



Running a Food Pantry: things to think about



About this guide

This guide brings together some of what we've learnt about what works in food pantries from a three-year evaluation of Peckham Pantry in the London Borough of Southwark. Peckham Pantry is part of the Your Local Pantry network and has received funding from Impact on Urban Health since 2020. Independent researchers Sophie Reid, Linda Jackson and Emma Carter have been working with Peckham Pantry to understand what impact it has for its Members and the financial sustainability of its model.

This guide will be of interest to funders or practitioners who are interested in supporting or running a food pantry and many of the themes will be relevant for people looking to set up a social supermarket. It's not a toolkit that tells you what to do, but more of a framework for things to think about, with some examples and learning from Peckham Pantry. We hope it can provide a common language for planning and decision making.

More information about the impact of Peckham Pantry, can be found on Pecan's website, [here](#). More information about Peckham Pantry can be found in the final evaluation report, *The Impact and Sustainability of Peckham Pantry*. This is available on Pecan's website, [here](#).

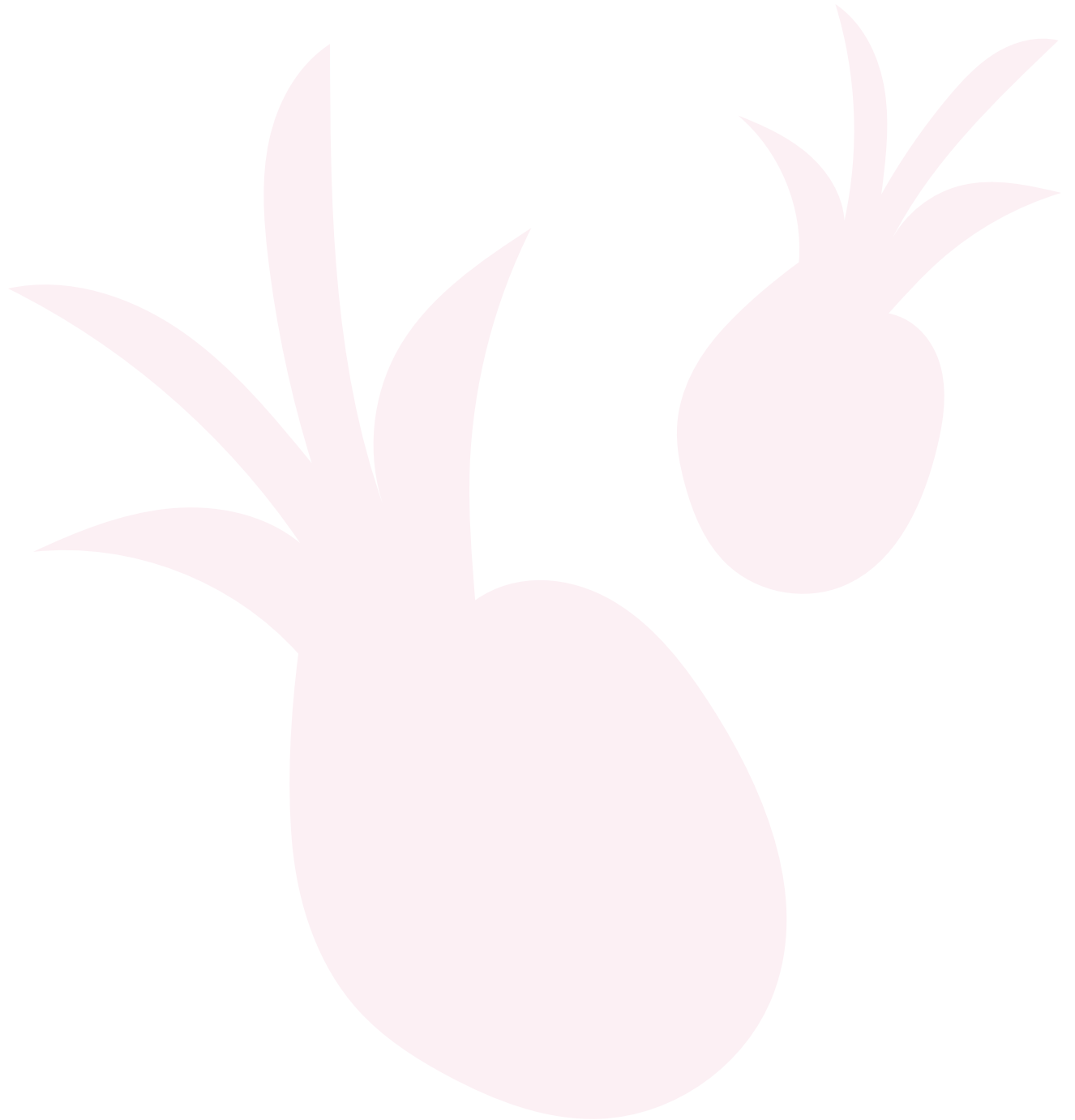
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What is a food pantry?

A food pantry is a project which provides a choice of food at low-cost to its members, in order to tackle food insecurity, increase access to fresh produce and tackle food waste. It will usually make use of surplus food that would have otherwise gone to waste, but often purchase food as well to ensure a good offer for members. Alongside a food offer, many pantries provide community activities, wraparound support or signposting to other services. Some pantries are in permanent premises, while others 'pop up' in other venues. They tend to be laid out more like a traditional shop, where members can browse and select what they want from the shelves.



