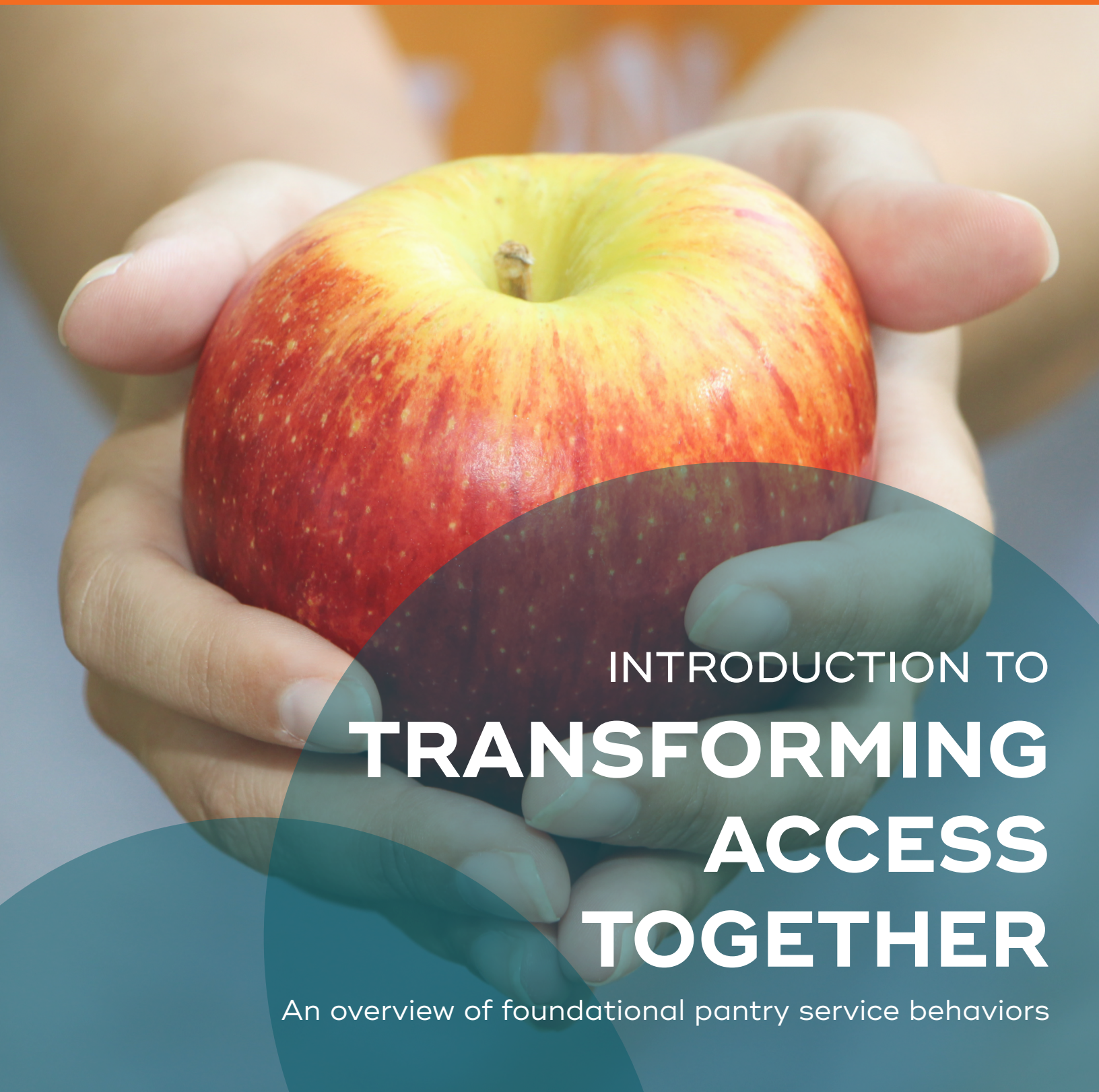
ATLANTA COMMUNITY FOOD BANK

TRANSFORMING ACCESS TOGETHER

Enhancing our collective effort to connect neighbors with food



INTRODUCTION TO TRANSFORMING ACCESS TOGETHER

An overview of foundational pantry service behaviors

Enhancing our collective effort to connect neighbors with food



Purpose

The Atlanta Community Food Bank seeks to enable and encourage agency partner pantries to provide increased access to food assistance through partnership, education, and resources. Transforming Access Together is both an invitation and a model to work collectively to increase food access and enhance the service experience for our neighbors in need.

