

POWER^{UP} YOUR PANTRY

VOLUNTEERS



Volunteers provide the bulk of the labor and sometimes even the leadership in food pantries.

Yet, finding and keeping volunteers can be a struggle for many food pantry directors. Fortunately, there are resources available to help directors identify the best practices for recruiting and keeping volunteers.

Getting Organized

For those in leadership or volunteer management at food pantries, the first step is to think about the different volunteer jobs in your pantry. What do people already do and/or what do you need people to do?

To help with planning, create simple job descriptions and be sure to list any special skills such as record keeping, computer skills, or customer service that would help. Make note of leadership positions (those jobs that require organizing other people and tasks versus simply performing a task). As a next step, begin to chart-out how many people you need for each position, how long you will need them, and whether it is a one-time job or something ongoing.

Finding Volunteers

Potential volunteers are all around. Like fundraising, the first rule is to ask! In general, seek volunteers from a diversity of groups rather than those you assume will be interested. Below are a few suggestions:

Clients. Your clients are often looking for a way to give back. Post signs around the pantry to extend a friendly invitation.

Community service programs. Court ordered help may be the key to filling in gaps in your volunteer schedule. Plus, it gives people a chance to give back.

Churches and related groups. Reach out to all denominations and religions in your community.

Service learning programs. High schools, colleges, and a variety of clubs now require students to do service in the community.

Also consider your local chamber of commerce, family and friends, a nearby military base, civic organizations, associations of retired professionals, girl scouts, boy scouts, sororities, fraternities, and others.

People who use your food pantry may be the largest, most overlooked source of volunteers.



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This series is intended for food pantries and other hunger relief groups looking for ways to enhance their current operations and better meet the needs of people who use their services.

The information provided is based on survey and other research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Center for Food Security at the University of Missouri.

Keeping Volunteers

Treat volunteer recruitment as a year-round project. This will keep new people coming in and lessen the load on existing volunteers. Likewise, avoid asking too much of volunteers in order to keep them fresh and energized about spending time at your pantry.

Keep records of volunteers and their hours. This is helpful for grants and telling your story to the public. In addition, be sure volunteers receive your newsletter and appeals for monetary donations. They may be some of your most loyal supporters and will appreciate being kept in the loop.

Finally, make volunteers comfortable. This includes providing training, a safety talk, and proper tools for each task. Access to water, coffee, and snacks will help them feel at home. Check-in with them periodically to make sure they have what they need whether it be information, supplies, or a break.

Recruiting Volunteers for Leadership Positions

Keep an eye out for volunteers who show exceptional interest or skills and are dependable. Consider asking them to take on more responsibility by leading a special project, organizing a particular task for other volunteers, or being a coordinator for one of the pantry's many operations.

Adapted in part from Soup Kitchen and Food Pantry Best Practices Guide, New York City Coalition Against Hunger, 2010.





SPOTLIGHT: CARGILL CARES FOOD PANTRY CALIFORNIA, MO



Barbara Mannering

When the food pantry in California completed their new facility, they held an event to thank their many supporters and make sure people knew that help was still needed. Now, instead of money, the pantry needed volunteers to run the new facility and handle the expanded hours.

The request was heard. On opening day, 150 volunteers showed up. Since then, the food pantry has maintained a list of 75 solid volunteers. "We fell blessed to have them," says Barbara Mannering, Operations and Statistics Manager for the food pantry. "We appreciate them all. Even when we're short on volunteers, they get the work done."

For recruiting, the pantry has relied on local radio and newspaper ads, girl and boy scout troops for help with buddy packs, and a partnership with Cargill Cares, an employee-led group of the Cargill corporation that supports local charitable organizations.

Creating a positive volunteer experience also helps. "We keep the atmosphere friendly, make it a social experience, and try to not overwork people," said Mannering. "We also feed volunteers once a month on our big packing day." Volunteers then tell their friends and family.

Importantly, those who go to the food pantry for help also contribute their time. Mannering estimates that 10-15% of volunteers are current or former clients.

When asked about what advice she has for pantries that may struggle to have enough volunteers, Mannering suggests treating volunteer recruitment as an ongoing activity.

"Get the word out about the continued need. You can never have enough help."



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For more information:
foodsecurity.missouri.edu

