



RIVERSIDE COUNTY OFFICE ON AGING

# FOOD BANK PROGRAMS SERVING RIVERSIDE COUNTY SENIORS

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AD HOC FOOD BANK COMMITTEE REPORT  
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## AD HOC FOOD BANK COMMITTEE REPORT

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## **I. BACKGROUND, PURPOSE AND FOCUS**

In March, 2005, the Riverside County Advisory Council on Aging (AC) convened an Ad Hoc Food Bank Committee to assess the current status of food banks in western Riverside County. The Ad Hoc Committee was charged to:

“Evaluate the food bank delivery system in Riverside County as it relates to senior food bank services and recommend strategies for public/private partnerships in service coordination, program operations, and funding in order to assure secure senior food bank services over time.”

In convening the committee, the Office on Aging (OoA) noted that the “Report on Future Challenges and Opportunities in Senior Nutrition”, produced in 2004 by the AC Blue Ribbon Committee on Senior Nutrition, had cited the need for greater coordination of public/private sector resources to address senior hunger issues throughout Riverside County.

This issue is of serious concern, since Riverside County’s population is rapidly aging. The County is now the fastest growing in the state and the second fastest growing in the nation. Over the next ten (10) years, the number of residents age 60 and over is expected to increase by 53%, and hunger and nutritional problems within this group are escalating.

The Ad Hoc Food Bank Committee decided from the beginning to focus its work on the issues and challenges facing the food banks in the western end of the County because the Regional Access Project (RAP) had recently completed a study of the food bank/distribution programs in the Eastern end of Riverside County. The Committee also agreed to focus on food banks rather than the multitude of local charitable agencies that receive food from food banks and then directly redistribute it to needy clients. It also included examination of USDA commodity foods received through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Commodities Supplemental Food Program (CSFP).

There was consensus among the Ad Hoc Committee members that:

- A. The current food distribution program is very fragmented;
- B. There are confusing guidelines/eligibility requirements for participating in food bank programs;
- C. There are multiple programs scrambling for a finite set of resources;
- D. Findings from the RAP study of food bank programs in Coachella Valley are parallel to issues that exist in food bank programs in western Riverside County;
- E. Multiple benefits could be realized from a better coordinated approach to the food bank distribution program;
- F. A senior food distribution program must continue in Riverside County;
- G. Office on Aging funding for the food distribution program is not secure over time; and
- H. Problems exist due to inadequate and insufficient client tracking systems.

Committee members also recognized that the food bank programs are plagued by escalating transportation costs. They also noted that there was a need to develop strategies that would better coordinate the OoA's senior nutrition program with the county's food distribution program.

The Committee subsequently focused its work on three areas:

- A. Examine how regional food banks were structured and operated to identify strategies that facilitated integration, promoted efficiency, and worked to maximize limited resources.
- B. Explore innovative funding strategies used by food banks to secure an ongoing source of financial support and to improve capacity.
- C. Study computer and web-based tracking and reporting models used by food banks to achieve efficiency and cost-effectiveness, and to enhance services.

During the eight months that the Ad Hoc Food Bank Committee met (See Appendix A for a list of members), Committee members explored the current food distribution system across Riverside County, conducted a survey of regional food banks, researched best practices gleaned from other successful bank models, and made site visits to three regional food banks.

## **II. FOOD BANK STUDY METHODOLOGY**

The Committee identified actions steps to address the agreed upon challenges and issues. They included:

- Closely coordinating a linkage between the Ad Hoc Food Bank Committee Chair and the Second Harvest Board on resource development.
- Research other funding mechanisms.
- Research other organization models.
- Survey distribution sites to identify issues and get recommendations.
- Research other tracking models.

### **A. Survey of Regional Food Banks**

During the course of its work, the Committee surveyed seven (7) food banks: Three in Riverside County, and one each in San Diego, San Bernardino, Los Angeles and Orange counties. The survey addressed annual operating budgets, funding sources and fund raising initiatives; degrees of coordination with community agencies and organizations; client and product tracking systems; programs addressing senior hunger; relationships with food suppliers and other sources of surplus food; and operational food bank models they considered to be innovative and that other food banks could replicate to achieve higher levels of efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Some of the highlights of those responding to specific questions include:

1. Food bank agency budgets range from \$500,000 (FIND) to \$18 million (Orange County Food Bank);

2. Pick up and delivery costs range from 40% (Community Action Agency, San Bernardino (SBFB) to 70% (Western Eagle).
3. Food banks supported from 85 (Western Eagle) to 1,000 distribution site agencies (LAFB).
4. Client and food inventory tracking range from tracking only gross weight of items moved, to a very sophisticated computerized system with a paperless client tracking system.
5. With the exception of Western Eagle, most food banks have a mix of government, corporate, foundation, private sector funding, and in-kind contributions. Revenue is also derived from “shared maintenance fees” that are based on gross weight and transportation costs passed on to community agencies for items other than USDA commodities.
6. Available food from retailers is not always compatible with the food bank’s needs, and usually is not free.
7. Innovative approaches include low cost commodity boxes and a gleaning program.
8. Resource coordinators are used by some food banks to seek commodities and other food locally and/or across the country.

A report of findings appears in Appendix B.

#### **B. Site Visits and Analysis of Current Food Distribution System**

1. ***San Diego Food Bank*** is in the Second Harvest Network, operates on a \$2.7 million budget and distributed commodities through about 200 community agencies. It serves approximately 40,000 seniors.
2. ***Community Action Agency (San Bernardino)*** (CAASB) is budgeted at about \$561,000 and distributes commodities through 94 USDA sites, 55 commodity/salvage sites, and 21 soup kitchens. CAASB could not provide information on the number of seniors served.
3. ***Community Action Partnership’s (Orange County)*** (OCFB) operating budget is \$18 million. OCFB serves about 400 community agencies. Their Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) directly distributes to 21,000 eligible customers a month, 75 percent of whom are seniors. It operates with a volunteer force of 150-200, and works closely with the Orange County Area Agency on Aging.
4. ***Los Angeles Regional Food Bank*** (LAFB) is also in the Second Harvest network and operates on a \$6 million budget. It operates with about 170 volunteers and directly distributes to 8,000 seniors a month through CSFP. Very aggressive volunteer recruitment and food fund raising programs.
5. ***General Observations:*** The focus of the visits was to expand on the generic questions that the food banks had responded to in the survey. The visits provided an opportunity to observe actual

operations in order to assess client tracking systems, differentiate commodity programs and the particular clients they served, gather information on bundled services, and relationships with the Area Agencies on Aging and volunteer programs.

Food banks do not distribute food directly to clients except where ability to pick up items is limited. Distribution sites either shop in person or online and pick up commodities which places the transportation burden on the community service agencies. Visited food banks referenced above have, or will implement, computer client tracking systems in order to minimize client double dipping and to streamline accountability.

The closer the relationship the food bank has with the Area Agency or local government agencies, the more successful they are in offering multiple services at the distribution site. Most food banks have systems in place to alert distribution sites when large quantities of perishable commodities become available and require immediate distribution.

Those food banks that make a dedicated effort towards fund raising and volunteer recruitment and retention are the most successful over all.

The RAP study, “Coachella Valley Hunger Report” was also reviewed for parallel issues, solutions, and recommended follow-up actions.

### **III. OVERARCHING CHALLENGES FOR FOOD BANKS**

The Committee identified three primary challenges which continually impact the effectiveness and efficiency of food bank operations:

#### **A. Capacity**

Food banks consistently report that they lack adequate and appropriate storage capacity, and that this hinders their ability to pick up and store food supplies that are readily available.

#### **B. Sustainability**

Securing a steady and secure source of funding to support food bank operations and to build capacity is a continuous challenge.

#### **C. Accountability**

The ability to effectively track inventory, client services, and other activities for management and reporting purposes, including avoiding duplication, is a serious administrative challenge.

#### **IV. ISSUES FACING FOOD BANKS**

##### **A. Growing Need Versus Stagnant/Declining Resources**

As noted above, Riverside County's population is growing at a tremendous pace, and this growth is bringing increasing demands for services and pressure on limited resources. Food banks report that charitable food distribution agencies are experiencing growing client loads. The Riverside County Office on Aging, in administering the congregate and home delivered meals program under the Older Americans Act (OAA) must now implement new federal nutrition requirements that will be more expensive to meet, putting new financial pressures on existing programs. The need for special diets due to chronic illness in the older (85+) senior population will further strain the program, as will increasing demands for home delivered meals and meals tailored to the County's increasing culturally diverse population. In addition, both the Commodity Food Bank and the OoA funding sources are annually under threat of reduction in the current climate of federal budget constraints.