This approach starts with making it easier for people to access the food and resources they need to live healthy and productive lives. The experience of accessing food should be convenient, consistent, frequent and equitable—freeing up the mental, emotional and financial space needed to thrive over time.

Overview

Our starting point on the journey to transform the neighbor experience includes four foundational service behaviors that we want to encourage to make this vision a reality:

These core behaviors are:

1. **Remove barriers to visitation**—to allow neighbors to come as frequently as they need to;
2. **Add distribution hours**—to add convenience for different neighbor lifestyles;
3. **Maximize SNAP participation**—to connect more neighbors to more healthy food and resources; and
4. **Gather intake information in our shared Oasis platform**—to learn more about our neighbors since knowing more about who we serve helps us serve them better.

These behaviors represent steps we can take together over time. They are not partnership requirements or expectations of overnight change. Change must come at the right time for every organization, and we look forward to charting different courses together. This will include commitments from the Food Bank of funding, coaching, community connection and expanded partnership resources for those who engage, to enable you to increase your capacity to serve neighbors and friends.

More information about each service behavior

This document is meant to be a conversation-starter as partner agencies explore adopting enhanced service behaviors. For each behavior, you will find the following sections:

DISCOVER

Discover and understand the behavior.

CONSIDER

Consider why the behavior is important to support neighbors in need.

TAKE ACTION

Determine the path forward and take action with the information and resources available.

Remove Barriers to Visitation



DISCOVER
Discover and understand the behavior.

The primary focus of **removing barriers to visitation** is to allow neighbors to access services as frequently as they deem necessary. While this journey will look different for every agency partner, we seek to provide opportunities for **weekly visitation**.

Other desired outcomes include serving neighbors regardless of where they live (no geographic restrictions) and eliminating the requirement of specific forms of identification for entry.

CONSIDER
Consider why the behavior is important to support neighbors in need.

Systemic barriers related to frequency limits, geographic restrictions, identification requirements and others make it challenging to get food when it is needed the most. If we can reduce these barriers, more people will be able to navigate the complexity and stress of accessing food in ways that can truly be transformational!

Navigating the process of finding a convenient pantry, understanding the steps to get food, building the courage to enter a pantry, and getting comfortable with the service experience can be challenging. Having to do that from scratch multiple times a month because the needs of a neighbor's family don't match the access and food they receive is overwhelming. For those undergoing significant stress and trauma, this adds a burden that could be avoided if return visits were allowed based on the needs of the neighbor.

Additionally, individuals may prefer to go to a pantry in another area where they know fewer people but are turned away because that pantry doesn't serve their home zip code. Expanding your service area will provide convenient access to people who work near you but live elsewhere, or to people on public transportation who pass by your facility on their way home.

> "Originally we allowed neighbors to come once a month. A neighbor told us, 'I come when I can, but how can you expect me to only visit once a month when you don't give me enough food to last till then?' Our shift was born from that conversation. We removed geographic restrictions and our limits on the number of shopping trips allowed by neighbors, so they can come as often as they need."

Remove Barriers to Visitation

TAKE ACTION

Determine the path forward and take action with the information and resources available.

1. **Listen to understand neighbor's needs that we may be missing:** Have a conversation with your team about what populations in your service area you may be missing or those who visit once and never return. Would removing visitation barriers help you reach these populations?
2. **Review your current policies:** Have a conversation with your team about why you have these policies in place. Ask questions like "Is this a necessary requirement?", "Who is this policy benefiting?", and "Who is this policy burdening?".

We know that additional resources are needed to bring this to life. This is what you have stated would be needed to allow neighbors to visit more frequently:

- More food
- Volunteers or additional staff
- Funding
- Space in the pantry (infrastructure)