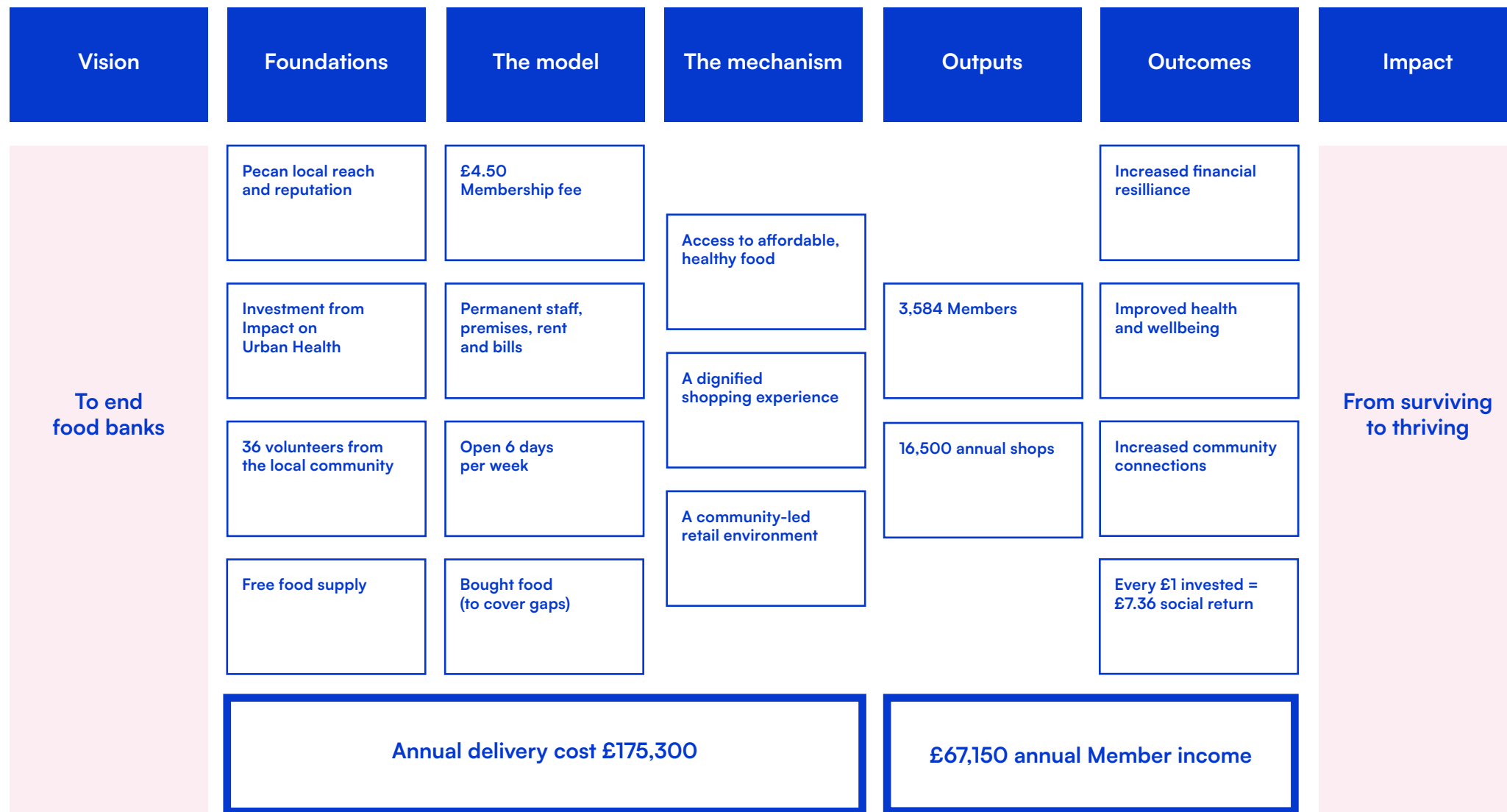
What is Peckham Pantry?

In 2019, [Pecan](#) set up a pantry at St Luke's Church in Peckham, based on the [Your Local Pantry](#) model. St Luke's Pantry opened for three hours each week and, for a payment of £4.50 per shop, Members could buy food, including fresh fruit and vegetables and store cupboard favourites to an average value of £15-20. In this way, the pantry model had dignity and choice embedded at its heart, where Members paid a subsidised fee to select the food they wanted and needed.

In early 2020 [Impact on Urban Health](#) provided funding for Pecan to open up a second pantry in Peckham Park Road. Peckham Pantry was also based on the Your Local Pantry model with a fixed Member shopping fee of £4.50, but it was to be unique from other pantries in that it would open six days per week and replicate a retail shopping environment. The aim was to target low-income young families but be open to all local people.

The following page presents Peckham Pantry logic model, which contains the key components of Peckham Pantry at a glance.

Figure 1: Peckham Pantry logic model



What impact do you want to achieve?

The first question is, what do you want to achieve by setting up a pantry? Thinking about the impact that you want to have is the most important step, and many decisions about the model you will adopt come from first deciding what you are trying to do. The starting point is to understand the difference you want to make for your members, so you can build your model and offer around that.

