



Welcome to the Redwood Empire Food Bank

This comprehensive guide is designed to equip staff with the essential information and talking points for conducting engaging tours for our valued visitors. To ensure a tailored experience, we've developed a flexible system that allows you to customize each tour based on the specific interests and needs of our guests.

Tour Structure

- **Base Tour:** The foundation of every visit, covering our core operations and impact
- **Customization Options:** Add-ons to enhance the tour based on visitor interests

Pre-Tour Preparation

Even for last-minute requests, please make every effort to notify the following team members of your upcoming tour:

- Distribution Center*: Erika (**ALWAYS provide yellow vests for visitors when entering the distribution center. Yellow safety vests can be found in the reception area cabinet in the bottom drawer.*)
- Kitchen: Chef Don
- Food Connections: Stephanie

Provide them with an estimated time of your group's arrival in their respective areas. This courtesy allows our team to prepare and potentially showcase their work in action, enriching the visitor experience.

Tour Customization

- Base tour
- Use add-ons
- Customize talking points based on visitor's reason for visit

Our mission is simple—we feed people. The complexity lies in how we accomplish this goal.

Remember, your role as a tour guide is crucial in sharing our mission and inspiring support for our cause. Keep the tour engaging by sharing anecdotes and encouraging questions throughout. Let's make every tour an opportunity to showcase the incredible work we do at the Redwood Empire Food Bank!

Guest Arrival / Lobby

Welcome and Introduction

- Greet visitors in the lobby
- Introduce yourself and your role at the organization
- Provide a brief overview of our mission and history

Base Information: Who We Serve

- The Redwood Empire Food Bank has been Ending Hunger in Our Community since 1987
- We serve over 135,000 unique individuals annually
- Approximately 50,000 unique individuals access our services monthly
- On average, 400 new families seek assistance each month

Our Programs

We operate 11 innovative programs under three strategic hunger relief initiatives:

1. Every Child, Every Day: Four programs providing food to 40,000 at-risk children
2. Senior Security: Senior Basket program serving 15,000 low-income seniors; 3,000 Veterans
3. Neighborhood Hunger Network: Various programs serving 135,000 individuals

95% of our funding goes to our programs.

The Space

- Building occupied for over 10 years, now outgrowing due to recent disasters (fires, pandemic)
- Point out volunteer check-in area. Warehouse volunteer shifts at the distribution center are Monday through Friday (**Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays:** 7am-9am and 10am-1pm. **Tuesdays and Thursdays:** 7am-9am, 10am-1pm, and 2pm-4pm.)

Distribution Center

Viewing Options

- Prefer view from the Mezzanine or on the walkway behind the gate
- If entering the distribution center, ensure guests wear yellow vests

Base Information: Operations/Distribution Center Features

- Our distribution center operates under a Safety Culture as does our teams on the road and in the field
- The distribution center is active with staff Monday through Saturday with shifts beginning as early as 3 AM and ending as late as 7 PM
- Rapid inventory turnover: food moves in and out quickly, which is why we refer to this area as a distribution center vs a warehouse
- Pallets labeled with destinations (e.g., partner agency names, distribution location)
- Diverse produce sizes accepted
- Wine box donations save \$165,000 annually
 - We use approximately 10,000 boxes per month in our packaging
- Grant-funded equipment (e.g., pallet wrap, sliding fridge/freezer doors)
- Grant-funded bar-coding functionality
- Night cooling system for energy efficiency obtained through federal grant
- All LED lighting for energy efficiency, compliance and cost savings, obtained through a federal grant
- Reusable plastic containers (RPCs) for sustainability—a shift from plastic mesh, which is a cost saving and planet saving solution

Distribution Overview

- 300+ monthly distribution sites (96% in Sonoma County, 3% Lake County, 1% Mendocino County)
- 130 partner organizations in Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties
- \$75.6 million of food distributed annually (25.2 million meals)
- \$33 million worth of food to partners (11.1 million meals)

Food provision: 50% produce, 9% protein, 8% dairy, 33% other staples (may simply say that half of our provision of help is fresh produce)

