

PSAC Local 610 Food Bank Committee



Orientation & Best Practices Handbook

Last Updated: April 2013

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PSAC Local 610 Food Bank Committee

Mandate

The Food Bank Committee administers and dispenses resources that have been budgeted to aid the Local's members in the event that they incur an unexpected financial shortage that affects their ability to purchase food for themselves and/or their families. Committee members meet at least once per month to coordinate and regulate the disbursement of the food bank's resources and also conduct business, such as the adjudication of food bank applications, via email. The committee follows the guidelines for standing committees stipulated in the union's bylaws.

Vision

The Local recognizes that many of our members, both graduate students and postdoctoral associates, find themselves struggling to make ends meet and to support themselves and/or their families. Some members often struggle to meet their most basic needs, including the ability to buy enough food to eat. Because poverty and the concomitant issue of food (in)security seriously impact the lives of members, the Local offers a food bank program to help members most in need. The Local believes that no member should go hungry and be forced to make choices that prevent them from being able to buy adequate food supplies.

Food Bank Committee Membership and Meetings

The Food Bank Committee shall be composed of the Committee Chair, who is normally the Local's Activism Chair, or a committee member, who is elected as Chair.

A call-out for committee members shall be made by the Activism Chair prior to end of the fiscal year (i.e., in April) to ensure the smooth transition of committee work from one term to the next. All members interested in working with the committee shall provide the Activism Chair with a short statement describing their interest in working with the committee. All members who apply will be considered for appointment to the committee by the Local's Executive.

The committee shall be composed of a maximum of seven (7) members selected by the Executive Committee after a call-out has been sent to the membership of the Local. The exact number of members is subject to change according to the needs of the committee and the volume of requests from members desiring to become a part of the committee.

The committee Chair shall schedule meetings, distribute a call-out for agenda items, compile and distribute meeting agendas, chair meetings, communicate with the Office Manager on an as needed basis (e.g., re: website updates, applications, etc.), and contribute to all aspects of the committee's work/mandate.

The committee shall also elect a member to take and distribute meeting minutes for the term of the committee.

Guiding Principles of the Food Bank Program

The Local recognizes that it is often very difficult to ask for help and to seek assistance from a food bank. With this in mind, the food bank program operates in accordance with six major principles:

- Members can access the food bank anonymously. The identity of all members who apply to the food bank is protected and known only to the Office Manager, who communicates with members about the status of their application.
- The information contained within all food bank applications is to be kept confidential by the members of the Food Bank Committee, who assess the applications.
- The food bank requests information regarding a member's financial situation, but also operates on the basis of trust and assumes that applicants are in the best position to assess and voice whether they are experiencing a need for assistance. The Local trusts that if a member applies for assistance, s/he is very likely an individual in need. This principle is a synthesis of the two primary schools of thought adopted in the best practices of area food banks across the City of London.
- Some applications to the food bank program may not be approved by the Food Bank Committee (see page 8 for further information). In addition, the food bank is unable to provide regular support to those who are experiencing a chronic need for assistance. Because of these factors, the Local strives to educate members about other food support services within the city of London that they can draw on, so that no member is left without some form of help.
- The food bank program strives to offer assistance that will meet the dietary preferences of all members.
- The food bank strives to support ethical and sustainable food practices and producers.

Key Functions of the Food Bank Committee

The primary functions of the Food Bank Committee are to:

- Receive, assess, and adjudicate food bank applications and communicate the decisions of the committee to the Local's Office Manager.
- Request funds from the Local's Finance Chair to purchase grocery store gift cards and visit local businesses to purchase the gift cards.
- Evaluate the criteria utilized to determine the disbursement of the food bank's resources.
- Evaluate the amount and frequency of food bank disbursements available to members.
- Promote the food bank program among members of the Local.
- Collaborate with the union's Office Manager to maintain the food bank program's webpage on the Local's website.

Food Bank Committee Policy & Best Practices

Eligibility

All PSAC Local 610 members in good standing (i.e., members who are currently employed as a TA, or have been employed as a TA in the past year) are eligible to apply for assistance from the food bank program. Members must have signed the blue union card in order to receive benefits.

