's systems, and do personal reflection based on their findings and feelings. Printed resources should be provided to do this research where needed or useful. Practicing cultural competency is a healthy way to promote dignified interactions between people with varying cultural identities, as well as provide opportunities for learning, self-care and healing spaces.

## Physical access to program

EFPs should work to make their program physically accessible to as many members of its community as possible. EFPs need to be aware of their member's ability levels and create modes for participation accordingly. EFPs should designate signage welcoming input as well as include a space in the intake process for the member to describe modes of participation the EFP should create. Additional or special access to participating in the program should be made for members. These modes of participating might entail being open in the evenings and on the weekends for working members, or members busy during regular hours. Members without transportation, or without the ability to physically access the EFP space, could be reached through a mobile pantry with a menu available to members for choice. For very busy members, there could be an option for additional appointments if the program staff power allows for that.

The experience to and from the EFP, for those members who visit, should be ensured by the EFP whenever resources are available. Some physical modes to participate in the program might entail construction of ramps, use of alternative entrances, or curbside delivery. The formal or informal waiting area of the EFP should receive attention, as this experience has potential to be **disempowering**, or empowering and a highlight of the program. After their travel to the EFP, not many members look forward to boring long lines, or waiting spaces that are physically difficult to be in. Any outside areas used for waiting or activities should ensure comfort of members despite local weather. Waiting areas need seating for members who need to sit while waiting. One recommendation is a central waiting area, as opposed to lines, designed like a living room or community space. Members are checked in and called to intake and/or food access by name according to arrival time. Snacks and kids' activities are provided. This design ensures a comfortable, fair/organized and socially conducive waiting space.

For members using public transit or walking, the EFP should consider supplying utility carts or other ways for members to carry food to their next destination. Members with cars might need assistance loading their car, or need additional bags to distribute food weight so they are able to unload it at home.

The best way to know what additional modes of participation need to be created is to ask the member! When creating modes of participation it is very important the EFP volunteers and staff are trusting and compassionate of the members. Asking for additional modes of participation, and advocating for oneself, can be a difficult process. Therefore, annoyed or distrusting attitudes towards creating these modes of participation are especially harmful. Remember, feelings matter!

## Simple requirements for participation

Requirements for participation should be as minimal as possible. Keeping count of EFP participants and their households is good practice for tracking program needs and success. Other requirements proving income, address, identification, or referral can be barriers for an individual seeking help. Asking for this proof can also feel invasive. Simple access to participation is based in trusting the member's intentions.

In situations where it is necessary to collect personal information from **guests**, which is the case for EFPs distributing government-issued commodity foods, EFPs should communicate the purpose of collecting the information. EFPs should also keep all member records private, and communicate this practice to members.

## Accessible allotments

There is never too much to give an individual while the need persists. Ideally, EFPs should allow members to visit as often as needed and take as much as needed. The EFP should strive to provide the ingredients for full meals. This means different individual members would have different types and amounts of food based on their needs and desires. However, equal access among EFP participants to food is legally required for federally affiliated EFPs. Equality can sometimes betray **equity**, because equity allots according to need, and need is not necessarily equal. Balancing these realities, EFP protocols should allow for the greatest access to food without compromising the access of other participants. When trust is established in the EFP, members tend to only take what they need, as well as enforce allotment rules amongst themselves. EFPs should encourage community accountability.



## Accessible foods

EFPs should solicit feedback or screen for physical (cooking and eating) food accessibility among their membership and **ensure** healthy and appropriate foods are available for its members. For example, cut/washed/prepared vegetables are useful for working/busy people who do not have the time to cook, or people without the physical ability to cut produce. Shelf stable foods with easy-open lids/packaging and whole produce (no need for refrigeration) are ideal for people without access to kitchens, cooking supplies or a refrigerator. Soft foods should be sourced or created/prepared for people without teeth. Source foods that the EFP members know how to cook with (i.e. culturally appropriate) and/or provide easy and nutritious recipes designed using almost entirely ingredients from the EFP.

