



WELLNESS PANTRY

Toolkit

In this toolkit you will learn about:

- Lowcountry Food Bank Wellness Pantry
- Achieving Wellness Designation
- Classification Information
- Pantry Coaching Support
- Key Strategies Within Each Focus Area
- Detailed Strategy Focus Area Sheets
- Definitions

Lowcountry Food Bank Wellness Pantry Overview

Wellness is defined as the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of whole health which is significantly influenced by physical, social, and cultural environments.

Lowcountry Food Bank (LCFB)'s vision is a nourished and thriving coastal South Carolina. We are on a mission to unite our community in the pursuit of equitable, dignified, and consistent access to food. To do this, our four strategic priorities are:

1. **Food for Today:** Meet today's need with a variety of nutritious food.
2. **Neighbor Focus:** Create a pantry environment with the neighbor at the center of the plan and process.
3. **Community Empowerment:** Offer supports that influence nutrition security through training, partnerships, and resource sharing.
4. **Organizational Excellence:** Maintain a healthy organization that can continue to support neighbors in accessing food.

These priorities outline LCFB's commitment to procure priority foods, engage with communities to develop long term solutions, and integrate education and empowerment so that the community has the opportunity to live healthy, active lives.

Wellness Pantry is a designation given to pantries that align with all four strategic priorities or as we will call them "focus areas" and support wellness within their communities.

While all partners have a focus on food for today, pantries that create neighbor-centered environments, maintain a balanced inventory of food, help connect neighbors with other resources that lead to long term success, and invest in the core of their organization are working towards a thriving community.

This designation is meant to communicate and celebrate your commitment. We encourage you to share your designation as you pursue funding, recruit volunteers, and engage with local community leaders.

Achieving the Wellness Pantry Designation

A Wellness Pantry assessment will be completed annually for all active pantries based on data gathered through LCFB platforms (e.g., CERES inventory software, annual renewal application, Learning Center course completion, and site visits). All pantries that receive the Wellness Pantry designation will be notified and will receive the Wellness Pantry toolkit.

All Wellness Pantry designees receive a Wellness Pantry window decal and will be announced and celebrated through Lowcountry Food Bank communication platforms as well as at our biennial Agency Conference.

Designation Criteria




Food for Today	Neighbor Focus	Community Empowerment	Organizational Excellence
Make at least 4 food groups available. Be open 4 or more times per month.	Have a choice pantry (at least modified choice level).	Order nutrition materials from the shopping list.	At least 1 pantry leader completes the Learning Center Welcoming Environment Course.

Wellness Pantry Classifications

Once the Wellness Pantry designation is achieved, pantries will be invited to work with their regional Nutrition Coordinator. Through a Wellness Pantry Self-Assessment, pantries can share how they engage in key strategies in each of the four focus areas to support their community. Based on the level of engagement in each focus area, one of three classifications will be given.

Nudging ■ Engaging ■ Empowering

Strategies implemented in the pantry have a point value based on the level of input and impact. Each focus area has a total point level to achieve to receive a classification. These classifications are meant to communicate the environment a pantry provides.

Wellness Pantry Classification Criteria	 Nudging	 Engaging	 Empowering
Food for Today	6 pts	9 pts	14pts
Neighbor Focus	6 pts	13 pts	15 pts
Community Empowerment	6 pts	15 pts	25 pts
Organizational Excellence	6 pts	15 pts	20 pts

**Point levels must be achieved within all four focus areas.*

Wellness Pantry Coaching

To guide pantries in evolving their Wellness Pantry, together with the regional Nutrition Coordinator, an action plan will be developed utilizing assessment responses. Coordinators will be able to share resources and best practice as detailed out in the toolkit.

LCFB Wellness Pantry Key Strategy Overview Chart

Strategies within the 4 Focus Areas help to maintain or evolve the Wellness Pantry. It is not expected that all strategies will be adopted. These classifications are meant to communicate the type of environment the pantry provides for neighbors. Review the detailed focus area pages to learn how to achieve these strategies and what supports LCFB can provide.

