



# **Merrimack Valley Food Bank, Inc.**

**Help US...  
Help OTHERS**

## **Agency Handbook**

**Warehouse/Physical Address:  
735 Broadway Street  
Lowell, MA 01854**

**Mailing Address:  
PO Box 8638  
Lowell, MA 01853**

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 (MVFB) 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.

MVFB distributes food through a network of member agencies; food pantries, meals programs, day programs, shelters, and group homes. Clients served by member agencies include elderly and disabled, children, families, mentally and physically handicapped, veterans, people in recovery and the working poor.

We are proud to provide safe transportation, storage and re-distribution of nutritious food to our member agencies and directly to needy populations in our local communities through targeted programs. 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 of all people.

As a member of MVFB you have joined in a partnership dedicated to stopping hunger and food waste in your community and the region.

MVFB 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 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 so we can disseminate information and in turn gain information from our agencies. As your programs expand, according to the guests you serve, we too, are able to assess the needs of those less fortunate as we advocate for the clients on a city and state level.

**MVFB is proud to offer the following programs:**

### **Food Distribution**

An emergency food program that distributes donated food through a network of member agency programs (food pantries, shelters, as well as day and residential programs) to help eliminate hunger and maintain good health for our neighbors in numerous cities and towns in Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire.

### **USDA - The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)**

Provides large quantities of nutritious food through the federal bulk purchase process to qualified food banks that pass the food on to member agencies serving low-income individuals and families.

### **Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program (MEFAP)**

Provides nutritious foods to Massachusetts food banks that distribute the food to member agencies serving low-income individuals and families.

### **Guy Francesshelli Food Rescue**

Picks up perishable foods three days a week from local grocery stores to be distributed to member agencies in Greater Lowell.

### **Mobile Pantry**

A home delivery grocery and health information service for homebound eligible elderly and disabled clients in Greater Lowell.

### **Summer Lunch**

A USDA feeding program operated by MVFB to provide nutritious lunches to youth participating in Lowell summer programs.

## **Community Market**

Provides fresh produce and other nutritious food products to residents of Lowell public housing complexes.

## **Operation Nourish**

Addresses hunger among Lowell public school children by providing nutritious food for students to take home over weekends and school vacations.

## **Safe Food Handling Education**

Provides valuable information to our member agencies regarding safe transportation, storage, and handling of food.

# **THE MERRIMACK VALLEY FOOD BANK**

## **Agency Handbook**

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# **MVFB MEMBERSHIP**

## **TYPES OF AGENCIES SERVED**

MVFB 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.

**MEALS PROGRAM** – 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 MVFB 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 MVFB Member Services Representative.

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 in writing. Updating contact information will be an annual requirement for each agency, regardless of changes in the agency or staff members.

Member Agencies can expect MVFB 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.

We expect that those representing our member agencies conduct themselves in a respectful manner toward MVFB personnel, volunteers and fellow member agencies while at the MVFB.



## **APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP**

Agencies that are deemed a PANTRY, RESIDENTIAL OR DAY PROGRAM, MEAL PROGRAM OR SHELTER, that holds a 501 c 3 status, are eligible to apply for membership to MVFB.

An application can be requested by phone or email. 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 IRS 501 c 3 certificate, provide a copy of your Permit to Operate a Food Establishment (if required by your city or town), and request a site visit with the return of their completed application.

A site visit will be scheduled by the Member Services Coordinator or a designated team member of MVFB. When the site visit is complete and the agency has passed the requirements of membership, authorized personnel at the agency will be required to make an appointment with the Member Services Coordinator to come to the MVFB for orientation to become familiar with the shopping process.

**All new MVFB members will start their membership receiving DONATED FOOD.**

## **AGENCY SHOPPING ORIENTATION**

When an agency has acquired membership status with MVFB, they will 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 provided for review and questions will be answered.

## **SPECIFIC PROGRAM MEMBERSHIP DONATED FOOD REQUIREMENTS**

This program offers food that is donated via supermarkets, 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 and put on the shelves, 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 MVFB Executive staff. No Agency can charge any fees upon distributing any donated food received from MVFB.

## **MEFAP (Massachusetts Emergency Food Assistance Program)**

This program provides food purchased through a line item in the Commonwealth of MA budget free of charge to member agencies serving low-income individuals and families. Agencies must be in good standing as outlined in the MVFB Agency Handbook.

This program is available for emergency food providers.

## **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. Agencies must be in good standing to qualify for this program.

This program is available for emergency food providers, and accurate inventory and records including income guidelines for individual and family recipients must be maintained by members who receive these commodities. The “And Justice for All” poster must be on display at food distribution locations and any additional licenses, permits, etc. as directed.

# **MAINTAINING MEMBERSHIP RECORD KEEPING**

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

- All client records for 2 years
- All MVFB invoices for 7 years
- A current copy of the signed agreements
- Pest control records and receipts
- Current health department inspection/license, if appropriate
- Agencies are responsible for keeping track of the pounds of food received from MVFB. Pounds are included on every invoice.
- A current food establishment permit issued by the city or town in which your program operates.

## **REPORTS MONTHLY and ANNUAL ALL AGENCIES are required to submit:**

**Monthly Statistic Reports** ~ completed reports must be submitted to MVFB by the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month for the previous month in order to maintain uninterrupted shopping privileges. Example: January's Report is due by February 10<sup>th</sup>.

**Failure to submit Monthly Statistics Reports may result in suspension.**

**Agency Information Forms** ~ completed forms must be submitted to MVFB annually in January.

**In addition, USDA AGENCIES are also required to submit:** A 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 30<sup>th</sup> of the following month. Example: October invoices are due on or before November 30<sup>th</sup>. Issues must be addressed within 30 days of the Invoice date. Please be sure to put invoice numbers on all check payments, and the name of the program if you have several programs under your agency name.

At the end of each month, invoices will be mailed directly to the Accounts Payable Staff listed on the Agency Information Form provided by each Agency.

NOTE: Payments should be mailed to:

**MVFB, Inc.  
Attn: Accounts Receivable  
PO Box 8638  
Lowell, MA 01853**

Please do not mail checks to our physical address.

**NOTE:**

*Agencies are responsible for keeping records of pounds of food received at MVFB, which is found on your invoice.*

# ATTENDING REQUIRED MEETINGS

**AGENCY MEETINGS:** MVFB will host occasional meetings 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. We encourage a minimum of one attendee per agency. These meetings may include a review of proper food safety rules: Transportation, Storage, Temperatures, Cleaning, Food Recalls, etc. Agencies who are ServSafe certified may present a copy of the certificate to satisfy this requirement. This workshop must be attended every 2 years.

# SHOPPING REQUIREMENTS

All MVFB Agency Members are required to shop at least **6 times a year** to remain as an ACTIVE Member.

# MVFB OPERATIONS/PROCEDURES

## SHOPPING PROCEDURES and DOCK APPOINTMENTS

*Please reference the Daily Shopping List on [MVFB.org](http://MVFB.org) to help plan your weekly shopping trip.*

All agencies are assigned a specific dock appointment. Each agency is allotted a **ONE HOUR TIME SLOT** each week for shopping. Vehicles should be parked along the inside of the fenced area while shopping -**NOT AT THE DOCK. VEHICLES CAN BE BACKED UP TO THE DOCKS FOR LOADING ONLY** (after your agency has

shopped, been weighed and signed out by MVFB STAFF).

ONLY THREE SHOPPERS ARE ALLOWED per agency, in the warehouse at a time and only if they are listed as approved shoppers via Agency Information Form we have on file in the agency folder.

Appropriate apparel (*no loose fitting clothes, dangling jewelry or open toed shoes*) should be worn by shoppers. MVFB will not be responsible for any accidents that occur due to improper apparel.

**Children under the age of 12 are not allowed in the warehouse on shopping days.**

## **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 3 approved shoppers (via the Agency Information Sheet) from the Executive Director or Food Program Director of the Member Agency. The badge will list the name of the individual shopper on the front. Badges will be kept in your Agency's Folder here at the food bank. Badges will be updated as necessary (from the information attained from the Staff Information form that is required annually). All changes must be presented via email or on agency letterhead and signed by the Executive Director or Food Program Director. Temporary Day Passes can be requested for a "stand in" volunteer

who is accompanied with an authorized shopper of the agency.

## USDA SHOPPING

Approved USDA agencies are allowed to shop every week for USDA products at MVFB. Limits will be determined by the MVFB Warehouse Manager. 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.** These are available through MVFB's Member Services Coordinator.

## MEFAP SHOPPING

Approved MEFAP agencies are given approximately 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, as reported in the Monthly Program Report submitted by the member agency to MVFB. 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 and 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 0.16 per pound. This food is stored in the walk in refrigerator and large walk in freezer; the non-perishable foods are located in the first room on the second floor and on the main floor in front of the refrigerator. 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 MEMBERSHIP**

MVFB 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 or selling any donated food or grocery product in a manner not related to the express purposes of your agency
- Being delinquent in payment of Invoices
- Being delinquent in filing reports (monthly and annual).
- Storing or transporting any donated food improperly
- Stockpiling any food products
- Inadequate record keeping (including client sign in form)

- Any violation of any state or local statute, ordinance, code or regulation related to the safe 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 based on age, disability, gender, race, religion or political affiliation toward member agency employees, volunteers or guests
- 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 6 times in a fiscal year). MVFB may terminate the membership.

## **PROCEDURE FOR ADDRESSING AGENCY VIOLATIONS**

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 member 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 the hold status, an agency may not utilize MVFB's services until becoming compliant with policies and procedures. Notification of hold status will be provided to the member agency in writing. The Member Services Rep. has authority to place member agencies on hold. The Executive Director of MVFB shall be informed when any agency member agency is placed on hold.
- If compliance is not accomplished as determined by MVFB within 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.
- MVFB reserves the right to suspend shopping privileges of individual shoppers or revoke agency membership without warning in extreme cases.

# **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

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

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)

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