

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

School of Public Health Nutrition Sciences Program

Food Bank Delivery Programs: Best Practices Across the U.S.

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BE BOUNDLESS



Background & Purpose

The United Way of King County (UWKC) has been running a county-wide food bank delivery program since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020). To provide the best and most efficient service UWKC partnered with the University of Washington Nutritional Sciences Program 2nd year graduate students for assistance with research on local and national best practices to inform further improvements to their program. The primary purpose of this project was to identify food bank delivery programs throughout the United States and collect information on their experiences running the program. This capstone project summarizes best practices and challenges other programs have faced. These project findings will be a resource for UWKC to make changes to best serve participants and ensure their program is sustainable.

Methods

I conducted a comprehensive internet search to identify food banks throughout the United States that currently provide home delivery. To ensure an adequate number of food banks were contacted, programs were included if they were providing delivery to any population, even if they targeted a specific group (like seniors). I excluded Meals on Wheels programs from this analysis given that they exclusively provide prepared meals to seniors.

Once I identified food banks, I contacted them either through direct email if an email address was provided on their website, or through an online contact form if email addresses were not provided. I included in the email a list of questions that the programs were asked to answer. I also offered the option to set up a Zoom call if they preferred to talk rather than send their responses by email. I offered a copy of this report if they were willing to share information about their food bank delivery program. Additionally, I conducted an online literature review to supplement the limited responses (3) from food banks I received. I searched on Google Scholar and Google with main keywords of “food bank delivery,” “best practices” or “food bank home delivery.” From there, I often had to explore much further to find program information within food bank websites. I found very little published literature on food bank delivery best practices.

Below, I present a table outlining all food bank home delivery programs I identified in my search, as well as a summary of best practices gather from email correspondence with foodbank programs and the online literature search.

Identified Food Bank Home Delivery Programs in the US:

I identified and describe below twelve food banks and food pantries in the U.S. that offer home delivery programs. Some delivery programs exclusively serve seniors or people with disabilities, while others serve anyone in need. Additionally, there are a few programs in the table that utilize partnerships with private businesses (e.g. Amazon or DoorDash) to complete deliveries, but many depend on volunteers to deliver food to clients. DoorDash also lists on their [website](#) food banks with whom they have partnerships, however, these organizations were not contacted and are not included in the table below. Starred programs (*) responded to questions and are included in the results.

Organization	Program Name	Program Website	Program Contact	Program Overview
Community Food Bank – IA*	Food Delivery	https://builtbycommunity.org/food-delivery/	Krystal Kabela , Food Bank Manager krystal.kabela@builtbycommunity.org (319) 351-2726 ext. 111	Food delivery is provided to anyone in need that lives within a specific county. They provide a mix of non-perishable staples and fresh produce, dairy, or specialty items that are available each day. They do not verify eligibility.
Central Texas Food Bank – TX*	Home Delivery Program	https://www.centraltexasfoodbank.org/home-delivery-program	https://www.centraltexasfoodbank.org/about-us/contact	Central Texas Food Bank partners with Austin Public Health (APH) Neighborhood Services Unit and Amazon for their Home Delivery Program. Participants receive a monthly box of shelf-stable groceries, delivered directly to their home by Amazon Flex drivers. The program is available to residents who need food assistance, have barriers to attending other food distributions, and have children or older adults in the households or are individuals with a disability, veterans, or active military members.
Northern Illinois Foodbank – IL*	My Pantry Express	https://solvehungertoday.org/get-help/my-pantry-express/	(630) 443-6914 support@mypantryexpress.org Direct Contact: Alex Veague, aveague@northernillfoodbank.org	My Pantry Express is an online food pantry developed and operated by Northern Illinois Food Bank in collaboration with community partners. Client eligibility is based on client attestation of need, and clients are able to choose online what items they want in their delivery boxes.
Central California Foodbank – CA*	Groceries2Go	https://ccfoodbank.org/findfood/	(559) 237-3663 info@ccfoodbank.org	This food bank no longer has a delivery program. The delivery was a temporary aspect of the program (that started out of need during COVID-19) that was run by a separate organization that made the decision to stop.
Food Bank Santa Barbara County – CA	Brown Bag Home Delivery Program (now SAFE Home Delivery Program)	https://foodbanksbc.org/programs/seniors/	(805) 967-5741	The Brown Bag Delivery program provides a grocery bag of nutritious staples like high-protein items, canned soups, pasta, eggs, and session fresh fruits and vegetables twice a month to homebound low-income seniors or those who have no social support systems to bring food to them. It has various distribution locations throughout the county and relies on over 150 volunteers to run the program. Participants are required to have a doctor’s note to verify their eligibility.

