# Healthy Pantry Network Client Choice Handbook

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# What is client choice?

Client choice is any method of distribution that allows neighbors to make selections on the food that they want. Many agencies may already be doing client choice without realizing, if that's you congratulations! If not don't worry, that's why we're here to help. The ideal client choice model would be the 'Grocery Store model' or full choice, where neighbors can walk into the agency and go up and down the aisles selecting food on their own, similar to a grocery store. However since not all agencies are the same, there is a spectrum of client choice models that can fit the capacity of any and all agencies.

# Why client choice?

Simple, client choice is respect, its dignity and gives our neighbors control at a point in their lives where they may not be experiencing much of it. Client choice ensures that neighbors will be selecting food that they want, can and will use. Whether it be due to their living arrangement, cooking capacity or dietary restrictions it's important to give our neighbors the freedom in choosing their own food. Agencies also experience benefits when switching to client choice such as:

- Reduction in food waste and greater financial efficiency
- Increased staff, volunteer interaction with neighbors
- Makes ordering easier by going with the popular food
- Reduces time spent pre-packing food items
- Allows flexibility with hours of operation

## Traditional prepackaged method of distribution:

This traditional model allows agencies to all give neighbors the same prepackaged box/bag of food in an assembly line manner.

- Strengths:
    - Appearance of being fair, every client receives the same
    - Agency controls nutritional value
    - Actual distribution is quick
- Weakness
    - Demeaning telling neighbors what to eat, "beggars can't be choosers" mentality
    - No account for neighbors allergy, religious or dietary restrictions
    - Neighbors may lack capacity to prepare food they receive
    - Food waste
    - Little volunteer time interacting with neighbors
    - May have to use resources to purchase foods to create identical bags

# Client Choice models

There are many ways to set up a client choice agency but before choosing which model is right for you, there are a few factors that must be taken into consideration: Equipment needs, physical space, and staff/volunteers. Everything here is just a guide so any of these models can be modified to best fit your needs or you can come up with a different method all together. The most important characteristic that all these models will share is the freedom neighbors have in choosing their own food. Some notes to consider when thinking about making the switch to choice are:

- May require a restructuring of the agency's layout
- Volunteers may need to be retrained to different tasks
- Distribution may require more time at the onset of the choice model


## Prepackage plus one

This is the easiest transitional step from the traditional prepackaged model where agencies still distribute its fixed bag/box, but also allow people to make a selection of an additional item (produce, bread and baked goods are good options). Agency determines the quantity allowed, for example one per household.

Another variation of this is where neighbors can decline any food items they don't want, leaving it on an 'exchange table' where other people may pick extra of these discarded items. This reduces waste.

Equipment Needs
- Extra space and table for people to place items and exchange them

Other considerations

- Extensive volunteer time packing boxes
- Agency needs to develop system for taking items back or doing exchanges
- Potential for congestion of people around the exchange table
- Good if space in agency is limited


## Menu/List model

This model consists of a list of food currently available and it's either posted or given to the neighbors so they can choose items from that list. Volunteers would then assemble the food bags and give them to the neighbor.

Helpful for neighbors who have trouble moving around and space is limited however neighbors won't be able to browse food themselves

Equipment needs

- Materials to make the list (paper, pens, clip boards, dry erase board or chalk board)


Other considerations

- Must update the food list to reflect the current inventory
- May need a translator or use food picture to help with the needs of non-English speakers

Steps to making it work

- Give neighbors instructions on how many items they may take based on whatever factor deemed best by agency
- Allow client to either write down choices, tell a volunteer or complete a checklist
- Provide nutrition handouts, recipes, cooking demos while neighbors wait
- Have volunteers/staff fill bags

## Window model

This model is very similar to the menu/list model with the only difference being is that instead of choosing the food from a list, neighbors will point or tell a volunteer what they want.

Model helps when agency has limited space and/or staffing but can only serve small number of neighbors at one time

Equipment needs

- Half door or window for easy viewing of agency storage

Other considerations

- Have volunteers available before or after agency opens to organize and stock shelves
- May need translator or food pictures to help with process



Steps to making it work

- Organize by food group
- Allow neighbors to choose by pointing
- Volunteers pick the food items off the shelf and packs into bag/box

## Table model

This model provides more choice than the previous 2 models mentioned. Food is set up on tables, preferably by food groups and neighbors go around selecting the food of their choice.

