

PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT: BUILDING FOOD BANK EFFICIENCIES AND BEST PRACTICES

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT



Project Management Toolkit: Building Food Bank Efficiencies and Best Practices

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview 4

Food Banks Participating in the Process Review 5

Best Practices 6

Templates for Efficient Food Bank Processes 8

Learning at Kaplan University..... 9

Overview

Graduate students enrolled in Kaplan University's School of Business and Management recently took on assignments within two courses—Strategic Project Management and Project Cost/Schedule Monitoring/Controlling—to examine efficiencies and best practices for distribution processes at food banks across America.

These students studied food banks in their local communities, analyzed their operations, and identified ways to build efficiencies into the distribution of food to residents in need during the upcoming holiday season. They applied the lessons learned from classes to generate this report under the direction of Kaplan University Professor Jeff Tyler, PMP.

This report, *Project Management Toolkit: Building Food Bank Efficiencies and Best Practices*, includes the students' observations and recommendations based on project management principles, best practices they found at the food banks they studied, and sample templates to aid food banks with project planning and budgeting.

In addition to sharing the students' insights with the food banks they studied, Kaplan University will distribute this report to hundreds of food banks around the country in the Feeding America network, providing a valuable resource to maximize food distribution during this peak holiday season.

Food Banks Participating in the Process Review

Kaplan University's online students live in a diverse array of communities across the country and were able to engage a variety of food banks that serve a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas. The participating food banks included:

- Idaho Food Bank in Boise, Lewiston, and Pocatello, ID
- YWCA Eastern Area Food Pantry in Batavia, OH
- Bread for the City in Washington, DC
- Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina in Charlotte, NC
- Maryland Food Bank in Baltimore, MD

These nonprofit food banks vary in size and scope. However, the paramount goal for each one is to maximize the use and effectiveness of its facility and to aid as many people in need as possible. Many food banks have contracts with local, state, and federal governments, or collaborate with local nonprofits, churches, civic organizations, and businesses large and small. The student assessments focused strictly on food collection and distribution processes and projects. For the purpose of this assignment, any food preparation or hot meal service was not reviewed, though many of the same project management practices are relevant for those operations.

Best Practices

- 1. Provide clear organization chart and project guidelines.** Each food bank must have a clear organization chart and project guidelines, so that all staff and volunteers understand their roles, responsibilities, and reporting relationships. Many food banks, especially smaller ones, could benefit from hiring project managers to organize special events or initiatives. If the food bank is too small or resources too limited, managers could train volunteers with the appropriate skills to perform project management tasks.
- 2. Train volunteers.** Program directors should train more seasoned volunteers to take on less critical assignments and tasks, such as directing and leading the food supply to its destination in the pantry/storage/warehouse or organizing the pantry. By reducing the need to directly oversee all tasks, directors may spend more time on specialized and management responsibilities.
- 3. Motivate staff.** As nonprofits, most food banks pay modest or low wages. Thus, it is essential to find ways to motivate staff and ensure smooth operations. This may come in the form of awards, recognition in organization publications or on the website, signage, or acknowledgement at meetings and events. The food bank could also provide perks, such as gifts or services donated from local businesses.
- 4. Prepare for peak seasons.** Many food banks have seasonal high and low periods. To maximize a food bank's budget, it is important to tie volunteer recruitment and placement during summer months when food is in high demand with children home from school and during winter months when shelters are full and major holidays are celebrated.
- 5. Consider succession planning.** All food banks are encouraged to have succession planning to establish a culture of leadership development and create a pipeline of internal leaders to ensure a smooth transition if a senior administrator takes a leave of absence, resigns, or retires.
- 6. Digitize.** Organizations still utilizing paper-based processes need to convert to computer-based systems. This will create significant efficiencies in the administration and logistics of food distribution. Furthermore, it makes the process of providing reports to city, state, and federal governments, and private or corporate donors more efficient. It may also eliminate roadblocks, such as lost paperwork, duplication of applications, and backlogged order forms.
- 7. Educate the public.** Organizations should have a robust public education program. First, it informs people about the food bank's purpose, the need for food donations, and how to make food, funding, or other resource contributions. Second, an education program informs potential food bank clients about the organization's services and how clients can access the services.
- 8. Rethink marketing strategy.** Food banks are encouraged to update and rethink their marketing strategies. They may want to consider which media—radio, television, cable, magazines, or newspapers—has the greatest reach in their communities. In addition, food banks should determine which media will provide public service announcements or other donated advertising, learn if local outlets will write or air stories about their efforts, and assess if there is a reason to pay for advertising. Food banks should also determine the best ways to leverage new media sources and the Internet for promotion.