Lift Urban Portland - OR	Delivered Food Boxes	https://www.lifturbanportland.org/delivered-food-boxes.html	(503) 221-1224 info@lifturbanportland.org	Home delivery is provided for folks who are unable to come to the food pantry. In order to qualify for this delivery service, residents must verify that they meet the following criteria: -Live within their service area -Comply with income guidelines -Provide a referral for services from a Case Manager or Resident Service Coordinator
New Braunfels Food Bank - TX	Home Delivery	https://nbfoodbank.org/cvresponse/	(830) 327-6000 info@nbfoodbank.org	Home delivery from this food bank is available to families experiencing transportation issues, are 60 or older, 60 and younger with a disability, or are quarantined due to Covid-19 diagnosis or exposure. You must live within the specified counties to qualify and have to fill out an application for approval by the food bank staff.
St. Mary's Food Bank – AZ	Home Delivery Program	https://www.firstfoodbank.org/get-help/	https://www.firstfoodbank.org/contact	Home delivery is available to anyone that is confined to their home due to disability or illness, is at greater risk due to COVID-19, or lacks reliable transportation. Additionally, they must attest that their income is within eligibility guidelines.
Flagstaff Family Food Center – AZ	Home Deliveries	https://hotfood.org/	https://hotfood.org/contact/	Monthly food deliveries of food boxes with pantry staples, bread and fresh produce are made to anyone in the community who is in need and unable to get to the food bank locations.
San Francisco Marin Food Bank – CA	Home-Delivered Groceries	https://www.sfmfoodbank.org/programs/home-delivered-groceries-seniors/	(415) 282-1900 info@sfmfoodbank.org	Deliveries are made to low-income seniors and adults with disabilities that are unable to travel to the food bank. Deliveries are made weekly and provide fresh produce, low-fat dairy, lean protein, and whole grains.

Best Practices

Provide Training and Training Materials

Providing adequate training and training materials is a best practice recommended through email communication by the Central Texas Food Bank and through a report prepared for the COVID-19 CBO Senior Food Delivery Local Operations Work Group by Diana Jensen in California.¹

The Central Texas Food Bank reported that they originally experienced challenges with Amazon drivers simply because the process of delivering food from the food bank was different from what the drivers were familiar with. To address those challenges, the food bank created a handout to share with the drivers when they pick up the food for delivery with general guidance on “do’s and don’ts.” In addition, they developed other written materials, including an enrollment guide for their partners at Austin Public Health to use when screening and enrolling new clients, a guide for staff that oversee the Amazon pickups, and a welcome letter for participants that receive their boxes with FAQs.

At the San Francisco Marin Food Bank, they developed specific instructions for their volunteer delivery drivers to ensure deliveries run seamlessly. These are step-by-step instructions on where to leave the food and who to contact if they

encounter any issues.¹ The Food Bank of Santa Barbara County reports providing continual training for new and returning volunteers on how to communicate with clients, and how to safely deliver food to their home delivery clients.¹

Utilize Technology to Streamline Processes

Food banks reported that the utilization of various tools including Excel, routing software for deliveries, and computer platforms for home deliveries as being crucial to their success. At the Northern Illinois Foodbank, they reported that by using Excel they were able to develop spreadsheets to help streamline processes and save time and energy. Specifically, they use these spreadsheets to help manage the transition of information from their system to the DoorDash delivery system so that the partnership is more easily maintained. Additionally, they have an online portal that allows clients to choose what they want to receive in their delivery box or pick up from their area food bank. This portal allows them to better meet client needs by providing them with more choice and customization.