Possible to serve many neighbors at one time and good alternative if agency doesn't have enough space for Grocery store model

Equipment needs

- Enough tables to display available foods

Other considerations

- Place tables in a U or L shape to maximize space
- May need workers before, during and after open agency hours
- Helpful if food storage is near food display. If not, carts and dollies are helpful
- Workers can either guide neighbors or remain by each display table to offer assistance



Steps to making it work

- Organize by food groups
- Tell neighbors how many items they can choose
- Allow neighbors to choose and package their own food

## Grocery Store model

This is the most client friendly model as it allows neighbors to freely walk through the aisles, choose any food they want and check out with a volunteer or staff member.

Equipment needs

- Shelving
- Refrigeration with clear glass to view products is recommended, but a list can be used if not possible
- Carts/baskets
- Tables

Steps to making it work

- Organize food by food group,
- Give neighbors instructions on how process works
- Allow neighbors to walk by themselves but have volunteers available to assist people
- Neighbors check out and pack food in a bag/box themselves or volunteers can help with packing

Other considerations

- Space needs to be large enough to display foods and allow people to walk but amount of space will determine how many neighbors can shop at a time
- Have team members available before agency open to organize
- May need to restock and straighten shelves during agency hours
- Volunteers can talk about food options or basic nutrition while guiding neighbors through agency



# Logistics

Controlling the rate of food distribution is of great importance and some may think that with the client choice model, it will be difficult to gauge the inventory. However, the choice models have little or no effect on the amount of food going out. It does affect the type of food going out.

Since the number of neighbors served and the amount of food coming in through donations and purchases should maintain similar levels, allotting the same amount of food to each client can help prevent food being distributed too quickly. It will be important to track individual items and types so future purchases reflect the neighbor's wants and needs.

Ensuring that food on the shelves isn't out of date is important, so make sure to use the 'first in, first out' method of inventory control. Meaning, when new delivery comes in, put the newest food/latest expiration date at the back and the older food/closest expiration date at the front.

There are many different ways to determine how much of each food item to give neighbors. Ideally agencies would allow neighbors to take as much food as they need but due to different factors, that is not always possible. You can use the following guidelines to help determine the amount of food to distribute but remember it's flexible so if none work for you, combine them or create brand new ones!

## Point system

This system is based on how much each item would cost if purchased at a typical grocery store. First devise cost ranges and then develop point values for each range. Each item is assigned a point value. Neighbor/Family is allotted a certain number of total points to spend on that visit. Total point allotment can be determined depending on supply, demand and size of household

Points are coded with a ticker of a certain color. This method allows flexibility where a agency can create as many or as few cost increments/point values as necessary.

Can also add point options for non-food items. Helps neighbors learn budgeting skills.

## Pound system

This system gives each neighbor/family a total number of pounds that can be used to shop food/non-food items. Neighbors then choose items they need until poundage allotment is expended. Will require volunteers to weigh client food.

- Can also break this down by assigning certain pounds by food type (meat, fruit, vegetables etc.)

Variation of this would be in combination with the point system, but assigns points based on ranges of weights instead of prices and gives neighbors a total point value to shop with.

## MyPlate

This system can be seen as a health conscious version of the pound/point system. All food items are categorized by food group and then poundage/point allotments are given for each food group. This ensures families are receiving a variety of foods and encourages healthier eating habits

If there are foods that spoil quickly and inventory permits, may want to provide unlimited spending limits

Good idea to provide health tips and meal plan ideas in case neighbors are unfamiliar with certain foods. Can also offer samples of food to increase interest

## Items systems

A simple system for agencies new to client choice, this allots a certain number of items per family size/person that they can choose.

Can have the option to fluctuate the number based on the current inventory

## Food Card

Agencies evaluate what their pre-packaged box/bag of food contain and then translate the amount and type of food normally given onto cards. Cards categorized by family size and the amount of each item they can take.

Volunteers will need to be trained and materials needed to create the food cards

# Getting Started

You have all this information regarding Client Choice, now what? Well, before you make the switch there are a few things you have to plan ahead on.

## Layout

- Is food arranged as like items with like items
    - Ex- Rice, bread and pasta together or chicken, turkey and meat together
- Shelves arranged in a 'route' for client/volunteer to grab food?
- Who will be packing food?
    - Neighbors? Volunteers?
- How many neighbors are usually at an agency at a time?
- How will neighbors know how much food they can receive?
- If serving senior citizens, are aisles wide enough to allow wheelchair and walkers to go through? Are shelves low enough for anyone to grab food or is there someone available for assistance?
- After an agency has maximized their space, they must determine whether it's enough to implement a grocery store model or should they go with another model.

