



2018 MAHN Annual Conference Breakout Session Summaries

The goal of breakout sessions this year was to generate something concrete to take back to your pantry and soup kitchen programs. We tapped the network's collective wisdom to share the details of great ideas already in place among us (Game Changers) and to brainstorm solutions for unsolved problems (Challenges). The summaries below are the outputs of those group discussions.

If you have a game changing idea to share with the network or challenge that you'd like help solving, please let me know and I'll feature it in a future MAHN newsletter.

~Paula Schafer (MAHN Administrator) pschafer@sharefoodprogram.org

Game Changer Breakout Session Summaries

Grocers Against Hunger and the MAHN Van Program

Grocers Against Hunger (GAH) is a retail grocer food rescue program established by Feeding America and managed locally by Philabundance. The program connects eligible food pantries and soup kitchens with usable food that would otherwise be wasted.

- Donated items vary from retailer to retailer and frequently include bakery, produce, meat and shelf stable items nearing their sell by date
- The retailer determines the content of each donation
- You don't always get the same products from week to week

Several MontCo food pantries with the capacity to sustain multiple weekly pick-ups and distribute large donations already have direct relationships with retail grocers through the GAH program. MAHN's refrigerated van allows smaller pantries (lacking that pick-up/distribution capacity) to participate by dividing donation days among pantries and delivering donations to the pantry's door.

Van program eligibility criteria

- Philabundance agency membership
- Open every week
- Must be able to offer GAH product as a choice
- Adequate cold storage
- Pantries serve at least 50 clients a week
- Soup Kitchens serving a minimum of 400 meals per week **or** have an existing program for clients to take unprepared food home and can utilize GAH product



Other GAH opportunities

- Low income clients of for profit housing management companies can create a non-profit tenant group to access the GAH program

For information about participation in MAHN's Van Delivery Program, contact Paula Schafer pschafer@sharefoodprogram.org.

For more information on session content, contact session facilitator Melissa Simmons msimmons@philabundance.org

Food Donor Messaging

Craft an ask that identifies and explains your pantry's needs. The more clearly you communicate with donors the more likely they are to give exactly what you need. People want what they give to be useful, but need direction from you to determine what useful is.

- When asking for donations or being offered something, be specific about what you do and don't have a need for
- Say no to what you don't need (We try not to accept what we have no demand for)
- When you need something specific, explain why
- Always OK to ask for dollars to buy what foods are missing/not donated

Establishing new donors

- Go beyond churches; Ask boys/girls clubs, companies, any local group
- Organize or ask the community service representative of a company you work with to organize a competition between two departments or even two organizations to increase food drive yield
- Ask those who travel/corporations for travel-size hygiene items
- Consider Lowe's/Home Depot /CSAs and nurseries for seedlings
- Tell everyone offering to host a food drive around the holidays that you run short of food in the summer and to consider organizing a drive then also

Tap the network

- Make an ask on Slack for what you need. Another pantry may have a surplus to share

For more information contact session facilitator Britt Peterson britt@mannaonmain.org



Line Management by Lottery

At New Life Presbyterian in Glenside, this method of line management has solved the problem of clients showing up hours before the food cupboard opens.

- It requires a client waiting area where seating is set up in rows
- Clients are asked to sit, filling one row at a time
- One person in each row draws a number
- The numbers drawn determine the order in which each row of clients is allowed to shop
- Raffle gift: Client initiated in this group; Provides incentive to be on time and makes the wait to shop more interesting
- Arguing/fighting is handled with a conversation and a warning; A second incidence of disruptive behavior results in program ejection
- Nutrition classes and food prep demonstrations conducted in the waiting room foster a sense of community and are a good way to pass the time

For more information contact session facilitator Bridget Franklin bdf0323@gmail.com

Catholic Social Services Coop: Client Led Initiative

The Coop is a subset of Martha's food pantry at CSS and is based on the [Urban Recipe](#) model in Georgia. CSS started with 10 families engaged, is now at 16 and aims to get to 25. The cost to join is \$5 per household and \$2 per biweekly opportunity to shop. Coop participants decide what that money goes toward.