##### **B. Lack of a Coordinated, Integrated System of Service**

Food banks in Riverside County, through cooperation with a network of multiple agencies and distribution sites, do leverage resources to some degree, and strive to achieve maximum efficiencies within the network. For example, Second Harvest Food Bank in Riverside reports that 425 agencies in Riverside and San Bernardino counties currently access food through their program by coming to the food bank once per week to shop from available goods and then distribute the products through their agencies. FIND food bank in the Coachella Valley, provides food to over 50 active charities that serve an estimated 60,000 plus people /month.

However these agencies of various sizes and sophistication compete with one another for financial and other resources, and there is little coordination or cooperation among them when it comes to food distribution. Data collection appears to be spotty and duplication of services can easily occur. In addition, there are hundreds of other food distribution organizations and groups outside of the existing food bank distribution system, many of them faith based, who also provide food to individuals in the same service area that the food bank system serves. These programs rarely engage in serious cooperative efforts to leverage resources in an integrated way to address the issues of hunger and the related social service and health care needs of their clients.

Thus the assumption can be made that the food bank system and the individual organizations outside the food bank network are providing overlapping services, both to the client population and to the geographic area as a whole. This creates competition between the food banks and

the independent program outside their network both in the acquisition of surplus food, and in requests for donations. Fragmented donations given to organizations outside of the food bank network can dilute the overall efficiency of the food bank system. Multiple requests for donations made to the same source can temper a donor's trust in the system and eventually reduce the willingness to participate in donating at all.

**C. An Adequate Supply of Surplus Food May be Available, but Quality is Inconsistent, and Limited Storage Capacity Restricts the Ability to Pick Up and Distribute the Food**

There appears to be a consensus among area food banks that there is an adequate supply of surplus food available from retail grocery chains and other sources, although this varies from area to area and from time to time. It appears that food banks in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties are not experiencing a shortage of surplus food that could be picked up and made available to food distribution sites (although following the Katrina disaster, the supply of available food has been impacted across the nation).

However, many food banks report a lack of space and appropriate storage that limit the ability to handle the food available to them. Funding instability and limitations restrict the ability of many food banks to build or move into larger facilities where adequate food storage would be available. Also, because they are subject to the variances in the supply of surplus foods, ensuring that distribution sites receive a selection of foods that are of high nutritional quality is difficult and often severely limited.

**D. Cost of Transportation**

Spikes in the cost of gasoline have impacted the ability of the food banks and distributors to deliver food, and may impact the "shared maintenance fees" received from food distribution sites with already limited ability to pay for food items.

**E. Limited Expertise at Tapping Alternative Funding Sources**

Lack of fundraising expertise and/or resources, and increasing competition between social and other programs for finite (and often shrinking) resources, hamper the ability of many food banks to secure reliable sources of on-going financial support for their operations. Few food banks are able to afford the services of professional fund development officers or grant writers.



## V. FINDINGS ON MOST PROMISING APPROACHES

### A. Effective Strategies That Have Facilitated Integration to Maximize Resources for Other Food Bank Customers Should be Applied by Riverside County Food Banks

#### 1. Tucson Food Bank Model

One food bank consistently cited as having addressed the challenge of coordination is the Tucson Food Bank (TFB) which created a centralized system to secure and deliver food to distribution organizations and sites. To gain access to the TFB's resources, local distribution agencies and sites must work with, and adhere to, the TFB's set of operational criteria, especially as they relate to obtaining surplus food from retail and other suppliers, and providing data to the TFB's data base to which those who "join" the food bank have access. The TFB argues that by centralizing the process and forcing collaboration, it can do what it does best – securing surplus food – while local food distribution organizations can focus on their core competency – distributing food. Food distribution sites that do not adhere to the TFB's system are not eligible to receive food from the food bank.

The Tucson Food Bank also has built and operated a large multi-service shared facility. While it occupies a substantial portion of the building, it rents out space in the remaining portion to other service providers (both food and non-food related), in effect creating an *integrated* one-stop center for clients.

#### 2. Los Angeles County Model

The Los Angeles County Food Bank (LCFB) conducts an aggressive outreach effort to enroll people in the food stamp program as a food enhancement strategy. The LCFB's three year trial program uses a software system based on a food stamp calculator secured from a local coalition. Staff perform onsite enrollment but then submit the completed paper applications to the County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) for processing. While this eliminates one step in a three step process, the food bank reports limited success with this *integration* initiative to date, and attributes some of this to the fact that County DPSS eligibility workers are not built into the enrollment process on site.

The LAFB also reports that it had secured a foundation grant to help *integrate* a local food distribution site to a public health clinic, enabling the site to offer clients needed health services as well as food.

