



Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Inc.

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Help US... Help OTHERS

Agency Handbook

In Accordance with federal law and U.S Department of Agriculture Policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age or disability. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs)

This handbook has been created to orient member agencies and their staff to general information, policies and procedures regarding membership at the Merrimack Valley Food Bank.

About the Merrimack Valley Food Bank

The mission of the Merrimack Valley Food Bank is to help agencies meet a person's most profound need for adequate nutrition and freedom from hunger. The Food Bank was created in 1991 under the umbrella of the Middlesex Shelter of Lowell, Massachusetts. In October 1993, it became an independent entity with its own board of directors and by-laws. The Food Bank distributes food through over 100 emergency feeding programs that serve the low-income population in the Merrimack Valley. Clients served by member agencies include elderly and disabled, children, families, mentally and physically handicapped, veterans, recovering addicts and the working poor. We are proud to offer eight feeding programs to our member agencies and directly to needy populations in our local communities. We distribute an average of 2 million pounds of food per year. The operating philosophy of the Food Bank is that only through cooperative efforts can society initiate change, develop strategies to alleviate hunger and work toward improving the quality of life.

Being a member of the Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Inc. means that you have joined in a partnership dedicated to stopping hunger and food waste. This includes not only in your community, but the Merrimack Valley, your county and your state.

The Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Inc. solicits product donations from food producers, processors, distributors and retailers. The food is collected, sorted, inspected and stored in our warehouse for distribution to our member agencies. Our funding comes from participating member agencies through the shared maintenance fees, donations from concerned individuals and corporations, grants from private foundations and corporations and government contracts. We encourage the member agencies, along with different facets of the community to network together to provide resources for people in need. To this end, our staff attends meetings in the community and we also host meetings each year so that we can disseminate information and in turn gain information from our agencies. As their programs expand, according to the clients that they serve, we too, are able to access the needs of those less fortunate as we advocate for the clients on a city & state level.

THE MERRIMACK VALLEY FOOD BANK is proud to offer the following programs:

1. **Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP)** distributes food purchased by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts free of charge to member agencies serving emergency food to low-income individuals and families.
2. **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (USDA/TEFAP)** distributes food purchased by the federal government and distributed free of charge to member agencies serving low-income individuals and families on an emergency basis.
3. **Food Distribution Program** – distributes food to our member agencies who in turn distribute this food free of charge to individuals and families in need. Food is donated by supermarkets, food wholesalers, manufacturers, distributors and the community at large.
4. **Guy Franceschelli Food Rescue Program** - Our 16-foot refrigerated truck picks up prepared and perishable foods from area supermarkets three days a week and delivers it directly to pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters free of charge.
5. **Nutrition and Safe Food Handling Education** is provided to member agencies every 2 years.
6. **Mobile Pantry** a pantry that delivers food to low-income elderly and disabled residents of Greater Lowell who cannot physically get to a food pantry.
7. **Summer Lunch Program** provides nutritional lunches for children in Lowell who would not eat otherwise, due to economic restrictions in their families.
8. **Community Market Program** offers fresh produce that is ethnically suited to residents of the North Common Village housing development in Lowell.

THE MERRIMACK VALLEY FOOD BANK
Agency Handbook – FY09
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MERRIMACK VALLEY FOOD BANK MEMBERSHIP

TYPES OF AGENCIES SERVED

The Merrimack Valley Food Bank has four types of agencies as members:

FOOD PANTRY – provides emergency or supplemental food to needy people to prepare and eat in their home or wherever they choose. Generally a pantry provides enough food for a minimum of 3-4 days for an individual or a family.

RESIDENTIAL/DAY PROGRAM – provides meals to registered clients for consumption on their premises. These agencies can be homeless shelters, rehabilitation programs, etc.

SOUP KITCHEN – provides meals prepared on site to walk in clients.

SHELTER– provides meals and/or snacks prepared on site to clients during a specified time period.

REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

All Agencies of the Merrimack Valley Food Bank are required to sign an agreement/contract. An agency must hold a 501 c 3 status, and provide a copy of this documentation for their file. It is expected that the Member Agency will adhere to and follow the regulations and rules in the contract and the guidelines for participation. The key personnel in the agency (Executive Directors/Food Program Directors) should be familiar with these regulations and guidelines. Failure to comply may result in suspension of Food Bank membership. If there are any questions about these regulations, please contact the MVFB Agency Relations Administrator.

If any changes in name, location or key personnel changes are made within your organization, please notify the Food Bank immediately to update your contracts and contact information. Updating contact information will be an annual requirement for each agency, regardless of changes in the agency or staff members.

Member Agencies can expect the Merrimack Valley Food Bank staff to treat all members with dignity, respect, and fairness, as we ask you to treat your clients. We expect to provide service with courtesy, be responsive to agency needs and problems, provide timely answers, and provide advance notice of food availability whenever possible.

APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP at MVFB

Agencies that are deemed a PANTRY, RESIDENTIAL OR DAY PROGRAM, SOUP KITCHEN OR SHELTER, who hold a 501-c3 status, are eligible to apply for membership to The Merrimack Valley Food Bank.

An application can be requested by phone, followed by an official request on agency letterhead via mail. A membership application will be sent to the Agency requesting membership via e-mail attachment or by mail. Agency applicants are required to fill out specific information, provide a copy of their 501-c3

status, and request a site visit with the return of their completed application. A site visit will be scheduled by the Agency Relations Administrator. When the site visit is complete and the agency has passed the requirements of membership, key personnel will be required to make an appointment with the Agency Relations Administrator to come to the MVFB for orientation before they can begin the shopping process. Member shopping orientations will be held at the beginning of a calendar month.

All new MVFB members will start their membership as a DONATED FOOD/DISTRUBUTION AGENCY.

MVFB MEMBER AGENCY SHOPPING ORIENTATION

When an agency has acquired membership status with MVFB, they will attend a member agency shopping orientation. At least 3 new agencies will come to the MVFB and take a tour of our facility, be assigned a dock appointment and be given badges that their approved shoppers must wear each time they come to shop at MVFB. A Member Agency Handbook will be reviewed and questions will be answered. Orientations will take place at the beginning of a calendar month.

SPECIFIC PROGRAM MEMBERSHIP

DONATED FOOD/DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENTS

This program offers food that is donated via super-markets, food wholesalers, manufacturers, distributors and the community at large from individuals and through food drives. Each new MVFB Agency Member begins at this status. A \$.16 per pound shared maintenance fee is charged for this donated food. The types of non-perishable foods that are available are canned, dry bagged or boxed items. This type of food has been inspected by volunteers and sorted into banana boxes, which are located on the second floor of the food bank warehouse. Cereal in case allotments is also available in limits and is located on the second floor of the warehouse. Perishable refrigerated and frozen food is located on the first floor of the warehouse. On occasion, MVFB will offer perishable items at no charge that are close to date or for another reason determined by the MVFB Executive staff.

MEFAP (MA Emergency Food Assistance Program)

This program is food purchased by the Commonwealth of MA, free of charge to member agencies serving low-income individuals & families. After an MVFB agency member has been on board for at least two years and has met the requirements of "maintaining membership" as outlined in the MVFB Agency Handbook, they can request, in writing on their agency letterhead, the privilege of receiving MEFAP for their agency.

This program is available for emergency food providers, which excludes residential programs.

USDA (The Emergency Food Assistance Program)

This is food purchased by the federal government, free of charge to member agencies who in turn are serving low-income individuals and families. To qualify for this program, an agency will have to request in writing on their agency letterhead, this privilege from the Commonwealth of MA, Board of Education. This program is available for emergency food providers, which excludes residential programs.

