**WA Food Coalition Food Assistance Advisory Committee Civil Rights Task Force 5/21/19**

1. **Participants and Self Introductions**

The following folks signed up as of 5/17/19; those in italics were on this call:

1. Chelsey King – Second Harvest of Inland NW
2. Jeff Mathias – Blue Mountain Action Council
3. *Katie Rains* – WSDA Food Assistance, task force convener; been with Food Assistance for the past 6 months, but prior to that was a nonprofit Executive Director, but was not running a food bank but was working in close partnership with food banks. Procedures specific to Food Assistance are new to me, and I will treat you all as the true subject matter experts given that you have significantly more experience with these tools than I do six months into my role
4. *Ken Trainor* – Sunrise Outreach Center; 5 food pantries and Ken is the director of operations and currently chairs the Washington Food Coalition
5. *Laura Lubash* – Food Lifeline; Lead agency representative for Food Lifeline and her goal is to make the practical material to enhance the Civil Rights materials so it’s more usable and impactful
6. Sue Potter – Nourish Food Bank
7. **Context –**

Last spring WSDA received a message from a legislator because they were contacted by a constituent who expressed concern over the Civil Rights Training document that they had been told that they would have to fill out if they wanted to continue volunteering at their local food bank. They were disturbed by the length of the document and legal jargon and felt overwhelmed and like they needed an attorney to decode it. Upon further review by WSDA leadership and program management, we agree that this training tool can be revised with the expertise of our partners to be more user-friendly and relevant to the needs of hunger relief agencies and the volunteers and staff who make their work possible.

1. **Task Force Overview –**

Our task is to improve the training tool(s) so that they are more accessible, user-friendly and relevant to hunger relief partners. Our challenge is to ensure that whatever we create complies with USDA Food & Nutrition Services’ requirements. The civil rights department for the USDA’s western region currently holds up our training tool as an example of what they’d most like to see, and so that complicates our work since we have to take them on a journey with us in the interest of a better volunteer experience. Another component of this relates to the increased frequency of electronic volunteer management practices; what provisions can we use to meet requirements and if possible, move away from paper copies to document compliance? Third, one of the civil rights requirements is to support Limited English Proficiency (LEP) customers to ensure that all clients can access the information needed in their primary language to be able to understand and receive all federal services available to them. At present, WSDA provides no guidance on how our hunger relief partners might meet this requirement. There are opportunities for us to help compile language access resources and best practices to help support hunger relief partners to comply with this requirement and ultimately ensure that everyone has access to food regardless of their primary language.

1. **Identifying the Pain Points –**

What are the issues/questions/complaints that we already know about the training tool?

* The current tool’s wording, vocabulary is complicated. The average reading level is 9th grade; Food Lifeline wants documents at the 4th grade reading level.
  + Disparate
  + Reprisal
  + Retaliation
  + Commodity Food
* The intent of the training tool as it is written is unclear.
* The current tool doesn’t present as a training, rather it is a legal agreement. It is excessive for volunteers and is not making the impact that it could be.
* The current tool is cumbersome; it doesn’t
* It’s not clear how it really relates to civil rights.
* The confidentiality piece is too detailed and specific; not appropriate for volunteers. Creates fear of being sued.

1. **Surfacing Existing Resources & Suggestions –**

* More plain talk to promote comprehension;
* Training should be separate from the agreement;
* Two versions – one for client intake and on-the-floor client support and one that’s more general with less detail, particularly around confidentiality;
* Training tool should have a caveat – many food banks have had to trespass clients for threatening volunteers. We need to clarify that denying someone who has been legally disallowed from being on the premises is NOT discrimination. Threatening behavior does not have to be tolerated for fear that denying that client would be discriminatory. The agreement needs to include some understanding of mutual respect. We’re going to need to be specific about what types of behavioral issues are disallowed so that we are cautious to avoid the ways that implicit bias might inadvertently lead to discrimination. We could do this by focusing on behaviors that are not allowable:
  + Threatening violence
  + Screaming expletives at volunteers
  + Sexually inappropriate behaviors or language, including innuendo
* To the extent that we can, let’s move away from US/THEM language and be more inclusive of how WE ALL are expected to behave within hunger relief establishments;
* Volunteers who meet eligibility requirements have rights to access food and be served without discrimination, too;
* Could we use simple statements that are relevant, for example:
  + We don’t discriminate against anyone for any reason. We maintain confidentiality about our clients and we never share their information.
* The words civil rights are very dated. Can we refresh the language to make it more relevant to today, while honoring the intent? We’re talking about respect. Kindness. Treat all people with dignity and respect. Could we just use the last sentence on the training tool and define each piece:
  + Who are all people?
  + What does dignity mean?
  + What does respect mean?
* It used to be 3 years of record retention. It is now 6 years. That’s a lot. Who set that requirement, WSDA or USDA? How are those records used? Clarifying the purpose/explanation would be helpful. Can we keep the roster page (example provided by Ken) instead of the individual signed training tool?
* How far can we go to ensure that we meet USDA requirements? Do we have to work within this really technical language or can we modify it so it makes more sense for our non-frontline volunteers?
* Onboarding system for new volunteers –
  + First time volunteer – brief verbal orientation for non-frontline work so folks can try out their experience once or twice;
  + When someone indicates that they want to keep volunteering, then they go through the full
    - Civil Rights Training Tool Section 1 & 2
  + Every January all volunteers refresh their training
* Chelsey King at Second Harvest indicated that they have put together an on-line Prezi that is an on-line adaptation of the training tool that we provide
* At Food Lifeline, they have created a power point with the exact same wording from the training tool on 27 slides. It breaks up the information into more palatable bites, but it’s still super long.
* Food Lifeline does monitoring visits every two years. Most folks are either keeping a roster or keeping all of the initialed training docs. They ask their subcontractors a question about how they show respect to their clients – some respond that they do the civil rights training. There’s an opportunity there – if we could make this training more impactful, we could really help ensure that clients are truly being treated with respect and dignity.
* Can we create a cartoon-y training video, like the food handlers card, along with an electronic tracking system for volunteer training? Katie will inquire with USDA.
* Clients and volunteers are concerned about confidentiality of their names with this current administration; folks are unclear about their rights and whether or not these rosters or client intake information could be subpoenaed.
* Can we keep the signed individual forms for a year, and maintain the roster sheet for 6 years to minimize recordkeeping burden?

1. **Our Approach to this Task –** 
   1. We want new tools to support volunteer and staff orientation and ultimately promote an environment of dignity and respect;
   2. Katie will lead negotiation and communication with USDA;
   3. WFC staff have asked if we’d be interested in hosting a conference session on Civil Rights in September; we may decline this year until we are clear
   4. We will strive to convene monthly, unless there are no updates since the prior meeting, for up to an hour by call;
   5. We’ll look to dates that the maximum number of people can participate and if folks miss a call, they will receive minutes and can participate via email. There is no obligation to participate in every conversation. Everyone who indicated an interest will continue to receive updates until or unless they notify Katie that they don’t want to receive them anymore.
2. **Next Steps –**

* Ken will share a copy of the roster sheet that they use – done. Thanks Ken!
* Katie will type up and send out notes to this committee… 6 weeks later ☺ Sorry!
* Katie will contact USDA Civil Rights office and inquire about the following:
  + What are the exact USDA training requirements for Civil Rights, per FNS policy 113-1 section XI items A-I? The policy, nor memo FD-113 from 1/22/11 does not clearly articulate the requirements.
  + Are there examples of training tools from other states that are recent, compliant, and exemplary that we can review?
  + All questions noted above, including language, records retention requirements, electronic volunteer management systems, etc.