



**MOBILE  
FOOD  
PANTRY**

# How to Run a Mobile Food Pantry Training Manual

## Introduction

Hosting a Mobile Food Pantry distribution is an efficient and rewarding way to distribute food to those in need. Feeding America West Michigan provides partner agencies with a truck loaded with fresh produce, dairy products, and other grocery items. Our partner agencies are responsible for organizing and distributing the food in a safe, dignified, and equitable manner. This guide is intended to help our agencies host the best distribution possible.

If you do not already have a Mobile Food Pantry account, visit <https://www.feedwm.org/mobilepantry/start/>

## Legal Requirements

As a Partner Agency, you need to be aware that food donors receive a tax-based incentive to donate product to Feeding America West Michigan. The Internal Revenue Code governs how and to whom those products are then distributed.

**POLICY:** Products from Feeding America West Michigan have been donated to feed and aid people in need at no charge to them. This means Partner Agencies may not charge recipients for food, require them to provide labor or other services for food, or participate in prayer or religious activities in exchange for food. Any individual or Partner Agency that does not comply with critical policies or distributes products from Feeding America West Michigan in a wrongful manner may lose services from Feeding America West Michigan or face criminal prosecution.

## Getting Ready

### Site Requirements

Safety is the primary concern when choosing a site for a distribution. The preferred requirements for a host site are as follows:

For Outdoor Distributions:

- Large, paved parking lot – no potholes or obstacles that can cause people to stumble
- Ability to block off distribution area to prevent cars from entering or parking
- Distributions may not take place in the street
- If drive-thru – identify how traffic should flow; clearly mark areas where cars must enter, exit, and stop (for registration and loading of food)

For Indoor Distributions

- Enough parking to accommodate the clients attending
- Door frame large enough to fit a standard pallet through – unloading items from pallets to be hand-carried inside is not an option
- Signage indicating where the distribution is occurring inside the building.

**All sites must be approved by Feeding America West Michigan prior to scheduling a distribution.**

### Financial Commitments

Feeding America West Michigan does not bill Mobile Food Pantries per distribution. Instead, we ask agencies to financially contribute in support of their Mobile Food Pantry program to whatever degree is possible. This contribution is not due all at once or in advance of scheduled distributions. However, such a pledge will assist the food bank in targeting its own fundraising efforts for the program. A pledge form will be issued annually for you to disclose your planned contribution.

If you have any questions regarding pledge amounts, actual program costs in your area, or how this process works, please reach out to a member of the Feeding America West Michigan Fund Development team.

## Training Requirements

In order to provide clients the best possible experience, all Mobile Food Pantry agencies are required to participate in training outlining the expectations for how distributions should be conducted and how clients should be treated. Required trainings include:

- How to Run a Mobile Food Pantry – Video
- Civil Rights – Video and Quiz
- Read and Acknowledge Policies and Procedures – Document

All agency coordinators are required to complete this training in full **prior** to hosting your first Mobile Food Pantry.

In addition, there is a shortened version of the Civil Rights training that is required **annually for all volunteers working with the program in any capacity**. This training should be administered, monitored, and documented by the agency coordinator.

## Scheduling a Distribution

Once you have an approved site, completed your training, and have determined the number of households you plan to serve, it is extremely important to schedule your distributions as soon as possible. Feeding America West Michigan serves 40 counties in Michigan and has over 180 partner agencies hosting Mobile Food Pantries on a regular basis.

In order for us to spread our resources equitably across our service area and best serve our clients, a number of Mobile Food Pantry slots will be available by county for host sites to fill. The number of slots will be based on the documented need in the county and distribution dates will be spread out evenly on the calendar. When filling slots, the food bank is careful not to duplicate services and ensures no part of our service area is underserved. This includes spreading out distributions taking place in close proximity to one another. We ask all Mobile Food Pantry partners to commit to hosting **a minimum of four distributions during a calendar year, spaced out at regular intervals**. This helps to provide reliable and consistent service to our neighbors in need. Mobile Food Pantries **cannot** be added to over community events such as back-to-school carnivals, open houses, resource fairs, etc. These “event mobiles” are expressly prohibited and will not be approved if requested.