MAINTAINING MEMBERSHIP

RECORD KEEPING

As an agency member of MVFB, you are required to keep certain records:

- All client records for 3 years
- All MVFB invoices for 3 years
- A current copy of the signed agreements
- Pest control records and receipts
- Current health department inspection/license, if appropriate

REPORTS - SUBMITTING MONTHLY & ANNUAL

DONATED FOOD/DISTRIBUTION AGENCIES

are required to submit:

Statistics - unduplicated individuals served
(by the 15th of the following month)
Agency/Staff information-annually (September)
Demographics Report-annually (November)

MEFAP AGENCIES are required to submit:

Statistics - unduplicated individuals served
(by the 15th of the following month)
Agency/Staff information-annually (September)
Demographics Report –annually (November)

DIRECT SHIP AGENCIES ONLY:

MEFAP Invoice copies (by month end)

USDA AGENCIES are required to submit:

Statistics: unduplicated individuals served
(by the 15th of the following month)
Agency/Staff information-annually (September)
Demographics Report –annually (November)
Single Audit signature page and if applicable:
A copy of auditor's opinion letter

INVOICE ACCOUNTS

As a member of MVFB, you are required to:

Pay all invoices from the previous month on or before the 30th of the following month (i.e. October invoices are due on or before November 30th). One check can be written for the whole month of invoices (individual checks for each invoice are not necessary). Please be sure to put invoice numbers on all check payments, and the name of the program if you have several programs in your agency.

All Invoices will be e-mailed to each agency's A/P Department Head by the end of the month. Payments can be mailed: MVFB, Attn: Deborah Luna, 735 Broadway St., Lowell, MA 08154 or hand delivered on shopping days.

ATTENDING REQUIRED MEETINGS

ANNUAL MEETING: MVFB will host an annual meeting to address new policies, issues or concerns. This meeting will also provide an opportunity for our member agencies to network and find out what others are doing to meet challenges, what methods are successful and to share ideas. One agency representative must be present for all required meetings.

FOOD SAFETY WORKSHOP:

A review of proper food safety rules: Transportation, Storage, Temperatures, Cleaning, Food Recalls, etc. Agencies who are Serv-Safe certified may present a copy of the certificate to satisfy this requirement.

MEFAP PLANNING MEETING: To discuss the past FY products, client feedback and plans for the new FY products. This is also an opportunity for agency networking.

The following meetings are required by:

DONATED FOOD/DISTRIBUTION AGENCIES:

MVFB Food Safety Workshop	Every 2 years
MVFB Annual Meeting	September

MEFAP AGENCIES:

MVFB Food Safety Workshop	Every 2 years
MVFB Annual Meeting	September
MEFAP Planning Meeting	February

USDA AGENCIES:

MVFB Food Safety Workshop	Every 2 years
MVFB Annual Meeting	September

SHOPPING REQUIREMENTS

All MVFB Agency Members are required to shop at least 4 times a year to remain as an ACTIVE Member.

MVFB FOOD BANK OPERATIONS/ PROCEDURES

SHOPPING PROCEDURES & DOCK APPOINTMENTS

All agencies are assigned a specific dock appointment. Each agency is allotted a one hour slot of time for shopping. Vehicles should be parked along the inside of the fenced area NOT AT THE DOCK. VEHICLES CAN BE BACKED UP TO THE DOCKS FOR LOADING ONLY after your agency has shopped, been weighed & signed out by MVFB STAFF. Only 3 shoppers are allowed per agency in the warehouse at a time. **Children under the age of 12 are not allowed in the warehouse on shopping days**, and then only if they are listed as approved shoppers via the letter from the Executive Director or Food Program Director/Staff member that we have on file in the agency folder.

BADGE SYSTEM

The badge system was put into place to ensure that those who were coming to shop at MVFB were approved representatives of a member agency. Each agency is allowed 8 approved shoppers (via a letter on agency letterhead) via an Executive Director or Food Program Director of the Agency. The badges will list all shoppers on the back of the badge, so the badges are interchangeable with shoppers. **Keep this in a safe place. Replacement badges will cost \$5.00.** Each October the badges will be updated.