The difference you want to make. This could include:

- a. Making it easier for families to access fresh and healthy food
- b. Reducing stress and worry associated with not being able to afford food
- c. Supporting people to improve their financial situation
- d. Building community resilience
- e. Reducing food waste



The impact of Peckham Pantry

By opening six days a week and operating out of permanent retail premises, Peckham Pantry was designed to support Members through periods of financial insecurity by opening up access to affordable healthy food in a dignified shopping environment. With the large staff base of local volunteers, and open to Membership to anyone who wanted to join, Peckham Pantry also intended to serve and invest in the local community. These outcomes were explored throughout the evaluation.

Financial benefits: The evaluation showed that Peckham Pantry had a very positive impact on Members' finances. Analysis of Member shopping baskets demonstrated that Members received great value for money at anywhere up to £20 per visit over the price of their basket. In the 2022 survey, 94% respondents agreed that Peckham Pantry had made things financially better for them — and this was particularly so for those who shopped at least weekly.

Health benefits: Members also reported that they benefited by having access to affordable and healthy food. By being able to afford fruit and vegetables — and encouraged to try new foods at Peckham Pantry — Members also described reduced anxiety of knowing that Peckham Pantry was available to them whenever they needed it. In the 2022 survey, 72% of respondents agreed that being a Member of Peckham Pantry had a positive

impact on their mental health, and 66% agreed it had a positive impact on their physical health.

Greater community connectedness: Members described a deep attachment to Peckham Pantry as a community resource, recognising the value and contributions of staff and local volunteers to create a warm, welcoming, non-judgemental atmosphere. In the 2022 survey, 62% respondents agreed that they felt more connected to the local community as a result of their Membership.

“What do I value most? The substantial food cost reductions to my weekly shopping bill. And just as importantly the friendly manner of all the people involved in the operation of the Pantry.” — Member

The challenges of delivering Peckham Pantry's retail model absorbed staff and volunteer capacity, taking emphasis away from the original plans of providing Members with wider wrap-around support. Despite this, the evaluation found that the Peckham Pantry, whilst incredibly challenging, costly and resource intensive to deliver, generated significant outcomes for a large core of 1,500 most active Members. Furthermore, it found a statistical link between the number of shops and the scale of benefits, suggesting that the more frequently a Member shopped, the greater the benefits they experienced.

Setting up

A pantry is essentially a form of a shop and you will need to think of it as business when setting up. This will include considerations around the premises, staffing, supply chains, budgeting, membership criteria, health and safety and food storage policies and other laws and regulations that must be followed when running a commercial food outlet. Careful and thoughtful planning is required for the pantry to become operational; be sure you have time and resources to plan adequately. The following list can help work through the key areas to consider.

01. Your offer

- a. What will be included in each shop?
- b. How much will you charge?
- c. How often will your members be able to shop?
- d. Will you offer different types of shop for different needs? (e.g. double shops for large families, single person household shops)
- e. Will you offer certain things 'free'? How will you decide? For example some pantries always offer some basic fruit & veg choices free, or offer freebies when they have too much of an item

02. Membership

- a. Will you have any eligibility criteria to join or be open to all? For example whether someone lives in the local area, or is struggling financially?

- b. What will it mean to be a 'member'? What is the offer you are making to members (including beyond the food)?
- c. What will you consider an 'active' member to be? e.g. someone who shops at least once a week? Someone who has shopped in the last six months? Consider this in terms of what you hope people will get out of their membership
- d. How important is it to you to formalise membership? You could offer membership cards and/or loyalty cards to encourage an active membership base
- e. At what point might you consider removing a 'lapsed' member from the membership? Is this an automatic process or will they get a call?

03. Community ownership

- a. What role will members play in how the pantry operates?
- b. Can you set up a Steering Group with volunteers and members to help make decisions about the pantry?

04. Layout

- a. How can you make the most of the space available in your premises?
- b. How can you ensure food safety?
- c. How can you create a pleasant and dignified shopping environment? Most people prefer to browse first, then pay. If you can't create this system, how can you make it clear to people how they should shop?

- d. How will you ensure space for food sorting and storage?
- e. Where will food be delivered and how will you ensure access for delivery?

05. Health & safety

- a. What food hygiene processes do you need in place to handle food? This will depend on what you offer and whether you do any decanting on-site
- b. Consider how you might deal with safety incidents in the pantry involving members — things like queuing, enforcing shop rules and non-availability of items can be flashpoints. What will be the process to de-escalate any issues with dignity? Do all volunteers know this process and feel supported to deal with issues if they arise?
- c. How will you store food and/or will you need fridges and freezers?

06. Opening times

- a. How often do you need to be open? Consider how you find a balance between providing flexibility for your members and being able to staff the pantry appropriately e.g., you may want to consider opening late one evening to reach those who work, and/or opening on a weekend day
- b. If you are connected or close to educational or family settings, how can you make it easiest for families to make use of the pantry e.g. opening around nursery or school drop off and pick up times?
- c. Will you be open-entry, or require people to book ahead for a timeslot? How can you balance managing demand with offering flexibility?

Setting up Peckham Pantry

For Pecan, Peckham Pantry was an opportunity to bring people together and then offer wider wrap-around support or referrals to tackle Member needs in a more holistic way, as opposed to the 'sticking plaster' of accessing free food from a food bank. Central to the model — and underpinning the dignified Member experience — were the extended opening hours; to underscore the point that Peckham Pantry was a shop and not a charity. Pecan identified permanent premises for Peckham Pantry and plans were to open in April 2020. In March 2020, the UK went into lockdown as a result of the Covid pandemic. Work to open Peckham Pantry was significantly delayed and, when they finally resumed, incurred additional, unexpected costs to set up. The Pantry finally opened in October 2020.

