



How to Run a Mobile Food Pantry A Guide for Partner Agencies

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Introduction

Hosting a Mobile Food Pantry distribution is a rewarding and efficient 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 **food** and grocery products. Our partner agencies are responsible for organizing and distributing the food in a safe and respectful manner. This guide is intended to help our agencies. If you do not already have a Mobile Pantry account, visit FeedWM.org/agencies/new.

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 or require them to provide labor or other services 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 a primary concern when choosing a site for a distribution. The preferred requirements for a host site are as follows:

- Large, paved area, no potholes or obstacles that can cause people to stumble
- Ability to block off distribution area to prevent cars from entering.
- If drive thru, identify how traffic should flow. Clearly mark areas where cars must be stopped (registration & loading)
- Ability to notify neighboring properties of distribution date and time

Scheduling a Distribution

Once you have an approved site and determined the size of the distribution, it is extremely important to schedule your distribution as soon as possible. Feeding America West Michigan has over 180 partner agencies hosting mobile distributions and dates and times are on a first-come, first-serve basis. To schedule your distribution, visit FeedWM.org/agencies/scheduling.

Mobile Food Pantry Distribution Sizes:

5,000 pounds: 100 households	15,000 pounds: 300 households
7,500 pounds: 150 households	20,000 pounds: 400 households
10,000 pounds: 200 households	30,000 pounds: 600 household

Conducting Community Outreach

To ensure good attendance at your Mobile Distribution, community outreach will be necessary. A sandwich board sign placed at the distribution site, 3 days prior, stating date and time of the is one way to inform the neighbors.

For Urban Areas: Target the immediate neighborhood; distribute flyers at churches, community centers, businesses and local agencies serving low-income populations (download sample at FeedWM.org/agencies/mobileflyer). Hand out flyers and/or post a sign at your site a day or two before the distribution. Many Partner Agencies, particularly churches, also use their building's changeable signage to announce the distribution.

For Rural Areas: In addition to the methods above, consider contacting local media — radio, newspaper, TV (modify the sample release at FeedWM.org/agencies/mobilepr) — as well as posting on social media. All upcoming distributions dates are available online at FeedWM.org/FindFood.

In all cases, include the criteria “need” in promotional materials; do **NOT** include the phrases “all are welcome”, “no questions asked”, or “free food,” as these terms are likely to bring people who don't need assistance. Please avoid the term “food truck” since these are commercial businesses selling prepared meals.

Recruiting Volunteers

Recruit 12-20 volunteers, and perhaps more for the largest distributions. Instruct your volunteers to dress for the weather and to wear closed-toe and closed-heel shoes. If you are concerned about liability, have them sign a waiver annually (FeedWM.org/agencies/waiver) and retain a copy of the waivers at your organization.

Suggested Volunteer Roles

- **Coordinator:** 1 volunteer/staff member with a cell phone takes the lead. Please make sure this cell number is listed when you schedule your distribution. This is the only way we have to notify you if there is a problem. The coordinator can keep everyone on task and help assign the other roles.

- **Set-Up/Distribution:** 8-12 volunteers set up tables, fill tables with food, inspect food for quality, put bulk foods in bags, and distribute food to recipients.
- **Carriers:** 2-5 volunteers help elderly and disabled recipients carry food.
- **Registration:** 1-2 volunteers register recipients— pre-train these volunteers if possible.

Sometimes your volunteers will be people who also need food assistance. If possible, they should get what they need at a different distribution. If this is not an option, ensure they do not receive preferential treatment — they can't go first in line, get more food than other recipients, or have food reserved before their turn. At the same time, be clear that you are not requiring recipients to work to get food. For example:

- **Recipient/Volunteer Option 1:** Let your recipient/volunteers assist with the set-up phase of the process (setting up tables, bagging bulk food, etc.), then join the distribution line as recipients.
- **Recipient/Volunteer Option 2:** If you are serving recipients by number, reserve a set of number cards (for example, every tenth card) and distribute them randomly among your recipient/volunteers. This ensures that they will leave their regular duties to go through the line fairly and predictably.

Required Supplies

- 8-12 tables for registration and to display food (may increase for larger distributions)
- Gloves: work gloves for those unloading the truck and food-handling gloves for bagging produce
- Waterless hand sanitizer
- Pocket knives or box cutters
- Grocery bags for bagging produce (estimate quantity from menu)
- Registration materials (ex: pencils, clipboards, forms: FeedWM.org/agencies/reg)
- Cleaning supplies such as Clorox wipes to sanitize the tables before and after
- **Shopping Carts/Wagons:** Each household will receive approximately 50 pounds of food, so having shopping carts or wagons available to bring food to recipients' cars can be a big help. This is highly suggested, although not required.