Mobile Food Pantry scheduling opens the Tuesday after Labor Day each year for the coming calendar year. At this time, you should submit your scheduling request for **all desired dates for the coming year at one time**.

Scheduling is done using our online scheduling form which can be found at

<https://www.feedwm.org/mobilepantry/schedule/>

Mobile Food Pantry Sizes:

50-75 Households	75-110 Households	110-160 Households
160-230 Households	230-350 Households	350+ Households

To make the best use of available food and better meet clients’ needs, Mobile Pantries are created using a family-centered menu style. Instead of focusing on pounds of food, we build Mobile Pantries to serve a certain number of families based on recent average attendance figures at your location, plus a small cushion. For example, if you plan to serve 100 families, about 110 bags of potatoes would be loaded onto the truck. Attendance figures are reviewed after each distribution to allow for changes in attendance and ensure the correct amounts are sent.

## Conducting Community Outreach

To ensure clients know about the services you are providing, community outreach will be necessary. In order to support your efforts to publicize your distributions, Feeding America West Michigan has created a Promotional Toolkit. This toolkit includes editable flyers, sample press releases, social media post options, as well as the approved logos to be used. We have also included information about the language you should use to describe and discuss your distribution. The Mobile Food Pantry Promotional Toolkit can be found at <https://www.feedwm.org/mobilepantry/documents/> - Promotional Toolkit.

## Recruiting Volunteers

Recruit 12-20 volunteers, and perhaps more for the larger distributions. The need for volunteers may fluctuate depending on the season and attendance at your distribution. It is always preferable to have more volunteers than you think you will need. Instruct your volunteers to dress for the weather and to wear closed-toe, closed-heel shoes. It is encouraged but not required to have volunteers sign a liability waiver annually (<https://www.feedwm.org/mobilepantry/documents/> - Volunteer Waiver) and retain a copy of their waivers at your organization.

## Volunteer Roles

There are various roles that volunteers could be assigned by the coordinator at a distribution. These roles can include:

- Food Set-Up – Using a provided pallet jack to set up the items for distribution
- Registration – signing in clients who attend
- Food Packing – bagging bulk items into family-sized portions
- Food Distribution – physically handing out the food
- Carriers/Loaders – assisting clients to carry and/or load the food into their vehicles
- Tear Down – consolidating trash, breaking down cardboard, and assisting the driver with reloading the truck.

While our drivers will remain on-site to assist you with your distribution, it is the agency's responsibility to recruit and assign volunteers to ensure all tasks are completed. This includes cleaning up and reloading the truck.

## Volunteer Responsibilities

Volunteers are required to follow all the policies and procedures outlined in this manual. The following behaviors are expressly prohibited:

- Smoking
- Chewing tobacco
- Using foul or inappropriate language
- Inappropriate dress (shirtless, shoeless, etc.)
- Photographing or videotaping clients
- Mishandling of client records (verifying addresses, sending out mailers, etc.)
- Contacting/working with the media without prior approval of Feeding America West Michigan
- Posting inappropriate or disparaging remarks about the food bank, the agency partner, or the clients
- Physical threats of any kind
- Any type of harassing behavior

Volunteering at a Mobile Food Pantry is a way to assist the most vulnerable members of our community during a time of need. Volunteers who violate these policies or act in a way that is at odds with our values will be asked not to return.

## Required Supplies

- 8-12 tables for registration and to display food (for walk-thru distributions)
- Gloves to handle ready-to-eat food
- Pocket knives or box cutters
- Grocery bags for bagging bulk products (estimate quantities based on size of items and normal portions)
- Registration materials – the most up-to-date USDA sign-in sheet, writing utensils, clipboards, etc.

While not required, please consider the following supply/facility/activity suggestions as well:

- Restrooms
- Water
- Additional Services – recipe cards, food demonstrations, information regarding other services you provide, etc.

**Note:** You are allowed to have some wrap-around services represented at your Mobile Food Pantry, including free services like community meals, blood pressure screenings, or information about federal benefits. You may **not** distribute political information. Religious information and additional food items can be made available at a table separate from the distribution. **All** additional services must be made available to all clients but cannot be required to be utilized. For example, you can make flyers about church services available to clients but you **cannot** put them in boxes for everyone to take. Clients must always have the right to refuse the additional service.