As things stabilised in the post-pandemic world, Peckham Pantry grappled with challenges of operating a retail offer across six days per week. Managing food supply presented wellbeing challenges for staff who devoted significant time, capacity and resource to develop adequate — but manual — processes and policies to operate safely and effectively, from changing the layout of the shop to receive and handle food, identifying processes around stock rotation and proper labelling of products. They also had the ongoing work to manage a consistent staff and volunteer rota and sourcing food.

Due to the small retail space, staff and volunteers were constantly restocking shelves and the fridge and the freezer. Deliveries needed to be met and sorted the moment they arrived, every food had to be checked for allergies and according to the best by dates. Items with no labels were put aside and not sold on the shop floor and certain products, such as oil or rice were decanted from large catering packs and labelled into smaller, sellable quantities. All of this was time consuming and physically demanding and required leadership from staff with relevant food safety qualifications to oversee the process.

Messaging

Messaging is essential to the success of a pantry and includes getting the language right and reaching the right people. For many communities, the food pantry model is not something they will have come across before, so there is work to do to explain it and build trust and, when you are more established, you may require different communication for your most engaged vs least engaged members. Language can be stigmatising so testing and learning about messaging along the way is always a good idea.

01. Reaching out to members

- a. How can you best communicate what a pantry is, how it works, who can come and what might be the benefits to them? Saving money on a food shop may be the main draw, but don't forget the other aspects of your model!
- b. How can you build trust with the local community? If it's possible, meeting people face-to-face e.g. door knocking or setting up a stall at a Children's Centre/community centre/local market might be an effective way to do this
- c. How will you know what has been effective? If you ask people who sign up where they heard about the pantry, you can start to understand more about what works
- d. How can you involve the community from the start? Could you hold an event to talk to people about what they want from a pantry?

02. Language about the model

- a. Can you test the messaging with people in the local community to make sure it is clear? (especially before printing anything!)
- b. How can you make sure that language used is non-stigmatising? For example, you might want to focus on communities supporting each other, or everyone being welcome, if those are parts of your model
- c. How can you use the right language for different people? Different aspects of the model appeal to different people, so you might want to test what works best, or rotate different messages

03. Reminders and promotion of the offer

- a. How will people know what's available? Is there a way you can share this before they make the journey? You could post photos of the stock on social media accounts, or an example basket, or remind people what is part of your 'core range'
- b. How can you ensure the pantry feels relevant to different members? Can you target messages at different segments of your membership (e.g. families with young children, older single person households, working families) and rotate these, or send more targeted messages to those members (if possible)

04. Communicating changes at the pantry

- a. Changes can be unsettling, especially when a pantry already has different rules to most 'normal' shops. If you need to make a change, how can you ensure that members know what's changing and why, how you knew it needed to change, and what it enables the pantry to do?
- b. How can you make members a part of any changes? For example could you invite them to be part of a steering group, or to provide feedback on recent changes?



Food supply

Getting the food offer right is normally the most crucial — and potentially most challenging — aspect of delivering a pantry, no matter what impact you are looking to have. The food tends to be what gets members through the door, and regularly engaging with the pantry, where they can then benefit from making small savings, interacting with others, or receiving other support. If the food isn't right, people may not choose to use the pantry. This can be one of the most challenging aspects of running a pantry, especially in models where you do not have a food purchasing budget and rely predominantly on surplus and donations. However, there are choices you can make to ensure that your food offer best meets the needs of your members.



01. Sourcing food

- a. Can you develop a 'core range' with members and volunteers that you can commit to always stocking? This could be at a high-level to make it feasible such as always stocking at least five types of fruit and veg, always rice or pasta. Some members find it reassuring to have some consistency within the model in order to plan, and to meet family/health needs
- b. What relationships with suppliers will you need to build, to access a range of food e.g. local businesses, supermarkets, market traders, local growers and farms?
- c. What sources of surplus food supply can you access? Organisations like the [Felix project](#) (London), [FareShare](#), [City Harvest](#), [HIS Church](#) and others are set up to manage the logistics of large quantities of surplus food. Some may charge for their service

02. Cultural foods

- a. What do your members like to eat? Food is deeply connected to identity and people understand themselves, their place in society and their health through their foodways. Not having access to familiar foods can be alienating and dissociative
- b. How can you collect information from members about what they like to eat and would like to see stocked in the pantry?
- c. How can you celebrate the different cultures of your pantry members and allow them to bring their identities, knowledge and skills as assets?

- d. What relationships with suppliers can you build, to access particular foods which may be more difficult to source e.g. importer wholesalers, local market traders

03. Stock management

- a. How important is it for you to know what is being sold? How will you manage that? How can you work out what is most popular to stock and what you struggle to shift? (e.g. stock take at pantry level, recording baskets)
- b. What can you do with this information? For example could you identify your most and least popular items, use the data to find funding to purchase the most popular 'staples', make targeted callouts for donations, or reject offers of least popular items
- c. Can you have a process to record and manage waste? Be aware there may be a cost associated with waste and plan that accordingly when taking surplus — there is no point taking it if it will only fall onto you to dispose of (potentially at your own expense)

Sourcing food at Peckham Pantry

Food range was a critical component of Peckham's Pantry objective to provide Members with a dignified shopping experience, as familiar brands, meat products and good quality food increased perceptions around the value of the offer. The two Peckham Pantry sites handled an average of 2,100kg of free food per week, supplied through three deliveries from The Felix Project and two deliveries from City Harvest. Pecan supplement this by paying for other staples including that supplied by Tropical Sun, sourced through Neighbourly and donations from Glengall Wharf Gardens (a local community garden).