## Choice & autonomy

Every member has their own mind; so let them use it! EFPs should strive to let members choose and fill their own baskets/bags/carts from a wide selection of fresh and shelf-stable items. Volunteers and staff should avoid the phrases, “you can have X (amount) of X”, and use language that promotes **autonomy**, “please choose X (amount) of X”. Volunteers and staff should describe and explain the food products, but should not seek to sway the member’s choice based on their own judgment of what is best for the member. Volunteers and staff must trust that members make their own best choices. There are many levels of choice and autonomy within EFPs including opportunities for members to swap unwanted items, members ordering desired products from behind a counter (or other situation where they do not grab products themselves or pack their own bag), choice for some items or bonus items, or full choice and autonomy. The point is to be as close to a grocery store as possible, without the pressure to spend money, because income should not determine an individual’s autonomy in their food choice. Money is not being exchanged, but if communicated, guidelines for family size and amount selection will be respected when members feel a stake in the common good of the EFP and its community.

## Food that nourishes

Some simple guidelines for healthy eating are: eat whole foods, mostly plants, including grains, and process them into meals yourself. Strictly counting calories or being on a regimented diet is not a healthy way to nourish oneself physically and mentally with food. Simple and respectful nutrition advice should be provided within the EFP community. Eating whole foods cooked at home is one way to avoid the high sugar, salt, and fat meticulously added to make processed foods so appealing and satisfying. Encourage sugars (which exist in fruit, grains, and vegetables) that have not already been “digested”, refined, or broken down to the point of being easily dissolvable. Free sugars (found in fruit juices, corn syrup, cane sugar, juice concentrates, white breads, etc.) have been isolated from the fiber, causing the body to absorb the sugar more quickly. This quick absorption forces the body to make dramatic efforts to level out the amount of sugar in the blood by creating insulin. The insulin stores the sugar as fat for energy use later. When this process has happened too quickly and is stressed, the body is more susceptible to diet related disease like type II diabetes, inflammation, high blood pressure, heart disease, etc.

The EFP should order and/or reserve special products whenever possible to accommodate it’s members dietary needs and preferences. Depending on the EFP community, they can seek products designed for individuals with food allergies (lactose intolerant, gluten intolerant, allergic to peanuts, etc.), religious or cultural food traditions (Halal meats, kosher foods, celebratory foods, etc.), dietary choices (vegan, vegetarian, etc.), and dietary health diseases (diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, etc.).

EFPs often are serving vulnerable populations including children, the elderly and those with compromised immune systems. Therefore EFPs must be stringent in their food safety practices and serve foods to keep these members healthy, happy and safe.

Lastly, when communicating about nutrition and food choices, one must be understanding and compassionate about others' relationships with food. Remember to balance health advice with celebration and taste- eat some sweets! EFP community members must respect other individuals' personal relationships with food and their own health. Shaming is never constructive, so EFP community members must only provide health or food choice advice if it is requested. Everyone's health status is their own business, that no one else is entitled to know about or pass judgment on. Any shaming regarding one's health and/or food choices is also ignoring the many intense cultural influences on food. For example, food product advertising uses everything from deceptively worded health claims to tactics that create brand loyalty among children. To maximize profits, food companies construct their products to appeal widely, often aiming their advertising at low income and minority communities, especially children. Along with intense advertising, eaters are given confusing nutritional guidelines and have their own busy/difficult lives. All of these factors make eating **just**/nutritious food very difficult. As mentioned before, these foods are also not economically obtainable to low SES populations. Food advice must be given with a thoughtful piece of salt!



Web sources:

<http://www.choosemyplate.gov/what-are-empty-calories>

<http://agresearchmag.ars.usda.gov/2015/nov/foods/#printdiv>

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2013/02/26/172969363/how-the-food-industry-manipulates-taste-buds-with-salt-sugar-fat>

<http://www.who.int/features/2014/uk-food-drink-marketing/en/>

# Effective food sourcing

Whenever possible, EFPs should strive to source the best food as possible for their member's needs and desires. Several guidelines for achieving this include:

- Communicate food safety requirements and dignity implications of damaged/old food products, especially produce, with retail partners through signage to display at the store sorting/food donation area
- Seek and build relationships with local farmers and food producers who can donate or sell their products to the EFP
- Source foods that are culturally appropriate for EFP members
- Source foods that meet special dietary needs of EFP members
- Source high quality foods grown with **sustainable** methods from local grocers

All volunteers/staff handling donated food uphold consistent standards for high food quality and discard food products that are damaged/old. Unhealthy, processed foods high in solid fats and added sugars are not accepted for donation, or accepted in a minimal amount.