Please consider the following supply/facility/activity suggestions as well:

Restrooms: As Mobile Food Pantry distributions may last up to two and a half hours including set-up and tear-down, your recipients and volunteers will appreciate having access to a bathroom.

Water: Hydration is important; make water (either cooler and cups or bottles) available for recipients and volunteers.

Number Cards: If you plan to host a weekly or monthly distribution, you may wish to use numbers. This eliminates the need to stay in line and reassure anyone worried about people cutting by printing number cards to hand out to recipients: FeedWM.org/agencies/numbers.

Additional Services and Pamphlet Distribution: You are allowed to have some wrap-around services represented at your distribution, such as additional staple food items, free services like community meals, blood pressure screenings, or information about federal benefits. You may NOT distribute political information. Religious information may be made available at a table separate from the distribution.

Anticipating Changes for Inclement Weather

For the summer months, make arrangements for water for volunteers and recipients. Also, it is beneficial to have a few chairs provided for people to sit down if they become overheated.

For the winter months, make arrangements to plow or shovel and salt your parking lot before the truck arrives.

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) or you cancel the distribution. We require at least 24 hours notice for Mobile Food Pantry cancellations, plan accordingly

POLICY: If you cancel with less than 24 hours notice, you will be assessed a \$100 fee; the fee is waived if you reschedule your distribution for an open time slot within 14 days of the original distribution or you request rescheduling but such a slot is not available. To cancel: Comstock Park: Mobile Pantry Coordinator, 616.389.6363; Benton Harbor: Branch Manager, 269.926.2646; Cadillac: Branch Manager, 231.779.0056.

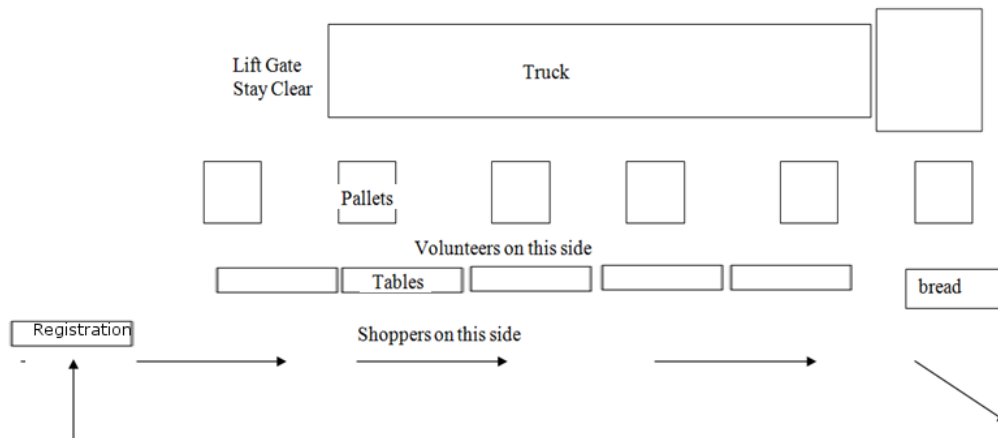
Distribution Day

The driver will arrive at least **thirty minutes** before the distribution. You and your volunteers should be onsite before the driver 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, give them an overview of how the event will proceed, provide them with some basic training on ways they should perform their tasks, and clean and stage your tables so you can quickly put them into place when the truck arrives.

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

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Vomiting | Sore throat with fever |
| Diarrhea | Uncovered, infected cuts or wounds |
| Jaundice (yellow skin or eye color) | Persistent cough or sneezing |

There are a variety of ways to set up a distribution, below is just one example



Drive-Thru Distribution: Sites serving lots of seniors and/or located in areas with deep cold/heavy snow may wish to recipients stay in their cars the whole time. In these instances, a Drive-Thru Mobile can be an option. Safety is of utmost importance. Clearly identify areas where cars should be placed in park, registration and loading of food. Follow these steps to ensure safety and efficiency:

- Registration person talks with the driver and assists them in registering. More than one family may be in the car and each family **MUST** sign in.
- Car moves forward to a designated area where volunteers load food into the vehicle.
- From there, move from car to car, then recipients pull up their car to the far end of the line of tables and volunteers load their box or portion from a shopping cart. Cars must be placed in PARK during loading.
- Safety cones and vests for volunteers are strongly advised.
- Consider having some pre-boxed food for people who do not have transportation.

Registering Recipients

TIP: Do not register recipients more than an hour before the scheduled distribution time, as this encourages people to show up very early. Registration forms are at FeedWM.org/agencies/reg. Use numbers if this becomes a problem.

