



Organize a Food Drive

Overview

Every day, millions of Americans lack access to food. In 2008:

- 39.8 million people were in poverty
- 49.1 million Americans lived in food insecure households
- 4.8 million American households accessed emergency food from a food pantry one or more times

Organizations such as local food banks food pantries, and soup kitchens provide vital services to individuals and families who otherwise would go to bed hungry. These organizations have been hit hard during the economic downturn as donations have shrunk. Now is your chance to create positive change in your community by contributing to these struggling organizations. Help support your community today by organizing a food drive to ensure that local families have the consistent nourishment they need to survive.

Suggested Age Group(s)

- Adults, teens, and children

Suggested Skill Level

- Moderate

Project Instructions

1. Recruit Project Leaders

- Contact your friends, family (don't forget to involve your kids), and coworkers and ask who would be interested in helping plan and implement such a project. You can also ask schoolteachers, community leaders, local businesses, government, faith-based and non-profit organizations to lend their support and ideas. Also, don't forget to check with your local HandsOn Action Centers to see if they can support your efforts as well. These partners may have materials and resources you can use for your project. Select the link to find your local HandsOn Action Center. [://www.handsonnetwork.org/actioncenters/maps](http://www.handsonnetwork.org/actioncenters/maps)



2. Identify Partners

- Contact your local food bank, food pantry, or soup kitchen and let the staff know about your efforts. It is good to inform them of your project and make sure it aligns with their needs. You should also schedule drop-off for food donations. They may even be able to support you by helping to post flyers or recruit volunteers.

3. Define a Project Plan and a Timeline

- As you continue to establish your project, ask yourself the following questions to create a coherent plan:
 - When will you begin and end the project?
 - What are your milestones in between?
 - What are all the tasks that must be completed along the way?
 - How will you measure success?
 - What resources are already available in the community to use?
 - Where can I find volunteers who would be excited about such a project?
 - How will I manage marketing and communications?
 - Should I design and create fliers?
 - Where will I secure and disseminate the large containers to serve as donation bins?
 - How will I manage donation pickup, sorting, and drop-off to the food bank?
 - What type of reflection activity can I lead volunteers through before, during and after the project?
 - How will I recognize the other volunteers?

4. Request Appropriate Food Items

- Don't assume people know the most needed and most healthy items. Provide a list of requested items on all promotional materials, and make sure your volunteers are aware of these items when they communicate with the public. Below is a sample list. Ask the food bank what types of food it needs and make sure your material has those items listed.
 - Canned vegetables
 - Canned fruit
 - Canned meat and fish
 - Peanut butter
 - Jelly



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- Cereal (hot and cold)
- Bagged and boxed grains
- Crackers
- Rice
- Beans
- Pasta
- Macaroni and cheese
- Shelf stable milk

5. Set up and Distribute Your Collection Containers

- Obtain collection containers (plastic bins, heavy cardboard boxes, etc.), label them properly and place them in convenient and targeted locations to make it easy for people to donate.

6. Promote!

- You may want to print flyers, publish information in print and online newspapers, send emails, and use social media to mobilize your networks. Use whatever methods you can to get out the word and engage people in the effort.

7. Hit the Streets

- Contact your local colleges and universities, places of worship, clubs and associations. Talk to people in your community and ask them to support the cause. After all, you are giving them a gift – an opportunity to give to others.

8. Sort and Transport Donations to the Drop-off Site

- It is easy to forget that a big part of organizing a drive is sorting the goods and transporting the products to the site. Don't forget to ensure that all containers are also collected and dropped off at the appropriate site.

9. Reflect

- After your volunteer project, it is important to reflect on the experience and think about the impact of the project on the community as well as what you learned about yourself and others. Here are some suggested activities:
 - Tell your family and friends about something you learned and how you will continue to help others.



- Blog, draw a picture, write a poem, and submit a letter to the editor.
- Write about your experience on your Facebook account, or Twitter feed.
- If you are working with a group of volunteers on this project, lead a group discussion with questions such as:
 - Why did you volunteer today?
 - What did you learn about poverty, hunger and your community?
 - What is the one thing that you will remember most about this service activity?
 - How can you continue to make a difference in our community?

10. Recognize

- Everyone likes to be recognized for his or her hard work and achievements, especially volunteers. Show your volunteers how much you appreciate them and they are more likely to fully participate and return in following years. The following are some suggestions on how you can recognize your volunteers.
 - Verbally recognize your volunteers' efforts, but also send a personalized note thanking them.
 - Plan to recognize your volunteers at your next special event.
 - Provide your team with a camera to take before and after pictures. Post the pictures in a visible, public area.
 - Recognize volunteer efforts through the media. Submit a press release and photo or write a letter to the local newspaper.
 - Have a celebration recognizing the accomplishments of the volunteers.
 - Give each volunteer a small token of your appreciation.
 - Ask people who were particularly enthusiastic or helpful to join next year's planning committee.

Additional Project Tips

Here are a few things to remember when volunteering with a food bank, food pantry, or soup kitchen:



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- Food banks store and distribute food to pantries, soup kitchens, senior centers, and shelters.
- Food pantries provide fresh produce and packaged, frozen and canned food items.
- Soup kitchens provide prepared meals. Many soup kitchens are located at homeless shelters.
- The best way to prepare yourself is be educated about the issues that matter most to the homeless and hungry in your area.
- If you're unsure about anything related to the project, ask a contact at your local food bank, food pantry or soup kitchen.

Resources

- To learn more about local food banks and feeding America, visit <http://feedingamerica.org>
- To learn more about hunger, nutrition, and food poverty in America, check out the Nutrition and Food Poverty Toolkit http://www.heartforum.org.uk/Publications_NHFreports_NutritionToolkit.aspx
- VolunteerSpot - A free resource to help schedule and organize volunteer activities
<http://www.volunteerspot.com>

Other ways to Support Food Banks, Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens

Food bank, food pantries, and soup kitchens utilize volunteers in many different ways. As a volunteer, you can:

- Sort and/or repackage donated food
- Load/unload donations
- Conduct nutrition-education or cooking classes
- Prepare and serve meals
- Set up tables and clean up after meals
- Deliver food to people who cannot leave their homes due to illness or disability
- Pick up produce for "food rescue" at local grocery stores
- Assist with gardening (if the site has a community garden associated with it)
- Support special activities, such as public awareness or fundraising events, kids' programming, holiday toy distribution, etc.
- Assist with clerical, maintenance, or cleaning duties