Program goals are to

- Increase client access to food by allowing them to shop bi-weekly for perishables
- Promote client ownership of a food security initiative in their community
- Create opportunities for client leadership

The group comes together every other week to

- Govern, manage and run the initiative
- Process food donations and facilitate member shopping
- Plan and execute community engagement events such as family cookouts
- Share practical skills like home repair and gardening with one another by demonstration

For more information contact session facilitators Patrick Walsh pwalsh@chs-adelphia.org or Eli Wenger ewenger@chs-adelphia.org

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Advocacy Tools and Strategies

If feeding hungry people is important to you, then advocating for that cause is your responsibility. Meeting with elected officials is one way to advocate, but is by no means the only one. Explore the tools noted below to get comfortable with and prepared to make your voice heard in a way that doesn't feel like a second job.

- [Philabundance Advocacy Toolkit](#): clarification of how your nonprofit organization is allowed advocate with step by step instructions on how to collect client stories, develop client advocates and talk to legislators (Emphasis on developing client advocates. The most effective advocacy is accomplished through clients telling their stories)
- [Advocacy Education Poster and SNAP Handout](#): education tools for clients and volunteers connecting food policy to feeding programs and advocacy; Passionate volunteers make good advocates too
- Postcards: for clients & volunteers to fill out and your organization to mail
- Voter registration at pantries, reminders to vote at election time; Think about collecting names and email addresses/phone #'s to personally remind
- [MAHN Food Policy Action Alerts](#): timely opportunities for our voices and those of people and organizations supporting our work to be heard
- Phone calls: more effective than a postcard or letter sign on; Takes just a minute to make and generally equates to leaving a message for your elected with one of their staff members; Locate your state and federal elected officials here.
www.usa.gov/elected-officials
- Use the Quick reference guide to #'s on hunger, SNAP participants pg. 24 of Philabundance toolkit

For more information contact Paula Schafer pschafer@sharefoodprogram.org

Effective Client Communication

Effective communication is an important building block in our relationships with clients and begins the first time we meet them. By centering on their humanity, our contact with them will be a positive experience going far beyond the food we provide.

- Intake volunteers should be able to answer questions about how your pantry operates, put a new client at ease, and listen with compassion to the information that's shared; This person sets the tone for the client's pantry experience
- Be sure to use people's names
- Pantry staff should lead by example, modeling that every client is to be treated with respect
- Regular communication with volunteers is important for them to be good communicators with clients
- Engaging and including clients conveys respect



- Busy is not an excuse for rudeness or not centering on humanity

Good communication is even more crucial when change is happening. Changing things up can be uncomfortable and cause people to push back. Clearly communicating change in a supportive way is the best way to acclimate to it.

- Give the news in person- not just posted on a sign
- Senior staff delivering news of change shows it's been thought out and is part of a larger plan
- Acknowledge that change can be difficult
- Explain the changes that are coming and the reasons/good intentions behind them

For more information contact session facilitators Tanya Sen tsen@hungercoalition.org or Sandy Knight sknight@chelten.org

SmartChoice Software

[SmartChoice](#) software manages food pantry inventory and broadens pantry reach into the community with online ordering.

- Front-end install cost and monthly fee is expensive, but there are grants available to pay for this
- Lower fee available to small pantries requiring a smaller subset of features
- Efficiently tracks inventory/which patrons shopped/what products they are choosing
- Don't need to weigh food that comes in
- Kiosks- log in (at pantry)
- Online ordering reaches community members who are unable to stand in line and shop during regular hours of operation.
- Patrons can place order online, order is packed, patrons pick-up order in afternoon/evening
- Self-shopping-patron get orders scanned at check out
- Need volunteers to pack orders
- Can be used to track what is shared with other pantries and projects like community meals

For more information contact session facilitator: Vicki Bumstead
vbumstead@PottstownCluster.org



Challenges Breakout Session Summaries

Volunteer Sharing

Volunteers. Some of us have too many, others not enough. Is there a way to pool our resources so that all pantries have as many as they need? What do we need to promote or overcome to be able to do this?