## Equipment

- Converting shelves used for storage to client choice shelves can maximize resources
- Contacting local high school or boy/girl scout troop to help build shelves
- Ask local grocery store to donate baskets/carts
- Storing bulk items may not be as big of an issue since with choice the space occupied by bulk is reduced since only popular food will be ordered and moved quickly
- Agency could also ask neighbors to bring their own bag/box beforehand to save resources. May be a good idea to have some stored in case a neighbor is unable to bring a bag/box.
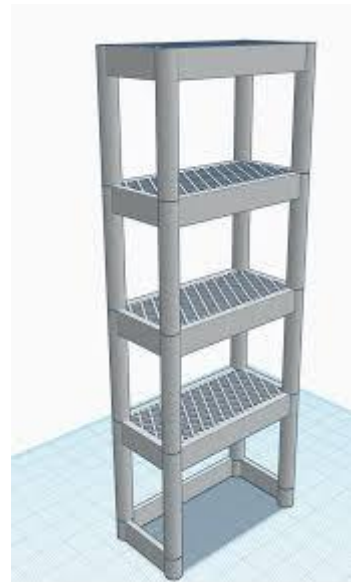
## Inventory

- During food drives, encourage people to donate specific foods that are popular with your neighbors
- To help move fresh produce and unpopular items more quickly, display selection tips for neighbors
- Offer different recipes to neighbors with the same 3 staple ingredients
- Foods that aren't popular can be made into a feature item and allow people to take as many as they want.
- Necessary to track individual items and types of items so future agency purchases reflect the neighbors needs and wants
- If having trouble sourcing specific food items that neighbors request, contact Second Harvest Food Bank to receive assistance.
- When figuring out which food to stock, ask yourself:

- o Which are most often asked for? Which run out the fastest?
- When figuring out what is the unpopular food, ask yourself:
  - o Which are returned in food drives, found in trash, have problems giving out?

# Volunteer

Changing the agency to client choice not only affects neighbors, but it will also impact volunteers. All that time volunteers spend prepacking boxes/bags will be transitioned to a more interactive, conversational and supportive role. This change will most likely attract more volunteers who tend not to enjoy repetitive, mundane tasks. However, you may also experience some resistance by volunteers who do prefer those tasks. Therefore, it's important that you have a variety of volunteer roles, recruit volunteers as well as explain the importance and benefits client choice has for our neighbors.

## Recruitment of volunteers

- Using current volunteers as salespeople that believe in your organization
- Mass media (TV, radio, neighborhood newspaper, organizational bulletins)
- Announcements at community events, services, educational sessions
- Web Site postings
- Appearances at senior centers, career fairs, events
- Mailings, referrals
- Registering with volunteer referral organizations
- Coordinating with schools, colleges, educational institutions
- Neighbors themselves

## Potential Roles

- **Greeter**) The greeter will acknowledge all neighbors in a friendly and professional manner. The greeter is responsible for directing customers to the client sign-in table, as well as giving an overview of how the program operates to all new neighbors.



- **Sign-In**) Sign-In person(s) watches over client intake process or assist with any other resource. This position makes sure forms are completed thoroughly, as well as signed by each client.
- **Stocker**) The stocker position organizes, and stocks shelves that neighbors will be shopping from during distribution.

- **Inventory Control**) The Product Organizer will log all incoming food. This volunteer will make sure the product that comes in from the Foodbank or various food drives is checked, dated, separated and stocked.
- **Shopping Assistant**) Works directly with the client while they shop. This person will engage the client in conversation, providing assistance and recommendation if needed.
- **Bagger**) The Bagger will bag all the client's groceries after they are finished shopping.
- Carrying Assistant/Runner) The Carrying Assistant or Runner will make sure the neighbors get everything to their vehicle quickly and efficiently and help the client load all their items into their vehicle.
- **Manager/Supervisor**) The Manager or Supervisor makes sure the agency is operating smoothly and efficiently.
- **Floater**) The Floater will be responsible for helping out where needed. This person will float from station to station to make sure other volunteers don't need help. This person will also relieve other volunteers from their job duties for a short time if they need a break.

*Not all of these positions are needed to run a Client Choice Agency. The above positions are simply suggestions. If any agency has ideas for other roles that weren't stated above, please let us know!

