

**HOW TO START AN
EMERGENCY FOOD PANTRY**

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This packet of information, which includes an overall guide, sample forms, lists, check sheets, and Second Harvest Food Bank guidelines, has been assembled to aid groups who wish to start an Emergency Food Pantry (also known as an emergency food box program).

In addition to this material, we would be happy to have a staff person assist you with your efforts. We hope you find these materials helpful. They are intended to be a guide, so use them to help develop your program in such a manner that it works for your particular situation.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, there are families and individuals who for a number of reasons find themselves without food or money. Such crises demand immediate attention, but unfortunately it usually takes government programs several days to respond to these emergencies. Therefore, people turn to churches, temples, and other social service agencies operating food pantries. These charities provide temporary emergency supplies of food, or prepared meals if they operate a soup kitchen.

An emergency food pantry is one way of providing a nutritionally balanced supply of food to needy people for a limited period of time, usually two (2) to four (4) days. It offers the community an effective and pre-planned approach to handling these emergency situations. Food Pantries provide only temporary assistance; they do not address the underlying cause of the client's lack of food or resources. Therefore, it is very helpful when pantry workers are able to refer their clients to social service and government agencies to provide the long-term help that may be needed. By definition, an emergency food pantry provides a supply of food for a family to use in their own home, and should not be confused with nor called a food bank (a Food Bank is a wholesale supplier of donated products to food pantries and other charities involved in the feeding of the needy).

HOW TO START AND RUN A FOOD PANTRY

There are four basic elements to the operation of a food pantry.

1. The facility and paperwork
2. Volunteers
3. Food
4. Clients

Each of these areas will be addressed separately.

FACILITY AND PAPERWORK

Any facility, which is both safe and sanitary, can be used to store food. The pantry should be located in a low traffic area of the building, easily accessible by the clients, with appropriate dry, frozen and refrigerated storage space to store appropriate items. Use of non-perishable food is recommended, but when possible other items such as fresh produce should be used to provide a variety of nutritious food. Good storage is essential and the following are some basic rules:

Store all food away from walls and off the floor, either on shelves or in cupboards. You should leave enough room to inspect for signs of problems (rodents and insects) and be able to easily and quickly clean the area.

Protect food from moisture.

Store all non-food items away from food items.

Inspect all food items before they are distributed. Check cans for leaks, bulges, dents or rust and discard any food you have doubts about. Do not distribute open containers of food or food that has been canned or packaged at home.

Do not repackage or can food in your facility unless you have proper Health Department approval and permits for processing food.

Record keeping is important for many reasons!

You will need to find out some basic information about anyone who requests food so that you can give them adequate assistance. For this purpose, we have included a sample Process Check Sheet with questions and a sample Intake Form.

For your own use, you will want records of whom you have helped, their particular needs, and your success in helping them. This will help you to get more food and volunteers, and may eventually help to document the extent and types of poverty in your area. The sample intake form can be used for this purpose and you may want to keep an alphabetized card file for easy future reference.

You may want to keep an inventory of the amount and types of food you have taken in and distributed. Besides helping you to show clearly how much work you have done, this will contribute to the smooth functioning of the pantry, as you will know what you have and what you need to get. This helps to ensure that you provide the best food possible.

ABOVE ALL ELSE, REMEMBER THAT YOU SHOULD KEEP ALL INFORMATION PROVIDED BY YOUR CLIENTS COMPLETELY CONFIDENTIAL!

VOLUNTEERS

Depending on the size of your pantry, it could be crucial to your success that you have as many volunteers as you need. This differs from pantry to pantry, as some are managed and run by staff people, while others are totally run by volunteers. If you do have volunteers, adopting a work schedule is necessary for you to maintain regular hours of operation. You might consider selecting an enthusiastic volunteer coordinator to manage the schedule, plan volunteer events and training, and recruit new volunteers, while providing overall supervision of the program. Remember to support volunteers with encouragement, clear instructions and praise.