#### 3. Orange County Model

As part of the Community Action Program system, the Orange County Food Bank (OCFB) has *integrated* year-around tax preparation and

other financial information services at its food bank to help people maximize their income by taking advantage of earned income credits and other financial assistance.

The OCFB also conducts an aggressive outreach effort to enroll people in the food stamp program as a food enhancement strategy. Their County's "Food Stamps in Four Hours" program works onsite with County DPSS eligibility workers and uses a computer-based enrollment system to electronically process the application at the point of contact. OCFB received a matching grant from the California Nutrition Network to hire outreach workers to help with the project, and secured funding to purchase a bus to pick up people and take them to the registration sites. Because County DPSS eligibility workers are *integrated* into the enrollment site, two of the three processing steps are eliminated, and people are enrolled in the program in real time. The OCFB attributes its 85% application approval rate to the close working relationship with County DPSS staff. It also emphasizes that the central message of its outreach program is important to the program's success. The message is: *"Food Stamps are a Nutrition Program, Not Welfare"*.

Another example of *integration* is how OCFB also works closely with the local Area Agency on Aging and with the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) to offer seniors access to information and services, including the new Medicare prescription drug benefit program.

OCFB has also *integrated* a work site for the County's Title V community service employment program.

#### **4. Los Angeles and Orange Counties**

While easier to do in large cities, food banks can build, leverage, and *integrate* a pool of volunteers into their operations to keep costs under control and maximize their efficiency. Both the LA and Orange County Food Banks use local businesses, industry associations, colleges and universities as a source of volunteers. Both food banks note, however, that volunteers are not "free" in that they must be screened, trained and managed. This takes time, energy and money. High turnover rates also create an "unreliable" base of human resources.

#### **5. Second Harvest Riverside and San Bernardino Counties**

Second Harvest Food Bank (SHFB) has developed a broad based *volunteer program* using volunteers from many venues including the community, corporations, youth programs, the court, and programs for the developmentally disabled.

Because of strategic location and a fleet of trucks SHFB can respond appropriately to donors who expect their surplus products to be removed promptly regardless of the donation load size. SHFB shares mega-load donations with other food banks in So, California, viewing the *regional response* important in moving large donations throughout a large area of service to avoid waste. At this time, SHFB is evaluating the feasibility of a mixing center which could provide more tailored loads in response to the specific needs and capacity of each food bank. This would provide better management of large load donations and also more effectively respond to different regional needs.

## **B. Securing Ongoing Funding and Capacity Building are Challenges Overcome by Other Food Banks and Should be Pursued by Riverside County Food Banks**

Some food banks leverage various programs, resources and *funding opportunities* to expand and strengthen their own services and help build capacity in the local community. Several food banks surveyed by the Ad Hoc Committee have opened and are operating thrift shops, grocery stores, and other retail outlets to enhance their revenue streams.

Two food banks visited by the Committee have created sophisticated *fundraising* efforts to enhance their access to ongoing revenue streams. Admittedly, these food banks have the advantage of being located in large, resource-rich metropolitan areas. But as one food bank executive noted, the food bank can leverage every contributed dollar into \$10 worth of food, so any fundraising effort is well worth the time, energy and money. These food banks have tapped into corporate giving and volunteer programs, and also have created innovative promotional and community awareness strategies designed to support their fundraising capacity.

### **1. Los Angeles County**

The LAFB sponsors special *fundraising* events such as annual wine tasting, and proactively works with employers to sponsor food or fund drives benefiting the Food Bank. It uses both a professional fundraiser on staff and has purchased a computer software program (RAZOR's Edge) for its fundraising initiatives. The Food Bank also has used the *pro bono* services of local media firms and corporations to launch public awareness and branding campaigns, both of which are geared toward supporting the Food Bank's fundraising capacity.

For example, LAFB has created a traveling photo exhibit entitled "Putting a Face on Hunger." The exhibit, featuring black and white photos of food distribution site recipients, is displayed in building lobbies and other public spaces.

## 2. Orange County

The Orange County Food Bank also has used *pro bono services* of area corporations for similar campaigns as LA's efforts.

The OCFB has a Congressional Hunger Fellow assigned to it for special projects. It also received a *matching grant* from the California Nutrition Network to hire and train outreach workers for its food stamp enrollment program. The food bank also employs a staff person who can use a computer software package to assist local startup organizations in applying for tax-exempt status.

