



**A new model for our region. A significant innovative change sometimes starts with a simple directive:
“We have hungry people, I want you to fix it.”**

This might be our simplified version, but the fact remains that the Northeast Washington Hunger Coalition (N.E.W. Hunger Coalition) got its start from a directive by Bob Campbell, Chief Executive of Providence Health Care Stevens County, to Michele Sakurai, Manager of Pastoral Care and Mission in Colville Washington, to “solve hunger”, or at least make progress doing so. He came to this mandate for two reasons; Providence Health Care Community Benefit (serving Stevens County) identified hunger as a primary issue through their comprehensive community assessment, and at the same time hospital administrators had growing concerns about the many health issues related to hunger showing up in dramatic ways in the medical system. The Providence Health Care Community Benefit Fund had been giving dollars for emergency food to the largest three food pantries in Chewelah, Colville and Kettle Falls for many years but the breadth and magnitude of the hunger issue across the region demanded a more intentional intervention. Michele gathered all the food pantries in the region together, large and small in September 2011 to start a conversation and identify issues. That meeting sparked the possibility of collaboration and the Hunger Coalition was born.

Since then, the N.E.W. Hunger Coalition has become a 501 (c) 3 nonprofit organization made up of fifteen food pantries and nine community partners; **our primary goal is to find resources and design systems and tools so our community can feed itself.** Food pantries feed hungry people, the N.E.W. Hunger Coalition helps food pantries be more successful doing it and more sustainable for the future. The organization is comprised of:

Members; representatives from the fifteen Food Pantries who meet monthly to share resources and talk about issues. Related agencies, stakeholders and community partners are encouraged to attend.

Board of Directors; representatives from partner agencies and elected food pantry Members; this group manages the budget, system-wide programs and activities.

Volunteers/Staff; over the past four years this has included a ½-time WSU Extension coordinator, three full-time AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteers, two summer AmeriCorps VISTA Associates, a 4-year AARP VISTA Volunteer, contract staff, one paid college intern, and a part-time county employee. Plus dozens of Directors, Members, and volunteers from the community work diligently each year to carry out the work of the N.E.W. Hunger Coalition.

1. Programs are driven by need and strengthened by relationships.

At the original food pantry manager meeting, Michele began with the questions: “*What are your greatest gaps? What are your greatest needs?*” As the discussion unfolded, it became clear that there was a prevalent scarcity outlook among food pantry managers of “more resources directed to your food pantry means less for mine.” Early in the process, one manager said **“just give us our money.”** Pushing past this attitude toward a spirit of collaboration, the group identified three immediate shared needs: 1) access to more fresh produce, 2) refrigerators to put produce in, and 3) advocacy with existing food delivery partners.

Just four years later, during a Ripple Effects Mapping session (more on that later) one food pantry manager said **“these meetings, the comradery, they’re extremely useful.”** Other managers said **“now we have relationships with each other”** and **“we can hear each other’s voices.”**

As a low-resource, high-passion organization, we have looked to discover, design, and fund relevant programs that work to have positive outcomes, expectations, and deliverables. We constantly ask and listen to the Coalition Members for issues and concerns to see if there are outside funds and/or staff to manage and grow those projects. See the Farm to Food Pantry program outlined below as our signature program success (others include Senior Meals-Links, Veteran’s Outreach events, and Free Flu Shots). Our existence and success is predicated on our attention to building social capital and relationships first, then working to find and leverage any funds, agencies or assistance.

2. Strategically Plan and Evaluate with Ripple Effects Mapping.

The Coalition uses Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) as a best practice for collaborative, strategic planning and evaluation to develop strengths, leverage the benefits of the Coalition, and find the impacts of our work; which in turn allows us to pivot and reapply resources to optimize equitable resource allocation for our community. REM is an engaging, visual way to tease out and capture all individuals' stories on a wall-sized page where the whole group can see and be proud of their collective work. REM has already helped us identify outside influences and partners that guide, fund, and improve our work. Coalition and Hunter's Food Bank Board Member Pattie Grable states, *“Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) has been instrumental in achieving optimization of resources in our local area.”* We have cross-share best practices and conducted REM evaluations with organizations doing parallel food systems work, such as Peninsula Food Coalition and the Food Security Coalition in the Columbia Gorge Region.