ENGAGE WITH US

If you're interested in **removing barriers to visitation:**

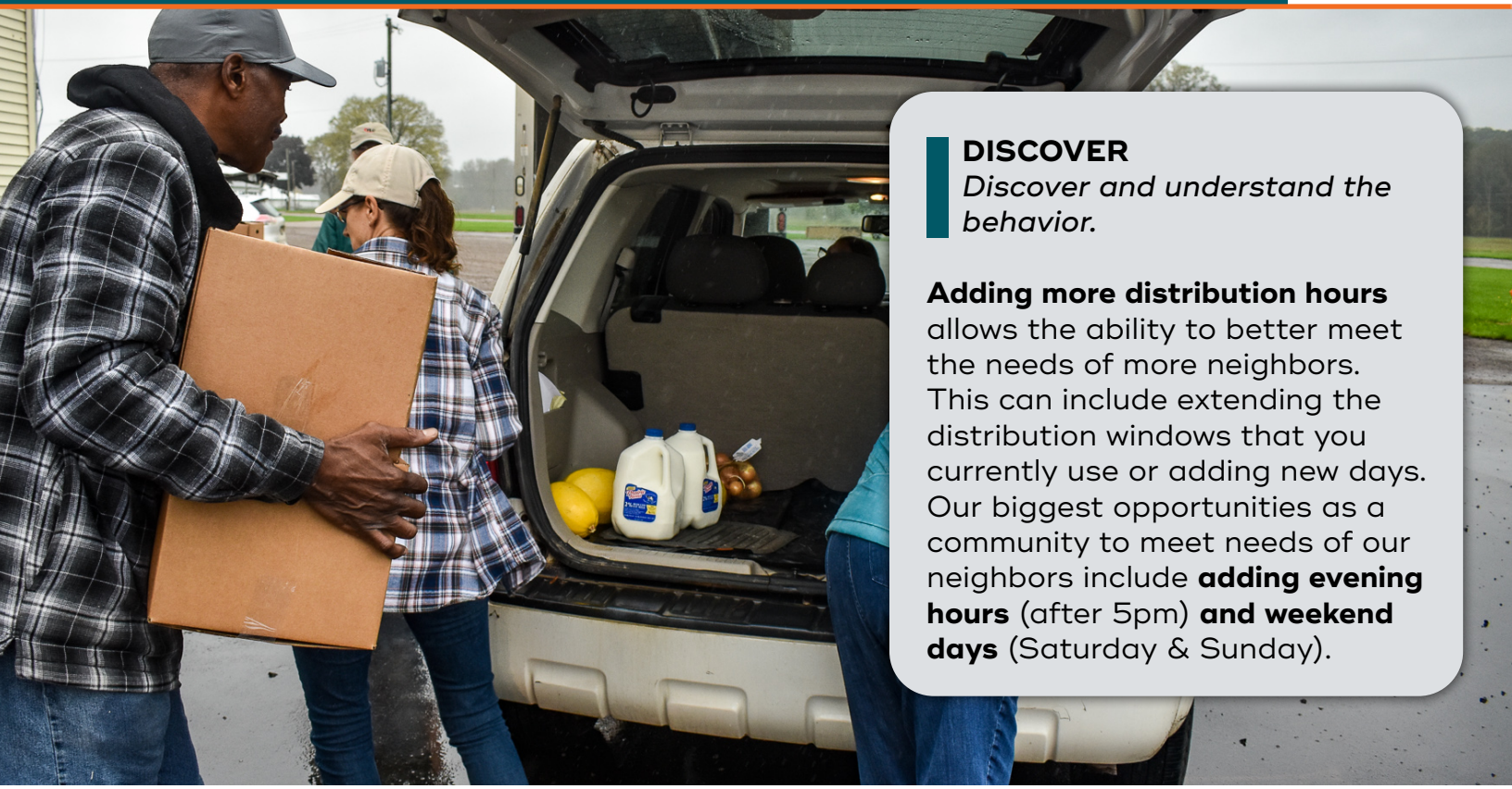
Grants Interest Form

Fill out the Grants Interest Form to inform the Food Bank of your resource growth needs. If opportunities arise that fit your needs, you will be contacted by a member of our staff.

Contact County Relationship Manager

Contact your County Relationship Manager who can partner with you to grow capacity and connect you with partner agencies exploring or currently implementing this behavior.

Add Distribution Hours



DISCOVER
Discover and understand the behavior.

Adding more distribution hours allows the ability to better meet the needs of more neighbors. This can include extending the distribution windows that you currently use or adding new days. Our biggest opportunities as a community to meet needs of our neighbors include **adding evening hours** (after 5pm) **and weekend days** (Saturday & Sunday).

CONSIDER
Consider why the behavior is important to support neighbors in need.