For purposes of advertisement, Feeding America West Michigan will provide a large sandwich board sign on each truck. These signs will be unloaded and placed near the entrance of your site by the driver. These signs **do not** belong to the agency and should not be taken by agency staff or volunteers. They will be returned to the truck during clean up.

### **Anticipating Changes for Inclement Weather**

For the summer months, make arrangements for water for volunteers and, when possible, clients. If your distribution is a walk-thru distribution, make sure you provide several chairs for people to sit in case they become overheated. The food bank will provide freezer blankets for products that need to be kept cold. Please utilize them during your distribution to keep food as safe as possible.

For the winter months, make sure your parking lot and walkways are plowed/shoveled and salted appropriately. **If our driver arrives and determines your parking lot is not safe for a distribution, the distribution will not take place. This is at your expense and there is no guarantee that it will be rescheduled.**

It is good practice to identify emergency shelter in case of bad weather. Feeding America West Michigan will deliver scheduled Mobile Food Pantries unless our Logistics Manager determines the roads are impassable (in which case you will be notified). If you choose to cancel a distribution for inclement weather or for any other reason, we require 24-hours notice from agencies located in the Lower Peninsula and 72 hours' notice from agencies located in the Upper Peninsula.

### **Distribution Day**

The driver is scheduled to arrive **thirty minutes** before the distribution in the Lower Peninsula and **one hour** before the distribution in the Upper Peninsula. Distributions are earmarked to run a total of 2 hours (in the Lower Peninsula) and 3 hours (in the Upper Peninsula). This time is generally allotted as follows:

- 30 minutes (Lower Peninsula) or 1 hour (Upper Peninsula) to setup
- At least 1 hour to distribute food
- 30 minutes to clean up

You and your volunteers should be onsite before the drive arrives so you can begin the setup process. This lead time is a great opportunity to thank your volunteers for helping, make sure none of them are sick, go over Civil Rights procedures, and assigning volunteers with their designated tasks. Be sure to give them an overview of how they should perform their tasks and make sure everyone is on the same page.

Exclude **any** volunteers exhibiting the following symptoms of food-borne or other illness:

- Vomiting
- Sore Throat with Fever
- Diarrhea
- Uncovered, Cuts or Wounds
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes)
- Persistent Cough or Sneezing

### Methods of Distribution

There are a variety of ways to set up a distribution, but the two primary methods of distribution are walk-thru and drive-thru.

In a walk-thru distribution, tables are set up near the truck where food is displayed and handed out from. Clients park their vehicles, join a line, sign-in, and are then served.

In a drive-thru distribution, food is served directly from pallets. Clients remain in their vehicles and are signed-in from their vehicles and food is loaded directly into their vehicles.

Both methods of distribution have their benefits and challenges. It is up to each site to determine the best method of service for their clients and volunteers.

### Registering Clients

Do not register clients more than an hour before the distribution's scheduled start time, as this encourages people to show up very early. The most up-to-date USDA Sign-In form should be used at every distribution. This form will be attached to the email containing your menu (generally the morning of distribution). It can also be found on our website.

**You are required to register and serve all who attend.** Be patient and welcoming and be prepared to gently explain the process to clients, as it may be new and unfamiliar to them. You **may not** refuse service to anyone who is in need. Refusal to serve clients who constitute a violation of client Civil Rights and could result in termination of the relationship between Feeding America West Michigan.

During registration is a good time to let clients know when your next distribution is scheduled for. We also encourage you to let clients go through the line a second time if there is food leftover after everyone present has been served.

**Client Qualification:** Clients can qualify to receive food under one of three possible circumstances:

1. They are in need of emergency food assistance
2. They meet the income guidelines shown on the sign-in form
3. They already receive or participate in another government program (WIC, EBT/Food Stamps, CSFP, etc.)

**Any** reason clients give is acceptable and no proof is required and **cannot** be asked for.

**Request Complete Sign-In Information:** You may need to reassure some clients that the main purpose for collecting this information is to ensure we are sending the appropriate amount of food to a distribution. Please assist clients in filling out the form completely, as the collection of this data is crucial to our practices.

**Do Not Request Proof of Income:** You should **never** require proof of income. Clients self-declare how they qualify to receive food, and we should take them at their word.

**Do Not Request Identification:** You may **not** ask for or require any type of ID. While reading information off of an ID may help minimize spelling mistakes, it can make clients feel uncomfortable. You can eliminate these barriers by allowing clients to sign themselves in and simply overseeing the process to offer help when needed.

**Do Not Start Early:** Clients arrive to your distribution based on the time we publicize on our website. Starting early means you are not honoring your commitment to be present for clients when indicated.

**Do Not Pack Up Early:** Sometimes there are lulls in the flow of clients through your distribution. This should be expected. You should plan on being available the entire two-hour window of time that is allotted to you to allow people to get there. You should not end your distribution before the two-hour mark unless you run out of food or there is inclement weather that makes distributing food unsafe, such as lightning.

**Serve Young Clients:** There is no minimum age requirement for individuals to receive food. If they can complete the sign-in form, then they should be served. Additional assistance and hospitality should be given to young clients.

**Serve Proxy Clients:** Clients may ask to collect food for a friend or family member who is unable to attend. You must have the client sign in for their household and sign in a second time using the household information for the person who could not be present. You do not need to advertise that you allow proxy pick-up; those who need this service will ask. However, you should have a policy for how many proxies you allow and be able to articulate that when asked. For example, you may pick up for your household and one additional household. Sign-in sheets may **never** be used to deliver to neighbors who are not present.

### Volunteers In Need of Assistance

It is possible you will have volunteers at your distribution who themselves need food assistance. Volunteers should **never** be allowed to receive food before clients. They must wait until all present clients are served before they can go through the line. They must sign in completely and receive the same amount of food as everyone else. It is also not allowed to set food aside from the beginning. This includes volunteers setting food aside for themselves or others they plan to deliver food to later. All the food must go to those in need.

### Keeping People Safe

Mobile Food Pantry distributions can become busy and hectic. Follow the guidelines below for keeping your clients and volunteers safe:

- Vehicles are not to block the parking lot entrance or exit.
- Clients should wait in line out of traffic areas (for walk-thru distributions).
- All sites should be free of glass, litter, and obstacles that might cause slip and falls.
- Children should be supervised at all times. Playing on or around the truck is **not** allowed.
- Unsupervised children may **not** be used as volunteers for the distribution. Adults must be present to supervise and mentor children at all times.

Sometimes situations arise that you cannot plan for. Do not hesitate to **call the police** for any reason (medical, aggressive behavior, etc.) If you anticipate a large distribution, as a courtesy, you may wish to notify the police ahead of time to assist with traffic and crowd control.

It is our driver's role and duty to report any/all injuries and contact 9-1-1 in needed. A first-aid kit is included on every truck. Consider having a volunteer trained in first aid too.

### Keeping Food Safe

Food is made unsafe by biological, chemical, and physical hazards. We protect food from those hazards with the following techniques:

- **Never place food on the ground.** Even boxed or bagged items should be six inches off the ground. Use tables, pallets, or other means.
- **Never** repack ready-to-eat or ready-to-cook items: Only bag whole, bulk produce onsite.
- Use good personal hygiene: wear clean clothes, wash hands, wear food-handling gloves when handling items that be immediately consumed, never smoke or chew tobacco around the food.
- Change gloves when switching between one item and another to protect people from allergens
- Control time and temperature: keep cold food cold and put it away in less than two hours.
- If you have multiple pallets of a single cold product, keep extra(s) on the truck until they are needed.
- Avoid cross-contamination by keeping each type of food separate from one another.

### Spoiled Food

The food bank receives food from many avenues. Generally, there is something about the items we receive that make them less desirable than grocery store items. This could include discoloration, abnormal size, or even packaged in an irregular way. All the items that are sent to you are quality checked by our staff to ensure they are safe to eat. You should also inspect these items to ensure nothing has happened in transport that makes them unsafe. Approximately 60% or more of the items that make up your Mobile Food Pantry menu will be produce. When handling produce, it is normal for there to be some spoilage, however it should not exceed 5% of the total of the item. If it does, please take photos of the items and inform the Programs Team at your earliest convenience.

### Distributing Food

**Do not begin distributing food before the scheduled start time.** Clients may come earlier in the future, which can be problematic if you use a business or school parking lot. Not to mention it feeds into the fear that the food will run out before clients are served.