Our fifteen food pantries in rural Northeast Washington are challenged by small populations, scarce resources, limited or changing leadership capacity, great geographic distance,

“Ripple Effects Mapping has helped us test the assumptions, goals, and vision of our Coalition through the use of narrative. It ‘speaks’ to what we have accomplished and gives a ‘road map’ to how it happened. This road map reveals whether the narrative reflects the direction of the organization's objectives; it is a constructive critique that can lead to re-envisioning or refocusing the efforts of the group. The strength of Ripple Effects Mapping is its inclusivity; the more the voices, the richer the results.”

Michele Sakurai

and little access to healthy produce. See page 6 for a Ripple Effects map specific to our micro-scale produce delivery system. REM has been instrumental in making obvious to individual food pantries the positive effects of social capital developed through intra-food pantry networks and collaboration. One food pantry manager said *"I have participated in Ripple Mapping several times. It never ceases to amaze me that it brings out links, strategies, strengths that were not noticed or given voice to prior to the exercise. There is always a surprise or two!"* Please refer to the report "Mapping the Impacts of the Peninsula Food Coalition" from WSU Clallam County Extension for another example and demonstration of the positive impact of Ripple Effects Mapping on coalition attitudes and impacts.

3. Addressing systemic health inequities

One of the first initiatives of the Coalition was advocacy regarding an equity issue with Second Harvest. Our food pantries had very specific examples of receiving "left overs," rotten food (onions, oranges, potatoes, etc.) and unhealthy options (bubble gum, sugared water). As an organization we sat down with the leadership of Second Harvest and developed a plan for better quality of food. It was so successful that Second Harvest used this as a model for problem solving for their other service regions.

In another example of advocacy with partner organizations, the Coalition advocated for Northport Food Pantry to get food from Second Harvest; at that time no more contracts were being offered. It was Coalition partners who remembered the history of that food pantry and knew that the contract for this food pantry had been carried under Kettle Falls. Information made available because of relationships developed in the Coalition is what enabled Northport get needed support from Second Harvest.

Another health inequity was identified for the elderly: with a small project grant, the Coalition created flyers listing local resources for each food pantry. This same project also piloted an emergency food pack system, partnering with Rural Resources Community Action Agency, for older patients in need who were being discharged from Stevens County hospitals.

4. Our Ways of Working

Our primary and most challenging systemic lesson is **constant attention to investing in human and social capital** for our Coalition Members, while trying to address their specific daily gaps.

Continuous human capital investment is critical for food pantry managers and volunteers - they have the mission and passion to feed hungry people, but are challenged by lack of management skills to run a nonprofit, recruit and retain volunteers, and manage boards. We repeatedly address this need as 60-70% experienced some level of management turnover in the past two years.

New directors always require attention, education, and moral support because they often come to the Coalition with the scarcity approach, and it takes consistent messaging and sharing of resources, or they fall back into the fear.

Our human capital approach includes: Monthly Coalition Member meetings open to all including lunch and mileage reimbursement (equitable for distant Members – the farthest is 57 miles away) that include agency representatives (Department of Social and Health Services, Catholic Charities Spokane, Northwest Harvest, Second Harvest, WSU Extension SNAP-Ed, etc.) Members at the table have a shared interest in nutritious food, diminishing hunger and hunger related health issues...solutions are usually a product of multiple inputs, rather than each food pantry trying to create a solution on their own.

We also underwrite training (grant writing, board development, understanding of poverty) and sponsor conference attendance (WA Nonprofits, WA Food Coalition, Northwest Harvest and Second Harvest) where they can learn new skills and network with peers.