Adding hours allows a greater opportunity for neighbors with different lifestyles, schedules and needs to access assistance. This includes individuals working multiple jobs, individuals working jobs outside of typical business hours and families with children, among others. These challenges make it hard to plan meals or find time to shop.

Individuals with fewer financial resources have limited options to meet food needs, and the options available take more time to access. There is no slack in their wallets or calendars to allow for the luxury of choice. This dilemma—less money with fewer, more time-restrictive and complicated choices—is often referred to as the Time Tax. Oftentimes, the Time Tax may force an individual to grab the low-cost, less healthy items at the dollar store or gas station close to their house, just in time for dinner.

If more community assistance organizations were accessible to accommodate a variety of schedules, these neighbors would be better able to extend their available resources.

> "We couldn't do it without the generosity of our volunteers' time. From being open on Saturday mornings, we have a lot more young people, working adults, and volunteer groups that can join us!"

Add Distribution Hours

TAKE ACTION

Determine the path forward and take action with the information and resources available.

1. **Listen to understand neighbor's needs that we may be missing:** Have a conversation with your team about what populations you may be missing. Collaborate with other organizations to fill time gaps.
2. **Listen to understand the needs of neighbors we currently serve:** Ask your neighbors what new days or times would be helpful for them.
3. **Engage your volunteers in the process:** Ask your volunteers to be engaged in learning about neighbors and involved in the decision-making process around increasing hours.
4. **Promote your new hours to neighbors:** Expand your marketing and outreach to let neighbors know your hours of distribution have increased or shifted.

We know that additional resources are needed to bring this to life. This is what you have stated would be helpful to increase distribution hours:

- Volunteers or additional staff
- Marketing and outreach
- Space in the pantry (infrastructure)
- Funding
- More food

ENGAGE WITH US

If you're interested in **adding distribution hours:**

Grants Interest Form

Fill out the Grants Interest Form to inform the Food Bank of your resource growth needs. If opportunities arise that fit your needs, you will be contacted by a member of our staff.

Contact County Relationship Manager

Contact your County Relationship Manager who can partner with you to grow capacity and connect you with partner agencies exploring or currently implementing this behavior.

Maximize SNAP Participation



DISCOVER

Discover and understand the behavior.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical resource that provides vulnerable populations access to nutritious food by providing money to spend on groceries.

Partnering with the Food Bank to provide benefits outreach increases enrollment and retention of participants by ensuring that eligible individuals can:

- Gain awareness of SNAP benefits, eligibility, and the application process
- Maintain their benefits (if active) and avoid having to apply again
- Learn about other forms of government assistance such as Medicaid and WIC that can complement SNAP resources

CONSIDER

Consider why the behavior is important to support neighbors in need.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has been called "the cornerstone of the nation's nutrition safety net" and is one of the most important programs to fight food insecurity. SNAP is considered the most effective and responsive federal program to aid during economic downturns. 43% of Georgia SNAP benefits go to households with incomes at or below the poverty line and 42% of Georgia SNAP benefits go to households at or below half of the poverty line.[1]

The Food Bank also screens for Medicaid, the nation's public health insurance program for people with low income, including many with complex and costly needs for care. Medicaid programs can cover the cost of premiums for dual eligible Medicare recipients which is a savings of approximately $2000 a year.

[1] Hall, L., & Nchako, C. (n.d.). A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Georgia

Maximize SNAP Participation

TAKE ACTION

Determine the path forward and take action with the information and resources available.

There are three methods to provide outreach to increase SNAP participation:

1. **Receive Benefits Outreach training:** Assist your neighbors with accessing public benefits directly. The Food Bank will provide training (including written manuals) explaining the screening process and ensure a thorough understanding of the different forms of government assistance. We will also train you to use Georgia's online tool, Gateway, and provide ongoing technical assistance.
2. **Become a Benefits Outreach screening site:** Invite Food Bank Benefits Coordinators to provide benefits screening during pantry distribution or other times you have visitors at your location. The Coordinator will come equipped to assist neighbors on the spot—all we ask is that you provide a table, chairs and suitable space. We also provide flyers to promote the service. This option is offered based on staff availability and will require a consistent volume of neighbor interactions to remain active.
3. **Provide warm referrals to the Food Bank's Benefits Outreach team:** Refer neighbor cases to the Food Bank electronically for our staff to screen. When your agency identifies a potential SNAP participant and receives neighbor consent, our team will contact the neigbor directly about the assistance they need.

