Emergency Food Systems Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 20, 2026
1:30pm
Host: St. Croix Valley Food Bank

Attendees:

- Andy Johnson – River Valley Charities
- Allen LeMay – River Valley Charities
- Katie Bull – Foundation for Essential Needs
- Lee Kroll – St Croix Valley Food Bank
- Sarah Fluegel – St. Croix Valley Food Bank
- Angie Pilgrim – St. Croix Valley Foundation
- Shelly Smith – Our Neighbors' Place
- Jody Murphy – Somerset Food Pantry
- Anamarie Schell – Fresh Harvest Pantry
- Erin Swanson – Osceola Medical Center
- Mindy Roth – St. Croix County WIC
- Katy Ellefson - HealthPartners

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1) Welcome and purpose

- Purpose of the meeting: Q1 partner connection, a short training, updates, and space for partner announcements.

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2) River Valley Charities overview (Andy Johnson)

Andy provided a brief overview of River Valley Charities and its focus areas including funding backpack and food programs, increasing fresh food access, developing wraparound services, and strengthening collaboration amongst partners in the St. Croix Valley.

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3) Training and discussion: Change Management (Katie Bull, FFEN)

FFEN supported the meeting by facilitating a mini-training and discussion on change management, defined as "managing the people side of change," with emphasis on the emotions and communication needs that come with transitions.

Key takeaways shared:

- Stay focused on the why (and what happens if nothing changes).
- Lead by example; listen for emotions and questions.
- Communicate vision and next steps clearly, and repeat messages (note shared: people may need to hear a message multiple times before it sticks).
- Anticipate resistance and engage detractors early.
- Celebrate milestones to build momentum.

Activity: Participants used a reflection tool to map change using:

- Why / How / What / Who (including champions, impacted groups, and likely resistors)

Discussion highlights:

- Participants shared real change examples (retirement/move; major facility and program changes; pantry shopping model transitions).
- Group affirmed the importance of incremental change and stakeholder involvement, including volunteers and shoppers/clients.

Resources mentioned/discussed:

- A reflection sheet (Why/How/What/Who) shared by email/handouts.
- Start With Why (TED Talk, Simon Sinek) referenced as a helpful framing concept.
- "One-to-one" conversation guides (for deeper conversations with stakeholders, especially resistors).
- Independent Sector volunteer value resources were referenced as a standard way to estimate in-kind volunteer time, including a general calculator and state-by-state values. (https://independentsector.org/research/value-of-volunteer-time/)

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4) St. Croix Valley Food Bank updates (Lee / Sarah)

Local food sourcing and grants

- The Food Bank shared new/expanded efforts to increase locally sourced Wisconsin food for partners, including:
    - A DATCP-related award routed through Feeding Wisconsin, with the Food Bank receiving a portion dedicated to locally produced/processed foods for partners.

- An additional farmer-to-food-bank style award to significantly expand sourcing through multiple local farms.

- Combined, the Food Bank highlighted substantial added capacity to distribute locally sourced food to partners.

Development role

- The Food Bank shared it is relaunching a Development Director search (after learning from the first posting and using interim support to strengthen foundations).

Events

- Empty Bowls was announced for Thursday, April 16, 2026 (awareness dinner and fundraiser).

TEFAP / commodity distribution changes

- Partners were informed of reductions and distribution changes impacting items like milk and apples.
- Shift in logistics was noted (routing through a different hub), with uncertainty about whether current reduced levels will change.

New Food Bank facility

- Construction on a new permanent facility is underway (site work, footings/foundations progressing; precast walls expected soon).
- A clean room/repack space is included to support safe repacking of certain foods for partner distribution.
- Timeline shared: construction targeted to be completed by the end of 2026, with a public campaign launch expected in summer 2026.
- The new space is expected to significantly expand refrigeration/freezer capacity and overall ability to serve partners.

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5) St. Croix Valley Foundation update (Angie Pilgrim)

- Reminder and overview of the Capacity Building Grant opportunity:
    - Focus is on strengthening internal infrastructure (people/systems/tools), not general operating.
    - Rolling deadlines with quarterly review; next deadline referenced as February 28, 2026.
    - The Foundation plans to share short videos on learnings from the first round, including what “best of the best” looks like and clarification on what capacity building is (and is not).

Stats shared from Round 1 (as discussed):

- Strong demand (dozens of applications and significant total dollars requested)
- A subset funded, with intent to clarify selection standards and improve applicant understanding.

Volunteer hour valuation question

- Group discussed the common practice of estimating volunteer/in-kind time using Independent Sector rates (with state-by-state variations).

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6) Partner roundtable updates

- **Fresh Harvest (Hudson):** New leadership/staff onboarding; exploring operational improvements and possible shopping model considerations as demand grows.
- **Somerset Community Food program:** New leadership/staff onboarding; focus on learning systems and meeting growing need.
- **Our Neighbors' Place:** Major year of change with new building progress and temporary relocation; temporary site expected to increase visibility (downtown River Falls storefront). Multiple major activities/events underway, including Coldest Night partnership and additional fundraising.
- **WIC (St. Croix County):** Operations steady; request for partners to share flyers/events/resources that can be handed to clients.
- **Osceola Medical Center:** Facility expansion updates (including additional campus development in Scandia).
- **HealthPartners:** Shared reflections on pantry transformation work and a brief remembrance for Peg from the Amery pantry who passed away in December; also shared availability of a printed family resource newsletter ("Power Up Press") for partners.

FFEN reminder

- FFEN reiterated availability for consultation and training support (choice models, food sourcing, maximizing resources, leadership development).

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7) River Valley Charities announcements (closing)

- **Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY):** Reminder that the walk is in downtown Hudson (third year), with a simple route along main downtown streets and a light soup meal afterward. Fundraising encouraged but not required. Pre-registration required at CNOY.com/hudson
- Meeting wrapped with thanks, invitation for feedback on topics and meeting format/tech, and an option for an on-site tour of the Food Bank for in-person attendees.

Next EFS meeting: 1:30pm on Tuesday, April 21 at Five Loaves in New Richmond (144 W 3rd St)

RIVER VALLEY CHARITIES in partnership with ffen Foundation For Essential Needs