



Food Pantry Start-Up Tips

Food Pantries serve more food insecure children and families than any other type of community-based response to hunger in north Alabama.

Times of Disaster: Food Pantries can play a critical role during weather events or times of disasters when services like schools are closed. For example, in the wake of the 2011 tornadoes, the Food Bank supplied over 3 million pounds of emergency food and water to partner pantries feeding residents directly affected by the disaster.

Starting Out:

(1) First, Identify the Unmet Need in Your Community

Visit www.closehungergap.org for a list of food pantries and hunger relief services in your area.

Take a look at your community and ask your team these questions:

- Are there food pantries operating already?
- What services are they providing?
- What are their hours of operation?
- Do they have specific geographic boundaries?
- How much food do they give to a family requesting help?
- How many times in a month, quarter, year will they serve the same family?
- Have they ever had to close their doors because they ran out of food?
- Does the pantry staff or volunteers know of unmet needs in your community?

Things to look for:

- Are the food pantries in your community generally open at the same times? For instance, do all the pantries have Monday through Friday hours and all close at or before 5:00? If that is the case, what happens to people who may need food but work the same hours the pantries are open? What about people who may need food on the weekends?
- If the pantry restricts the number of times they will serve the same family, what happens when that family needs food but have exhausted the number of times they can get help from that pantry?
- Are the pantries you visited unable to meet increasing requests for food?

If you have identified an unmet need in your community then move forward! Consider your options and decide what it is you really want to do. What is the best way to impact hunger in your community? Start a new pantry or join forces with an existing one and support it with volunteers, food drives, or financial support. Whatever you decide, the rewards will be great!

(2) Identify Community Resources That Will Sustain Your Program

Starting and maintaining a dependable source of emergency food in your community takes work and partnerships with churches, service organizations, businesses, schools, community foundations, local United Way in addition to utilizing the Food Bank of North Alabama. Our member agencies report the food bank provides up to 80 percent of the food they distribute, so they find other food sources to keep their food pantry well supplied.

- First, develop a simple presentation about what you want to do and why you want to do it. Show the research you have done with existing pantries to identify an unmet need. When you speak to groups or send letters, be sure it is from the heart, share stories about who is hungry and what each group you are talking to can do to help.
- If there is a ministerial alliance in your community, ask to speak at their next meeting to explain what you want to do to meet the needs you have identified. Be clear about what you are asking for i.e., can each church in the alliance adopt a month to collect food and/or money to help your food pantry?
- Locate your local Jaycees, Kiwanis, Optimist or other types of service clubs and ask to speak at a meeting to request help with volunteers or financial support.
- Talk with your local schools and colleges, get students involved by holding food drives or collecting change from the cafeteria for you.
- Identify the Human Resource Directors with local businesses; talk with them about what their company can do to help – volunteers, food drives, food funds.
- If you have a community foundation, ask if they can help you with startup costs, like shelving, refrigerators, freezers, hand carts, etc.
- Talk with your local United Way, they may be able to help you identify other resources or provide ongoing resources themselves.

Good Luck and please call if you have any questions!

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