Peckham Pantry's dependency upon surplus food distribution led to inconsistency in supply and range. There were examples where a large 350kg delivery included 200kg of potatoes or celeriac. When this occurred, the team had to manually fill gaps in food supply, with a top up budget of £1.75 for each £4.50 basket sold. Filling gaps in food supply was an unexpected demand on operations that cost Peckham Pantry staff significant time and money to address.

Across the three years of delivering Peckham Pantry, the pantry manager explored numerous routes of increasing free or discounted food supply.

This involved approaching supermarkets directly, such as Aldi, M&S and Lidl, to introduce Peckham Pantry and ask for surplus food. They also went to large London markets, such as Billingsgate, Smithfield and Spitalfields, often in the early hours of the morning, to explore whether there were opportunities for discount trading. However, these markets only dealt in large budgets which were beyond both the budget and storage facilities of Peckham Pantry. Attempts to mobilise a borough-wide VCS food procurement programme also proved challenging, with little discount available through wholesalers amongst the wider food cost increases.

There were some successes, in securing chicken from Nando's and sponsorship with Tropical Sun, but, while almost two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents agreed that the pantry had food they wanted to buy in stock, this was one of the lower rated indicators. Fieldwork with Members consistently highlighted the inconsistent stock offer as a barrier to them shopping more frequently. Filling gaps in food supply remained an ongoing challenge.

Specific areas to consider:

Some specific things to think about around food preparation and handling are:

- a. If you plan to offer fresh or frozen produce, ensure you know the correct fridge temperatures to use and keep a daily record of these. If you can, source glass-fronted fridges and freezers to avoid unnecessary door opening and keep them at the correct temperature
- b. If you accept frozen food, ensure it remains frozen at all times. If it has been defrosted, this should be clearly marked so that members know
- c. If you do any decanting (e.g. of foods into smaller packets), ensure that there is a clean and separate place to do this, and that the decanted packets are clearly labelled with their contents and allergens
- d. Ensure that allergens are clearly marked on anything available at the pantry, and consider keeping a record of members' allergies
- e. Ensure that health and safety training is provided to staff and volunteers and that this is updated where required



Supporting members with other needs

Providing members with low-cost food helps them to save small amounts of money, over the long-term. Members in less urgent situations are able to use these savings to improve their financial situation, such as through paying for education and career-related training or paying off debt. For others, a pantry can help them to stay afloat and not fall into debt, rent or bill arrears. Beyond the financial benefits of accessing affordable, healthy food, the pantry might play a role in providing or signposting to wider forms of support to tackle other areas of need.

01. Vision

- a. Do you want/have capacity to support members with their other needs?
- b. What is your vision for signposting/other support services to be provided?

02. Capacity

- a. What support do you have the capacity and skills to offer?
- b. What support can you provide directly and what might you need to signpost or partner with other services/organisations to provide?
- c. What relationships might you need to build with other organisations and services to do this?

- d. Can you refer people formally to other services if needed? Or will you just provide information?
- e. What existing skills/knowledge do your staff and volunteers have?
- f. What training might be needed for staff and volunteers? Could you develop some guidance with volunteers?

03. Signposting pathways

- a. How will you collect data about your members' needs? You could ask some questions when they sign up, or in regular surveys, more informally through conversations in the pantry, or by bringing members together in focus groups
How can you support volunteers to identify where someone might have a support need? It can be difficult to talk to people about their needs, especially if/where people only associate the pantry with food shopping
- b. Will you offer support straight away where members request it?
- c. Will you monitor take-up of support offered?
- d. Will you aim to transition people out of pantry use by providing this support, or will people be able to continue indefinitely as members?

04. Format

- a. Is there space in the pantry to have people come in and set up a stall on an ad-hoc or semi-regular basis?
- b. Could you link in to voucher incentive schemes within the pantry, such as [Healthy Start](#) vouchers (available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland), [Best Start](#) vouchers (available in Scotland) or [Rose vouchers](#) (available in selected locations in England and Scotland)? There are some examples where funding for these sorts of schemes enables pantries to make regular orders of high quality fruit and veg to offer as a veg bag to members, alongside their full pantry shop



Staffing and volunteers

The number and role of staff and volunteers will depend on the pantry model of delivery. For example, if you are open a few hours per week, you might not need to recruit a new member of staff to deliver it and volunteers might be able to pick up more responsibility in delivery. Alternatively, if you open up more frequently over the week you might need to recruit dedicated staff members who pick up the greater share of delivery.