Volunteer Rooms

- Volunteer activities: sorting, gleaning, packing, and special projects

- We rely on over 7,400 volunteers annually. In 2025 they gave 126,700 hours of their time.
- On average, warehouse volunteers at our distribution center prepare 100,000 lbs of food per week for distribution.
- Describe volunteer opportunities and their importance (Distribution Center volunteer opportunities: Warehouse, Food Connections Market, and Kitchen Collective. Offsite volunteer opportunities at various Distribution Sites in the communities we serve, and local Farm Support at Farm to Fight Hunger during the summer months.)
- Explain how interested visitors can get involved: visit refb.org/volunteer

Special Events

- Empty Bowls annual fundraiser transforms our distribution center into a gala space with artist demonstrations, silent bowl auction, and paddle-raise

Customization Options:

Food Sources

- 53% purchased produce, 29% donated food, 11% purchased staples, 7% USDA program
- 105 major food donors
- Local farm sourcing initiatives: Range to Table, Farm to Fight Hunger, Novavine
- Grocery Recovery: 60-70 weekly stops generating 150,000-200,000 pounds recovered monthly
 - We pick up food that is short on date or in excess inventory and bring it to our distribution center for distribution at sites and to partners.
 - Excellent variety.
 - Food is separated into categories and weighed and recorded for state requirements.
 - Largest donors include: Safeway, Raley's, and Amy's Kitchen, who have donated over 475,000lbs, 250,000lbs, and 130,000lbs respectively.
- Purchased food for specific needs and flexibility, we leverage our scale for stronger purchasing power to save money for our partners
- USDA partnerships

Kitchen Overview

Base Information: On the Spot Nutrition Program

- Addresses acute food needs of those facing persistent hunger
- Volunteers assemble healthy snacks using fresh donated ingredients
- Provides immediate relief at food distributions – we feed the line

Allow Chef to provide additional insights about kitchen operations.

Daily Operations

- Produce 1,000 meals per day
- Use large bulk food donations (e.g., cheese wheels, flour) unsuitable for direct distribution, which allows wholesale food donors to donate to the food bank
- Convert donations into meals, maximizing resource use

Customization Options:

Equipment Highlight

- Dough sheeter donated by volunteers Jody and Bill
- Significantly improves efficiency: 45-minute tasks now replace 2.5-hour processes
- Enables creation of various pastry items (crusts, galettes, pizzas)
- Commercial Mixer acquired with a USDA grant
- Increased production capacity by 5X over the previous equipment

Food Connections Resource Center

- Explain intake process (if applicable)
- Describe types of services offered on-site (see below)
- Emphasize confidentiality and respect for clients

The Food Connections Resource Center offers:

- CalFresh application assistance
- Free emergency food boxes
- Information on hunger relief programs
- Details about food distributions in Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte Counties

This resource is available to anyone in need of food assistance

Food Connections Market

Base Information: About Our Partnerships

- Having a network of partners is crucial in ensuring no one goes hungry
- The Food Connections Market provides donated food to our partners at no-cost
- Our 130 dedicated partner organizations form a powerful network
- Coverage extends to Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties
- Diverse partners include pantries, dining rooms, shelters, group homes, child care facilities
- Annually, the food bank provides partner organizations with \$33 million worth of food
- Partners must have 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status

The Food Connections Market Offers Partners:

- Affordable or free healthy food options (fresh and non-perishable)
- Private shopping by appointment
- Personalized support, enabling partners to continue their vital work in ending hunger

Conclusion

Return to the lobby and...

- Thank visitors for their time and interest
- Provide information on how to stay connected (email, social media)
- Offer to answer any questions

How You Can Help End Hunger

The Redwood Empire Food Bank needs your support to continue our mission:

Volunteer

- Visit refb.org/volunteer to sign up
- We rely on 7,400+ volunteers annually
- 92 volunteers for each staff member

Donate Food

- Visit refb.org/donate-food

- Find food barrels at Whole Foods, Oliver's Markets, etc.
- Non-perishable staples stock our shelves
- Supports our programs and partner organizations

Contribute Financially

- Cash/Checks can be mailed or delivered in person to 3990 Brickway Blvd., Santa Rosa 95403
- Card/bank account donations can be made online at refb.org or in person
- 51% of funding comes from individual donors
- 95% of expenses go directly to hunger relief programs
- Every \$1 donated provides \$3 worth of healthy food

Contributions in time, food, or money are crucial for our operations and help us distribute food to those in need.