Tasks for volunteers or staff include preparing and providing food to clients, keeping the pantry clean and stocked, helping clients identify other sources of help, keeping records, and understanding the problems clients may have. Food boxes can be prepared in advance or custom made, as the client's needs are determined. Pre-packing saves time to be spent with the client, while preparing boxes on a case-by-case basis tailors the package to the particular needs of the family. Both systems work and a sample food list has been included. Most pantries give enough food to feed a family for 3-5 days, but this is often determined by the resources of the pantry. You might also want to provide clients with sample menus to help them make the best use of the food.

FOOD

Food is often supplied by the group sponsoring the pantry, and is usually obtained through food drives or financial contributions to purchase food. A food drive consists of asking people to donate various needed items to the pantry for distribution. Some groups charge a canned good admission fee for group activities. Often, pantries have supplemented their food supplies with larger donations from individuals who have connections within the food industry, or people who have excess food in their gardens.

Some churches in poorer neighborhoods have stocked their pantries by joining with another church. This sister church program enables the other church to obtain supplies for the church with the pantry.

In smaller areas, small churches join together in an ecumenical effort to get enough food for each of their pantries, or they pool their resources to run one centrally located pantry.

Another way to get food, especially for non-profit groups is to join a food bank. The Second Harvest Food Bank can provide further information on how to do this. Appeals directly to local businesses will also help provide added food resources, but this requires much work. The Food Bank can assist in this area if needed.

Don't forget to include in your requests for donations boxes and bags. These will make it easier for you to prepare the food, and make it easier for clients to take it home.

CLIENTS

Pantries vary in the types of people they serve, and the ways in which they serve them. Most pantries have regular hours and will help anyone that walks in and demonstrates a need (that's what your intake form is used for). Some pantries only take those people who have been referred from agencies who do the screening for them, eliminating the need to spend time screening and keeping client records. The enclosed sample process check sheet lists several points to cover while talking to clients.

IT IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO FIND OUT EACH CLIENT'S MOST CRUCIAL PROBLEMS IN ORDER TO HELP THEM IN THE BEST WAY.

It is advisable to compile a list of local agencies, job programs, legal clinics, medical clinics, county hospitals, senior citizen centers, immigration centers, and any other social service agency in your area that might help clients (that's what the sample referral form is used for). This form can be used by you to refer clients to another agency, and can be required by you in order to help a client referred to you by another agency. Please remember to call the agency you are referring to ensure they can help before sending the client.

GENERAL SUPPORT

Running a food pantry can be hard work, but the Second Harvest Food Bank wants to help you make the job a successful one. To this end, we will be happy to help you with training, speaking engagements, educational resources, or whatever you need to help feed hungry people.

EMERGENCY FOOD PROCESS CHECK SHEET

CLIENT ARRIVES

1. Ask how we can help.
2. State that you think we can help.
3. Find out some basic information (and begin to fill out the intake form) such as:
 - Have we helped before? If so, continue to find out what their needs are, and follow our guidelines for repeaters.

- How many people in the family?
 - Any source of income?
 - Do they receive public assistance? Have they applied? Are they having trouble getting assistance (if they are eligible but are having problems, remember to refer them to someone who can help)?
4. After determining that they should receive assistance, explain what you can and cannot do for them. Note this on the intake form.
 5. Find out if they have other immediate problems, such as:
 - Unemployment
 - Immigration
 - Housing
 - Medical
 - What have they done so far to solve their problems?
 Follow through with help. This will most likely be a referral to an agency or advocate. Note this information on the intake form.
 6. Always give them help with a smile.
 7. You might want to change food items to meet special needs, such as infant formula, low salt, diabetic, allergies, etc.

FEEL FREE TO CHANGE THIS CHECKLIST TO SUIT THE NEEDS OF YOUR CLIENTS AND YOUR PANTRY.

BASIC FOOD LIST FOR EMERGENCY FOOD BOXES

There are some obvious limitations to how much and what kinds of food we can provide in a food package, but we can try to ensure that at least essential basic food requirements are being met. Here are a few key points to remember when putting together a food package, and recommendations as to what should be included.