Getting concept buy in

- Develop a strong bond with one other pantry; You and your “sister pantry” can rely on one another for volunteer opportunities, resource sharing, and general support
- Build on the appeal of being part of a group
- Share your pantry’s culture with another pantry by organizing volunteer swap days. Include volunteers from both pantries who are seen as leaders
- Focus on messaging: it’s about feeding the community, not supporting a specific pantry
- Promote opportunity to work at more than one pantry location when doing volunteer intake/orientation
- Learn why and address why people may not want to go to another pantry to volunteer
- Focus your training on skills, not process (for example, train volunteers checking clients in with an emphasis on customer service and compassion; Those people skills will translate to other pantries, regardless of how they manage check-in

Managing the logistics

- Create networks in coalition regions or smaller clusters
- Establish a shared volunteer calendar on MAHN website or Slack
- Help volunteers get to the pantries with bus tokens, car share, Uber credits

Other places to find volunteers

- [County Community Services, RSVP, Maturity Works](#)
- Groups of younger students or retirees who volunteer to go from place to place as needed under umbrella organization to track and coordinate
- Community civic organizations like Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions
- Recruit retired pantry clients

Questions? Additional Ideas to offer? Contact Paula Schafer
pschafer@sharefoodprogram.org

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Volunteer Van Drivers

We have plenty of pantries that would like to receive deliveries of Grocers Against Hunger food, but not enough van drivers to get it to them. We're looking for people who would enjoy driving a large vehicle and are available to help $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 full day a week. Let us know if you have a candidate!

What we're already doing and exploring

- Developing a promotional flyer/and distribution plan
- Reaching out to local logistics companies
- Seeking volunteers through RSVP
- School bus drivers
- Able-bodied adults on SNAP looking for volunteer opportunities
- Job-corps volunteers
- Community Connections volunteers
- Sign seeking volunteers on the van

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Special Dietary/Ethnic Food Items

Food items made to address specific dietary needs can be hard to find and expensive. The cooking styles of your ethnically diverse clients may call for ingredients that you could be providing if you were aware of them.

How do you know what your client's needs are?

- ethnicity of your client population
- no salt, gluten-free for starters
- client surveys, talking with clients
- could dietary restrictions/needs be captured during client intake?

How do you fulfill those needs?

- [Garden of Health, Inc.](#) special dietary foods: gluten-free, heart-healthy, sugar-free, foods free of top allergens
Carol Bauer Bauercarol@gmail.com, 267-664-4397
- Donor education. Incorporate these items into your ask
- Publicize on website/social media
- Ask clients where they get these foods
- Solicit specialty food vendors
- Put out an appeal to local gardeners for their extra produce
- Get seeds and grow through garden committee/community gardens
- Enroll churches in square foot gardening for the items you need
- Teach pantry clients to how grow their own

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Client Language Barriers

Being unable to converse with your clients is an obstacle. It stands in the way of building a respectful relationship with them, making sure they understand your program's rules, and the likelihood that their visits will be a good experience for you both.

- [Google Translate](#)
- Use pictures where applicable
- Recruit speakers of the language you need to translate (place of worship/community gathering place)
- Find a way to convey that the amount of food they can take is related to their family size
- Create signage in the needed languages
- Refer to identification to make sure you are clear on and using the client's first and last names properly
- Ask client to bring a translator with them or to get one on the phone
- See if local school has students who can translate pantry materials
- Translation service providers

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Serving Disabled and Homebound Clients

How do we serve community residents who need us, but cannot get to the pantry?

Within MAHN and our community of organizations that support our work

- Call upon our own network to see if any of us already do this
- Jewish Relief Agency (JRA) delivers to homebound; They use volunteers to deliver
- Make use of partnerships; There are social service providers doing home visits as part of their work; Bring providers together to talk about and find some actionable steps; Include disabled groups to tackle this issue.
- Use RSVP home visiting program: as a partner to get food to disabled if they fit the need

Possible partnerships outside of our network

- Get Para-transit vans to transport clients to and from pantry
- Use Para-transit vehicles to deliver
- Use Amazon delivery system
- UBER eats- and grocery store delivery services

