Introduction

Recent changes in federal immigration enforcement policies have brought new challenges to the emergency food system. Immigrant program participants, regardless of legal status, have been pulling back from food assistance programs out of fear of deportation. This has been heartbreaking to hear about and to witness. At Northwest Harvest, we believe that when help is needed, it should be freely given, no questions asked. No one should go hungry, putting the health of themselves and their families at risk, because of fear. We will work to ensure that anyone in need knows that our nutritious food is available to anyone in need and that they are welcomed.

We have attempted to compile the best resources available into the following toolkit to make it as easy as possible for them and others to find the answers they need. We have seven primary recommendations for programs that wish to make their space as safe and welcoming for immigrants as possible:

1. Distribute relevant resources to participants in your program.
2. Understand your rights as a program and prepare a safety plan in the unlikely event that enforcement officials visit your program. Ensure all board, staff, and volunteers are on the same page about your program’s approach.
3. Help staff/volunteers arrange consultations with an immigration attorney as needed to give them advice about their specific situation and conditions of status.
4. Protect clients’ personal information by collecting no more than is mandated by law or grant requirements and keeping that information secure.
5. Create a welcoming environment at your program to affirm the fact that you will continue to serve all regardless of immigration status and protect personal information. Include this message in welcome signage and other communications.
6. Implement strategies to reach out to immigrant communities to provide them with accurate information about the risks of participating in your program and encourage them to return while those risks are minimal.
7. Explore further opportunities for collaboration and solidarity with other immigrant rights organizations in your community including Sanctuary Coalitions, places of worship, and other organizations who are taking the lead around these issues.

In this toolkit, you will find the following resources intended to help you implement the above recommendations: a comprehensive guide for service providers from the Northwest Immigrants Rights Project, a guide for how to create an emergency response plan for your program, a list of data safeguarding tips, know-your-rights handouts for participants in your program courtesy of the ACLU, immigration attorney contact information, tips for reaching out to immigrant communities that may be fearful of receiving services, welcome signs in several languages for your program to post (in order to let immigrant populations know they are still welcome at your site) and a list of additional resources.