Rethinking your Food Pantry
We do it like this because it’s how it’s always been done...

“Be the change that you wish to see in the world.”
— Mahatma Gandhi
Questions to consider...

• Have I set my distribution days/times because it’s easy for me/my volunteers, or because it works for my clients?
• Are my pantry hours meeting the needs of the families in which I mean to serve?
• Is my pantry a place that I would like to come if I needed assistance?
• Can I be open more often?
• Can I offer client choice?
  – If so, what’s stopping me?
  – If not, what’s stopping me?
• Do I ask my clients how I can serve them better?
• Do I offer additional resources to my clients?
  – SNAP, recipes, non-food, produce, commodities, nutrition education
• Do I train my volunteers to treat all clients with dignity and care?
• If there is a problem with a volunteer, do I know how to address it?
• Do I have preconceived ideas about the people that come to my pantry for assistance? (they should just be happy with what I give them)
• Have I considered ways to provide Culturally Appropriate Foods (CAF’s)
• Do the volunteers at my pantry/program represent the clients we serve?
• Is there an unmet need that I see, that my program could assist with?
What is a Client Choice Pantry?
A client choice pantry allows clients to select their food instead of receiving a pre-packed or standard bag of groceries. They do not take items they have already, do not like, or cannot eat for health or personal reasons.

Why give clients a choice?
Imagine your family is in need of food. Your kitchen has some items but not enough to make meals for the next few days. You need to visit a food pantry. When you go to the food pantry, you are handed a pre-packed or standard bag with food you already have at home. There are also some items your family does not like. You're not sure what to do with the food. If you had been able to choose the foods you need and like, your family could have enjoyed a well-rounded, nutritious meal.

Client choice:
• Upholds the dignity of clients
• Meets clients' health needs
• Makes clients feel like they are food shopping
• Limits food waste - customers take food they will use and leave the rest for others
• Helps pantry workers get to know clients
• Saves money for the pantry
• Makes ordering easier - pantries know what popular food to stock
Moving from this...
To This...
CHOICE

Empowering clients to choose the food items they prefer in a space where a variety of healthy options are available and promoted. The core components of this continuum are wait, distribution and food quality. The following are examples of different levels along the continuum.

1. LOW
   Clients wait a long time and receive pre-packed food that is often not very healthy

2. MEDIUM
   There is a waiting area for clients, who can choose their food from a display where some healthy options are available

3. MEDIUM
   Clients come by appointment, choose their food from a selection of healthy options, and receive nutrition education
Culturally Appropriate Foods

Let’s ask ourselves this question – “Is there a way to incorporate CAF’s into our food assistance program? What would that take and how would it work?”

• **Hispanic/Mexican**: The traditional Mexican-American diet is rich in a variety of foods and dishes that represent a blend of pre-Columbian, indigenous, Spanish, French, and more recently, American culture. Traditional diets also reflect the geographic regions of Mexico and the availability of local fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, and protein sources. The five staples of most Latin American diets are beans, corn (tortillas), peppers, tomatoes, rice and chilies. Typically, these diets are rich in complex carbohydrates, which are provided mainly by corn and corn products (usually tortillas, present at almost every meal), beans, rice, and breads. This diet also contains an adequate amount of protein in the form of beans, eggs, fish and shellfish, and a variety of meats mostly including pork and poultry (Also beef, ie., fajitas and carne asada). Popular fruits and vegetables are tomatoes, squash, sweet potato, avocado, mango, pineapple and papaya, cilantro, onions, and lime/lemons).
Call to action

1. Survey your clients
2. Review your distribution day/times
3. Review the way in which volunteers works with clients
4. Call a meeting to talk about client choice
5. Gather your volunteers to talk about CAF’s
6. Commit to offering SNAP outreach
7. Commit to learning how to offer nutrition education