Applications

Information about the food bank program is listed on the Local's website at www.psic610.ca under the heading "Benefits". Applications are available at and can be dropped off to the union office daily from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. in Somerville House, room 1313. Applications can also be deposited in the secure drop box located just outside the door to the office at any time, or they can be downloaded, filled in electronically, and emailed to the Local's Office Manager at psac610@psac610.ca.

Adjudication of Food Bank Applications

Food bank applications are uploaded into an email by the Local's Office Manager and sent to the Activism Chair, who then distributes the applications to committee members via email for adjudication. All committee members, including the Activism Chair and Chair of the committee if not the Activism Chair, vote on whether to approve or not approve applications. The committee strives for consensus when adjudicating applications, however, consensus will not always be reached. When consensus is not reached, the committee will render a decision based on the principle of majority rule. The committee strives to respond to all applications within 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. The committee's chair communicates the decisions of the committee back to the Local's Office Manager via email. The Office Manager then notifies members of the status of their application and, if successful, informs them that they can come to the office at their earliest convenience to pick up a grocery store gift card of their choice.

Criteria for Disbursement & Determining Whether to Approve or Not Approve an Application

The food bank strives to provide assistance to members who identify themselves as being in need. Typically, applications to the food bank are approved if:

- A member's annual expenses are greater than their annual income.
- The difference between a member's annual expenses and annual income places the member in a financially unstable, or insecure position.
- A member experiences an unexpected financial emergency that strains their capacity to meet their food supply needs.

Applicants who are granted food bank benefits are sent the following email message by the Local's Office Manager to notify them of the status of their application:

Hello,

Your application to the PSAC Local 610 food bank has been approved. At your convenience, please come to the union office, located in Somerville House, room 1313, to pick up your grocery store gift card. The office is open Monday to Friday from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. Please note that the food bank is only able to provide limited support to students experiencing a food shortage once per academic term. In the event that you require ongoing food support, you may wish to access one of the City of London's food banks, which are listed here: <http://www.info.london.on.ca/docs/FoodBanksSeptember2012.pdf>, or the City's low or no cost hot meal program, available at various locations throughout London. Information about the meal program is located here: <http://www.info.london.on.ca/docs/MealCalendarSeptember2012.pdf>.

Sincerely,

PSAC Local 610 Food Bank Committee

Typically, applications to the food bank are not approved if:

- A member's annual income exceeds their annual expenses and they do not seem to be facing a precarious financial situation.
- A member seeks support in order to save money for non-essential items.
- A member indicates they are able to meet their basic needs and are not facing a precarious financial situation, but feels they have a right to food bank resources simply because they are a dues-paying member of the Local.

When the food bank committee does not approve a member's application, the Local's Office Manager sends him/her the following email message to notify them of the status of their application:

Hello,

The PSAC Local 610 Food Bank Committee is unable to approve your application to the Local's food bank at this time. Please note that the current decision of the committee does not preclude you from reapplying for assistance in the future. Although the food bank is unable to provide you with assistance, we recognize that you may still feel that you require food support. If this is the case, you may wish to access one of the City of London's food banks or no to low cost hot meal programs, which are listed here: <http://info.london.on.ca/meal.asp>.

Sincerely,

PSAC Local 610 Food Bank Committee

In some cases, when a member's application to the food bank program is not granted, the member will want to know why. In the event that this happens, the Local's Office Manager will send the member the following response to the question, "why was my application to the food bank program denied?"

Dear Member,

The Food Bank Committee recognizes that when a Member feels s/he is experiencing financial difficulties, it may be frustrating to learn that her/his application to the Local's food bank benefits program has been denied and an explanation as to why this has occurred may be sought. As you know, the committee requests information regarding applicants' annual income and expenditures, as well as other relevant information regarding whether the Member has a domestic partner and/or children, is a domestic, or international student, as well as any other information s/he thinks helps to explain why they are a member facing a precarious financial situation and potential food shortage. The Food Bank Committee carefully considers all of this data when assessing food bank applications. Unfortunately, because the food bank program operates on limited resources, not all applications for assistance can be granted. In general, when an application seems to indicate that a Member is not facing a precarious financial situation **when compared to the level of need shown by other applicants**, benefits from the food bank program will not be granted.

