

Coordinated Food Procurement for Toronto's Community Food Sector Introducing the online portal project:

What exactly is the online portal project?

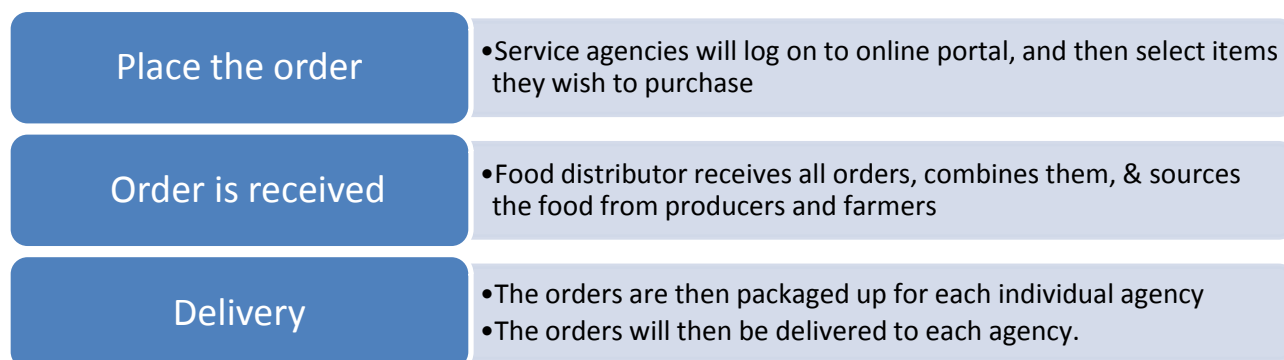
The online portal project is a central food purchasing and distribution system that will enable group buying for community agencies across Toronto. It allows chefs, food coordinators or staff at community agencies to access an online system (similar to a platform like Amazon) to order healthy food at reduced prices that is needed for their programming. Orders can be tailored to accommodate the unique needs of the participating agencies. To begin with, approximately 20 items will be available to portal shoppers and as the project evolves, more foods and products will become available. We know that 20 items will not be enough to supply your entire food order, but bear with us, and we will increase the number of items as soon as possible. Food will be sourced from local producers wherever possible.

Background:

As recent research has highlighted, the social services sector in Toronto spends a significant amount of money (approximately \$29 million for community agencies and \$17 million for student nutrition programs) on food. When those funds are combined, the sector has considerable purchasing power. Therefore, combining the purchases of several agencies through an online order portal would enable bulk purchasing and cost saving opportunities. At the same time, Ontario food producers would directly benefit from a new direct channel of sales while agencies and student nutrition programs can improve the nutritional quality of food served while reducing costs.

How does it work?

Service agencies will only require a computer and internet connection to place an order. No special hardware or software will be required



What are the advantages to this project? Why is this important?

- Cost-savings
- Increased healthy foods
- Tailored orders to meet agency need
- Time savings
- Supporting local farmers/producers

What are the next steps? What are the potential challenges?

In order to move forward with this project, community agencies will likely require a shift in thinking about the way they "do" food in their organization:

They can begin by asking these kinds of questions:

What role does food play in our agency? Do we have a budget for food? Do we have healthy eating guidelines? Are we spending more than we should be on food? Is staff time well-spent when running out to the local grocery store? Are our meals as healthy and cost-effective as possible?

This process will also require some level of internal coordination within agencies and familiar practices may have to be reconsidered. Additionally, volunteer roles may need to change.

Frequently Asked Questions:

Will there be a minimum order amount? If so, what is the minimum?

- Recognizing that community agencies do not have much storage and/or flexible funding, the order minimums will be kept low. The minimum amount will be approximately \$75.00

I'm not good with computers; will this system be difficult to navigate?

- The online portal will be very intuitive and easy to use. Training will be provided to staff that will be using the portal.

Our programs use grocery shopping in life-skills training, how can we best use the online portal?

- Where possible staff can include clients in decisions regarding food orders on the portal. Also, the portal is not meant to replace programming by any means, or be a complete substitution for all food procurement practices.