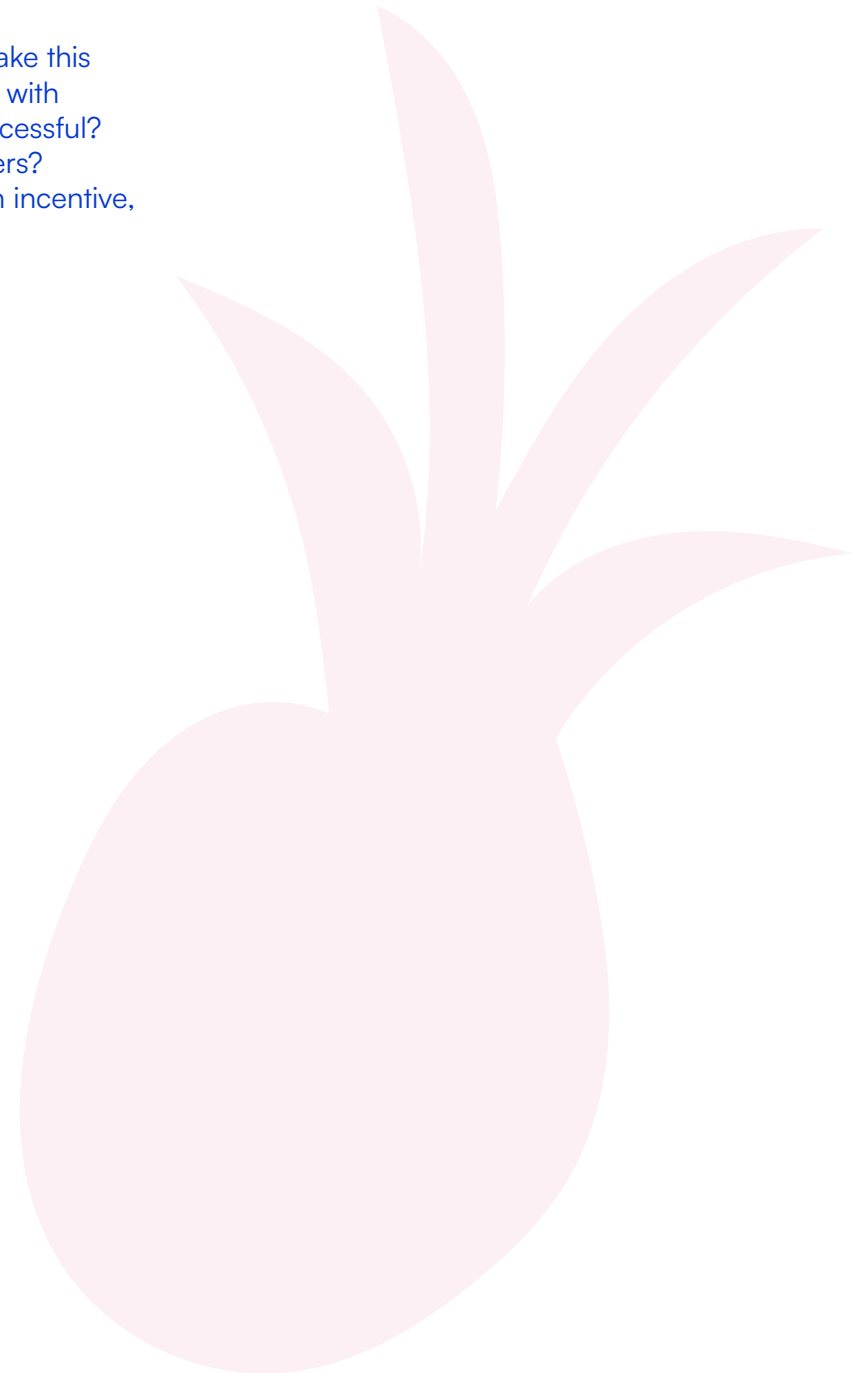
01. Staffing

- a. How many staff do you need to run the different elements of pantry operations?
- b. Can staff pick up the pantry alongside other aspects of their role or do you need a dedicated manager?

02. Managing volunteers

- a. How will you reach and recruit potential volunteers?
- b. How will you manage a volunteer rota?
- c. What skills or knowledge do you need in your team and what skills and knowledge do volunteers want to lend you to make their volunteering meaningful and satisfying?
- d. What training might volunteers need and/or benefit from?
- e. Would you like to offer pathways from membership into volunteering, including to boost ownership of the model from the local community?

- f. Would you like to offer pathways to employment from volunteering?
What capacity have you got to make this meaningful and how will you deal with volunteer recruitment if this is successful?
- g. What is working to retain volunteers?
- h. Do you want to give volunteers an incentive, such as a free shop?



Operational considerations at Peckham Pantry

The Peckham Pantry evaluation team interviewed five other Your Local Pantry sites based in urban and rural parts of England and Scotland to explore the similarity and difference between Peckham Pantry and other pantries and draw out process learning about delivering a pantry model.

There were some common themes from the interviews. All pantries struggled with sourcing regular and reliable food supply and managing member expectations around what would be available during each visit. They all spent money and time to fill gaps in supply and meet the needs of their membership. All pantries used volunteers from the local community to support operations and set the tone of the pantry environment. None of the pantries that took part in the interviews were financially sustainable based on member shopper income alone.

However, there was a significant difference between Peckham Pantry and the five pantries that took part in interviews; by opening six days per week Peckham Pantry had a wider set of operational considerations and costs to delivery which was not shared by other pantries.

For example, handling and sorting the volume of food required to serve Peckham Pantry Members over the week was significantly more resource intensive compared to smaller pantries.