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- Mobile crisis units

Logistics to consider

- In-person intakes through home visits and permitting people to have friends/family shop for them
- Calling the client that morning to get a list and volunteer shops for them
- Meals on Wheels model to deliver pantry food orders
- Volunteer drivers could also help with Senior Box Program (CSFP)
- Ask an able-bodied client to volunteer and bring food to a disabled or a homebound client in addition to picking up their own food; We have clients who are volunteers and volunteers who are clients; It feels good to give back.
- Add friendly visitor/cooking buddy
- Have a cooler outside home to store so person inside can get whenever they are able

Other resources

- [Aid for Friends](#) Alleviating the hunger and loneliness of isolated homebound individuals
- SNAP Screeners/Compass system
- “Salesforce” or Google routing systems, or alter transportation of proteins (meats, dairy)

Questions? Additional Ideas to offer? Contact Paula Schafer

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Donated Food That's Difficult to Distribute

It's a fact. Some food donations are difficult to work with. It's also a fact that thoughts on what's OK to pass onto clients varies from pantry to pantry. There is no one size fits all solution to this challenge. The key is to strike a balance for your organization.

General thoughts shared

- Be sure to understand the donation guidelines that already exist with a donor
- Talk with your donor when they repeatedly pass on excessive spoiled produce and unhealthy foods
- The cost/trouble of disposal is worth the great food we get for free
- Find an agency that will use the food you do not want
- Not every agency has the capacity to dispose of spoiled or unwanted food

Spoiled produce

- Sometimes we need to pay for an extra trash pick-up when we haven't been able to refuse a spoiled donation
- Sorting rotten produce is an unpleasant volunteer task

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- Talk to donor to share your hope that food is fresh and usable

Unhealthy food

- Not all pantries turn down junk food. Accepting within reason is part of the give and take of the donor relationship
- Lots of pantries don't want to make a moral judgment about candy etc. and feel it is okay to give it out
- Talk to donors and educate them on needs of clients and pantry's goal to promote good nutrition
- Let them know you can only take healthy
- Throw away what you don't want

Too much bread!

- Give to farm/zoo- we give extra bread, etc., to people with animals or who compost
- Put up an easy-to-access bread rack for everyone in the community

Clients are unsure of how to prepare what you're offering

- We announce what is abundant and offer suggestions on ways to use it
- Provide recipes for what's difficult to move; (Share the good ones with the network!)
- Set up a tasting station and you'll be able to distribute more than you could before
- Use SNAP-ed Nutritionists; Free for pantries in county
- Find nutritionist among existing volunteers, offer more nutrition training to clients
- Volunteers talk up the product and how to use it/ cook it as clients shop; Be enthusiastic
- Cookingmatters.org
- [Veggie Book app](#): vegetable familiarization for kids

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Problem Volunteer

Overzealous volunteer arrives before all others and leaves nothing for anyone else to do. Adamantly rejects appeals to modify this practice.

- Develop job descriptions; Clarify expectations and process
- Give this person new responsibilities that steer him/ her away from the work of other volunteers



- Ask church administrator if there are any other tasks this person can work on to minimize their time in the pantry
- Change the timing of volunteer shifts
- Hold volunteer meetings to problem solve with over-arching theme of “better together”
- Emphasize the need of the other volunteers to do meaningful work and feel they are part of the mission
- Consider changing the work hours as long as that doesn’t impact the clients/guests
- Give them an ultimatum
- Fire them

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Serving Homeless Clients

It’s very likely that some of your clients are experiencing homelessness and don’t have a place to store and prepare food. It’s also likely that they need more help than others to provide for basic necessities and care.

Measures we can take to support

- People experiencing homelessness are likely to have experienced trauma; we must offer safe /welcoming spaces for them.
- If they are receptive, connection to other services is essential; Pantries should have info to offer and/or a procedure to connect them to 211, [Community Connections](#), [Norristown Pantry and Soup Kitchen Schedules](#).
- May need utensils like can openers, sporks
- Provide an inventory of single serve, no cook meal options
- Provide toilet/shower access at pantry
- Provide female hygiene products
- Use software tools like FoodBank Manager to recognizing patterns and increase partnerships and collaborations to address what the patterns reveal
- If any pantry has an effective way to meet the needs of clients experiencing homelessness there should be a way and a place for them to share it with the network

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