## 2. SHFB Riverside and San Bernardino Counties

Locally, SHFB conducts an *annual fund raising event* each year that includes a Chef competition with excellent food, wine, beer and cheese tasting, and a silent and live auction. The food bank is also in its third year of a *direct mail campaign* to enable the community to support its operation, and currently provides \$25.00 worth of food for every \$1 dollar raised.

### **C. Existing Technology to Track Clients and Inventory, Meet Reporting Requirements, and Provide Enhanced Services Should be Utilized by Riverside County Food Bank Programs**

SHFB was the first food bank in So. California to implement the Ceres *inventory tracking* software provided by America's Second Harvest, and also was the first to implement *bar code tracking* to enable rapid checkout for participating agencies. SHFB uses the software DonorQuest to track and manage the funds development process

Both the Orange County and LA County Food Banks have installed and use sophisticated *computer programs* to track their inventory and clients, detect and prevent duplication, meet reporting requirements, and enroll people in other assistance programs, including food stamps. The LAFB has modified the CERES software system available to Second Harvest affiliates, with help from a local software company, to meet its own needs. It also uses the subscription-based RAZOR's Edge fundraising software system and has implemented a website based program that allows recipient agencies to shop and order online. In addition, it uses a sophisticated database to manage its inventory and food disbursement process.

Both the Orange County and Los Angeles Food Banks also use *encoded swipe-card* systems for a range of tasks, including client tracking.

The San Diego Food Bank uses *e-mail* blasts to alert recipient agencies of the availability of large quantity perishable items.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS / NEXT STEPS

### A. Conclusions

For the most part, there is ample surplus food available to help feed those who are hungry in Riverside County, including seniors. What is needed to access this supply are:

1. Larger storage capacity,
2. More effective and cost efficient ways to retrieve and transport the food from all potential food sources, and
3. Better ways to improve coordination and integration in food distribution with agencies and organizations currently not participating in the food distribution system.

### B. Recommendations

#### **1. Create a More Inclusive System That Encourages More Collaboration and Coordination Using Outreach, Education, and Training Initiatives**

The Regional Access Project Foundation (RAP) in partnership with a counterpart agency in western Riverside County should organize a strong partnership task group to achieve collaboration among food banks and food distribution agencies, local service programs, community organizations, and the private sector across Riverside County. This partnership would develop and implement strategies to address and remedy fragmentation, expand storage capacity, improve food distribution systems, leverage existing resources, promote case management, and encourage participation of those currently not in the food bank distribution system.

#### **2. Food Banks Should Leverage All Available Food Related Programs for Their Customers**

Food banks, distribution sites, public and privately administered programs, and local CBOs and FBOs, in collaboration with the Office on Aging, should explore opportunities for leveraging all existing food related programs that can also benefit the food bank customer.

In addition to maximizing enrollment in the Food Stamp Program, and participation in the Older Americans Act congregate and home delivered meal programs, food banks and food distribution agencies could explore model programs that allow for flexibility and alternative avenues for accessing food. For example, the Food Stamp Program includes an option for elderly, disabled and homeless individuals to purchase meals at

authorized (and participating) restaurants. San Francisco has implemented a successful program whereby the Subway Sandwich Shop chain is participating in areas where other services are not available.

### **3. Initiation of creative fund raising**

Food banks and distribution sites, in collaboration with a new task force that includes representatives from the funding community should pursue alternative funding opportunities, such as, those successfully implemented in neighboring counties and outlined in Section V-B.

### **4. Advocate for Continuation of All Current Federal and State Funded Food and Nutrition Programs Implemented at the Local Level, and For New Innovations.**

The Advisory Council on Aging and the Office on Aging, in cooperation with key community leaders and stakeholders, should advocate to retain and expand all current local funding for food and nutrition programs including TEFAP, CSFP, OAA Title C1 and C2, and CA. Brown Bag programs. This will maintain the current safety net.

They should also advocate for nutrition program innovation, such as the creation of a WIC-type program for seniors, which would ensure their access to adequate, nutritionally balanced food on a regular basis. This would promote health engaged lives for seniors and reduced health care cost for society at large.

### **C. Next Steps**

Achievement of these recommendations will require substantial resources in terms of time, commitment, and resolve. All participants in the process must be committed to offering substantive input over a period of time. They will also need the resolve to overcome territorial issues. In order to expedite the process, participants should focus on what is best for the customer and be committed to alleviating barriers to positive system change. Every organization at the table should benefit from the exercise, but the ultimate beneficiary should be those individuals in Riverside County in need of food.