## **Meet as many needs as possible**

EFPs should expand programs and services to meet as many basic human needs as possible including: warm meals, groceries, baby food and supplies, pet food and supplies, hygiene products, any other household items (light bulbs, bicycles, etc.), clothing, showers, address at EFP to receive mail (for homeless members), assistance connecting with government services, emergency assistance with rent, and necessary information to access other EFPs and social service programs. In these spaces it is essential that community interaction and support is promoted and practiced so that the services are experienced with dignity.

## **Strong volunteer & staff community**

Building a strong volunteer/staff community requires diverse identities, skills and leadership development opportunities, and community building opportunities. Diverse identities, especially volunteers/staff with first hand experience of poverty in the past or present, need to be included and supported in the volunteer/staff community. Skill sharing amongst volunteers/staff as well as leadership development is essential for a resilient community. Knowledge of the EFP processes and any other resources offered in the community should be consistent among volunteers and staff. Lastly, community-building events should be hosted at the EFP site and held off site. Some examples include: costumes for Halloween, volunteer potluck, bowling, etc. As well as activities designed for creativity, healing, education, sharing and advocacy.

# Programming for community food security

Once an EFP feels comfortable with their efficient and dignified feeding processes and protocols, they can begin to create and expand other programming supporting **community food security (CFS)**. CFS is “a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice”. EFPs need to incorporate programming, as well as support their members to participate in other programming in the community, that is designed to foster CFS.

Fostering CFS entails changing the food system on an individual level through skill building for food growth, preparation and entrepreneurship, as well as at the societal level advocating for policy to increase social assistance (SNAP/Food Stamps, TANF/Welfare, etc.) and labor protection (increased minimum wage, union rights, etc.). These are also referred to as “shorten the line” programs because they address some root/systemic causes of poverty and food insecurity/hunger.

In order for EFP community members to participate and succeed in programming, the EFP should ensure participation in the program by meeting their members’ needs. These needs could include: schedules for working people/people busy during normal hours, provide monetary/in-kind compensation, childcare, meals/food, transportation, and training/personal tutoring. Needs should be assessed by asking members directly.

EFP communities must balance promotion and recommendation of nutritious, locally and/or sustainably grown food with the difficult reality of hunger and food insecurity that individuals face. EFP communities must respect the need for food by its members, and not shame an individual’s desire for food that does not necessarily fit CFS criteria. There is a potential conflict between the goal of economically supporting local producers/sustainable food and the goal of increasing the accessibility of affordable food for low SES populations. The immediate solution is not to demand cheaper food, but to demand equitable access to income to allow everyone to purchase food at its real cost. Everyone deserves high quality food grown in a sustainable manner.

## **Food Justice at the Individual & Community Level:**

Community-focused food initiatives engage individuals to build skills and relationships. Some initiatives and programs might include: catering and career development, community kitchens, community gardens, farmers' markets, supporting community economic development efforts, and building EFP community decision-making skills through advisory councils representing different EFP stakeholders.

### **Catering, meals & career development-**

EFPs with access to kitchens can venture into creating catering businesses to support their programming. Catering and for-profit programs would not be supplied with donated food. However, volunteers and chefs can prepare meals for EFPs who serve meals. As long as participants are fully supported throughout the education process and into the employment field, culinary career development, with special recruitment and support for marginalized populations, can provide a steady and superior labor force at the kitchen site.