# FAQ

## My agency is small, do I have the space for client choice?

There is a client choice model that can fit any agency, from a broom closet to a conference room. You may just need to rearrange food space and equipment to allow for better flow of traffic. Converting storage space into shelving units can increase browsing space and enables more neighbors to shop at a single time. Points to keep in mind:

- Think about stackable shelving units to maximize space
- If agency has a large bulky counter, consider downsizing and putting shelves in the acquired space
- Simultaneously utilize shelves to display food to neighbors and as storage
    - (Insert pics for examples)

## How can we prevent giving away food too quickly?

Remember, if you set item limits and implement one of the previously mentioned systems (pound, point, item) the agency won't see much of a difference in the amount of food you give out. The popular foods may experience a quicker turnover and the agency may experience more leftovers. Points to keep in mind:

- If agency is having trouble moving fresh produce (fruits, vegetables) allow neighbors to take as many as they want
- Tracking which foods run out first is a great indicator which items are popular and agency should then adjust their inventory to source more of those items.

- Agency can collaborate with Second Harvest Food Bank to provide nutrition tips, recipes and food samples on unpopular food items to peek interest
- Variety is important so try introducing different food from time to time

## Will our hours of distribution need to change?

Hours of distribution do not need to change. Something to keep in mind is that volunteers won't spend nearly as much time prepacking boxes/bags of food. An option with that extra time is to extend the hours of distribution to later in the day which will allow more neighbors to take advantage of the agency, potentially lessen the line of people waiting and may attract more volunteers with the extra time flexibility.

## How long will it take to process neighbors?

When first implementing any new system or program, there will be a period where situations need to be ironed out before the system starts running smoothly. Implementing a client choice model is no different so don't be discouraged when it may take a little longer distributing food. Factors to keep in mind that affect neighbors when selecting food is their family size, age, physical mobility and comparing each item. That's why it's important to have volunteers ready to help and have nutrition education posted throughout the agency

## Will nutritional quality be affected if people choose their own food?

Neighbors may not know how to make health conscious decisions and may automatically reach for less healthy lower priced food items out of habit. Volunteers can encourage Neighbors to select healthy items while educating them on nutrition basics and provide recommendations on well-rounded meals

- Should give training to volunteers on nutritional issues and post nutrition education
- Look on USDA's myplate website on general nutrition
    - https://www.myplate.gov/

# Appendix

## Food Card

*(Instead of items, can replace that with lbs or points)*

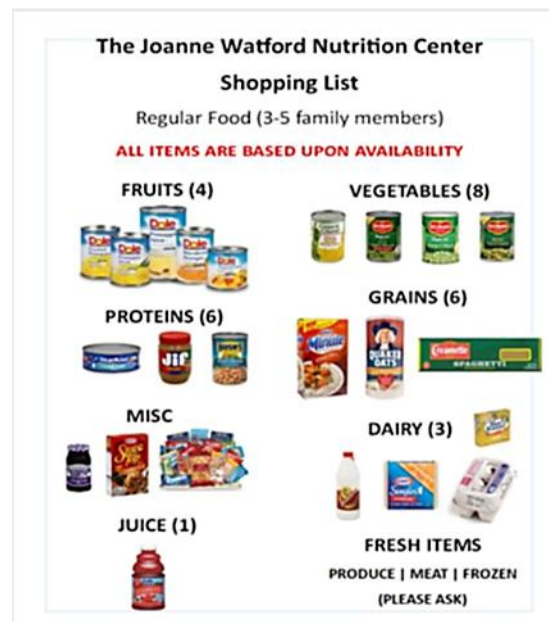| 1-2 people in household | |
|---|---|
| Grains/Granos | 2-3 items |
| Vegetables/ Verduras | 3-6 items |
| Fruit/ Frutas | 3-6 items |
| Dairy/ Producto Lacteos | 2-3 items |
| Meats and non meat protein/ Carnes y proteina sin carne | 2-3 items |
| Combination Foods/ Comidas Combinadas | 1-2 items |
| Fats and Oils/ Grasa y Acietes | 0-1 item |
| Sweet Foods/ Comidas Dulces | 1 item |



*Photo credit: Client Choice Handbook 2019 Houston foodbank*

The Joanne Watford Nutrition Center
**Shopping List**
Regular Food (3-5 family members)
ALL ITEMS ARE BASED UPON AVAILABILITY

FRUITS (4)   VEGETABLES (8)
PROTEINS (6)   GRAINS (6)
MISC   DAIRY (3)
JUICE (1)   FRESH ITEMS
PRODUCE | MEAT | FROZEN
(PLEASE ASK)



*Photo Credit: Client Choice Course Workbook Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma*