Key Insights: Our Current Challenges and Impact

- Current Demand Trends
- Donation Dynamics and Resource Management
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Ongoing Challenges in Food Security

Demand and Supply

- Holiday season: Typically higher demand due to additional family expenses
- Stock management: Proactive monitoring and adjustments to meet year-round demand

Donations and Resources

- Cash donations: Steady but not increasing with demand; reduced purchasing power
- Most needed donations: Food, funds, and volunteers – all are crucial
- Monetary vs. food donations: \$1 donated provides \$3 worth of food
- Supply chain issues: Higher costs affecting food purchasing power

Volunteer Support

- Year-round volunteering encouraged for consistent community assistance

Challenges and Needs

- Main challenges: Inflation, supply chain issues, higher food costs, sourcing difficulties
- Impact of inflation: Increased demand as families face difficult financial choices

Frequently Asked Volunteer Questions

To address common questions from volunteers, we've compiled this concise FAQ section. This information will help you provide quick and accurate responses during tours.

Food Sources and Distribution

- Where does the food come from?
Our food comes from various sources: 53% purchased produce, 29% donated food, 11% purchased staples, and 7% from USDA programs. We partner with 105 major food donors: manufacturers, dairies, farms, and retail partners.
- Where is the food going?
We distribute food to over 300 monthly distribution sites (74% in Sonoma County) and 130 partner organizations across five counties: Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte.
- Which grocery stores and organizations donate food?
Major donors include Safeway, Raley's, and Amy's Kitchen. We have 105 major food donors in total and they are listed on our website at refb.org.

Facility and Operations

- How many square feet is the building?
The entire Redwood Empire Food Bank building is 60,000 square feet. The distribution center is 40,000 square feet.
- How many people are on staff?
We have 80 staff.
- What is grocery recovery?
Grocery recovery is a vital program where the Redwood Empire Food Bank collects short-dated or excess inventory food from local stores. This process involves making 60-70 weekly stops, which equates to approximately 150,000-200,000 pounds of food monthly. The recovered food is then brought back to the distribution center, where it's sorted, categorized, and distributed through various sites and partner organizations, ensuring that good food doesn't go to waste and instead reaches those in need.

This program not only helps reduce food waste but also provides a diverse range of food items to those facing food insecurity. Major donors to this program include Safeway, Raley's, and Amy's Kitchen, who have contributed significant amounts of food.

Volunteering and Employment

- What's the minimum age to volunteer?
Children are welcome to volunteer as long as they are accompanied by an

adult at all times. Children 14 years of age and older can volunteer independently.

- Can I get a job here?

For job opportunities, please visit refb.org.

- Why are there fewer volunteer opportunities now?

We've improved our efficiency, particularly by no longer using small mesh bags, which has reduced the need for as many warehouse volunteers at our distribution center. We have many more volunteer opportunities outside of our distribution center, including distribution sites and special events.

Confidentiality and Policies

- Can I take some food home?

No, but if you need food assistance, please visit our Food Connections Resource Center.

- Is employee information confidential?

Yes, we maintain confidentiality regarding our employees' personal information.

Additional Information

- How many people does the Redwood Empire Food Bank feed annually?

We serve over 135,000 unique individuals annually.

- When was the Redwood Empire Food Bank founded?

The Redwood Empire Food Bank has been Ending Hunger in Our Community since 1987.

Remember, if you're unsure about any information, it's best to direct volunteers to our website (refb.org) or to the informational displays in our lobby for the most current data. Alternatively, you can respond with, "Great question. Let me find the answer to that for you," and follow up with them later once you have the accurate information.