This meant that Peckham Pantry needed one full time Pantry Manager supported by three part time staff to oversee these processes and manage the large volunteer rota whereas other pantries could incorporate pantry staff time as part of a wider role and/or use volunteers to lead key aspects of delivery.

Similarly, Peckham Pantry operated in a permanent premises compared to other pantries housed within the local church or in community hubs. This meant that Peckham Pantry had rent, service and fuel costs unlike other pantries which often had these costs covered by the hosting organisation.

Taken together, this meant that Peckham Pantry had explicit and fixed costs associated with delivery that couldn't be 'waived' or hidden within other budget lines. Despite having a rota of 36 volunteers, 66% of Peckham Pantry costs were related to four staff member salaries.

Working towards healthy and sustainable diets

Working towards healthy and sustainable diets might be one of your main ambitions for setting up the pantry. Access to healthy food can help tackle some of the health inequalities that those on low incomes face. Pantries can help communities access and support food practices which are better for the planet. But even if your focus isn't primarily on health and sustainability, there are small choices you can make in the service you offer, to help people move towards healthier and more sustainable diets.

01. Tailoring your offer

- a. How can you ensure that the processes set up support healthy choices? For example, can you reduce bulk-buy 'special offers' on unhealthy foods, can you avoid putting limits on healthy items like fruit & veg, or make fruit & veg free?
- b. Can you stock a good variety of high quality fruit & veg and only use surplus to top this up?
- c. Can you look at the arrangement and display of healthy foods to make them more appealing? Programmes such as SuperShelf in the US offer guidance which includes promoting fruit & veg to eyeline, making fruit & veg the first thing members encounter when making their choices, organising colourful and varied displays, and ensuring consistent stocking levels of fruit & veg
- d. Can you provide healthy eating advice alongside the pantry offer? To encourage people to make use of the fresh produce available?
- e. Will you take anything you are given as surplus, or will you reject the most unhealthy items e.g. ultra processed sweets, crisps and fizzy drinks?

02. Sourcing

- a. Can you make links with local growing projects or community supported agriculture projects to supply some fresh produce?
- b. How can you move to more sustainable (less polluting, less fossil fuel dependent) methods of transport to collect surplus? For example by using bikes or electric vehicles to make collections, avoiding the use of lots of petrol or diesel vehicles to make multiple small collections
- c. Can you link up with another service to help with this e.g. [Food Connect](#)
- d. How can you reduce waste within the pantry? This could involve careful stock rotation, offering 'freebies' to encourage selection, surplus sharing networks with other Pantries, and not accepting things you don't think you can shift

03. Advocating

- a. How can you organise and advocate for the food system you want to see in this country? Food Pantries are usually at the sharp end of food insecurity, but this can be harnessed to put citizen pressure on government and businesses to act in ways which are responsible, effective and equitable

Financial models

Pantries run on a range of financial models. Most have some element of subsidisation — whether that is through grant income, donations, corporate sponsorship, or in-kind financial support such as being offered free or low-cost rent. Pantries also receive some income from members through shops, but this is not usually enough to make the projects financially sustainable. The balance of income and subsidy will look different in each project and may be driven by the outcomes you want to see (for example, some funders may be willing to fund the project based on its health or social outcomes).

01. Costs

- a. What costs do you have? Most pantries' largest costs are staff and rent, followed by bills for services and food supply. Breaking your overall costs down into spend per basket is a useful way to compare cost with income

02. Income

- a. What income do you expect to bring in? When you are more established you can use real member visit data to predict this, but at the beginning you may need to make best estimates of how many visits you expect.

- b. There are usually marginal income gains from each visit. This means that increasing visits may not ever cover your costs. A useful comparison is between your spend-per-basket with basket income to work out which strategy might work best

03. Using financial data for decision-making

- a. How much do you know about shops at the pantry? You may want to collect data about how many people shop at the pantry, how often and when. This can help you to understand what sort of shoppers you have, for your financial modelling. A smaller core of regular shoppers may be easier to maintain and design the service around, than a large group of infrequent shoppers
- b. How busy is the pantry at certain times? Do you know why people shop when they do? You could collect this information through tracking visits in a computer system, sending out surveys, or at sign-up so you can build the model around members' needs (which may change throughout the year e.g. school holiday effect)
- c. If the data tells you there are very quiet days/times, could those be better used for something else (for example staff training, doing stock check, closing and using the venue for other events) rather than staffing it all day. Due to small marginal gains from each visit, closing on quieter days and reducing staff costs could be more effective and financially sustainable than staying open



Financial sustainability at Peckham Pantry

One of the evaluation objectives was to explore whether Peckham Pantry could be financially sustainable, covering the cost of delivery through the income generated by Member shops alone, rather than rely on external funding to fill any financial gaps.

As already described, the Peckham Pantry model was not comparable to other Pantries; it operated out of a permanent premises and also needed four staff Members to oversee processes, such as handling, sourcing and safety sorting the large volume of food, and managing the large volunteer rota.

The cost profile for Peckham Pantry included 25% fixed costs, premise and central management costs, and 75% semi-variable and variable costs, food top-ups, staff and other operating costs. The shopping charge of £4.50 was less than half the current unit cost of providing a Member basket.

Together, this resulted in a marginal gain per shop of around a third of the basket price, with the other two-thirds covering the related variable costs.