### **Growing food-**

Understanding where food comes from, and the energy that goes into its production is a great skill and can cultivate a deeper value for food. Demonstration gardens, community farms and community gardens are great opportunities for education and community building. If a project is designed to attract and incorporate the community, it must work with the community throughout the development, giving them decision-making power. There must be opportunities for skill sharing and education on gardening skills. Local, historical, and especially indigenous peoples', agricultural practices should be incorporated into garden designs where possible. For example, in Tucson, AZ, the irrigation strategy using ollas is great for desert gardening because ollas preserve water. These buried clay pots slowly leak water to the plants' roots beneath the soil surface, minimizing evaporation. EFP garden construction and programming should reflect the needs and desires of the EFP population and local environment.

## **Cooking food-**

Cooking in community can be a successful learning space and community building space. EFPs should offer cooking community classes according to its members needs and desires. This can include cultural cooking classes, age related cooking classes, skill specific cooking classes or how to cook with foods available at the EFP. Whatever the educational or community need, a community cooking class can be a successful and rewarding program. EFP community members can lead cooking classes based on their cultural heritage, or experience in food service. Cooking classes have potential to be a creative community healing space.

## **Access to local & sustainable foods-**

EFPs can sell, at a reduced price, foods they purchase from local and/or sustainable farmers and producers. These programs need to accept forms of government assistance like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, and any state or local programs. EFP programs can take the form of farmers markets, mobile markets, or markets on/off site. Programs such as these can increase food security and consistent access to nutritious, sustainably grown and fresh foods.

## **Community Economic Development efforts-**

Where possible, EFPs should address the economic needs of low SES individuals and families by supporting **sustainable** business development and employment opportunities. This initiative can partner with *access to local and sustainable foods* and *growing food* by offering to build garden beds, support the gardener through training, have the plot gardened by an EFP community member gardener who might not have space at their home, and compensate those selling through the EFP's market. Providing low interest, potentially eventually forgiven, micro loans to individuals, and loans to community organizations, support low SES community efforts. EFPs should employ EFP community members with direct experience of food insecurity, as well as support them if needed in the application process and throughout employment.



# Advocacy, Community Organizing & Civic Engagement

Programming that supports reframing social problems and responses are essential for addressing root causes of hunger and poverty. The EFP should **facilitate** activities that institutionalize CFS by building community capacity for civic engagement, advocating for policy changes on issues, and for their institutionalization, such as increased minimum wages, social assistance, union support, local and sustainable food systems, and urban agriculture and food systems education. Some activities EFPs can participate include registering voters, offering information on candidates, offering results of a community poll, having a speakers advocacy group that meets with elected officials, a bus riders' union, a living wage for EFP staff, as well as providing education on how to engage in the civic process, or advocate for your rights despite citizenship. Other options for involvement in advocacy and decision-making within the organization can include planning, equity and advisory committees or other organized groups with power composed of EFP community members. This way EFP community members have a safe space to practice public speaking, idea formation and advocacy in a community setting. This can double as a healing space to share stories and empathize. EFP community members with experience of food insecurity should be compensated to the highest ability of the EFP for their effort in all programs, with advocacy being an especially emotionally taxing activity.

“If you give me a fish you have fed me for a day. If you teach me to fish you have fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline is seized for development. But if you teach me to organize then whatever the challenge I can join together with my peers and we will fashion our own solution”

—Ricardo Morales

Every individual and community is worthy of success and holds that potential. By providing opportunities, knowledge and support, EFPs can facilitate that success through programming designed to create CFS.

## Training Scripts

A good way to introduce and build upon practices for ensuring a dignified experience at EFPs is to **facilitate** a conversation between those who experience EFPs. CFB recommends bringing together staff, volunteers and members of EFPs for an hour and a half, or longer, training. It is also recommended to make this training accessible to all those invited; guidelines on page 21. Each facilitation script is easiest with two people, but can be done with one person and a volunteer from the audience for the skit. The following introduction and goals are applicable to both the Spanish and English speakers' script and the English speakers' script. It is also strongly recommended to improvise with the skit scripts or make an entirely new script skit. Any and all of the guidelines in this handbook should be communicated through a skit and group discussion. The skit and discussion scripts are followed by a closing and feedback section that is applicable to either script.

### Introductions (8 minutes)

Share why you are here, and a goal you have for this training- in three sentences or less

- Experience with EFPs, Relationship to trainers/ organization, Desire to ensure a dignified experience at EFPs, etc.

