Organize a Food Drive for Veterans and/or Military Families

The benefits of holding a food drive for veterans and/or military families are numerous:

- You have the chance to improve the quality of lives of veterans, service members and military families who struggle and need help
- You have the opportunity to show you care, support and are appreciative of the veterans’ and military families’ sacrifices and service
- Through our project, you are able to connect veterans, service members and their families with other employees and members of the community, therefore strengthening you community as a whole and informing it or raising awareness about veteran or military-related challenges
- You can help organizations that serve veterans and/or military families in their efforts to feed the needy

**Type of service:** ongoing, one-time project, special event project, family/guest volunteering, group volunteering

**Time commitment**

Food can be collected in numerous ways:

*Single-site/multiple-site drop off:* You set collection bins and ask people to bring food cans and packages to one or multiple locations on a specific day (this can be in your office or on an external location such as a grocery store, restaurants, etc.)

*Extended food drive:* You set up numerous collection points with drop boxes where people can leave food cans and packages over an extended period of time. Volunteers collect the donations once per day or at the end of a specified period. The extended supply drive can be part of your division’s week of engagement for example and can be event-related (around Veterans Day, winter holiday season, etc.)

For a single-site food drop-off event, a project leader will spend two to four hours each week for up to six weeks. For a food drive involving numerous drop-off locations and spanning several days or weeks, additional time is needed to cover the length of the drive. Volunteers in other roles will spend anywhere from two to 10 hours throughout the collection process.

**Project instructions for a single-site drop off:**

*Step 1: Recruit Project Leaders and Volunteers*

Contact your friends, family, and coworkers and ask who would be interested in helping plan and implement such a project. Organizing a food drive is an easy project that will require planning and preparation. Ask your most enthusiastic colleagues to form a planning committee in order to ensure that your project is running smoothly. Organizing a food drive is a service project you can easily implement by engaging your entire community.

Once you have identified your leaders, it’s time to maximize your volunteers’ skills and interests and put them to work. Identify people to can fill the following roles:

- Obtain and distribute large containers to serve as donation bins
- Manage donation pickup sorting, and drop-off to the partner
- Lead reflection and recognition efforts with the volunteers

Remember that the personal “ask” is always the most effective. Explain your colleagues the benefits of this project and who the supply drive will benefit (targeted number of veterans, military children, etc.) This will solidify your “pitch” and will motivate more people to participate and help.

*Step 2: Identify Partners and Beneficiaries*

Contact local military or veteran service organizations, shelters, senior centers, schools, food banks or other bodies that serve veterans, service members, military and their families and let them know about your project plans and willingness to help and ask if they have access to military families who are in need
of food. You may even find a partner that will want to help you with everything from start to finish. Make sure your project aligns to their needs. Determine what kind of food they need, how much food they need, who will be the beneficiaries, how will the drop-off be organized and when they need the food. The details you will gather will help you adjust your project plan and schedule the drop off in a timely and impactful manner.

Often the benefiting partner may even be able to support you by helping to post flyers or recruit volunteers. If you don’t know where to start in your search process, you can start by contacting your local food bank. Food banks are warehouses that collect large quantities of food to distribute to local food pantries, soup kitchens, etc. The food bank itself may be interested in benefiting from your drive. Or, they may suggest a local food organization in your neighborhood which serves veterans. You can find them listed online at www.feedingamerica.org.

Identifying other stakeholders can be crucial for your drive. The number of partners who will support your food drive will often dictate the way you proceed with the actual collecting. It is always a good idea to partner with organizations that can help with making your drive successful. Talk about the benefits of this food drive and pitch your project to local businesses such as supply stores, grocery stores, organizations that can provide storage space, transportation services, etc.

**Step 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 ensure you have enough people to complete these tasks?
- How will you measure success?
- What resources are already available in the community to use?
- How can I get employee volunteers excited about such a project?
- How will I manage communications during the project?
- 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 benefiting organization?
- What type of reflection activity can I lead volunteers through before, during and after the project?
- How will I recognize the other volunteers?

Give yourself enough time to plan and organize the project (four to six weeks), as well as recognize those involved during and after the project have been completed.

**Step 4: Request Appropriate Food Items**

Don’t assume people know what items they can bring to the drop-off site. Discuss the needs for products with the benefiting organization and make sure you include a list of requested items on all promotional materials and collection bins. Conduct an orientation for your volunteers and instruct them what items can be accepted for donations. Below is a sample list:

- Canned vegetables
- Canned fruit
- Canned meat and fish
- Peanut butter
- Jelly
- Cereal (hot and cold)
- Bagged and boxed grains
- Crackers
- Rice
- Beans
- Pasta
- Macaroni and cheese
- Shelf-stable milk
- Other nutritious and nonperishable food

Local food organizations often are in short supply of age-appropriate food (e.g., low sodium, low sugar or easy to open foods) and/or culturally appropriate foods. Consider narrowing your requests for donations to these special areas to best meet the needs of the people who need food.

**Step 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.
Talk to people in your community to promote your project. Ask others to support the cause. Spread the word and become an ambassador for your cause. Remember that you are giving them a gift – the opportunity to give to others. Get creative in promoting your efforts and make sure you engage all stakeholders throughout the process.

**Step 6: 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 items and transporting the products to the site. Don’t forget to ensure that all containers are collected and dropped off at the appropriate sites. Make sure you include a message from your team/company to accompany the drop-off and have your volunteers engaged in the delivery of food products. This will give them a sense of accomplishment and pride. If possible, make sure the beneficiaries of these supplies can be present and delegate a team of volunteers to deliver the donations. Take pictures. You will use them in communicating about your project.

**Step 7: 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 others about something you learned and how you will continue to help others.
- Write about your experience and communicate about it through company media channels.
- If you are working with a group of volunteers to do this project, lead a group discussion with questions such as:
  - Why did you volunteer today?
  - What did you learn about veterans 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?

**Step 8: Celebrate Your Success**

Give yourself a pat on the back for all of your hard work. And remember to thank everyone who helped you. It will make them feel great. While the school supply drive is still fresh in your mind, think about what worked well and what didn’t. That way you can build on your success, if you decide to do this again.

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 and online.
- Give each volunteer a small token of your appreciation (for example company T-shirt).
- Ask people who were particularly enthusiastic or helpful to join next year’s planning committee.

**Additional Resources**

- To learn more about local food banks and Feeding America, visit [www.feedingamerica.org](http://www.feedingamerica.org)
- To learn more about hunger, nutrition and food poverty in America, check out the Nutrition and Food Poverty Toolkit [www.heartforum.org.uk/Publications_NHFreports_NutritionToolkit.aspx](http://www.heartforum.org.uk/Publications_NHFreports_NutritionToolkit.aspx)
- HandsOn Network [www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org)
- Community Blueprint [www.the-communityblueprint.org](http://www.the-communityblueprint.org)