

Organize a School Supply Drive for Children of Veterans or Active Service Men and Women

In these tough economic times, many American families, including military families, struggle to purchase school supplies for their children. In addition, schools across the country are facing severe budget cuts and lack the funding to purchase necessary supplies. A school supply drive is an easy way to have a profound impact on students and their learning experience as you are ensuring that students have the tools they need to be successful, as well as support military moms and dads who struggle to provide the necessary resources for the children. In addition, through your project you are able to create new relationships, educate the community about veteran or military-related issues and strengthen your community as a whole.

Difficulty level: moderate

Resources:

- Collection boxes
- Possible donation supplies
 - 3-ring binder
 - Backpacks
 - Colored pencils
 - Colored pens
 - Erasers
 - Glue sticks
 - Notebook paper
 - Graph paper
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Highlighters
 - Markers
 - Organizer/planner
 - Paper clips
 - Pens/pencils
 - USB flash drives
 - Books
 - Rulers
 - Tissue paper
 - Antibacterial liquid soap
 - Hand sanitizer
 - Calculators
- Water
- Snacks

It is easy. Collecting school supplies can take as little as a few extra minutes during your weekly visit to the store. Planning and implementing a school supply drive could take up to a couple of hours per week for several weeks.

Note: Many youth-based organizations require that adult volunteers have a criminal background check prior to serving with their agency. Volunteers must attest confirm, represent, and warrant that they have never been convicted of or charged with a violent crime, child abuse or neglect, child pornography, child abduction, kidnapping, rape or any sexual offense, nor have they ever been ordered by a court to receive psychiatric or psychological treatment in connection therewith. Before choosing to organize a project working with children or for youth-based agencies, please make sure that volunteers in your group meet the aforementioned requirements and are prepared to have a full background check and perhaps fingerprinting before they are eligible to volunteer.

Project instructions:

Step 1: Recruit Project Leaders and Volunteers

Contact your friends, coworkers, and family members and ask if anyone would be interested in helping plan and implement a supply drive. Collecting supplies for military children is usually a well-supported activity since many of your colleagues are either parents or want to support service members in need.

You have already identified your leaders. Now it's time to maximize your volunteers' skills and interests and put them to work. Identify people to 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 the people you are reaching to the benefits of this project and who the supply drive will benefit (targeted number of children and families). This will solidify your “pitch” and will motivate more people to participate and help.

Step 2: Identify Partners and Beneficiaries

The success of your supply drive will depend on the partners you engage. The number of partners who will support your supply drive will dictate the way you proceed with actually collecting the supplies.

It is always a good idea to partner with organizations that can help with making your school supply drive successful. Talk about the benefits of this supply drive and pitch your project to local businesses such as supply stores, organizations that can provide storage space, transportation services, etc.

Identify your beneficiary(s). It is a good idea to reach to a local organization that has access to military families. Contact your local schools, PTA groups, and any military or veteran service organizations and let them know about your willingness to lead this project and ask if they have access to military families who are in need of school supplies. You may find a partner that will want to help you with everything from start to finish for this. It is always good to inform them of your project and make sure it aligns with their needs.

You need to understand what kind of supplies are needed, how many supplies are needed, who will be the direct beneficiaries of your drive, when are the supplies expected. Answering questions will help you plan your project and schedule the drop off for donations in a timely and impactful manner.

Step 3: Define a Project Plan and a Timeline

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? Give yourself enough time to plan and organize the project, as well as recognize those involved.

Supplies can be collected in numerous ways:

Single-site/multiple-site drop off: You set collection bins and ask people to bring supplies 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 supply drive: You set up numerous collection points with drop boxes where people can leave supplies 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.)

Start planning your project early and reach out to your potential partners as soon as possible. Give yourself at least six to eight weeks to form a planning committee (if applicable), identify prospect partners, set up meetings with benefiting agency(s) or organization/school to learn and better understand their needs and how you can best address them.

Step 4: Promote

Make a list of places you can promote your effort. You may want to connect with nonprofit partners or your place of worship. Talk to people in your office and community and ask them to support your cause. After all, you are giving them a gift – an opportunity to give to others. Get creative in promoting your efforts and make sure you engage your partners throughout the process.

Step 5: Collect Appropriate School Supplies

Don’t assume people know the most needed and most useful items. Make it easy and explicit, provide a list of requested items on all promotional materials and make sure your volunteers are aware of these items as they are communicating with the public. Make sure you ask your partner what types of supplies they need and make sure you are collecting the needed items.

Step 6: Set-up and Disseminate Your Collection Containers

Obtain collection containers (plastic bins, heavy cardboard boxes, etc.), label them properly and strategically place them in convenient and targeted locations throughout your office or other space to make it easy for people to donate.

Step 7: 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 collected and dropped off at the appropriate site. Make sure you include a message from your team/company to accompany the drop-off and have your volunteers engaged in the delivery of supplies. 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 9: Reflect and Celebrate Your Success

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 have 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?

Don't forget to 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:

- HandsOn Network www.handsonnetwork.org
- Community Blueprint www.the-communityblueprint.org
- www.volunteerspot.com
- www.DoSomething.org