

## ***There Are a Variety of Ways to Implement Client Choice***

### **Grocery Store**

Food pantries set themselves up like small grocery stores, stocking food shelves with a variety of food and nonfood items. Clients can browse among the goods and select items they want & can use, just as they would at a store. If some very popular items are available in only limited supply, the pantry can put limits on how many of those items each client can take.

### **The Point System**

Each item in the pantry is assigned a point value based on the price of the item in a grocery store. Pantry clients are given point allowances, based on family size and need, to spend during their visit to the pantry. The clients may spend their points on whatever items they choose. Color-coding can be helpful.

### **The Item List System**

Your pantry acquires a variety of food and itemizes what is available on a list. This list is given to clients as they arrive to pick up food. Lists say how many items from each category a client may take based on family size. Clients indicate on the list the items they want, and the pantry staff assembles their bag.

*As a reminder, all TEAP agencies are required to use Client Choice models in order to receive commodities. All of our other partner agencies are strongly encouraged to use Client Choice.*

## ***Food Finders will work with you to offer Client Choice!***

## **Food Finders Food Bank, Inc.**

*Feeding the Hungry since 1981*

Is a proud member of



Office Hours: Mon-Fri, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.  
Shopping Hours: Mon-Thurs, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.



If you have questions relating to **Client Choice**, please contact:

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# **Client Choice Food Pantries**

*Empowering Clients by Promoting Choice*



**Client Choice:** any method of distributing food at a pantry that allows clients to select the food they take away



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## Introduction

Most of us take for granted the choices we make when we go to the grocery store. We are able to pick from a wide variety of food, in control of what we take home. This same concept can carry over into our pantries. In promoting Client Choice, we ask our partner pantries to move away from the system of distributing standardized food bags. Ultimately, adults and parents know what food is best for their households and families based on their eating habits, dietary needs, allergies, etc.

The food that Food Finders Food Bank distributes only aids in the goal of alleviating hunger if it is consumed by the intended recipients, **people in need**. Research from Gleaner's of Western Michigan's *Waste Not Want Not* project found that if people are given arbitrary selections of food without regard to their specific needs and circumstances, up to half of the food given will not be consumed by intended beneficiaries. This finding is further supported by first hand experiences of pantry volunteers and clientele. There are numerous stories of pantry volunteers who dutifully pre-bag identical grocery bags for distribution, only to later find some of those items scattered throughout the parking lot. By giving our clients the items that they neither want nor can use, valuable food resources are wasted.

While Client Choice and pre-bagging distribution methods have their strengths and weaknesses, we believe that in working to alleviate hunger, methods of distribution modeled after Client Choice are definitely the most effective.



## Traditional Pre-Bag Model

### Strengths

- Appearance of being fair- every client receives more or less the same thing
- Pantry controls nutritional value of the food package and amount of food distributed
- Actual distribution takes very little time

### Weaknesses

- It can be demeaning for clients to be told what their family should or should not eat
- Does not take into account the needs and preferences of those receiving the food
- Recipients may have allergy, religious, and/or dietary restrictions that prevent food from being used
- Clients may lack the capacity to prepare the food they receive
- Not all food given to clients is used, which results in waste
- To create identical bags, pantries must use valuable resources to ensure that they always have the identical food items
- Valuable volunteer and staffing time is spent packing bags and less time is spent actually interacting with clients

## Client Choice Model

### Strengths

- Empowering! Clients can *choose* what food they will receive and what items will be most useful for them
- Eliminates waste because when given the option to choose, clients will not take food they will not use
- The pantry is more fully able to work with Food Finders' constantly changing inventory; no need to purchase items for identical bags
- Pantry volunteers can monitor which food items are popular and which ones are not; this will help the pantry stock popular items
- More interaction with clients makes the volunteer experience more rewarding and personal for both the clients and volunteers
- Pantry still controls *amount* of food going out; client choice just impacts the *kind* of food going out
- Volunteer time is saved by not needing to pack bags, and this extra time can be used to have the pantry open longer
- Giving clients choice will promote their joy and satisfaction!

### Weaknesses

- May require a restructuring of the pantry's layout and food storage system
- Volunteers may need to be reoriented to different tasks, which will require new training and a mindset shift