	Strategies to Adopt	Points
Food for Today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make at least 2 forms of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, and/or dairy available - Have open pantry days during more than 2 weeks of each month - Make evening or weekend pantry hours available - Promote inventory needs to donors - Implement at least 2 waste reduction practices - Adopt a Nutrition Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 pt per food group with least 2 forms available (up to 5) - 1 pt for each week with a pantry day (up to 4) - 2 pts - 1pt - 3 pts - 4 pts
Neighbor Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Give neighbors the ability to choose their food - Create a welcoming space - Receive and use neighbor input in the pantry - Implement innovative food distribution strategies that overcome barriers to food access - Post clear directional signs for confident navigation of the pantry - Establish a Neighbor Respect and Dignity Statement or Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 pts for full, 2 pts for modified, 1 pt for limited - 1 pt per strategy (up to 5) - 3 pts - 4 pts - 1 pt - 2 pts
Community Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement strategies to nudge healthy selection and preparation of foods within the pantry - Offer nutrition education classes for neighbors - Engage in partnerships that support other basic needs - Share information about other resources to meet basics needs - Conduct neighbor resource navigation/case management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 pt per nudge strategy (up to 5) - 3 pts per class offered (up to 18) - 3 pts - 1 pt - 5 pts
Organizational Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer trainings/classes for staff/volunteers - Establish a budget to be able to procure a variety of whole foods - Develop and utilize a pantry policy and procedure manual - Develop succession planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 pt promoting online training, 3pts per in-person training (up to 8) - 1 pt - 3 pts - 5 pts

Focus Area: **Food for Today**

Goal: A balanced, variety of nourishing foods from all five food groups are available for neighbors to choose from and strategies in place to reduce food waste.

By having a variety of foods available in each food group, neighbors can choose the foods they prefer and leave the foods they do not prefer or cannot have for other neighbors. The empowering standard of variety is at least 4 varieties of foods available in each food group as well as at least 2 different forms of each food group available. Working with donated food products means that foods are not always at their peak of freshness. Having a food waste reduction plan in place ensures that food is being used to the extent of its ability even if not shared with neighbors.

Strategy 1: Offer a variety of forms of foods (fresh, frozen, canned, dried) in each food group.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Variety of foods available, of both donated and purchased product, to support neighbors' preferences
 - o Produce at no shared maintenance cost
 - o Identification of Foods to Encourage (F2E) which are low in saturated fat, sodium, and added sugar
 - o Retail partnership opportunities (in some areas) to pick up food directly from retail partners
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Purchase products to increase variety
 - o Receive donations of foods from other sources

Strategy 2: Open pantry days available on two or more weeks of the month to ensure food is available throughout the month.

Strategy 3: Offer evening or weekend hours to ensure food is available throughout the day and the week.

Strategy 4: Develop communication for donors that promotes specific inventory needs to increase variety.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Template donation request letter

Strategy 5: Put practices in place to reduce waste such as providing neighbors with or asking neighbors to bring their own reusable bag or recycled box, engaging in composting programs, or sharing food waste with hog farmers.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Food Shelf-Life Recommendations
 - o Food waste audit tool
 - o Tips for Reducing Pantry Food Waste

- Ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Seek out farmers who would be able to take food waste
 - o Ensure recycling takes place for all recyclable items
 - o Take part in a compost program (some cities or organizations offer programs)

Strategy 6: Adopt a Nutrition Policy to communicate the pantry's priority to distribute nourishing foods.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Sample Nutrition Policies
 - o Review the pantry's Nutrition Policy and provide feedback

Focus Area: Neighbor Focus

Goal: Create a pantry environment with the neighbor at the center of the plan and process.

Seeking out and asking for food assistance is not easy. Pantries should be a space that supports neighbors in uncertain times. By creating a sense of belonging and connectedness, stress can be lessened, and a less stressed individual can begin to make choices that propel them forward rather than push them backwards.

Strategy 1: Create a choice environment in which neighbors can choose all, or at least some, of their food. Different models work for all types of spaces.

- LCFB can provide
 - o [Online training](#) for creating a choice food pantry
 - o Pantry coaching to determine the best process for the pantry space
 - o Connection to other pantries that already have choice models in place
 - o Printed and laminated How to Stock Your Pantry guide
 - o Food Bag Guides and Shelf Tags (filled)
 - o Guidance on how much food to make available based on the number of neighbors served
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Engage pantry volunteers and neighbors who can help think through creating a choice pantry model for the pantry space

Strategy 2: Create a welcoming space by using color, lighting, greenery, pictures/posters, and positive language to help neighbors feel in control and at ease when they enter the pantry.