When you are ready to begin, the coordinator should let the volunteers know, make sure they understand their assigned tasks, and address any last-minute questions. Remind your volunteers to be friendly and patient with clients so the atmosphere is safe and hospitable.

Some faith-based organizations may want to say a quick prayer with their volunteers prior to starting the distribution. This is acceptable; however, you **may not** require clients to participate with you. We do not recommend even inviting clients to participate as it risks giving the impression they must. It is best to do this prayer away from where clients are waiting to be served.

### Driver Tasks and Duties

You can expect our drivers to remain onsite during the distribution. They will **assist** a designated volunteer with unloading the food from the truck and can offer suggestions on the best way to setup the distribution based on the items on the truck. Drivers will break down cardboard, collect and separate plastic and spoilage, and take trash and other dunnage back with them. It is expected that volunteers will assist with these tasks to keep the distribution on schedule.

Our drivers are not permitted to carry food to client's vehicles, intercede in arguments or disputes, or to plow/salt/shovel an area for the distribution. These activities are the responsibility of the agency.

## **Wrapping Up**

### Record Keeping



The driver will provide the coordinator with a copy of the menu for signature. This is an acknowledgement of receipt of the food. The driver will also provide the coordinator with a copy of the feedback form. This form is where you should record the statistics of those who attended your distribution. These statistics include:

- Number of Households Served (each line represents a household)
- Number of Individuals Served (the “Total Number in Household” column added up for all sheets)
- Number of Children Served (the “Number of Children” column added up for all sheets)
- Number of Seniors Served (the “Number of Seniors” column added up for all sheets)
- Number of Veterans Served (the “Number of Veterans” column added up for all sheets)

The Mobile Pantry Feedback Form should be filled out and returned to the Programs Team within **72 hours of the distribution**.

**All records should be kept in a safe, secure place for three years, plus the current year. All records are confidential.**

### Leftover Food

If there is food leftover after everyone has been served, encourage clients to go through the line a second time. You can also connect with a nearby food pantry so they can receive the leftover items. If you choose to do this you must follow our agency policy for receiving leftover food.

POLICY: Leftovers must be sent back to Feeding America West Michigan on the truck or transported to an approved designated Partner Agency. Some Mobile Food Pantry hosts maintain their own storage area (which would already have received approval by this point), while others designate a pantry already affiliated with Feeding America West Michigan which follows the required food safety and distribution practices. Mobile Food Pantry food items should be utilized for immediate use whenever possible. Items cannot be held back to supplement a pantry.

It is important to note that our drivers will not be able to deliver leftovers to an approved pantry. You must make arrangements with the pantry partner to pick the food up from the distribution or for you to deliver it to them yourself. A list of pantries with approved storage can be requested from the Programs Team.

### Cleanup

After the last client has been served, it is expected that volunteers will assist the driver with cleanup. Help breakdown remaining cardboard, separate spoiled food and trash into provided totes, and help load the pallets back on the truck. Volunteers are **not allowed** to operate the lift gate on any Feeding America West Michigan equipment. They can assist with loading by using the provided pallet jack to position pallets on the lift gate to be reloaded. Our drivers are on a tight schedule, often going to multiple distributions in a short amount of time. This additional support ensures the drivers remain on schedule and all communities will be fairly served.

## **Civil Rights and Client Treatment**

Providing our clients with a safe, equitable, and dignified experience is the goal of every food distribution. Remember, you are there to provide a valuable community service to those in need. You **are not** there to pass judgement on clients or decide who is and is not deserving of support. Please treat everyone with kindness and care, and serve them the way you would like a loved one served. By following the above outlined policies and procedures, you are illustrating your compliance in these areas, as well as your dedication to our mission. Any behavior that violates Civil Rights or treats our clients in a disparaging way will not be tolerated.

## **Online Resources**

- Online Scheduling Form
- Mobile Food Pantry Promotional Toolkit

- Policies and Procedures
- USDA Agreement
- Training Videos
- Mobile Food Pantry Feedback Form
- USDA Sign-In Sheet
- Volunteer Civil Rights Form
- Volunteer Liability Waiver
- Find Food Map
- Mobile Food Pantry Schedule