We can support these options for both English and Spanish-speaking neighbors. If there are other languages that your community needs, we'd love to explore that together.

ENGAGE WITH US

If you're interested in **maximizing SNAP participation:**

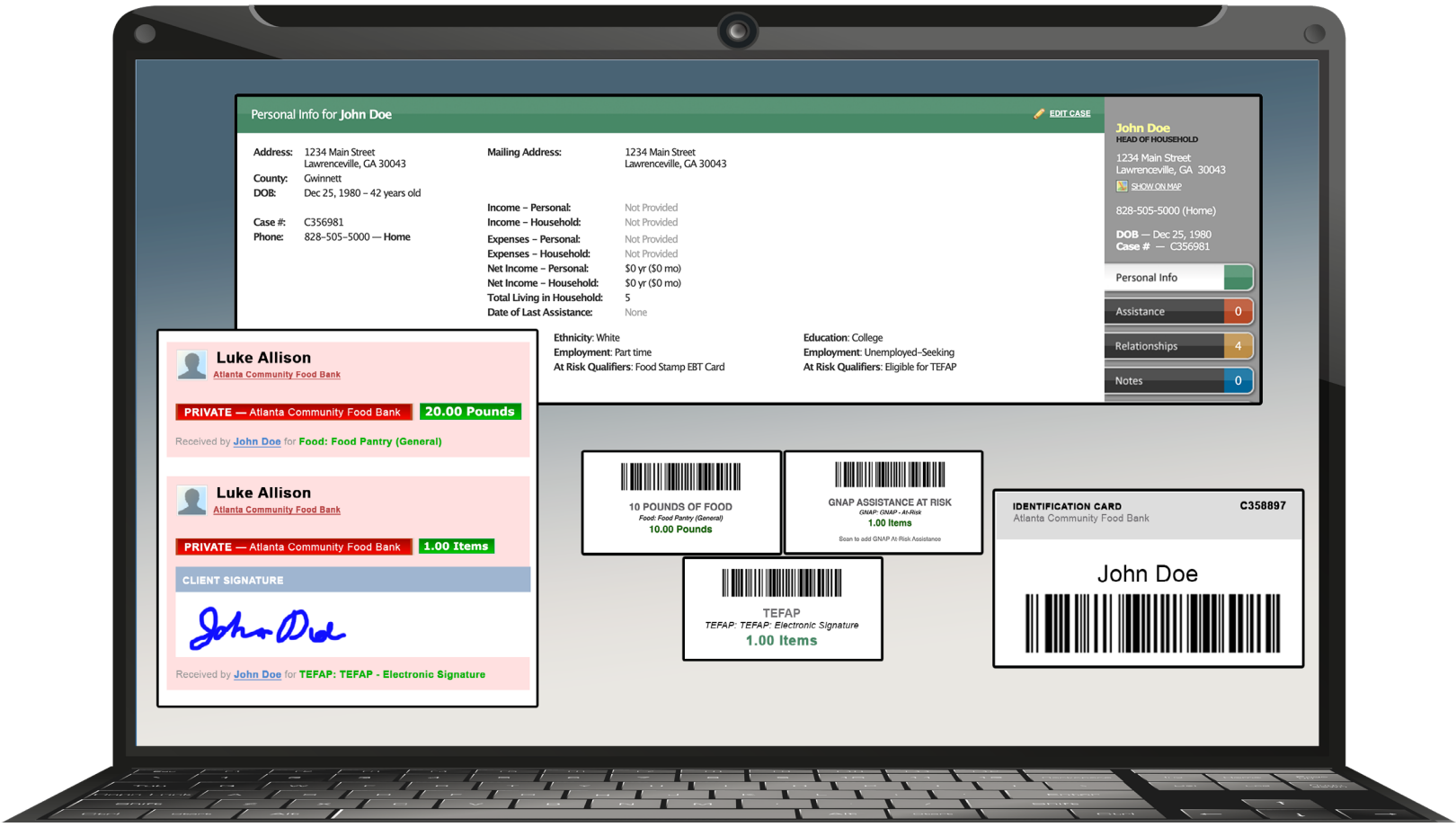
Benefits Outreach Interest Form

Fill out the Benefits Outreach Interest Form to connect with the Food Bank's Benefits Outreach Team to discuss the best option for your organization.

