

Key Features of The Tribal Food Pantry Assessment Tool:
Cultural Integration:

- Emphasizes traditional foods like Three Sisters crops, wild rice, and Indigenous plants
- Incorporates food sovereignty principles

Nutrition Environment Assessment:

- Evaluates food availability, variety, and quality
- Addresses food safety and storage protocols
- Focuses on fresh produce, lean proteins, and whole grains

Healthy Eating Research Guidelines:

- Incorporates evidence-based nutrition standards (sodium reduction, whole grains, etc.)
- Addresses chronic disease prevention relevant to Native communities
- Includes portion control and nutrient density considerations

Introduction:

The American Indian Cancer Foundation (AICAF) is a national native non-profit organization that was established to address the tremendous cancer inequities faced by Native communities. AICAF focuses on prevention, early detection, treatment, and survivor support. In partnership with Amy Warne, MBA, RD/LD (Muscogee/Seminole), we were able to create the Tribal Food Pantry Assessment Tool. This tool integrates cultural sensitivity while leveraging Healthier Eating Research (HER) guidelines and NEFPAT+ framework. This was thoughtfully created to support Tribal food sovereignty and promote health through cultural nutrition practices.

The tool uses a systematic scoring approach while allowing for qualitative observations that respect the unique cultural context of each Tribal community. It can be adapted based on specific Tribal traditions, geographic location, and available resources while maintaining focus on both cultural authenticity and evidence-based nutrition practices.

Tribal Food Pantry Assessment Tool

Purpose

This comprehensive assessment tool evaluates Tribal food pantries through a culturally responsive lens, incorporating traditional food systems, nutrition environment factors, and healthy eating research guidelines while respecting Tribal sovereignty and cultural food practices.

Assessment Framework

Section A: Cultural Food Environment & Sovereignty

A cultural food environment encompasses the social, cultural, and physical contexts that shape how people acquire, prepare, and consume food. It includes the practices, beliefs, and attitudes related to food within a specific group, as well as the physical spaces and available options that influence food choices. Indigenous food sovereignty is the right of Indigenous peoples to define their own food systems, ensuring access to healthy, culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable and traditional methods.

A1. Traditional and Cultural Food Offerings (12 Questions = 36 points)

Instructions: Rate availability and accessibility (0=Not Available, 1=Limited, 2=Adequate, 3=Excellent)

- Traditional Proteins**

- Wild game (when seasonally available and legally sourced) : _____
- Fish (salmon, trout, other culturally significant species) : _____
- Traditional fowl: _____
- Plant-based proteins (beans, nuts, seeds) : _____

- Indigenous Plants and Produce**

- Three Sisters crops (corn, beans, squash) : _____
- Wild rice: _____
- Traditional berries (blueberries, huckleberries, etc.) : _____
- Traditional greens and vegetables (dandelion, onions, etc.): _____
- Medicinal and culinary herbs (sage, mint, rose hips, etc.): _____
- **Cultural Staples**
 - Blue corn, hominy, and other traditional corn varieties: _____
 - Traditional grains and seeds (amaranth, pumpkin, sunflower, etc) : _____
 - Traditional seasonings and spices (juniper, sumac, peppers, etc.): _____

A2. Food Sovereignty Practices

Indigenous food sovereignty practices focus on reclaiming and revitalizing Indigenous food systems, emphasizing control over food resources, traditional foodways, and cultural practices.

Check all that apply:

- [] Sources food from Tribal producers/gardens
- [] Partners with Tribal agricultural programs
- [] Includes foods from traditional hunting/fishing/gathering
- [] Offers nutrition education incorporating traditional food knowledge
- [] Provides culturally appropriate food preparation resources

Section B: Nutrition Environment Assessment

A nutrition environment assessment refers to the process of evaluating the availability, affordability, convenience, and promotion of healthy foods and beverages within a specific setting, such as a food pantry.

B1. Food Availability and Variety (14 Questions = 42 points)

Rate each category (0=Not Available, 1=Limited, 2=Adequate, 3=Excellent):

- **Fresh Produce**
 - Variety of fresh fruits: _____
 - Variety of fresh vegetables: _____
 - Quality of fresh produce: _____
 - Seasonal availability: _____
- **Protein Sources**
 - Lean meat options: _____
 - Fish and seafood: _____
 - Plant-based proteins: _____
 - Low-sodium options: _____
- **Whole Grains**
 - Brown rice, quinoa, whole wheat products: _____
 - Traditional grains: _____
 - Low-sodium bread options: _____
- **Dairy and Alternatives**

- Low-fat dairy products: _____
- Plant-based milk alternatives: _____
- Calcium-rich options: _____

B2. Food Quality and Safety Practices

Check all that apply:

- **Storage and Handling**
 - Proper refrigeration for perishables
 - Appropriate dry storage conditions
 - FIFO (First In, First Out) rotation system
 - Temperature monitoring logs maintained
- **Food Safety Protocols**
 - Staff trained in food safety
 - Regular cleaning and sanitization
 - Pest control measures in place
 - Expiration date monitoring

Section C: Healthy Eating Research Integration

Healthy Eating Research integration works to improve the quality of foods in food banks and pantries in order to increase access to and promote healthier food choices across the charitable food system, allowing all people, regardless of income, access to the foods necessary for an active, healthy life.

C1. Evidence-Based Nutrition Standards (9 Questions = 27 points)

Assess alignment with dietary guidelines:

Rate each category (0=Not Available, 1=Limited, 2=Adequate, 3=Excellent):

- **Sodium Reduction**
 - Low-sodium canned goods prioritized: _____
 - Fresh/frozen vegetables without added salt: _____
 - Reduced-sodium traditional foods when possible: _____
- **Added Sugar Reduction**
 - 100% fruit juices (limited quantities): _____
 - Unsweetened or low-sugar options prioritized: _____
 - Traditional sweeteners (maple syrup, honey) when culturally appropriate: _____
- **Whole Grain Emphasis**
 - Whole grain breads and cereals: _____
 - Brown rice and whole grain pasta: _____
 - Traditional whole grains featured: _____

C2. Chronic Disease Prevention Focus

Addressing prevalent health concerns in Tribal communities:

Check all that apply:

- **Diabetes Prevention/Management**
 - Low glycemic index foods emphasized
 - Portion control resources available
 - Traditional foods with blood sugar benefits featured
- **Heart Health**
 - Low-sodium options prioritized
 - Healthy fats (nuts, seeds, fish) available
 - Lean protein sources emphasized
- **Obesity Prevention**
 - Nutrient-dense, lower-calorie options
 - Appropriate portion size guidance
 - Physical activity resources provided

Scoring and Interpretation

Overall Assessment Categories: (105 points possible)

Excellent (85-100%): Pantry fully integrates cultural foods, meets nutrition research standards, and evidence-based nutrition standards with a focus on disease prevention.

Good (70-84%): Pantry meets most criteria with minor gaps in cultural integration or nutrition standards.

Fair (55-69%): Pantry meets basic needs but has significant opportunities for improvement in cultural responsiveness or nutrition quality.

Needs Improvement (<55%): Pantry requires substantial changes to align with Tribal food sovereignty principles and evidence-based nutrition standards.

Action Planning Template

Priority Improvements Identified:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Cultural Enhancement Opportunities:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Nutrition Quality Improvements:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Assessment Completed By: _____ **Date:** _____

Tribal Community: _____ **Pantry Location:** _____

Recommended Review Date: _____

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