5. Storming, Forming, Norming, Performing and now Storming again

The original Hunger Coalition meeting was a storm of ideas and attitudes, and through perseverance and organization, the Coalition moved toward norming and performing stages. Over time we have lost a few leaders and key volunteers to retirement, and always have a high turnover of food pantry managers.

In 2017 the Board conducted a Strategic Planning session, including our most recent REM session. That session identified 3-year goals: 1) Identify funding opportunities leading to sustainability, 2) Sustain our member network and community partnerships to share information and coordinate resources; increase knowledge and capacity of food banks, 3) Identify sources for nutritious food, including produce, protein and dairy, 4) Develop creative food distribution systems with growers, industry partners and food banks, 5) Promote education on cooking, gardening, preserving and budgeting, and 6) Maintain a strong internal organizational structure.

The Coalition continues to face our biggest challenge—financial stability. Historically relying on a small number of funding sources, our plan is to develop a more diverse funding development plan. As part of this effort, the Board recently moved toward hiring a transitional manager. This person will be tasked with developing strategy, organization structure, and implementation processes to further the six goals outlined above. It's the intent of the Board that this transitional staff person will shepherd the organization through its current stage of "storming" as it grows into its next organizational stage.

6. Farm to Food Pantry Program: our hope for equitable access

The number one food pantry need of "more fresh produce" is where we have made the most progress, and gives us hope for a positive change in access equity through our innovative distribution model. The Farm to Food Pantry (F2FP) program delivers nutrient dense and culturally desirable produce to resource-poor rural pantries trying their best to serve resource-poor clients. These challenges led to the **creation of a right-sized, right-scaled micro-delivery system that equitably delivers fresh, local produce to all food pantries, small rural schools and rural food desert stores in our region.** Our CoolPup™ refrigerated trailers pick up contracted, pre-paid and donated produce from local farmers and delivers it through a purpose-designed, data-driven delivery schedule that works because of volunteers

and pre-determined delivery routes. Data analysis determines an equitable distribution of the produce coming into the system so that each food pantry (with special attention to smaller, remote pantries limited access) receives their “fair share.”

Ripple Effects Mapping the Farm to Food Pantry program showed high value across the food pantry community which led to increased private donations for the program and more resources allocated to the program by the Coalition Board.

Our movement toward a better future is demonstrated by **support and recognition from many levels:**

Local:

- We have increased donations specifically directed to purchase food from local farmers, up to \$7000 this year
- The Coalition Gala crowd-sourced (\$14,000) to fully-funded **two** CoolPup Trailers™

Statewide:

- Hunger Coalition staff have been invited to six conferences and many additional planning meetings across the state to share best practices, data and methods
- The CoolPup Trailers™ and our Micro-Delivery System received WSDA’s Fresh Results Award - given to one farm and one service organization in the state that “exemplifies the commitment to bringing farm fresh goodness to hungry folks in our communities.”
- Our program received the Second Harvest 2016 Innovation award for our F2FP work.
- Parts of our F2FP program are being replicated by the Peninsula Food Coalition (Olympic) who just purchased their first CoolPup Trailer™ funded through a USDA NIFA grant.

National:

- The N.E.W. Hunger Coalition and Peninsula Food Coalition received the National Association of Community Development Extension Professionals Team Award for joining forces and sharing best practices on the CoolPup Trailers™ and Micro-Delivery System.
- The N.E.W. Hunger Coalition was included as a case study in *The Field Guide to Ripple Effects Mapping* found at <http://z.umn.edu/REMbook>.



Food pantry managers have noticed their clients increased interest in fresh produce as well as an improved connection with the local farming community.

“I’m pleased to see client’s express their gratitude to the local farmers through the F2FP Appreciation Postcard Program. And more importantly, many food bank clients are now eating healthy produce that they had never tried before, AND being encouraged to grow on their own when available, (like kale and chard!)” stated Susan Urhausen, Coalition Board Member and former Kettle Falls Food Pantry Manager.