USDA SHOPPING

Approved USDA agencies are allowed to shop **every week** for USDA products at MVFB. A limit of 5 cases per item is the maximum amount to be taken per visit, unless otherwise approved by Executive Staff. USDA items are to be counted by our warehouse staff and paperwork must be signed. Keep USDA product cases separate from other shopping products. Please do not write any other numbers or notes on the USDA shopping sheets. Agencies receiving USDA commodities must display the poster titled, "And Justice for All", and follow all requirements for this program.

MEFAP SHOPPING

Approved MEFAP agencies are given 4 weeks (this time may be more or less, depending upon the time of year) to pick up their case allotments. Case allotments are determined by the numbers of individuals served. After the allotted weeks for pickup, the cases that remain are considered SURPLUS. The week that our next month's shipment is expected, the cases are made available to any MEFAP agency that comes to shop. Each agency's case allotments are kept on file in the Warehouse Office. Please keep the MEFAP products separate from the USDA & Donated Food for counting purposes. Paperwork must be dated and signed by shopper.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM SHOPPING

All MVFB Agencies are eligible for donated food. The shared maintenance fee for this food is 16 cents a pound. This food is stored in the walk in refrigerator & large walk in freezer; the non-perishable foods are located in the first room on the second floor. Limits are set according to the supply that we receive. The paperwork for this product is called MVFB Shopping Record. Paperwork must be signed and dated by shopper.

VIOLATIONS OF AGENCY MEMBERSHIP

The Merrimack Valley Food Bank is required by the IRS, United States Department of Agriculture and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to enforce proper and legal product usage. Therefore, the following violations to your agency's membership agreement are strictly prohibited, and any violation may result in restriction or termination of membership.

- Exchanging any donated food or grocery product in a manner not related to the express purposes of your agency
- Being delinquent in payment of Invoices
- Storing or transporting any donated food improperly
- Stockpiling any food products
- Inadequate record keeping
- Any violation of any state or local statute, ordinance, code or regulation related to the handling or storage of food
- Termination or expiration of your 501-c3 tax exempt status with the IRS. This document must be current and on file at MVFB
- Any discrimination in serve delivery based on age, disability, gender, race, religion or political affiliation
- Failure to use (as the criteria to determine need for its clients) a reasonable standard percentage of the U.S. Poverty Income guideline
- Being inactive (not meeting the requirement of shopping of 4 times in a FY). The MVFB will terminate the membership.

PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING AGENCY VIOLATION

The MVFB will handle each agency violation as a reason for terminating agency membership. The purpose of our mission is to ensure that food products are available to those in need, through the responsible efforts of our agencies.

The following procedures will be applied to any agency violation:

- An agency found to be in violation of any of these requirements shall be issued a written warning, addressing the issue of concern and the corrective action required.
- If the violation is not corrected within a reasonable amount of time, the agency shall be issued a second warning. This warning will reiterate the concerns and outline an appropriate timetable for compliance by the agency.
- If the agency fails to comply, the agency will be placed on hold status.
Under hold status, an agency may not utilize the MVFB's services until falling into compliance with policies and procedures. Notification of hold status will be confirmed in writing. The Agency Relations Administrator has authority to place member agencies on hold. The Executive Director shall be informed when any agency member agency is placed on hold.
- If compliance is not accomplished as determined by the allotted time, the agency's membership will be terminated. Only the Executive Director has the authority to terminate a member agency. Upon termination, an agency will lose the privileges of a member agency for a minimum of six months. At the end of six months, an agency may reapply for membership as a new agency.

GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

Any member agency may appeal the Executive Director's termination decision by sending written notice of appeal to the Board of Directors within 30 days of such notification. All decisions of the Board of Directors will be final.