Register and Serve All Who Attend: Be patient. Welcome recipients to the distribution, and be prepared to gently explain the process as it may be unfamiliar. If your organization is restricted to serving a particular demographic, you may reduce the likelihood that recipients falling outside those guidelines by making it clear in your outreach materials who your distribution is intended to serve (i.e. Veterans or Seniors). You **MAY NOT** turn away anyone in need. Turning people away — or even asking them to go last — would reflect poorly on your agency and is not consistent with Feeding America West Michigan’s values.

During registration is a good time to let recipients know when your next distribution is scheduled, and to inform that they can go through the line a second time after everyone has been served.

Do NOT turn away anyone in need while food is present.

Request Complete Contact Information: You may need to reassure some recipients that the main purpose of the registration process is to be able to contact them if there is a food recall. If they have no mailing address or phone number, write “N/A”. Zip codes **ARE** required. If a recipient needs a referral, encourage them to use FeedWM.org/FindFood or 2-1-1 (United Way) to find pantries and distributions closer to home.

Request “# in Household” and “Reason for Need”: Remind recipients that personal information remains anonymous, however certain demographic information such as zip code and number in household may be shared with funders.

Do Not Request Proof of Income: You may not require proof of income at distributions. Many recipients with middle class incomes find themselves in need due to medical expenses, caring for disabled or elderly family, and other factors.

Do Not Require ID: You may not require an ID. While reading an ID helps minimize spelling mistakes, you can side-step those barriers by allowing recipients to enter their own data, with your help to guide them through the prompts. Data entry on a computer or tablet may eliminate errors when you have a regularly scheduled distribution.

Serve Young Recipients: Older teenagers or supervised children may pick up for their family if they declare their parent is not available and they can provide complete registration information. Serving all clients, regardless of age or circumstance is a priority. Extra hospitality and consideration should be given to young recipients.

Recommendation – Serve Proxy Recipients: Recipients may ask to collect food for a friend or family member. You must have the recipient register the absent person or family. Some sites do place limits in for total number of households one individual can pick up for (or number of households per vehicle at drive-through), typically 2-3. It is recommended the absent recipient provide a written note (proxy).

Keeping People Safe

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

- Cars are not to block the parking lot entrance or exit.
- Recipients should wait in line out of traffic areas.
- All sites should be free of glass, litter, and obstacles that might cause a slip or fall.
- Children should be supervised at all times. Playing on or around the truck is **not** allowed. Climbing on or in the truck is **strictly prohibited**.
- Unsupervised children may **not** be used as volunteers for the distribution. Adults must be present to supervise and mentor children at all times.

Do not hesitate to **call the police** (9-1-1) 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.

It is our driver's role and duty to report any/all injuries and contact 9-1-1 if 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): elevate ≥ 6 " with tables, pallets.
- 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 touching produce that doesn't need to be peeled, and do not smoke around food.
- Change gloves as needed: when moving to a different bulk produce item or when soiled.
- Control time and temperature: keep cold food cold; put it away in less than 2 hours.
- If you have multiple pallets of a single cold product, keep extra(s) on the truck.
- Assign cold pallets to sites on the shaded side of the truck during the distribution.
- Working from a single cold pallet, leave the product stacked as long as possible.
- At the same time, keep cold pallets covered with a freezer blanket if provided.
- Avoid cross-contamination: each type of food should get its own spot; tables should be cleaned and sanitized before and after the distribution.
- Don't introduce hazards: Keep dogs out of the distribution area (except service animals).

Inspect items during distribution: 5% waste is expected when dealing with produce. Consult FMI.org/Consumer/FoodKeeper for code date and food storage guidelines. Be aware that we typically load extra pounds onto each Mobile Pantry to compensate for any spoiled product.

Spoiled Food

We don't issue financial credit for bad produce or other product. However, if the amount of food that was bad exceeds the extra pounds, you can report that loss to us in order to request additional bonus pounds for your next distribution. If you are concerned with the quality of food, please take a photograph and email to a staff member.

Unloading and Displaying Food

Coordinator Task: Determine how much food each recipient can take. Use the menu (provided by email or with driver) & guidelines:

Case-Counted Product: Estimate the number of cases of each product, and divide it by the number of households attending your distribution. Example: If you've got 160 cases of yogurt and 100 families, you can probably offer 2 full cases to each family (some families will often only want one or none and it ought to balance out).

Bulk Product: Take the poundage on the menu and divide by the number of households attending your distribution. Example: If you have 800 pounds of potatoes and expect 100 families, create 8-pound bags of potatoes. You will probably need to show volunteers a sample bag. You do not need to display all food options available. If you have both carrots and radishes but not enough of both, you can ask the recipient to choose which they'd prefer or only make one available at a time. **DO NOT overload tables.**

Distributing Food

Tip: Do not begin distributing food before the scheduled time. Recipients may come earlier in the future, which can be problematic if you use a business's or school's parking lot.