### Share and source training goals (5 minutes)

Participants leave with...

- An understanding and critical analysis of societal determinants of poverty; in contrast to an individual's choices/actions
- Tools and support to advocate for a dignified experience in other EFPs
- New ideas or perspectives for ensuring dignity at emergency food programs
- Tools and strategies for personal reflection and to guide future change
- Their own ideas and perspectives being incorporated for future trainings

Ask the audience to make notes as they watch the following skit interactions and operational aspects that enforce or hurt a dignified experience at the EFP.

# Spanish & English speakers' script

**Skit (7 minutes) Key:**

Spanish Speaking Guest Character 1 : 1

English Speaking Character 2 : 2

\* speaking one's thoughts to the crowd

*Actions and adjectives*

\*1: Hello, my name is X and I am a Spanish Speaker, this is my first time coming to any food pantry, I will share my thoughts with you in English

\*2: Hi, my name is X and I am a long time volunteer at this food pantry, I speak English and very little Spanish

*2 is working at a table and is focused*

*1 enters and is looking around for help*

*2 in booming voice with beckoning arm motion to the empty chair across the table:* Come over here!

\*2: We are running a tight operation here, come along now!

2: Do you need some food?

1 *in Spanish:* Yes, is there anyone here who speaks Spanish?

2 *shaking head collects application paper and Spanish intake script:* no, wait one second

\*2, *grumbling and annoyed:* Oh gosh, I hardly speak Spanish...

\*1 worried: I hope I am able to communicate what I need

2, *in rudimentary accent:* Income amount, Cuál es su ingreso?

1: \$18,000

2 is confused so 1 writes on application directly

\*1: I work very hard in food service, but it is still difficult to get food on the table for my family each month with so many other bills, this makes me feel like my work isn't enough

2: Number in household, número de personas en el hogar?

1, *in Spanish:* 3, my 2 kids and I

\*2: I feel with some budgeting help 18,000 could make the cut for a family of three

2: Picture Identification, foto tarjeta de identificación?

1, *worried:* no

\*1: There are so many requirements, why do they need all of this? 26

## Spanish & English speakers' script cont'd

2: Lastly, address and contact info. Dirección e información de contacto?

*1 writes an address and phone number*

\*1: I feel uncomfortable. If this information is public, people I know will see I am seeking help. It makes me feel embarrassed.

2, *pointing to paper*: I need printed proof or original documents for these. Mostrarme una prueba de papel?

1: No

2: You are lucky, we can give you food this time, but next time you need proof. Próxima vez traer prueba!

*1 looks worried about this demand but nods*

\*2, *proudly*: We let each person have one warning to bring paper proof and will still give a food box, it's our policy, I feel it's generous!

\*1: It will be so difficult to collect all of this paperwork and I cannot afford a new ID!

*2 sets empty bag on the table and starts filling*

*2 loads a can of gluten free and organic soup into the bag*

2: oh, gluten free and organic, how healthy for you!

*2 loads a can of pumpkin into the bag*

\*R: what should I do with pumpkin?!

*2 loads sauerkraut into the bag*

\*1: what is that food? I don't recognize it

*2 loads a can of turkey gravy into the bag*

\*1: It would be great to have turkey to put that on...

*2 loads white buns and/or white bread into the bag*

*2 loads an eggplant*: Look at the great variety in today's box!

\*1: What is that, I don't know how to cook it!

*2 loads some wilted kale/chard into the bag*

2: Oh kale is so great, isn't it?

\*1: This does not look fresh!

*2 loads wilted carrots into the bag*

2: Remember 3 servings of veggies and fruit a day! Para los niños!

\*1: I know how to feed my children, sometimes it's hard to get them vegetables, and for them to eat them is another story!

## Spanish & English speakers' script cont'd

1 *pushing box forward*: Alright, we have lots of other people to help today, adios! Don't come again till next month please!

2 grabs box and rushes out

\*2: I'm going to need food sooner than that, I will not be coming back here!