The analysis of current levels of activity and costs showed that financial sustainability was not achievable. The cost of delivering Peckham Pantry in 2022/23 was £175,300 and the value of Member shops was £67,150. This meant that there the financial gap to sustainability on a like for like year was £108,150.

To eliminate the financial gap through Membership income alone would require over 450% more visits which was not feasible due to the volume of food required to accommodate such an increase. Additionally, the nature of the cost profile meant that increased visits would incur more staff time and more food top-ups.

Pecan have been able to explore and understand the costs and the break-even position of Peckham Pantry to support their strategic planning for the future.

Data collection and evaluation

When thinking about the impact you want to have, it's always a good idea to think about how you can measure and evidence against this impact as you open up the pantry. Setting up simple systems to collect data at the beginning can help streamline the process and reduce unnecessary burden at specific points of delivery. Having a clear and simple evaluation plan will help you know whether and how you are making a difference on your members and also gather evidence to share with funders. Understanding why you are collecting data and how you will use it is also an essential part of GDPR too.

01. Collecting and using data

- a. If you're planning to collect personal data from your members, are you clear about why? It is good practice to only collect the minimum data that is required, and that you have a use for. If in doubt, don't collect it. You have a duty to keep data secure
- b. Data can be an incredible resource for learning and improving. But for this to happen, it is essential that you collect it in a systematic way, understand how to analyse it, and put what you learn into practice. You might want to consider getting expert support with this (this could include recruiting expert volunteers or in-kind/pro bono support)
- c. You might want to consider collecting the following sorts of data:

- Information about members — where they live, their household size and composition, their motivation for joining, their support needs, demographic data, any allergies they have
- Information about shops — what day/time they take place
- Information about wider member needs — if you wish to provide a wider support off

02. Evaluation

- a. How will you know if what you're doing is working, and whether you are having the impact you want?
- b. Can you develop some questions you'd like to answer through evaluation?
- c. What sort of information do you need to collect on an ongoing basis (monitoring/ feedback/operational data) and what might you want to do as a one-off?
- d. If you make a change, can you collect data before and after to understand what difference it makes?
- e. Depending on your evaluation questions, you might like to consider the following methods:
- f. Quantitative (breadth): analysing your membership and visits data, your stock data, running surveys with members or volunteers, recording the contents of baskets (and maybe comparing it to shop prices to understand whether you are providing consistent basket value)
- g. Qualitative (depth): holding events or focus groups to gather feedback, checking in by phone with members who haven't shopped in a while, interviewing a sample of members, using a feedback box, observing shops as a 'shopalong'

- h. Make sure you follow up on what you've learnt. You may want to use predetermined criteria to prioritise it for taking action (for example by what is most common/most important/in your direct control)
- i. Communicate what you have found and what changes you have made back to members (including where there is little/ nothing you can do because it's not in your direct control)

For more information about collecting monitoring and evaluation data you can look at previous Peckham Pantry evaluation reports saved on the [Pecan website](#) or contact the evaluation team [here](#).



Peckham Pantry evaluation

The evaluation was commissioned in February 2020. Phase 1 of the evaluation was delivered by Linda Jackson, Sophie Reid and Neil Reader and concluded in January 2022. Phase 2 of the evaluation was delivered by Linda Jackson, Sophie Reid and Emma Carter and concluded in January 2024.

Key evaluation questions

The evaluation had three key objectives which were consistent across the evaluation period;

03. To understand the impact of Peckham Pantry upon Members
04. To understand what worked well and less well in achieving outcomes
05. To review the longer-term financial sustainability of delivering the extended opening hours of the Peckham Pantry model

Learning cycle approach

Given the longer time frame for the evaluation and the uncertainties of the global pandemic, the evaluation took a learning cycle approach, identifying key areas of focus, methodology and reporting within a six-month time frame.

Qualitative fieldwork

Over the three years of evaluation a number of qualitative methods were adopted to gather data from Peckham Pantry Members, staff and volunteers and from other Your Local Pantry sites. These methods included:

- Nine scoping interviews with Pecan staff and key stakeholders (2020)
- Two phone interviews with members during lockdown (2020)
- Workshops with four ambassadors (2020)
- 10 member shopalongs and follow-up interviews (2021)
- Counterfactual calls with five lapsed members (2021)
- Five ambassador WhatsApp diaries and after action review (2021)
- Steering group event and attendance at

meetings (2021 and 2023)

- Case study interview with five Your Local Pantry sites
- Counterfactual calls with 80 lapsed members (2022-23)
- Member WhatsApp diaries with eight most regular shoppers (2023)

Quantitative methodologies

Various data sources were analysed including:

- Member sign up/needs data
- Stock management and rotation data

The evaluation designed an online survey which was completed by members in:

- November 2020 completed by 99 respondents
- November 2021 completed by 286 respondents
- November 2022 completed by 346 respondents

The first year of the survey was launched as Peckham Pantry opened up and so included reflections from a very new membership plus this was a period of unprecedented change between lockdowns.

Financial sustainability analysis

- Basket of goods analysis (2021 and 2022)
- Member segmentation analysis
- SROI analysis (2021 and 2023)

Learning reports

The evaluation has generated a wide body of information and learning reports over the four years of delivery. These can be found on the Pecan website, [here](#).



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For more information about the evaluation, contact Linda Jackson, [here](#).

Design: [Sadie May Studio](#)