Routing software like OnFleet and ServTracker are used by different food banks in California to manage their deliveries. At the San Francisco Marin Food Bank, they successfully use OnFleet to communicate delivery information to their volunteer drivers, optimize routes to limit travel time and delivery maximums, and facilitate planning. Additionally, they use robocalling software called DialMyCalls that can utilize multilingual scripts to contact recipients of the deliveries to let them know when they will be receiving their food.¹

In collaboration with an area tech company, Central California Food Bank was able to develop a Salesforce-based platform to manage requests for home delivery. This platform allowed the food bank to better manage sign-ups as well as the logistics of deliveries that they handled in-house.¹

Maintain Lines of Communication

The food bank's ability to efficiently communicate with both the clients and the drivers appears to be critical to the success of some programs. The Austin Public Health (APH) office in partnership with the Central Texas Food Bank, has set up a phone number specifically for their Amazon Flex drivers to contact if they encounter any issues with finding a participant's home. The food bank reported that "The drivers will call APH and the staff will either have notes about the participant's address, or will call the participant for additional information on locating their address."

Additionally, at the Northern Illinois Food Bank they have four staff members trained to address concerns that specifically arise during the delivery times. This has allowed for an effective line of communication between the drivers, the food bank, and the clients that supports the programs' ability to troubleshoot effectively during a delivery. In their email about their program, they reported that their "... process is a bit unique, so orienting shoppers to delivery has been a challenge. However, continual communication and adjusting how and when we share new information has been our best way to address this orientation challenge."

Food Bank Responses (provided by email)

Community Crisis Services and Food Bank

Iowa City, IA

<https://builtbycommunity.org/food-delivery/>

1. **How long has your program been running?** Since March 2020. We started our Delivery program at the beginning of COVID. We originally started the program because it wasn't safe to facilitate mobile pantries and have people crowding at those sites. But we also knew people were in need.
2. **How is it funded?** We receive some funding from our county funding, that also funds our Mobile Pantry program. Otherwise, the delivery program comes out of our annual food bank budget at this time.
3. **How do people sign up?** People can call in or sign up online on our website.
4. **Who is eligible? And do you verify eligibility?** Anyone in Johnson County is eligible. No, we do not verify eligibility for any of our food distribution services.
5. **How frequent are your deliveries?** We deliver Tuesday through Friday
6. **Who is your program's target population?** Anyone in need, and lives in Johnson County
7. **Where does the food come from?** Some of our food comes from community donations, Table to Table (a partner organization that does food rescue) and then some is purchased.
8. **How do you choose what goes into the box?** We have a list of staple items that go in each box (canned fruit, canned vegetables, pasta or rice, cereal and beans) We have these items on the floor in our food bank continually because we keep things in categories. Every day our order list is updated to include any produce, dairy or specialty items we may have in stock to offer to clients.
9. **How is the delivery made?** We have 1 or 2 volunteers each day that sign up to help. If we don't have volunteers for that particular day then staff will take the deliveries.
10. **Are you matching drivers based on location?** As best we can, yes.
11. **Who manages the logistics of the deliveries?** Our Mobile Pantry Supervisor and Food Bank Coordinator take care of all of the planning and routing of our deliveries.
12. **UWKC has faced many challenges including struggles to meet demand and specific dietary requests, difficulties in making sure deliveries run smoothly, among many others.** Being aware of what the client needs is truly helpful in this process, however, the struggle comes when we can't find access to those foods or not having them when the client needs them. Working together with HACAP and other organizations has helped with this in a way but it is something that we strive to improve all of the time. Having a dedicated position to the program has helped immensely in making sure that things run smoothly and efficiently. We still have challenges within the program that we continue to work on.
13. **What challenges has your delivery program faced? And how have you addressed them?**
 - a. The challenge of personalizing each delivery to meet the client needs as well as getting volunteers for deliveries. We can only offer what we have access to, which sometimes isn't at all what the person needs. If we have clients who call regularly we can watch the inventory coming in for specific dietary needs and set those items aside for the clients in need.
 - b. As for delivery volunteers, it seems that just in the last month or so we have had a steady amount of volunteers. Recruiting volunteers in any of the programs has not been easy during the pandemic. Because we live in a college town and all classes are back in person, I believe this has brought in the bulk of our delivery volunteers at this time.
14. **Are there any other challenges your program faced in getting started or continuing to run?** We started the program during the pandemic, which brought us many challenges. However, the biggest challenge has been recruiting volunteers.