**FOOD (Red 1-3 in Family)**
Quantity Allowed/When Available
1 Box Cereal
1 Carton Milk (fresh or dried)
1 Dozen Eggs
4 Cans Vegetable (your choice)
1 Bag of Rice
1 Bag of Pasta (Spaghetti or other)
1 Fresh Meat
1 Can Meat
1 Can Soup or Stew
1 Pkg. Dried Potatoes
1 Pkg. Dried Beans or Peas
2 Cans Fruit
1 Can Fruit Juice

**FOOD (Blue 4-6 in Family)**
Quantity Allowed/When Available
2 Boxes Cereal
1 Carton Milk (fresh or dried)
1 Dozen Eggs
8 Cans Vegetable (your choice)
1 Bag of Rice
1 Bag of Pasta (Spaghetti or other)
2 lbs. Fresh Meat
2 Can Meat
2 Can Soup or Stew
1 Pkg. Dried Potatoes
1 Pkg. Dried Beans or Peas
3 Cans Fruit
1 Can Fruit Juice

**FOOD (Yellow 7-10 in Family)**
Quantity Allowed/When Available
3 Boxes Cereal
1 Carton Milk (fresh or dried)
2 Dozen Eggs
10 Cans Vegetable (your choice)
2 Bags of Rice
2 Bags of Pasta (Spaghetti or other)
2 lbs. Dried Beans or Peas
3 Can Meat
3 lbs. Fresh Meat
3 Can Soup or Stew
1 Pkg. Dried Potatoes
5 Cans Fruit
3 Can Fruit Juice

**FOOD (Green 10+ in Family)**
Quantity Allowed/When Available
3 Boxes Cereal
1 Carton Milk (fresh or dried)
2 Dozen Eggs
12 Cans Vegetable (your choice)
2 Bags of Rice
2 Bags of Pasta (Spaghetti or other)
2 lbs. Dried Beans or Peas
3 Can Meat
3 lbs. Fresh Meat
4 Can Soup or Stew
2 Pkg. Dried Potatoes
5 Cans Fruit
4 Can Fruit Juice

## Item System

| FAMILY SIZE | ITEMS ALLOWED |
|:---:|:---:|
| 2-3 | 25 |
| 4-5 | 35 |
| 6+ | 45 |

## Point System

| Cost of Food | Points per Price | Coded with sticker of this color |
|---|---|---|
| $.01-$1.00 | 1 point | 🟥 |
| $1.01-$2.00 | 2 point | 🟧 |
| $2.01-$3.00 | 3 point | 🟩 |
| $3.01-$4.00 | 4 point | 🟦 |

## Pound System

| Family Size | Number of pounds |
|:---:|---|
| 1 | 20 |
| 2 | 25 |
| 3 | 30 |
| 4 | 35 |
| 5 | 40 |

*Remember these are flexible, so change any of them to better suit your agency needs or create your own.

|  | Description | Equipment | Space | Advantages | Other Consideration |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Supermarket** | Food is set up on shelves by food group. Neighbors walk through the space and select their food based on agency guidelines. | Shelving, Carts/baskets, refrigerators/freezers (with clear glass doors preferred but not required) | Space large enough to display foods on shelves with room for neighbors to walk through. | Agency workers have more one-on-one time with neighbors enriching their volunteer experience. Allows neighbors to ask workers specific questions. Storeroom and place where neighbors choose food are the same. Many neighbors can be served at one time. Most client friendly model | Need team members to restock and organize food throughout. Planning in advance is required to set up foods on shelves. |
| **Table** | Food is set up on tables by food groups. Neighbors walk by each table to choose and pack their food. | Tables, Carts/baskets | Space large enough to set up tables with room to walk in between the tables. | Many neighbors can be served at one time. Neighbors can handle food like they would in a grocery store. | Agency team members needed to set up and break down tables. |
| **Window** | Neighbors stand outside the agency area but can see the food in the agency. Neighbors choose by | Shelving visible to neighbors | Works in any space where client can see the food. | Very small space needed to offer client choice. Good if you don't have many volunteers | Can only serve a small number of neighbors at a time. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | point to the foods they want. | | | | |
| **Menu/List** | List of foods in stock is posted or given to neighbors. They choose their foods from the list and agency team members assemble the bags/boxes. | Clipboards, Dry erase/chalk board, paper, writing utensils | Only needs enough space to store food and have intake area. | Very small space needed to offer client choice. Neighbors can choose food for themselves without leaving their seat in the intake area. | May not be able to serve many neighbors at a time. List may be difficult for neighbors that speak English as a second language (use pictures instead). Need to update food list as inventory changes |