



Food and Nutrition Guidelines

Purpose and Guidelines

“Unkitawa,” the Lakota word meaning “ours,” “yours,” and “mine,” embodies the concept that what belongs to each of us individually equally belongs to all living things. As a non-profit founded and operated by an Indigenous board and staff, Unkitawa acknowledges the impact that equitable access to nutritious and healing foods has on the health of Indigenous communities.

Unkitawa’s Indigenous Wellness program promotes whole-person wellness through food, culture, self-help, and traditional medicines. Owówičhak’u Wašté (“nourish us” in Lakota), our First Foods Access Pantry aims to dismantle barriers to food access. It also mobilizes our commitment to address the impact of chronic disease among Indigenous peoples. We strive to provide options that enable positive health outcomes, promote mental well-being, and prevent and treat diet-related chronic disease for Indigenous peoples of all tribes in South King County, Washington State, and beyond.

Our Food and Nutrition Guidelines, developed in collaboration with the American Heart Association, demonstrates our commitment to the quality of food we offer to our community and serves as guiding principles for food gleaning and purchasing. Additionally, the guidelines will help steer and educate staff responsible for stocking Owówičhak’u Wašté and selecting ingredients for our hot meal services. They also allow these efforts to be sustainable regardless of staffing changes or new community partners. We will utilize the [Healthy Eating Research \(HER\) Nutrition Guidelines](#) and [My Native Plate](#) as tools to guide our nutritional priorities.

Overall Nutrition Commitments

To prioritize the health of our community, we commit to increasing the availability of high nutrient foods, focusing on those that fall under the “choose often” category of the HER Guidelines, including whole grains, lean proteins, local fruits and vegetables, and low-sodium options. We strive to distribute items that meet the cultural and dietary needs of local Indigenous communities by sourcing from local Indigenous producers, hunters, businesses, and farms. We especially prioritize Indigenous food staples including: proteins (smoked salmon, buffalo, elk); fruits and vegetables including traditional berries (huckleberries, saskatoon), squash; dehydrated foods; grains including wild rice and corn. We prefer to limit donations (and avoid purchases of) dairy and gluten, as they are not vital to Indigenous diets.

Food Donations

While our primary food source is purchasing, we strive to utilize these guidelines to advocate for donations that align with our preferences (specifically the items outlined above) by establishing relationships with mainstream grocers and/or food distributors. Our overall nutrition commitments coupled with the following principles will guide our choices:

1) Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020. Available at <http://healthyeatingresearch.org>

Choose Often	Choose Rarely
Dark green vegetables	Dairy products
Fresh fruits	Items containing gluten
Lean proteins	Breaded or pre-prepared items
Whole grains, such as wild rice and whole-wheat	Sugary beverages or candy
Dehydrated foods	Large quantities of dessert items
Nuts and seeds	Foods without nutritious value

Food Purchases

When grant funding is available, we commit to purchasing items that align with our commitment to nutrition and reflect the cultural preferences of our community. We will prioritize fresh produce, spices, cooking staples, and other items on the “choose often” list of the HER Guidelines. We choose not to purchase sugary beverages, candy or food without nutritional value.

Special Programs

- Owówichak'u Wašté – During our selection and stocking of our pantry for our community members, (including those experiencing houselessness, elders and individuals with disabilities) we are committed to prioritizing nutrient dense, culturally traditional foods. In this program, Unkitawa provides meal samples and recipes for the community, then community members are able to recreate the sample meal at home with some foods from the pantry. This reaffirms self-sufficiency and connection to culturally traditional recipes and cooking methods.
- Hot meals – When developing the menu for our hot meal services, we will reference Indigenous cookbooks and recipes, culturally inclusive alternatives to USDA's MyPlate tool, to guide our choices. We commit to ensuring that every meal strives for a balanced, nutrient-dense plate that contains protein, grains, fruit, and vegetables.
 - Every meal should include vegetables for all recipients, including salad as available.
 - Each mealtime will include a healthy vegetarian and/or vegan option for those who prefer.
 - Water, coffee or tea will be the default beverages.
- Farmers Market Access – Unkitawa provides stipends to community members to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. We also provide stipends (when available) for gas to enable community members to drive to farmers markets.

Broader Commitments

We will elevate our commitment to providing foods that meet health and cultural needs while supporting other community-led efforts by sourcing fresh, culturally traditional produce from local Indigenous producers, hunters, businesses, and farms. We strive to purchase produce with organizations within a local radius. We also aim to purchase First Foods from the areas that they are traditionally grown/harvested/hunted, understanding that our Owówichak'u Wašté programming serves a diverse Indigenous population with First Foods from across Turtle Island. Through these actions we will help protect Unci Maka (Grandmother Earth), reducing our environmental impact by decreasing pollution to protect our land, water, and air.

Administration and Implementation

Our Food and Nutrition Guidelines, approved by our team on 08/21/2024, will take effect on 08/27/2024 at which time it will become part of the organizational policies and procedures. We will communicate the adoption of these guidelines by adding to our [website](#), including in our weekly email newsletter, and sharing directly with community partners and vendors. All new staff and volunteers will be provided with an orientation to the guidelines by Unkitawa's Human Resources Staff Member.

1) Schwartz M, Levi R, Lott M, Arm K, Seligman H. Healthy Eating Research Nutrition Guidelines for the Charitable Food System. Durham, NC: Healthy Eating Research; 2020. Available at <http://healthyeatingresearch.org>