

Community



Food Hub Action Plan

What is a food hub?

Food hubs use community buying power to provide healthy, affordable food. They are there for everyone in the community, regardless of income.

Here's how **St Ann's Food Hub** made it happen!



Why create a food hub?

- By buying in bulk, without staff to pay or profits to make, boxes can have much more food in them
- For around £10 per week, communities get easy access to healthy, affordable food – much better value than at the supermarket!
- Food hubs give members of the community the chance to buy 'solidarity boxes' that can go to local people in need, so neighbours can help out neighbours
- Members can choose to donate a different amount to add to the 'pot', which gets given to local charities
- Bought boxes and solidarity boxes are exactly the same, so all members of the community have the same access to good food
- The more people that sign up, the better! It means more resources to buy a greater variety of food
- Buying in bulk also means that food comes in packaging that is designed to go back into the supply chain or be easily recycled, reducing waste



How to set up your food hub

St Ann's Food Hub didn't access any financial support – they use the power of their own community to set up and run the hub.

However, many housing providers, local authorities or local charities could be interested in helping with this kind of project - it's always worth reaching out!



“ Keep the scope narrow - do one thing, do it well and consistently ”

Rich, a founder of St Ann's Food Hub

01 Does this already exist?

Check if something like this already exists within your community. Will it be more productive to join that initiative or set up a new one?



02 Get people together

- Harness the power of your local community – find volunteers. Use social media and local businesses in the area to spread the word
- Before you start, get a sense of how many people will be needed so you can understand how it can work in your community
- St Ann's find that they need 3 volunteers doing admin and 9-10 volunteers receiving and packing the boxes each week over 2 collection shifts - that builds on average 60-80 boxes!
- St Ann's never let their volunteers do a shift on their own. The only exception is the person who sends messages to the community that the boxes are ready, as they do this from their home

03

Set up a Gmail account

- Keep your personal and food hub emails separate!
- With a Gmail account, everyone involved can access shared documents and you can set up a PayPal account

05

Set up an unincorporated association

- An unincorporated association is the simplest legal entity that can hold money for people
- It is an organisation set up through an agreement between a group of people who come together for a reason other than to make a profit
- When starting one, it is not necessary to have a name, a bank account or even any money – in fact many community groups inadvertently create one when they come together!
- You don't need to register an unincorporated association, and it doesn't cost anything to set one up.

04

Organise a payment system

- Getting a business bank account can be tricky (and expensive!), so St Ann's found this solution...
- Get a business PayPal account that links to your Gmail address – this is free!
- Something to note is that PayPal will require a phone number, so ensure that the number that's linked belongs to someone involved for the long-term

06

Get online

- This can be done with something as simple as a Google Form – you can do this through the Gmail account you set up earlier
- For St Ann's, this eventually evolved into a simple website
- If this skill isn't available in your community, this service builds websites for free for community organisations and not-for-profits:
e-voice.org.uk/free-website
- It will cost a small amount of money to enable people to subscribe to boxes through a web shop tool on your website. For St Ann's, it's worth paying for the ability to do this, as it makes it easier for repeat customers and means that your hub can rely on a certain amount of money coming in regularly to the account



Top tip from St Ann's:

Harness the talents within your community!

07

Get wholesaler greengrocer

- Find a local greengrocer – most will already order wholesale and can add your weekly order to theirs
- If you can find one, ideally approach a greengrocer who is already engaged with community activities
- St Ann's found that generally, greengrocers will be really open to working with community groups and going beyond 'business as usual' (and with a food hub they're giving back without being out of pocket!)
- One of the benefits of ordering wholesale for a food hub is that the greengrocer isn't having to pick items for 'customer appeal' (the beautiful stuff). This means they can often get you cheaper produce or more of it!

08

Find a space

- If there is one thing you are going to need, it's space! It will need to be big enough to sort out the delivered produce and store the boxes for the allotted pick-up times
- At first, St Ann's used a local primary school that offered them space. Now they rent space at a nearby community centre
- Some councils have lists of unused buildings though, so it's worth checking if those are available for your food hub!

09

Find 'solidarity box' partners

- To give away the 'solidarity boxes', St Ann's partner with institutions that refer individuals who need them
- Find local organisations that you trust that work with those in need

10

Set up WhatsApp groups

- You'll need one group to manage volunteers...
- And one group for the organisers

How to run your food hub

MONDAY

1. Send a weekly email to those on the community mailing list to remind them to order their boxes
 - St Ann's takes orders for boxes from Monday to Wednesday
 - People buy a box up front. St Ann's only buy what they've got orders for to ensure easy finances and no wasted food
2. Pay the greengrocer

TUESDAY

Tuesday's tasks are ongoing throughout the week:

1. Request names of 'solidarity box' recipients from partner organisations
2. Start turning the orders from paying community members and 'solidarity box' recipients into lists for Friday and Saturday

WEDNESDAY

1. Close the online ordering for the week's food boxes
 - For each £10 that someone spends on a food box, St Ann's spends £7.50 on produce, £1 to make up solidarity boxes, £1.50 on admin, space and subscription costs
 - St Ann's break even with cash-in and cash-out
2. Hold a check-in meeting amongst organisers in the evening to total the orders and make sure there are the right number of 'solidarity box' recipients for the number of donated boxes

THURSDAY

1. Put in produce order with your greengrocer
2. Close 'solidarity box' list for the week
 - Referrals will have been coordinated throughout the week from Tuesday through partner networks. Generally, this takes a couple of hours during the week

FRIDAY

1. Produce arrives at the food hub
2. Unpack the produce in the morning and divide it between the boxes that have been ordered, including the 'solidarity boxes'
 - Receiving and packing needs 2-3 volunteers for 1-2 hour shifts
 - St Ann's boxes are created with up to 17 different products!
3. Send reminder text to those that have ordered boxes to collect them
 - People from the community collect their boxes in the afternoon
 - Top tip from St Ann's: If there is any additional produce, create a box that people can help themselves to for free to avoid any waste
4. Open up ordering system for the following week

SATURDAY

1. Open food hub for the second shift of collections

SUNDAY

1. Confirm volunteers and set the rota for the following week via your volunteer WhatsApp group
 - St Ann's find that this can take until Thursday night to finalise, so start early!
 - To ease this process, St Ann's use the website signup.zone to help organise shifts
2. Let partner organisation network know that they can begin referrals for 'solidarity boxes' for the following week



Top tip from St Ann's:

Be careful with freebies! Sometimes the wholesaler turns up with extra free boxes of produce because the items are close to their use-by dates. Be very clear to those picking up the boxes about what needs to be used first - otherwise you might get some complaints!

The concept of this Community Action Plan was born of a desire to produce something tangible from what communities are already doing that can counter the impacts of the cost of living crisis.

These step-by-step guides align with findings that emerge from Resident Voice Index™ data, research which has been commissioned by MRI Software. They demonstrate community empowerment in action – a core tenet of the Resident Voice Index™ project.

ST ANN'S FOOD HUB

We would like to thank St Ann's Food Hub for their ongoing work in their own community and their support with the creation of this Community Action Plan.

For more information about the great work that St Ann's Food Hub do, visit stannsfoodhub.org

residentvoiceindex.co.uk