

Connecting Guests to Additional Resources

Food assistance programs provide an opportune setting to connect guests to non-food resources.

What does connection mean?

People come to food assistance programs for food, but there are other factors rooted in poverty and systemic inequities that make it hard for households to be food secure. We know that it takes more than food to end hunger. Food assistance programs can offer wrap-around services to help build pathways out of food insecurity. Here are ideas for connecting guests to additional community resources.



The importance of community partnerships

A food assistance program doesn't have to be an expert on community resources. You can collaborate with existing community programs and services to support your guests. Get creative. Think of additional services that you think will be helpful for the people you serve. Ask your guests what services they would like to connect with. You can start slowly with referrals to one or two programs and then grow over time.

Examples of community partners:

- 211
- Schools
- Community action agencies
- Community health centers
- Husky/Medicaid
- Libraries
- Police department
- Department of social services

Examples of community resources that will create a holistic environment for food assistance programs:

Social Services

- Coaching and case management
- Social work
- Active referral services
- Connection to SNAP and/or WIC
- Housing and utility services



Health Care

- Connection to insurance
- Mobile health services
- Mental health counseling/support
- Substance use counseling/support



Youth & Family Services

- Childcare
- Parenting groups
- Youth summer meal programs
- Afterschool programs



Classes & Workshops

- Cooking/nutrition
- Job skills
- GED
- Finance
- Computer training



Ways to connect



Wrap-around services

Client-centered services offered on-site at the food assistance program to meet guests where they are.

Examples:

- Case management
- Mental health &/or addiction counseling
- Housing counseling
- Job coaching

Active referrals

A staff/volunteer at the food assistance program directly connects a guest to another organization to receive additional services. The staff/ volunteer also follows up with the client to see if the referral was successful.

Examples:

- Worker calls the other organization with the client and makes the appointment
- Worker introduces client to a representative of another organization.

Passive referrals

The food assistance program has information available about additional services offered in the community.

Examples:

- Staff or volunteer provides a list of resources and guest must call on their own.
- TV or bulletin board displays information on other resources.

Tips to start connecting to community resources:

- **Gather information.** You can start by visiting 211ct.org from United Way to become knowledgeable about programs and services in your local area. Contact programs that are most needed by your guests and speak with their staff so you can provide a “warm referral” that is more personalized. Discuss eligibility criteria and ways to collaborate.
- **Set up an area of your food assistance program as a Resource Center** to provide information and referrals to connect guests to other services. Identify at least one staff member or volunteer who is knowledgeable about these services and can offer warm referrals. If possible, provide a computer and printer on-site so people can search for services online and enroll in programs.
- **Invite local community agencies and organizations** to your food assistance program to provide information and enroll people in their programs. A representative from another organization can set up a table at your site on a food distribution day and offer services on-site.
- **Offer classes and workshops** on-site at your food assistance program to provide one-stop shopping for guests.