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Foundation For Essential Needs

Food Sourcing Prioritization Facilitation Guide

Why Prioritization Matters

Because food sourcing directly affects both budgets and the types and amounts of food available to the community, it's important for each food shelf to have clear purchasing priorities.

Having a strategy will:

- Prioritize the sourcing of foods most important to your community.
- Maximize your budget and stretch every dollar.
- Help you make real-time adjustments as availability changes.
- Maintain transparency with staff, volunteers, shoppers, board members, and other stakeholders.
- Provide clarity for decision-making, reducing confusion and stress.

Tips to Keep in Mind:

- **Whenever Possible, Source by Category, Not Specific Item.** Instead of planning for "green beans," look for the most affordable vegetable option available at that moment. This is especially critical in categories that take up a larger portion of your budget.

- **Alternate Strategies for High-Cost Priorities.** If an item is very important to your food shelf but consumes a large portion of your budget, think creatively about alternatives. Example: Host a targeted food drive or ask community partners to donate that specific item, such as a soup drive or spice drive.

- **Flexibility is Key.** Your prioritization list is a guide, not a rigid rulebook—it should adapt as your context changes.

Use this template to help you create your Food Sourcing Prioritization List.

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Food Shelf Experience Goal Examples by Category

Fresh Produce

- **Example Goal:** Full and Abundant with a variety of options
    - At least 5 fresh fruit and vegetable options.

Protein

- **Example Goal:** Maintain at least **8 total varieties**.
    - 3 fresh or frozen proteins (ex: eggs, chicken breasts, ground beef, tilapia)
    - 3 beans/lentils (dried or canned)
    - 1 fish option (canned, fresh, or frozen)
    - 1 nut/seed butter option (ex: peanut butter)

Dairy

- **Example Goal:** Provide at least **2 varieties**.
    - 1 milk product (preferably plain, but flavored is acceptable)
    - 1 additional dairy (cheese, yogurt, or milk alternative)
    - *Items to consider if available: milk alternatives*

Fruits & Vegetables (Canned, Dried, & Frozen)

- **Example Goal:** At least **5 varieties** (canned, dried, or frozen).
    - 2 frozen
    - 3 canned or dried

Baking & Cooking

- **Example Goal:** At least **5 varieties** of staple items.

    - 1 cooking oil or spray
    - 1 condiment (mustard, dressing, salsa, mayo, jam, marinades, etc.)
    - 1 dried spice/herb/rub blend
    - 1 flour (wheat, white, rice, maseca, etc.)
    - 1 additional cooking item (baking soda, salt, etc.)

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Grains

- **Example Goal:** Offer at least **8 total varieties**
    - 1 plain breakfast grain
    - 1 plain rice
    - 1 plain noodle/pasta
    - 1 plain bread
    - 1 whole grain cereal

Meals & Sides

- **Example Goal:** Provide access to as much of a variety as possible through donations and free food bank options.

Snacks & Beverages

- **Example Goal:** Source these items primarily through community donations and free food bank options.

Bread & Bakery

- **Example Goal:** Provide a variety of items through retail rescue partnerships.

Other

- **Example Goal:** Evaluate shopper needs that are not met in the above and source these items primarily through donations and the food bank when available.

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Shopper Preferences and/or Culturally Connected Food Needs

- Here are some questions you can ask to help develop your list of food priorities:
    - What foods do our shoppers most frequently request or ask about?
    - Are there foods we purchase that align with the cultural traditions, cooking practices, or dietary needs of our community?
    - Have we gathered shopper input (surveys, focus groups, conversations) to understand which foods are most valued?
    - Are there items we currently stock that don't reflect shopper preferences or cultural relevance?
    - What substitutions could better meet cultural or preference-based needs without increasing cost?

Aligning Purchases With Food Shelf Values

- **Budget Priorities:** (What should we always spend money on to keep consistently stocked?)
- **De-prioritization:** What food items should the food shelf never spend money on, even if it is not on the shelves?