



community food centres
CANADA good food is just the beginning

GOOD FOOD PRINCIPLES

1. TAKING ACTION FROM THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE SYSTEMIC — FOOD ACCESS, FOOD SKILLS, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The poverty and food issues we see manifested in low-income communities have multi-faceted and complex causes and solutions, and there is thus power in individual-level to systemic-level approaches. We believe that all people have the right to the basics of a dignified life: a decent income, housing and employment, access to healthy food. Together we need to fight for these rights and create opportunities for those affected to make their voices heard. Until we achieve these goals, we can work to help meet basic needs in the short term and to maximize the choices available to people by providing them with skills that enable them to choose, grow, and prepare good food. Offering programs that span the range of access, skills, and engagement on food and hunger creates relevance and multiple points of connection, while creating the potential for a critical mass of staff and programs.

Examples:

- Creating consensus among a range of organizational stakeholders (from board to staff) that systemic action is necessary to create change on food and poverty issues, and needs to be pursued at all levels of the organization (e.g. via recruitment and training processes)
- Creating mechanisms for staff, volunteers, and participants to reflect and take action on policy issues
- Introducing new food programs in the areas of access, skills, and engagement to enhance the range of programs
- Designing program mix to hit a balance of breadth of impact vs. depth of reach (i.e. programs such as meal programs that meet immediate needs of larger numbers of people alongside skills and engagement programs that allow for some participants to go deeper in areas that they wish to)
- Having a minimum number of programs and staff to start creating efficiencies, synergies, and cross-pollination
- Using program planning procedures to encourage the expression of multidimensional objectives vis-a vis access, skills, and engagement within each program

2. BELIEVING AND INVESTING IN THE POWER OF GOOD FOOD

We believe good food has the power to build health, connect people, and inspire people to become engaged in issues that matter to them. We strive to make good food a priority and to provide food through our programs that is delicious, healthy, sustainably produced, and pleasurable to eat.

Examples:

- Introducing a healthy food policy
- Increasing the amount of healthy food in hampers, meals, or programs
- Rejecting donations of unhealthy or sub-standard food
- Fundraising and building budget lines for healthy food
- Purchasing local food
- Purchasing sustainably-produced food
- Working to understand community members' food preferences, and to take them into account in offering food that is both delicious and nutritious

3. CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT OF RESPECT AND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

We believe that respect — for the inherent value, assets, and potential to contribute of all people — should underpin all of our work. Thus we strive to avoid the signs, symbols, and procedures that contribute to the stigma often experienced by people attending food programs in charitable organizations, and to positively communicate our respect for all participants through respectful procedures and inviting community involvement. We believe that people are healthiest and happiest when they are making their own choices, meeting their own needs, and contributing to their communities. We strive to empower those with lived experience of hunger and poverty with a platform to speak up against these issues and help others in the community who are struggling with them too. In addition, inviting community involvement breaks down the binary between the 'givers' and 'receivers' of charity so dominant in many emergency food programs.

Examples:

- Eliminating judgmental or intrusive means testing
- Creating procedures to eliminate lineups and/or maximize food choice available in programs
- Creating and posting policies that affirm respect and welcome diversity, along with complaints procedures
- Ensuring that programs have adequate numbers of trained staff to enforce inclusive, respectful policies and procedures, and to ensure that volunteers are adequately overseen to reflect them
- Investing in renovations or physical improvements to enhance quality of participants' experience in the space and to reflect respect

- Demonstrating respect for cultural and other diversity through programs and hiring practices
Charging staff with incorporating strong consultation and leadership development opportunities in each program
- Creating places within the organization where community leadership is foregrounded (e.g. boards, peer leadership programs, advisory committees, staff)
- Ensuring that staff (and where possible) volunteers are grounded in an understanding of marginalization, discrimination, and anti-oppression principles

4. MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY'RE AT

We work to meet people where they are at by recognizing and striving to meet the needs of participants at multiple levels in ways that are relevant to their actual circumstances. By recognizing that people's skills and goals are diverse and that many bring their own assets to the table, in all areas we work with people toward self-identified change, without judging or preaching. We work to ensure that there is as much pleasure and value in the process of reaching individual and community goals as there is in reaching the outcome sought.

Examples:

- Providing supports, where necessary, to recognize daily struggles of program participants (e.g. providing meals, food vouchers, hampers, or food at events, meetings, and in programs)
- Maintaining a program mix that strives for both breadth and depth of impact, to have both wide relevance and deeper impact for those that choose to get further involved
- Providing facilitation and different levels of involvement to enable people who experience barriers, e.g. of mental health or addiction, to be involved in programs
- Surveying participants to discover more about their tastes, needs, or priorities and to understand their interest in / response to programs
- Maintaining minimum attendance numbers and questioning or re-considering programs when numbers consistently fall below
- Working with program participants to identify a range of objectives and measures of success in each program, from the short- to the longer-term
- Providing opportunities to share food and socialize in programs
- Naming and celebrating successes

5. AIMING HIGH FOR OUR ORGANIZATIONS AND OUR COMMUNITY

Volunteers are an important part of our work but cannot sustain the entire sector — private philanthropy and government must also play a role in supporting organizations like ours to be properly staffed and funded to create impact, to operate in accordance with best practices in our sector, and to ensure that consistent and transparent policies are followed. To this end we are committed to valuing our staff members and offering sustainable and rewarding employment. To stay accountable, we fulfill our commitments to our supporters by holding ourselves to a high standard of performance, and measuring and communicating our impact.

Examples:

- Having a strategic plan and/or clear set of strategic objectives for the organization; integrating these into regular program planning and review procedures; and measuring all new programs and funding opportunities against them
- Conducting research on current best practices in the program field
- Regularly measuring and communicating program impacts; charging all staff with some responsibility for program evaluation
- Creating program logic models to ensure that programs have a coherent theory of change
- Developing and striving to resource the staffing plan necessary to offer, at a minimum, respectful programs, and further, to offer programs that deliver a range of impacts in the area of food access, skills, and engagement
- Investing in the fundraising function, where possible, and including it in board and staff workplans
- Offering staff reasonable compensation, benefits, and flexible work arrangements
- Working to create an organizational culture that is healthy, collegial, supportive, and invites staff self-determination
- Sharing our expertise with other organizations