



Beyond Charitable Food Aid

Almost every Big Local partnership is doing something connected with food – growing, cooking and sharing it. During the pandemic, many Big Local partnerships stepped in and provided emergency food to those who needed it. Dozens of you still provide vital support to your communities through the cost of living crisis. You are not alone! There are around 2,500 food banks in the UK, and unfortunately the need for aid is not going away.

Nobody believes that charitable food aid should be a permanent fixture. Even the Trussell Trust, which runs over 1300 food banks, has a vision of a future without food banks.

Ultimately, much of the responsibility for reducing the need for food aid lies with the government and businesses to ensure people have sufficient income or benefits to buy enough healthy food. But while these needs remain, how can you build on your great work to create a longer-term, sustainable impact?

Here are some actions, ideas and questions to help you think and plan your next move.

1. Strengthen community connections

- How are you using the convening power of food in your project? Could your project be a place for the community to unite through food?
- What do you know about the people accessing your services and their needs? Is there an opportunity to provide other kinds of support, warmth or connection for the people accessing your service? Could you explore making your space even more warm and inviting? (e.g. using music or other aspects to draw people into enjoying the space in different ways)
- Where can you find opportunities to connect people within your community and encourage cooperative work?

2. Encourage local food production

Your work can help shape a new national food system and ensure a more sustainable food future.

- Could you partner with local producers or growers producing healthy/sustainable food?
- What opportunities are there to provide fresh or hot food? Could you turn the food you receive into healthy ready meals or frozen meals?
- Does the food you provide help people to eat a healthy diet? What would you add to your current offering if you could? Where could you source that from?

3. Connect food with other issues

- Are there opportunities to collaborate with other projects nearby? E.g. local food growing projects, community kitchens, food banks, social supermarkets or a benefits advice service?
- How about organisations working more broadly on health, nutrition, poverty, isolation, inclusion, natural environment, climate change or community development?
- How would you describe your work from the perspective of isolation, public health, climate change, etc? How could your project deliver positive change for multiple issues? Could describing your work this way help you access different funding or volunteer support?

4. Address the root causes of poverty

- Could you explore offering a 'help and advice' service that addresses the root causes of poverty (e.g. debt, benefits payments, etc)? Look up First Love Foundation's transition from providing food to providing skilled poverty/welfare rights advice and advocacy for inspiration (www.firstlovefoundation.org.uk/).
- Could you connect with other organisations seeking to ensure people have enough income/benefits to afford healthy food?
- Could you provide training or other work experience opportunities through your work? For inspiration, look up Heart of BS13's sustainable flower farm training programme, which also funds their food work (www.heartofbs13.org.uk/).

5. Advocate for changes in policy

- Can you use your experience in your community to advocate for local or national policy changes – for example, with your local councillor or MP?

6. Reflect and plan for the future

- What can you build on that already exists in your neighbourhood?
- What long-term goals do you have for your work? Can you map out how you might achieve them?
- Can you apply for some "experimental" funding to try out a new approach and see how it goes?

7. Look after yourself and your team

- Are you paying enough attention to your own wellbeing, and that of your volunteers?
- What can you do to give yourself and your team some downtime, appreciation for your hard work, or even opportunities for joy and celebration?
- Can you take time away from your daily work to learn from other communities or organisations doing different things?
- No one person or organisation can do everything, and every organisation has its specialism – who can you partner with to try new approaches or create a more robust community food system?