*Give the audience a minute or two to decompress and think individually.*

### **Group discussion (45 minutes)**

Facilitator(s) should write ideas from audience about what interactions and operations were harmful or conducive to a dignified experience. The following are points that should be recognized, followed by their page reference in the handbook:

- 1 is not greeted when entering the EFP (9)
- 2 is hurrying 1 throughout the process (8)
- Members are able to sit down and have personal interaction when receiving food (13)
- 2 is prioritizing efficiency to individual interactions (8)
- 2 is disrespectful of language differences (12)
- There is no interpreter at the EFP (12)
- There are many invasive requirements, creating barriers (15)
- Reason and confidentiality for information gathering from member is not communicated (15)
- 2 passes harmful judgment on 1 (4,5)
- Members do not have choice in EFP operation (16)
- Nutrition information is incorrectly communicated (gluten free and/or organic does not necessarily mean healthy!) (17)
- Nutrition advice is condescending (feeding kids) (18)
- Foods are not culturally relevant (sauerkraut, eggplant, kale) (12)
- Foods are not useful (pumpkin) (15)
- Foods are low quality (highly processed foods or wilted whole foods) (17)
- Monthly allotment of food is not accessible for 1 (15)

**Spend the remaining discussion time re-telling the story with changes that ensure a dignified experience.**

# English speakers' script

## Skit (7 minutes)

Key:

English Speaking Guest Character 1 = 1

English Speaking Character 2 = 2

\* speaking one's thoughts to the crowd

*Actions and adjectives*

\*1: Hello, my name is X and I speak English, this is my first time coming to any food pantry

\*2: Hi, my name is X and I am a long time volunteer at this food pantry, I speak English as well

*2 is working at a table and is focused*

*1 enters and is looking around for help*

*2 in booming voice with beckoning arm motion to the empty chair across the table: Come over here!*

\*2: We are running a tight operation here, come along now!

2: Do you need some food?

1 *intimidated*: Yes

*2 collects application paper*

\*1 worried: I hope I am able to communicate what I need

2: Alright, what is your income?

1: \$18,000

*2 writes on application*

\*1: I work very hard in food service, but it is still difficult to get food on the table for my family each month with so many other bills, this makes me feel like my work isn't enough

2: Number of people in household?

1: 3, my 2 kids and I

\*2: I feel with some budgeting help 18,000 could make the cut for a family of three

2: Got a picture ID card?

## English speakers' script cont'd

1, *worried*: no

\*1: There are so many requirements, why do they need all of this?

2: Lastly, address and contact info

1 *writes an address and phone number*

\*1: I feel uncomfortable. If this information is public, people I know will see I am seeking help. It makes me feel embarrassed.

2, *pointing to paper*: I need printed proof or original documents for these. Do you have them today?

1: No

2: You are lucky, we can give you food this time, but next time you need proof!

1 *looks worried about this demand but nods*

\*2, *proudly*: We let each person have one warning to bring paper proof and will still give a food box, it's our policy, I feel it's generous!

\*1: It will be so difficult to collect all of this paperwork and I cannot afford a new ID!

2 *sets empty bag on the table and starts filling*

2 *loads a can of gluten free and organic soup into the bag*

2: oh, gluten free and organic, how healthy for you!

2 *loads a can of pumpkin into the bag*

\*R: what should I do with pumpkin?!

2 *loads peanut butter into the bag*

\*1: my kids are allergic to peanut butter!

2 *loads a can of turkey gravy into the bag*

\*1: It would be great to have turkey to put that on...

2 *loads white buns and/or white bread into the bag*

2 *loads an eggplant*: Look at the great variety in today's box!

\*1: What is that, I don't know how to cook it!

2 *loads some wilted kale/chard into the bag*

2: Oh kale is so great, isn't it?

\*1: This does not look fresh!

2 *loads wilted carrots into the bag*

## English speakers' script cont'd

2: Remember 3 servings of veggies and fruit a day for your kids!

\*1: I know how to feed my children, sometimes it's hard to get them vegetables, and for them to eat them is another story!

1 *pushing box forward*: Alright, we have lots of other people to help today, seeya! Don't come again till next month please!