Sincerely,

PSAC Local 610 Food Bank Committee

Amount & Frequency of Disbursement of Food Bank Resources

The food bank distributes benefits to members in the form of grocery store gift cards. This enables members to purchase food that meets their dietary preferences. Individual members are eligible to receive \$50, members with a domestic partner receive \$75, and members with families receive \$100. Members are eligible to receive assistance from the food bank program once per academic term (i.e., fall, winter, and summer). Successful applicants can select any gift card from those that are available at a given time and can mix and match gift cards if they so choose (i.e., select gift cards from two, or more businesses totaling the amount they are eligible to receive from the food bank). Gift cards/certificates for the food bank program are to be purchased in \$25.00 denominations whenever possible.

Grocery Gift Cards

The food bank currently provides gift cards/certificates from the following locations:

- Loblaws Supermarkets
- Western Fair Farmer's Market
- On the Move Organics
- London Co-op Store
- Centre Spot On-Campus Meal Plan Cards
- Grocery Checkout (located on-campus and also online)

Promoting the Food Bank Program Across Campus

The food bank committee has utilized the following means of educating members about the food bank program:

- Advertising in the Gazette
- Classified ad in the Gazette
- Inprint poster service located in the UCC (posters hung on boards around campus by inprint, for a fee)
- Advertisement on the Grad Club televisions
- Speaking engagements, such as stewards meetings, SOGS Council meetings, and the Local's AGM
- Information London's Health Line Food Bank list, which is available at: <http://info.london.on.ca/meal.asp>. Contact: Amy Yateman (Amy.Yateman@mlhu.on.ca)

Recommendations & Considerations for Future Committee Members

Recommendation	Rationale
Merge applications sent to committee members into a Pdf file.	Applications are currently scanned and uploaded as Jpeg files. Merging the applications into a single Pdf will help make the process of reading and responding to applications more efficient. This initiative requires collaboration with the Local's Office Manager.
Promote the food bank program in a public service announcement on CHRW, the on-campus radio station.	This was something that the food bank committee looked into, but did not have time to accomplish in 2012-2013. The committee can write the PSA, but CHRW needs to review its content before it is aired.
Do not increase the amount or frequency of food bank disbursements for at least a couple of years.	The Local did not have a food bank committee for several years prior to 2012 and the criteria used to evaluate applications was historically, quite restrictive. With the changes made to the criteria for disbursement and the active promotion of the food bank program in 2012-2013, the amount of resources disbursed by the committee has increased dramatically and the program's entire budget will likely be disbursed by the fiscal year end. While recognizing that the amounts disbursed are modest, there are two important things to consider. If the amount and frequency of

	<p>disbursement are increased, but the program's budget remains the same, the experience of the 2012-2013 committee indicates that there will not be enough resources to support the program for an entire year. Second, the Local will be begin negotiating its next collective agreement in 2 years. The current committee believes that instead of bargaining for more funding for the food bank program, the employer should provide members with a fair funding and employment package that eliminates the need for the program in the first instance.</p>
<p>Speaking to members is the most effective means of promoting the food bank program.</p>	<p>Posters and advertisements are useful means of promoting the food bank program. However, each time a committee member spoke to members about the program at public speaking engagements, applications to the program increased dramatically in the period immediately following their talk.</p>
<p>Use a group email to communicate with one another re: relevant committee business that needs to be conducted between meetings.</p>	<p>The 2012-2013 committee originally communicated and conducted business via an OWL page. The OWL page was found to be more cumbersome and less timely and efficient than email communications.</p>
<p>Track applicant demographics.</p>	<p>One committee member, perhaps the Chair or Activism Chair, should keep an ongoing record of the</p>

	<p>pertinent demographic characteristics of applicants, including whether they are international/domestic students, and whether they have a domestic partner and/or children. This information could be very useful in the next round of bargaining. It can also help to inform the committee about things such as how/where to target their promotional efforts.</p>
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Attachments

- Food bank application form
- Example of an application that is typically approved by the committee
- Example of an application that was not approved by the committee
- Food bank promotional poster (a copy of the poster is kept in the file's of the Local's Office Manager)
- Confidentiality / Non-Disclosure Agreement