Coordinator Task – Prep Volunteers: When you are ready to begin, let your volunteers know, make sure they know their tasks and address any last-minute questions. Remind your volunteers to be friendly and good-natured so recipients feel at ease.

Some church groups say a quick prayer with their volunteers at this point, which you are welcome to do if you are so inclined. You **MAY NOT** require recipients to join you, so we do not recommend even inviting them to participate as it risks giving the impression they must.

Coordinator Task – Prep Recipients: Once everything is in order, make an announcement to your recipients that you are ready to start the distribution. If you are using numbers, call 5-10 at a time.

Driver Activities: Expect our driver to help break down cardboard, to take care of trash and food waste, and to move pallets if needed throughout the distribution. Our driver is not permitted to help carry food for recipients for liability reasons, nor can they intercede in arguments. You or your designee would be responsible for settling any disagreements among recipients or volunteers.

Wrapping Up

Coordinator Task: Collect paperwork from the driver. Sign and return one copy of the invoice for the items received that day on the Mobile Pantry. Do not pay the driver. You will also receive a second copy of the invoice for your records (whereas your Billing Contact will receive a statement by mail at month end to settle up), a feedback form, and a paper copy of the menu.

Leftover Food: Let recipients go through the line again. If the crowd has largely dispersed, assemble a few boxes with a complete assortment of the remaining products. That way you can easily serve late arrivals while packing up the rest to be transported to its next destination.

POLICY: Leftovers must be sent back to Feeding America West Michigan on the truck or transported to an approved designated Partner Agency. Some Mobile Pantry hosts maintain their own storage area (which would already have received approval by this point), while others designate a pantry or other program already affiliated with Feeding America West Michigan which follows the required food safety and distribution practices..

Store Records: You must retain registration records for 3 years. You will be notified by email if there is a food recall. It is your responsibility to contact food recipients.

Consider Keeping Electronic Records to Simplify Reporting & Responding to Recalls: You can type registration data into a spreadsheet or database either directly or from paper registration forms after the distribution. For repeat visits, you can similarly log them directly or alphabetize and print your complete roster to check off returning families at future distributions.

Analyze Attendance: If you need to adjust the size of your truck for the next distributions, send the new size (preferably with your agency name, number, and upcoming distribution dates) please contact Agency Relations at mobiles@feedwm.org.

POLICY: Identify a safe place to store your confidential registration forms for the next 36 months that will be accessible in case of a food recall. Records are mandatory and if not collected and retained could result in closure of a Partner Agency's account. Similarly, you will need to retain your invoices for 12 months.

Share Feedback and Request Changes: Any problems or concerns should be noted on the feedback form ([FeedWM.org/agencies/feedback](https://www.feedwm.org/agencies/feedback)) or you may contact a staff member directly. You can also comment on our drivers' adherence to our Standards of Conduct if needed (see [FeedWM.org/agencies/Conduct](https://www.feedwm.org/agencies/Conduct)).

Online Resources

- Flyer - FeedWM.org/agencies/mobileflyer
- Feedback Form - FeedWM.org/agencies/feedback
- Food Keeper (Food Safety) - FMI.org/Consumer/FoodKeeper
- Find Food - FeedWM.org/FindFood
- Press Release - FeedWM.org/agencies/mobilepr
- Registration Forms - FeedWM.org/agencies/reg
- Registration Number - FeedWM.org/agencies/numbers
- Scheduling Form - FeedWM.org/agencies/scheduling
- Standards of Conduct - FeedWM.org/agencies/conduct
- Volunteer Waiver - FeedWM.org/agencies/mobilewaiver



Training Evaluation

Agency Relations
Training

This form serves as proof of training for Mobile and Food Safety training. The completed form will be placed in the Agency file.

Training Course: Mobile Food Distribution Date: _____

Agency Name: _____ Agency # _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

Print Representative Name(s) receiving this training: _____

The above agency representative has completed the training specified above. Feedback on this training is as follows:

- 1. Circle method of learning Self-study / Workshop
- 2. Circle level of topic knowledge prior to training: Unsure Comfortable Confident
- 3. Circle level of topic knowledge after training: Unsure Comfortable Confident
- 4. Was the content clear? Yes / No
- 5. Did the training meet your goals? Yes / No

Comments: _____

6. What topics should be included in future training? _____

7. Recommendations to enhance this training _____

Agency Representative Signature(s):

Return completed forms at end of training or mail to:
Feeding America West Michigan
Agency Relations
864 West River Center Dr
Comstock Park MI 49321
or Fax (616) 784-3255