- 9. Plan for the year.** Using project management tools to map out scheduling and budgets may help determine the feasibility of proposed projects for annual planning purposes. Food banks should plan their projects for the entire year to utilize their resources most efficiently. During tough economic times, project management tools are especially helpful for managing limited resources by making historical information about past project work more easily accessible. This mapping enables food banks to identify opportunities to consolidate or use resources for multiple simultaneous projects.
- 10. Staff based on project requirements.** Project duration is based on event size and resources. Food resource managers should determine the time and manpower required for each project to help make scheduling and hiring more efficient. For example, Idaho Food Bank uses 3.5 person hours per event to schedule and plan, deliver food to a food bank agency, and sort and package donations. Idaho Food Bank finds that it takes 3.5 hours per pound of food donated for the sorting and packaging process. A good rule of thumb for all work durations is 4 hours per pound of food.
- 11. Synchronize food and volunteers.** Coordinate the food truck arrival times with the availability of community volunteers and staff. This resource management strategy enables food banks to utilize volunteers most effectively for food unloading and storage.
- 12. Use portfolio management.** Utilizing the portfolio management model enables projects to be categorized based upon priority, allocation, and sequence. For example, numerous Thanksgiving food drives can be set to a single type of Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) that addresses each food drive, regardless of resources or locations. This portfolio of food drives can be tracked based on its commonality of purpose (portfolios) and use of common resources (programs).

Combining existing processes into a single project management plan leading up to the holidays will increase efficiencies, therefore reducing stress and improving the organization in the process. The work breakdown structure templates that accompany this report are valuable resources to begin implementing the model.

Templates for Efficient Food Bank Processes

In addition to providing best practices, this report also includes templates to help food banks manage processes over the course of a year. The consolidated templates are scalable to larger and smaller food banks and can be modified to account for the specific circumstances of each food bank's food drive project.

FOOD DRIVE PROJECT WORKBOOK: WORK BREAKDOWN STRUCTURE TEMPLATES

- The **High-Level Work Breakdown Structure** (WBS) outlines the food drive scope, including major tasks or activities required for a successful food drive.
- The **Activity List** illustrates how to break down major tasks into smaller activities and work packages that can be applied in the form of hours worked.
- The **WBS** or fully decomposed WBS shows a generic set of tasks, subtasks, and work packages developed as a result of breaking down the high-level activities of a food drive.
- The **Network Diagram** shows how to sequence the major activities in order to see what activities must be completed before other activities can begin and which activities can be conducted at the same time as other activities.
- The **Duration Estimate** is a calculation sheet of proposed workers that might conduct the different activities at the lowest level of the WBS (work packages). This work is entered into the cells corresponding to the workers' job and the work package. The sheet will tally the totals for each major activity, each skill, and the total amount of time it will take to conduct the food drive.
- The **Cost Estimate** takes the information from the duration estimate and calculates the labor costs for the food drive (Note: Most food drives rely on unpaid volunteers. It is recommended that food banks use a \$10 flat rate to get a sense of the amount of work conducted and to help show where future food drives will need more labor.).
 - The **Gantt Chart** depicts the durations of the major activities in relation to each other.
- The **Material and Equipment Listing** lists the material (expendables) and equipment (durables) that will be needed for each work package. This allows for scheduling these commodities.
- The **Spend Plan** is developed based on when and where resources will be committed over time. This enables a baseline to be set for the expenditure of resources.

Learning at Kaplan University

For additional information about Kaplan University's School of Business and Management, visit <http://studentcenter.kaplan.edu/business/>.