- LCFB can provide
 - o [Online training](#) for creating a welcoming environment
 - o Pantry coaching to implement strategies
 - o Handout on positive, person-first language to share with staff and volunteers
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Enlist staff, volunteers, or community members who have an eye for design and/or can donate items to develop the welcoming space
 - o Utilize clear signage that states where the pantry entrance is and the pantry hours
 - o Clear check-in process so neighbors know they have a secure spot in line
 - o Ensure signs and documents are available in languages common to the area you are serving

Strategy 3: Receive and use neighbor input to ensure the pantry meets the needs of the community.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Examples of ways to obtain neighbor input

- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Work with a local university or volunteers to develop a plan for collecting and utilizing neighbor input

Strategy 4: Implement food distribution strategies to overcome barriers to food access such as time, transportation, and sense of security.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Connection to pantries who have implemented novel strategies
 - o Assistance in developing an online ordering plan
 - o Coaching in utilizing [Feeding America's Order Ahead platform](#)
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Seek out grant opportunities to implement novel food distributions
 - o Develop a process for delivering food to homebound individuals or families
 - o Implement an order ahead process utilizing online forms, such as google forms, so neighbors can order food in privacy and spend less time at the pantry
 - o Partner with other community organizations to set up a process to get food to vulnerable populations when and where they need it – schools, senior centers, health care case managers, etc.

Strategy 5: Clearly communicate the intake process for neighbors to feel confident in navigating the pantry (signs displaying where to enter, how to sign in, what food they can select).

- LCFB can provide
 - o Coaching on the current pantry intake process to assess where signage or a shift in process can make navigating the pantry clearer for neighbors
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Translate signage to support neighbors that do not speak English. Connect with community members who can help with the translation

Strategy 6: Implement a Neighbor Respect and Dignity Statement to communicate to all how you will treat everyone.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Respect and Dignity Statement template

Focus Area: **Community Empowerment**

Goal: Offer supports that influence nutrition security through training, partnerships, and resource sharing.

Food insecurity does not usually exist in a vacuum. Providing food for today is incredibly helpful. However, financial stability, good health, safe housing, and other basic needs are usually also at risk alongside food security. While we cannot address all needs, empowering neighbors to make the most nutritious choices can help with overall health and well-being. Strategies can also be implemented to support neighbors in accessing or engaging with other resources that will help advance them towards self-sufficiency.

Strategy 1: Implement nudge strategies to empower neighbors with ideas on how to utilize the foods in the pantry.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Online training to learn what nudges are and how to implement nudge strategies in the pantry (coming summer 2026)
 - o Food Group signs with nutrition tips
 - o Shelf Tags with nutrition tips
 - o Shelf Tags that are customizable
 - o Nutrition promotion kits with posters, outdoor signs, and education items to share monthly nutrition messages
 - o [Recipes](#) and [produce handouts](#) to help neighbors learn new cooking techniques or flavors
 - o Recipe samplings to allow neighbors to taste a new recipe before taking the time to cook it with their limited resources
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Invite volunteers or donors who enjoy organizing and/or decorating to help organize the pantry in a way that encourages nourishing meals
 - o Ask for a donation of specific supplies that will help display key food items more attractively – tablecloths, baskets, sign holders, etc.

Strategy 2: Offer neighbor focused classes to learn and/or practice skills that will advance neighbors to self-sufficiency.

- LCFB can provide
 - o [Nutrition education classes](#) upon request (based on availability)
 - o Connection to other nutrition education providers
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Ask volunteers if they have any specific nutrition, culinary, health, or financial expertise to share in a class format with neighbors
 - o Engage with local universities/colleges/tech schools to inquire about class opportunities

Strategy 3: Partner with organizations to offer support in meeting other basic needs such as finance, health, or social service organizations.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Lowcountry [Community Resource map](#) to learn about local resources
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Engage in local coalitions to strategize as a group to meet basic needs such as housing, clothing, food (that's you), transportation, health care, etc.
 - o Connect with a local library to learn what classes/programs they offer

Strategy 4: Share ways to access other resources through resource stands or bulletin boards.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Resource stands (limited supply)
 - o Dry erase or cork boards (limited supply)
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Develop a binder that is divided into basic needs in which flyers or promotional materials can be inserted

Strategy 5: Provide neighbor resource navigation or case management opportunities to help neighbors navigate the myriads of services in the community.

- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o [Connect](#) with other partners who provide resource navigation to learn best practices

Focus Area: **Organizational Excellence**

Goal: Maintain a healthy organization that can continue to support neighbors with food access.

Social service organizations tend to put the needs of neighbors above their own. To continue supporting the community, an organization needs to have their own healthy finances, physical space, and committed staff/volunteers. Creating a strategy to support the excellence of the organization will allow for better support for the community.

Strategy 1: Offer trainings for staff/volunteers to improve organizational capacity and efficiency.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Online training through [LCFB Learning Center](#)
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Engage with community coalitions/organizations that may provide free trainings for non-profits.
 - o Explore programs through the local library. Some libraries offer [LinkedIn Learning](#) with library membership. LinkedIn Learning has a library of career advancement trainings from social media to grant writing to finance to public speaking

Strategy 2: Develop or update organizational budget to be able to procure the food and resources needed to sustain the Wellness Pantry.

- LCFB can provide
 - o A worksheet to create a food budget for LCFB foods
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Join [TogetherSC](#) to gain access to capacity building resources
 - o Recruit a volunteer or board member who is skilled in non-profit finance to help develop a sustainable budget or update the current budget

Strategy 3: Have a pantry policy and procedure manual to clearly communicate how the pantry is run.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Sample policy and procedure manuals
- Other ideas
 - o Seek out volunteers who have experience writing procedure manuals to develop one for the pantry

Strategy 4: Have a succession plan in place to ensure food distribution continues beyond the current leadership.

- LCFB can provide
 - o Guidance on succession planning/succession planning worksheet
- Other ideas to accomplish the strategy
 - o Connect with other agencies who have plans in place



CLICK to find resources to support strategy implementation.

Definitions:

Wellness - The active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of whole health which is significantly influenced by the physical, social, and cultural environments.

Designation – The overarching recognition given to a pantry based on accomplishments in four key focus areas to create an environment of wellness. Pantries are assessed annually to determine if their designation continues.

Classification – Once the Wellness Pantry designation is achieved, pantries can complete a self-assessment to share other strategies they engage in within each of the four focus areas. Based on the level of engagement in each focus area, one of three classifications is given – Nudging, Engaging, Empowering.

Choice Level Definitions

1. None: Pre-packed bag or box of items. Volunteers/staff determine what goes into the bags or boxes.
2. Limited: Neighbors can either choose from a few types of prepacked boxes or receive a prepacked box and also choose a few specific food items such as produce and/or bakery items.
3. Modified: Neighbors can state their preference of food items but not choose specific flavors or varieties. For example, a neighbor may select a category such as “canned vegetable” but not a specific type such as “green beans.”
4. Full: Neighbors select the items, flavors, and varieties of food they want as they walk through and shop like they would at a grocery store, in-person, or online. For example, a neighbor may select “chicken noodle soup,” “canned corn,” or “frozen chicken.” Pantry may limit quantities.

Nudge Strategies – subtle environmental changes in a food distribution setting designed to make healthy choices the easy choice. Nudge strategies include:

1. Food Placement – placing items to be encouraged at the forefront of a lineup of food options to ensure it is the initial item visible or in a display that brings the item closer to the neighbor such as putting it at a gradient, so it leans towards the shopper.
2. Display change – organization of the pantry to bring more of a grocery store or farmers market feel to display food items to encourage.
3. Multiple exposures – increasing the number of times and locations a food item is being displayed/offered.
4. Signage – using posters, shelf tags, flyers that promote foods to encourage.
5. Food Pairing/Bundling – pairing Foods to Encourage with other items that make a recipe or a meal.
6. Samples – providing a sample of the food or a sample of a recipe that includes the food to encourage.

Succession Planning – The process and strategy for transitioning leadership when the time comes.