- 1. About your delivery program:** We partner with Austin Public Health (APH) Neighborhood Services Unit and Amazon for our Home Delivery Program, where participants receive a monthly box of shelf-stable groceries, via contactless delivery, directly to their home. APH Neighborhood Services Unit provides the caseload management, including screening and enrolling participants into the program. The Central Texas Food Bank sources, packages, and delivers the food boxes to one of the APH Neighborhood Centers. We also provide program management and trained volunteers to assist APH staff with the Amazon pick-ups at the Neighborhood Center. Amazon routes the deliveries, recruits and schedules drivers, and then the drivers pick up the boxes from the Neighborhood Center and deliver to each participant.
- 2. How long has your program been running?** We launched our Home Delivery program on June 1st, 2021.
- 3. How is it funded?** Amazon donates their delivery services through their Community Delivery Program and this website provides an overview of their efforts: <https://www.aboutamazon.com/impact/helpforhunger>
- 4. How do people sign up?** Interested individuals contact one of the six APH Neighborhood Centers to find out if they are eligible and/or to enroll in the program.
- 5. Who is eligible? And do you verify eligibility?** The program is open to Travis County residents who are in need of food assistance, have barriers to attending other food distributions, and have children or older adults in the households or are individuals with a disability, veterans, or active military members. The APH Neighborhood Services Unit staff go through the eligibility with the interested individual and all information is self declared.
- 6. How frequent are your deliveries?** We currently deliver 3 days a week and participants receive their delivery once a month on the delivery day/week they are enrolled for (example 1st Tuesday of each month).
- 7. Who is your program's target population?** Eligibility listed above.
- 8. Where does the food come from?** The Central Texas Food Bank sources the shelf-stable food boxes pre-built from a vendor.
- 9. How do you choose what goes into the box?** The box contents were pre-determined (we provide them for programming outside of home deliveries as well) and each box contains shelf-stable groceries such as oatmeal, pasta, dried beans, canned protein, and canned fruits and vegetables.
- 10. How is the delivery made?** Amazon Flex drivers are recruited and scheduled by Amazon and assigned to a route of participants.
- 11. Are you matching drivers based on location?** Amazon routes the deliveries and the assignments take location and vehicle size into consideration.
- 12. Who manages the logistics of the deliveries?** Amazon manages the delivery logistics.
- 13. What you've learned so far:** Partnering with Austin Public Health Neighborhood Services Unit and Amazon has been so important to our success, as there are a lot of moving pieces to providing home deliveries and each organization is responsible for the piece of the program that they do best. Additionally, incorporating volunteers into this work to help support APH with Amazon Pickup Days (when the Amazon drivers pick up from the Neighborhood Center for their routes) has been a great additional support to the program.
- 14. UWKC has faced many challenges including struggles to meet demand and specific dietary requests, difficulties in making sure deliveries run smoothly, among many others. What challenges has your delivery program faced? And how have you addressed them?** One challenge we originally faced was the fact that our program is different from other deliveries the drivers were used to picking up for and figuring out the best way to communicate our expectations and protocols. To address this, we created a handout that each driver receives upon arrival for quick "do's and don't's" for the day. Additionally, APH Neighborhood Services Unit set up a designated phone number for the drivers to be able to call for assistance locating participants' addresses. The drivers will call APH and the staff will either have notes about the participant's address, or will call the participant for additional information on locating their address.
- 15. Are there any other challenges your program faced in getting started or continuing to run?** I think the main challenge when getting started was not knowing what to expect, so this required flexibility and adapting as we went, for example, incorporating the handouts for drivers and having a phone number for them to call for address

assistance. What helped with this was that we started small, with only one delivery day per week when we first launched and then gradually grew to three delivery days per week.

16. **What type of systems or processes have you developed that have worked well?** We have developed many written materials to streamline activities and expectations, such as an enrollment guide for APH staff to use when screening and enrolling individuals, a guide for overseeing the Amazon pick-ups, a handout for the drivers, a welcome letter that participants receive in their box for FAQs, etc.

Northern Illinois Foodbank Geneva, IL

<https://solvehungertoday.org/get-help/my-pantry-express/>

1. **How long has your program been running?** My Pantry Express: 2.5-3 years, Delivery through My Pantry Express: 6.5 months (since May 2021)
2. **How is it funded?** DoorDash is offering the deliveries as gifts, Northern Illinois Food Bank purchases the food or receives the food donated from our generous donors
3. **How do people sign up?** Shoppers visit our website: www.mypantryexpress.org and choose a delivery site.
4. **Who is eligible? And do you verify eligibility?** Anyone who attests to being in need of food assistance is eligible to shop with My Pantry Express. To receive delivery, a shopper must live within a 10 mile radius of our delivery location. To attest to being in need of food assistance, a shopper checks a checkbox on the website to access the shopping capabilities. To confirm the delivery location eligibility, we check all addresses against a formula that confirms distance.
5. **How frequent are your deliveries?** We offer delivery at least once a week at each delivery location. We currently have four (4) delivery locations.
6. **Who is your program's target population?** My Pantry Express has a general goal to increase access to food assistance to those who need it, regardless of demographics. Depending on the location, each delivery location has a different focus. Among our target populations are veterans, folks with disabilities, those without reliable transportation, and busy parents.
7. **Where does the food come from?** The food is a mix of purchased and donated products.
8. **How do you choose what goes into the box?** My Pantry Express is referred to as "Client Choice". This means that we have a menu of items that shoppers choose from, and each shopper chooses what they want from that menu in their delivery. We have another program at Northern Illinois Food Bank that also offers delivery but is not client choice. This program always offers two boxes. One box is always full of perishable items: as many fruits, vegetables, milk, and protein as they can safely fit in the box and as they have on hand for the number of deliveries, they are doing that day. The second box is mostly staple items: canned fruit, canned vegetables, rice, pasta, etc. These are reflective of the items most often sought after by both our other food pantries and our shoppers in general. These are also the shelf stable items that we most readily have in stock.
9. **How is the delivery made?** We supply DoorDash with the delivery information and they upload the information into their system. We then pack all of the dry items into boxes labeled with the individual's name and order number at our main warehouse in Geneva, IL. We also pack as many of the perishable items as the distribution will need into coolers or on pallets and ship the entire order (perishables and dry orders) to the location where DoorDash will delivery from. At that location, we pack the perishables into boxes and label them with the name and order of number of the individual or family that they are going to. We then match the perishable box with the dry box and wait for Dashers (DoorDash drivers) to arrive. As Dashers arrive, we check off each order to make sure that each one gets picked up. We then invoice all of the product out at the end of the distribution.
10. **Are you matching drivers based on location?** We do not match drivers, DoorDash takes care of all of those logistics. Their system routes drivers based upon proximity of deliveries.
11. **Who manages the logistics of the deliveries?** DoorDash manages the logistics of deliveries from our locations to the shoppers.
12. **What you've learned so far: UWKC has faced many challenges including struggles to meet demand and specific dietary requests, difficulties in making sure deliveries run smoothly, among many others. What**

challenges has your delivery program faced? And how have you addressed them? In the charitable food network, dietary requests can be difficult. We have an opportunity to help meet that need by offering shoppers the opportunity to choose what they want in their order. However, because we do not list specific brands or sizes, etc. due to continually changing donations and purchases, this isn't a perfect system. It is helpful for many people though. We always accept shopper feedback and see what we can do to accommodate requests in our menu. When possible, we also try to label items as "low-sodium" or "gluten free" if we happen to have a large stock of those items.

Our system for deliveries using DoorDash has our deliveries running fairly smoothly. We do have four (4) different people trained on how to address concerns during deliveries. This helps as we have to troubleshoot with dashers or shoppers during a delivery.

Our process is a bit unique so orienting shoppers to delivery has been a challenge. However, continual communication and adjusting how and when we share new information has been our best way to address this orientation challenge.

13. **Are there any other challenges your program faced in getting started or continuing to run?** Much like everyone else, supply chain has impacted the things we normally offer. The other large challenge that our program has faced is growth. We grew very quickly without a solid process and so we struggle sometimes with making sure everything is ready at the correct time.
14. **What type of systems or processes have you developed that have worked well?** Our team is very proficient at excel so we developed a couple of spreadsheets in addition to the one that DoorDash gave us and then we modified the one DoorDash gave us to make sure that it worked for us. Because this is a manual process to move the information from our system to theirs at the moment, using Google forms and spreadsheets saves us a lot of time and energy!

References:

1. Jensen D. *Promising Practices: Scaling Delivery and No Contact Models for Food Assistance to Older Adults During the COVID-19 Crisis*. https://www.cafoodbanks.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Promising%20Practices_Scaling%20Food%20Delivery%20for%20Seniors_FINAL.pdf
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