Looking Ahead to 2024 With Optimism and Determination

Just like so many people do at the start of a new year, Food Bank of the Rockies is also using this time to outline some 2024 “resolutions,” brainstorming ways to more effectively support our communities. Join us in looking ahead to the new year knowing that, together, we will be able to nourish our neighbors experiencing hunger.

Understanding Barriers to Food Access
Through a USDA grant, we will continue our efforts to map and understand service gaps and barriers to emergency food access in the counties we support. Examples of such obstacles include a lack of food distributions easily reached by public transportation and areas where affordable, nourishing food is hard to access.

Responding to Community Needs in Real Time
When challenges arrive in the communities we support, we do whatever we can to help. Last year, Food Bank of the Rockies Western Slope established temporary mobile pantries in two cities after the major food pantry in each community closed. We will continue to work within each community to create long-term solutions to provide nourishing food for neighbors facing hunger.

Healthcare Program
Our newest initiative as an organization is the Healthcare Program, which provides weekly, nutritionally tailored food boxes to people who have been diagnosed with certain medical conditions and screen positive for food insecurity. Currently, the program is being piloted in the Denver metro area. In 2024, we plan to increase the number of participants, add new healthcare partners, provide virtual education classes, and expand the amount of culturally diverse foods available.

Nutrition
Our Nutrition Team is implementing Healthy Eating Research guidelines to assess the nutritional quality of the food we distribute and identify strengths and opportunities to equitably distribute nutritious food in our communities.

Western Slope Growth
The expanded capabilities of our new Western Slope Etkin Family Distribution Center enabled us to add two new counties to our service area: Ouray and San Miguel. The larger facility also allows for a higher number of volunteers: In 2023, we logged 66% more volunteer hours than 2022, and we are on pace to keep increasing that volume!

We are able to provide these resources and much more to our neighbors thanks to supporters like you. With your backing, we are able to look forward to 2024 with hopeful anticipation, knowing that wherever there is a need, together we will find a way to meet it.
With the busy holiday season behind us and a new year before us, I’d like to take a moment to pause and reflect back on some of the things Food Bank of the Rockies and our Hunger Relief Partners accomplished across the Western Slope in the last few months.

November and December are months when we gather together with loved ones, and food has so much meaning. It’s also a time when we at Food Bank of the Rockies pull out all the stops to not only meet the basic requirement for nourishment, but to provide our neighbors with items that are special to them. Familiar. Comforting. Maybe even foods that put smiles on their faces when they see it at a mobile pantry or on a Hunger Relief Partner’s shelves.

Part of doing that looks like sourcing turkeys for Thanksgiving months before November rolls around to ensure we’ll have enough to go around. Another aspect of that is asking our community members and partners what foods they want to see, then doing our best to get those items into the hands of the neighbors who requested them. Things like corn husks, masa flour, ground beef, tomatillos, and dried ancho chiles for tamales, a traditional meal at Navidad celebrations.

A few of the other things we are especially excited about from last year include incredible growth in our volunteer and dehydrator programs, hosting region-specific events to engage with supporters in the various communities we serve on the Western Slope, and partnering with The Little Nell in Aspen to provide fresh Thanksgiving meals to neighbors through our El Jebel Mobile Pantry.

What an honor to be part of an organization that asks and responds, innovates and listens. Thank you for joining us on our journey to truly nourish our communities with foods that fill plates and fuel joy. We are so grateful for your support.

Sue Ellen Rodwick
Western Slope Director
Food Bank of the Rockies
The Benefits of Volunteering as a Family

Many families value volunteering as a way to teach children about the importance of community service and social justice, and help them become more connected to their communities.

By being asked to expend effort on helping others, kids learn valuable lessons about empathy that can help them grow into compassionate, caring adults. They also gain an earlier understanding of factors like socioeconomic status that can help broaden their worldview and allow them to communicate more easily with people from different backgrounds.

Not only that, but volunteering is also statistically associated with better mental and physical health in children and teenagers. Research published in JAMA Open Network showed that youth who participated in community service were 35% less likely to have behavioral or anxiety problems, 34% more likely to be in excellent or very good overall health, and 66% more likely to be “flourishing,” which the study defined as a holistic measure of well-being.

On the other end of the age spectrum, volunteering can also be beneficial for older adults as it helps keep them active and invested in their communities. Older adults have a wealth of life experience and expertise that can provide learning opportunities for youth volunteers and create cross-generational connections.

Research has also shown that volunteering is good for older adults’ mental and physical health. A Carnegie Mellon University study found that older adults who volunteered on a regular basis were less likely to develop high blood pressure and experienced improved mood and self-esteem and lowered anxiety levels.

If you’d like to get started volunteering as a family, consider joining us for a special family volunteer night on February 9! We appreciate your support and hope to see you and your loved ones at our distribution center or a mobile pantry soon.

Help Alleviate Difficult Decisions

No one should have to choose between paying the bills or buying food. This winter, provide relief and hope to our Western Slope neighbors experiencing hunger. $1 helps provide enough food for 3 meals and removes one more difficult decision from people’s lives. Donate today at foodbankrockies.org/give. Thank you!
Hunger challenges our neighbors every day. With support from individuals like you, we are able to provide help to anyone who finds themselves in need. Discover inspiring stories of how together we are nourishing communities in our newsletter.

We ignite the power of community to nourish people facing hunger.