Contact County Relationship Manager

Contact your County Relationship Manager, who can partner with you to grow capacity and connect you with partner agencies exploring or currently implementing this behavior.

Gather Intake Information in Our Shared Oasis Platform



DISCOVER

Discover and understand the behavior.

The Atlanta Community Food Bank provides a shared, no-cost platform called Oasis Insights, a neighbor-services database designed for food banks and their network of partner agencies to track neighbor assistance directly. **Gathering intake information in a shared platform** includes the collection of basic, administrative data from the people you serve, and then using that data to identify insights about who you serve and **how to serve them better.**

Key features include:

1. All software and subscription costs are covered by the Food Bank (free for partners)
2. TEFAP compliant, including electronic signature capture of 832 forms
3. Barcoding: Use any barcode (generated by Oasis or in neighbor's possession, like a gas card) to check people in
4. Neighbor aging: By entering date of birth, the system will automatically classify a neighbor as a child, adult, or senior
5. Appointment scheduling
6. Text and email messaging (message and data rates may apply to partners)

Gather Intake Information in Our Shared Oasis Platform

CONSIDER
Consider why the behavior is important to support neighbors in need.

Gathering intake information in Oasis has many benefits.

For neighbors we serve:

- Eliminates need to restate personal information at return visits, creating quicker, easier entry
- Provides increased security for personal information compared to paper forms
- Provides flexibility for information neighbors wish to provide, including option to remain anonymous

For Partner Agencies:

- Eliminates need to re-interview neighbors at each visit; records are searchable by name, date of birth, address or phone number
- Helps track personal information, like age, dietary restrictions and language spoken
- Facilitates easier, more accurate summary reports, including ability to easily count unique vs. duplicated households as well as new vs. return visitors
- Provides capability to easily include those who choose to remain anonymous in reporting

> "What I can say quite unequivocally is that there is no way we could serve the number of people we have been serving without Oasis. It has also been instrumental in helping us to understand the people we are serving."
>
> - Lisa Heilig, Toco Hills Community Alliance

For our collective network:

- Invites the opportunity for insights about our community to emerge based on real-time information, rather than lagging reports based on academic research
- Helps standardize the data collected, achieving a truly unduplicated, unique view of the people we serve
- Gathers information to help tell a more powerful story about fighting hunger in our community,
- Fosters better fundraising, food sourcing, and equitable distribution for our neighbors

Gather Intake Information in Our Shared Oasis Platform

TAKE ACTION

Determine the path forward and take action with the information and resources available.

The Food Bank will find the right pace and process that works for your staff, volunteers and the neighbors you serve. The steps necessary to begin using Oasis are as follows:

1. On-site or virtual staff & volunteer training
2. Technology acquisition (including potential grants)
3. Intake process review
4. Neighbor data transfer from existing system (optional)
5. Testing
6. Full implementation

Here's what you will need to use Oasis:

Required:

- Stable internet connection and/or WiFi
- Computers, Chromebooks or tablets at point of service

Optional:

- Barcode scanners
- Digital signature pads

The Food Bank may be able to provide some of the technology equipment mentioned above for agencies interested in signing up for Oasis and those who need additional equipment to maintain use of the system.

ENGAGE WITH US

If you're interested in **gathering intake information in our shared Oasis platform:**

Oasis Inquiry Form

Fill out the Oasis Interest Form here. Once submitted, you will be contacted by Food Bank staff to begin the onboarding process.

Contact County Relationship Manager

Contact your County Relationship Manager, who can partner with you to grow capacity and connect you with partner agencies exploring or currently implementing this behavior.

Conclusion

Together, our work can strengthen and support families and individuals across metro Atlanta and north Georgia. If we each commit to making our part of the journey to stability more convenient, consistent, frequent and equitable, then access to food becomes even more powerful for our neighbors. The Atlanta Community Food Bank is committed to supporting this journey by working in collaboration with our partners to provide the information, resources, and relationships you need to be successful.

Transforming Access Together will look different for each partner and community. It will be ongoing and collaborative as we work together to determine the best approach. We will get some things right, and we will learn some things. Your feedback will be necessary to help us learn how to improve together.

Access to food can be transformative. It can be the foundation that real change is built on. Together, we will enhance our collective effort to connect neighbors with the food and support they need for a brighter tomorrow. For questions regarding Transforming Access Together, please reach out to your County Relationship Manager.

