Troubleshooting Tips: Transportation, Communication, Volunteers, Produce Variety

Food programs often run into barriers regarding the transportation of produce, communication, volunteers and produce variety. Below are suggestions to deal with these issues in the short and long term. For additional information, see the Growing Connections Farm-to-Food Bank Toolkit. Troubleshooting quick tips specific to cold storage issues can be found on the Cold Storage Quick Tips document, as well as in the toolkit.

Transportation – It is challenging for some food programs to get fresh produce due to having a remote location, open hours that do not coincide with grower hours, or insufficient funds, volunteers or time to pick up produce. Solutions:

▪ Advertise a need for volunteers who have vehicles.
▪ Form a solution with growers to coordinate efforts.
▪ Make ride-share connections for produce pickup with people who often travel around the area
▪ Use the online Produce Portal, which connects food donors to nearby charities.
▪ Find a donated vehicle for food transport or publicly fundraise to get one.
▪ Have staff or a volunteer coordinate produce transport (multiple programs could share staff to limit costs).

Communication – Networking with other food programs is hard when everyone is busy. It also can be difficult to reach out to growers and coordinate on a consistent basis with volunteers. Solutions:
• Schedule regular meetings or conference calls with other food programs in the area.
• Make a flyer with local food programs to advertise your program at stores frequented by growers.
• Research local growers through the USDA Small Farmers search. Reach out to your local extension office, community events, or your local farmer’s market.
• Send out frequent email updates to volunteers about opportunities and events.
• Keep a central log for volunteers to write down important information for each other.

Volunteers – Regular, reliable assistance is critical to the success of a food program, but such people may be hard to come by. Solutions:

❖ Rotary First Harvest’s Resource Guide contains articles written by AmeriCorps VISTAs regarding produce recovery best practices from local projects. It is found at: rfhresourceguide.org
❖ Post available position needs on searchable sites like Idealist or Volunteer Match.
❖ Apply for an AmeriCorps VISTA.

Produce Variety – It is helpful to clients when a food program varies the types of produce it supplies, although this can be hard to achieve on a consistent basis. Solutions:

➢ Pass out recipes. Recipes can be accessed at the Northwest Harvest Portal.
➢ Fundraise or pool WSDA EFAP dollars to contract with growers to grow produce popular among clients.
➢ Develop a nutrition awareness initiative at your food program to encourage clients to make healthy selections. This can include signage, how and where food options are presented, and recipes.

For more information about starting or developing your farm-to-food bank initiative, please email growingconnections@northwestharvest.org, or contact Laura Titzer at 206.923.7423