2 grabs box and rushes out

\*2: I'm going to need food sooner than that, I will not be coming back here!

*Give the audience a minute or two to decompress and think individually.*

### Group discussion (45 minutes)

Facilitator(s) should write ideas from audience about what interactions and operations were harmful or conducive to a dignified experience. The following are points that should be recognized, followed by their page reference in the handbook:

- 1 is not greeted when entering the EFP (9)
- 2 is hurrying 1 throughout the process (8)
- 2 is prioritizing efficiency to individual interactions (8)
- There are many invasive requirements, creating barriers (15)
- Reason and confidentiality for information gathering from member is not communicated (15)
- 2 passes harmful judgment on 1 (4,5)
- Members do not have choice in EFP operation (16)
- Nutrition information is incorrectly communicated (gluten free and/or organic does not necessarily mean healthy!) (17)
- Nutrition advice is condescending (feeding kids) (18)
- Foods are not recognizable (eggplant, kale) (12)
- Foods are not useful (pumpkin, peanut butter) (15)
- Foods are low quality (highly processed foods or wilted whole foods) (17)
- Members able to sit down and have personal interaction when receiving food (13)
- Monthly allotment of food is not accessible for 1 (15)

**Spend the remaining discussion time re-telling the story with changes that ensure a dignified experience.**



## Training Script Closing

(15 minutes)

Thank the training participants for sharing their ideas, stories, truths and/or presence. Encourage them to advocate for simple changes in the interactions and/or operations at the EFP they are involved with over time. The easiest way to convince others of changing their perception is to connect with them and form a relationship. Attempt to share the information in this handbook through a training setting, or through informal interactions and relationship building inside and outside the EFP setting.

Building relationships is the best way to influence another EFP community member to genuinely interact more in the EFP community space. Changing attitudes and interactions between EFP community members (especially those required to follow EFP guidelines: staff and volunteers) is a quick, low-cost and effective way to ensure a dignified experience at an EFP despite serious lack of resources or operational capacity. Operational capacity can be made on small and large and scales, from arranging a few tables for choice, to installing a garden and creating programming. The broader the support for ensuring a dignified experience through operational enhancements (physical changes) the more investment can be made.

## Feedback

(10 minutes)

Ask participants to answer the following three questions:

- What did you learn during the training?
- How will you implement what you learned into your work?
- What is something that could be changed or added to improve this training?
- What is something new you brought to the training?

Also provide the option for other feedback, and provide an opportunity for training participants to exchange contact information.

Facilitator(s) should review this feedback and change the training script accordingly. Please contact CFBSA with additions so we can edit the printed material where applicable!

## Terms Defined

**Autonomy:** independence or freedom, also a self-governing community

**“Band-Aid solutions”:** a temporary solution that does not deal with the cause of a problem

**Client/Guest/Member:** a person seeking services at an emergency food program

**Community Food Security:** a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice

**Disempowering:** to damage one’s feelings of importance and influence

**Emergency Food Programs:** a program traditionally providing emergency services, primarily through food; food pantries, meal programs, food banks, etc.

**Ensure:** make sure that something will happen

**Equality:** making things equal

**Equity:** making things fair according to the needs and situation

**Facilitate:** to assist the process

**Food Insecurity:** an economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.

**Generational/Cyclical Poverty:** a family having been in poverty for at least two generations, showing that traits and trauma associated with poverty are passed down from generation to generation

**Guest/Member/Client:** a person seeking services at an emergency food program

**Inequity:** Unfairness

**Just:** describing an act of justice

**Justice:** a situation that is fair and righteous

**Marginalization:** to be forcibly put in a position of low importance and power

**Member/Client/Guest:** a person seeking services at an emergency food program

**Oppression:** situations imposed on individuals in a burdensome, cruel or unjust manner

**Privilege:** a situation where one is granted rights or immunities for a specific reason

**Systemic privilege and power in society:** economic, social and political norms and laws give power to some people in society based on social identity

**Stakeholders:** someone or group with an investment or interest in something

**Sustainable:** capable of existing and thriving by itself

**Unjust:** Wrongful, not fair

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