



The Free Food Supply

Pantries get most of their food from the local Food Bank and food rescue organizations. **Community donations** can be most useful to directly fill gaps or to allow pantries to **fill gaps** by purchasing needed items.

MAKING USEFUL FOOD PANTRY DONATIONS

BEST ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- Donate money to the organization on a regular basis. Consistent donations are most impactful because the pantry can plan around them.

BETTER ★ ★ ★

- Donate money once or occasionally.
- Donate gift cards for grocery stores. Pantries can use these to buy food or choose to give them out to families who may need extra help.

GOOD ★

- Arrange a high-quality, convenient donation.
- Ask the pantry what foods they want and donate those items. Items a pantry might need to buy, such as cooking oil, coffee, and spices, are usually good donation items.
- Bring the items to the pantry at a time that is convenient for them. If you have multiple kinds of foods, try to sort the items into categories beforehand so they are easy for pantry staff to organize.



4 SUPPLY LINES FOR PANTRIES

FROM FOOD BANKS

- 1 GREATER BOSTON FOOD BANK (GBFB)**
75-98% of food offered by pantries comes from GBFB, depending on the pantry and season. This includes many staple foods like pasta, beans, potatoes, apples, frozen meat, and peanut butter.

DIRECT SUPPLY TO FOOD PANTRIES

- 2 RESCUED FOOD** Organizations like Food For Free, Food Link, Spoonfuls, and Boston Area Gleaners rescue excess food from grocery stores and farms.
- 3 PURCHASED FOOD** Pantries may use money from their organization's budget to buy food from the GBFB and other sources. Funding can come from **grants, private monetary donations, and state budget earmarks**.
- 4 DIRECT DONATIONS** Some pantries receive **regular food donations** from **local businesses**, ex. leftover bread. **Food drives and individual donations** provide a small amount of food to pantries annually.

COMMUNITY FRIDGES

Community Fridges offer a **different model** than pantries. They can be especially useful as a **supplement** to more reliable resources, as a tool to **support a mutual aid approach** to food access, and as a way to **repurpose rescued or extra food**.

Somerville has several community fridges. These outdoor fridges are accessible to anyone at any time and are stocked and maintained by volunteers. **Right:** The Union Sq Community Fridge is stocked with produce from the Boston Area Gleaners.



Advantages and disadvantages of community fridges

Advantages	Disadvantages
• Enables access to people whose schedules do not line up with food pantry hours. • No paperwork needed for access. • People can get food anonymously. • Supplements other food resources. • Can reduce food waste. • Builds community. • Good site to communicate about other food resources.	• No tracking makes it hard to measure impact. • Inventory is unpredictable, making it an unreliable food source for users. • Volunteers are needed to regularly monitor inventory to keep it clean and well-stocked with good food. • Outdoor sites need special attention to electrical wiring and pest control. • Can be difficult to enforce food safety and sanitation guidelines.

Food pantries face a unique set of constraints, such as transportation, staff, funding, and storage space, that are different from those of food retailers and other types of non-profits.

Funding is the biggest constraint on pantry operations.

Each free food operation has additional constraints based on their space and organizational structure, but some of these can be addressed by providing more financial resources.

“ I can’t get some of the food because of storage. For example, I don’t have room for bottles of juice, yet it is often available [free] at the GBFB and people want it.

– Elizabeth Peabody House

“ If we don’t have enough staff on the floor, the line moves really slowly, and people have to wait.

– Project SOUP

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE FREE FOOD DISTRIBUTION:

- Assess and plan for long-term allocation of the City’s **community benefit funds** to support **consistent and longer-term application** for community partner food access programs.
- Continue to **leverage the participatory budgeting process** to support food security needs and innovations.
- Ensure that the **financial support** and **technical assistance** provided to food assistance programs address their **unique operational needs and challenges**.
- Coordinate and broaden Somerville Food Coalition messaging to **harness the community’s desire to volunteer and donate** to food security.

Want to learn more?
Find the full
assessment here:

