THE ALASKA FOOD COALITION

AFC Capacity-building Research Project Overview

June 2005

Background

At the 2005 Annual Meeting, Alaska Food Coalition members decided that, for FY05, one of the AFC's priorities would be to begin a research project on the physical constraints of the anti-hunger system in Alaska. The ultimate goal of this project is to assemble enough information to lay the foundation for a major grant request, possibly to USDA or the Denali Commission. The grant would be sought for the system as a whole, either by the AFC or by Food Bank of Alaska, and would fund a variety of small capacity building projects at food pantries and other anti-hunger agencies around the state of Alaska. The actual leg work of this initial research project will be undertaken by the AFC Coordinator, a 20hr / wk employee paid $15 / hr. This research project will most likely form the majority of the Coordinator's work.

A meeting was held on June 16th at Food Bank of Alaska to discuss this project. Attending the meeting were Joel Neimeyer, Catherine Woods and Mary Elizabeth Rider. Susannah Morgan, Merri Mike Adams and Ruth Riley-Elvsaas of Food Bank of Alaska and Dan Stellar of the Alaska Food Coalition were also present.

Overview of Method

The project will consist of several different data gathering steps. The first two steps will be gathering community information and gathering general information about food pantries around Alaska. These steps are not sequential and could happen concurrently. With the information gathered from the food pantries, as well as research into current models of ideal food pantries (beginning with America's Second Harvest,) the project will create a prototype of an "ideal" food pantry. This model, as well as information gleaned during the first two steps will guide the formation of the final community assessments. It is these final assessments which will yield the information which will form the basis of the large grant request.
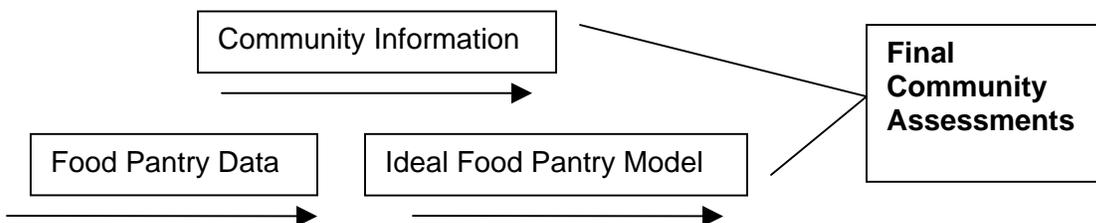
Initial Data Gathering Steps

The project will consist of several different data gathering steps. One of the early steps will involve gathering community information. This will include a wealth of information about a number of communities around Alaska. In order to make the project more manageable, meeting participants recommended taking only communities of a certain size, such as those over 200 people. The majority of this information can be gathered online, through the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development's website http://www.dced.state.ak.us//. Since the information required is detailed and specific, it will be advisable to talk to a representative from this office to help

with the query. See Appendix A for a list of information to be gathered about each community.

A second step, which could run concurrently, would be gathering information about virtually every food pantry in Alaska. This information would have to be gathered via personal contacts with food pantry representatives, most likely by telephone. A letter containing a questionnaire could also be sent. The final project will involve food pantries all around the state, not just from Food Bank of Alaska partner agencies, but this original food pantry data gathering effort could include only or predominantly Food Bank of Alaska partner agencies as a place to start. See Appendix B for a list of information to be gathered from each food pantry.

Ideal Food Pantry Model

The participants at the meeting agreed that a key component of this project would be coming up with an "ideal food pantry" model. This model would be very detailed (see Appendix C) and would be useful in determining a cost estimate of constructing a new food pantry in a rural location. While most rural locations would not necessarily build the ideal food pantry, it would be useful both to give them a guide to work with and to help the grant writers come up with a cost estimate. The ideal food pantry model will also be useful in collaborative procurement of construction materials.

It is likely that there would need to be at least two ideal food pantry models, one for food pantries constructed as separate structures and one for food pantries constructed as rooms in existing structures. It might be necessary to create even more ideal food pantry models depending on what type of service the agency offers. For example, it might be necessary to create a model for an ideal client choice food pantry model, as well as ideal TEFAP food pantry.

The ideal food pantry model will come from several sources, including the preliminary survey work and research into food pantry prototypes (beginning with America's Second Harvest). It may be necessary to research other outlets for any work done on food pantry prototypes.

Final Community Assessments

The content of the final assessments will be largely determined by information gleaned in the first two data gathering steps as well as by the ideal food pantry model. These surveys will be very detailed and require gathering a large amount of highly specific data from each community. This information could be gathered by an AFC or Food Bank employee but may involve using volunteers in rural locations to actually gather the information.

Most likely, there will be two versions of the final community assessment, one for communities which already have a food pantry and one for communities which do not.

Final Assessment Case 1: Communities with a Food Pantry

In the case of communities which already have a food pantry, the goal of the final community assessment will be to answer the following question: *"What is necessary for a given food pantry to become an ideal food pantry?"*

In this case, part of the assessment will be a thorough examination of the current facility, ideally performed by someone knowledgeable about the ideal food pantry concept. The final assessment will also involve reviewing information gathered during the community survey phase of the study and seeing if this information needs to be supplemented.

In the case of communities with a food pantry, the final assessment phase of the study will be guided by the ideal food pantry model. The goal however, is not to convert every food pantry into an identical ideal food pantry. Rather, the goal is to use the model facility created by the ideal food pantry concept as a basis of comparison.

In communities with a food pantry, the community assessment will be based on the following questions:

1. Is a given food pantry relatively close to being an ideal food pantry?
2. If not, then can a few changes be made to bring the pantry close to the ideal pantry model? (i.e.; purchasing new appliances, making changes to the layout of the space.)
3. If not, then can and should serious renovation work be done to bring the pantry close to the ideal food pantry model?

The remainder of the assessment will be shaped by the answer to these questions. In general, however, it will involve the details of converting a given pantry into an ideal food pantry.

Final Assessment Case 2: Communities without a Food Pantry

In the case of communities which do not have a food pantry, a slightly different version of the final assessment will be performed. This assessment will be centered around the question *"What is necessary to build an ideal food pantry in a given community?"*

This assessment will involve determining the specifics of building a food pantry in a given community. Primarily, this assessment will be concerned with determining the most cost effective way to build a new food pantry. The first part of this assessment will be based on the following series of questions:

1. Can existing space be used for the food pantry?
2. If not, then can a room be added to an existing building?
3. If not, then can and should a new facility be constructed?

While the answer to these questions will determine the exact makeup of the remainder of the final community assessment, in general it will involve the details of building a food pantry and beginning distribution.

In the case of communities without food pantries, the ideal food pantry model will again be utilized. As in the case of communities with food pantries, the goal is not to create an identical, ideal food pantry in each community. Rather, the goal is use the model as a tool, useful in determining the approximate cost of building a food pantry in each community, and to create a model that will be helpful in conducting the assessments.

Appendix A – Community Information

General / Demographics
What is the name of the community?
What tribe is it affiliated with, if any?
In which borough is it located?
In which election district is it located?
What is the population?
What percent of the population lives in poverty?
What percent of the community is Alaska Native?
What percent of the Alaska Native community lives in poverty?
What is the per capita income of the community?

Social Services
How many WIC participants are there in the community?
How many food stamp participants are there in the community?
How many individuals / families receive ATAP?
How many individuals / families receive GA (General Assistance)?
How many churches are there and which ones?
How many 501(c)3 organizations are there and which ones?

Access
Is the community accessible by road? Always or seasonally?
Is the community accessible by air? How frequently and how consistently – always or seasonally?
Is the community accessible by barge? How frequently and how consistently – always or seasonally?

Health[1]
How is the overall health in the community?

Internet Access[2]
Is there any internet access in the community? Where, how consistently and of what type?

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[1] To more fully address this question, it will most likely be necessary to use health indicators. Some research has been done on health of different communities around the state by the Division of Public Health. Alice Rarig at the Division has gathered much of this information and could help the Food Coalition assemble this data.   See Appendix D below.
[2] GCI has wired most of rural Alaska and can most likely provide information about which communities have access and of what type. They should be contacted to answer this question.

Appendix B – Food Pantry Information (to be gathered from existing pantries)

Capacity and distribution
How large is the food pantry (sq. feet)?
How many people does it serve?
How much product does it distribute and what types of product? (USDA, donated, not from FBA, etc)
How many staff-hours does it take to operate the pantry?
What sources of food, in addition to FBA, do they access?

Equipment
What type of appliances do they own? (Freezers, refrigerators)
How many of each type do they own?
What is the make, model, age and state of repair of each appliance?
What other types of equipment do they own? (Scales, vehicles, handtrucks, 4-wheelers)
How many of each type do they own?
What is the make, model, age and state of repair of each piece of equipment?

Need
How much food is needed, based on 234 pounds per year per person in poverty, to provide food for all the hungry in the community?
What are the pantries specific needs? (Food, equipment, money)

Appendix C – Ideal Food Pantry

The following is a general list of questions that will guide the creation of the ideal food pantry model. Information gleaned from the food pantry study will help to refine these questions. The final model(s) should be very specific and detailed.

Given a certain amount of poundage distributed, how large should the pantry be?
What should the layout (floor plan) look like?
What type of shelving should the use?
How should the shelving be arranged?
What type of equipment should they own?
What type of appliances should they own?
How should the pantry be constructed? What material should be used?
How should the pantry be heated in the winter and kept cool in the summer?

Appendix D – Contacts

The following names came up as people who may be helpful in the project.

Alice Rarig – Division of Public Health   907-465-1285
Has access to statistics on health in rural communities.

Jeff Smith – Environmental Health Specialists   907-729-3600
Organizes "sanitarians", engineers who work in rural communities. May be helpful in doing on the ground work in the final phase of the project. Joel Neimeyer can contact him.

Jay Lavoi – Estimators Inc   via Joel Neimeyer
May be helpful in answering cost questions regarding ideal food pantry model and creating a cost estimate.