1. Provide food from all four basic food groups.
2. Provide a Vitamin C source (citrus fruits and their juices) for each person per day.
3. Provide a good source of Vitamin A (dark green, yellow and orange vegetables).
4. Consider family size - larger families need more food.
5. Determine if clients have cooking facilities, refrigerators, and storage space.
6. Find out what foods clients will eat - if they won't eat it, don't give it to them.
7. Include can openers and hygiene products if you can get them.

FOOD LIST BY FOOD GROUPS

This is a general guide to follow, and amounts given should depend upon the family size.

- MILK GROUP - powdered or fresh milk, cheese
- MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE - meat, peanut butter, tuna, beans
- FRUITS/VEGETABLES - fresh or canned citrus, fruit, vegetables
- GRAIN - bread, tortillas, rice, oatmeal, flour, Bisquick
- MISCELLANEOUS - infant formula, baby food, diapers
- OPTIONAL - can openers, tea, coffee, soap, toothpaste, detergent

Please keep in mind that this is a basic food list, and is just a guideline. You can substitute items when necessary, but always refer to the basic four food groups, and try to choose a wide variety of food from all groups.

SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK GUIDELINES FOR EMERGENCY FOOD BOX PROGRAMS

1. All food is distributed free of any and all charges to recipients. The agency is not to ask for money, food stamps, or anything else either as a requirement to get food or as a donation to the charity to defray its cost in providing the food. If the recipient meets the charities requirements, and the charity has food, that is all that is required of the recipient.
2. The emergency food box should have a balanced, nutritious diet as much as is possible to serve the number of people in the family for the stated period of time.
3. Charities should provide their service on a regularly scheduled basis, and have these times of service posted. It is desired, but not required, that service be provided a minimum of five days per week. The charity will provide service from either a church building or office from which it normally operates. **NO EMERGENCY FOOD BOX PROGRAMS ARE TO PROVIDE SERVICE OR BE OPERATED FROM PRIVATE HOMES, APARTMENTS OR PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL FACILITIES.**
4. Charities shall keep track of appropriate information on the clients they serve. This information shall be made available to the Second Harvest Food Bank as requested. This record should document the service(s) provided, the number of people helped, the date of help, and any other information that will substantiate that service was provided.
5. Charities are not to sell, offer for sale, trade, barter, or accept donations for any and all items that they have obtained from the Second Harvest Food Bank for money, services, or other items. Charities will not place donation containers or

signs requesting donations in any area that is used for the emergency food box program.

6. Charities must have an ongoing emergency food box program that is funded from other sources, and may not rely upon recipients for any support whatsoever. The program must be self-sustaining from the charity resources.
7. Charities must have the capability to operate their program without products from the Second Harvest Food Bank. Food Bank supplies are only a supplement to the charities other resources, and cannot be used as the only source of food for the charity, since the Food Bank cannot guarantee the quantity or selection of product it might have.
8. Charities may set their own criteria for service, and may set a limit on how many boxes an individual or family may receive during a specified period of time. This information should be posted at the agency for the client's information.
9. Charities must store and handle all food in accordance with Health Department requirements for their area. They must have proper storage areas and capacity to store food-awaiting distribution. It is not recommended that food be distributed the day it is received, unless there is a particularly heavy demand for it that day. It should be distributed as the charity gets requests for help over a period of time, but it should be distributed before it spoils.
10. All charities should attend training sessions provided by the Second Harvest Food Bank for their benefit.

DEFINITIONS

1. **Recipients/Clients** - People who need emergency food assistance, and come to an agency for help.
2. **Charity** - A non-profit organization that operates an emergency food box program or pantry that provides food to people in need. All food is provided free, and the agency receives nothing from the recipient for the food.
3. **Emergency Food Box** - A supply of food that will feed a certain number of people for a certain number of days. The food is given to the people to prepare in their own home in an effort to alleviate their immediate, short-term food crisis.

CONFIDENTIAL CLIENT INTAKE FORM

DATE					
LAST NAME		FIRST NAME		M.I.	
ADDRESS					
CITY		STATE		ZIP CODE	
PHONE					
NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN FAMILY					
ADULTS		CHILDREN			
RESIDENT		TRANSIENT			
HOW DID YOU FIND OUT ABOUT US?					
HAVE WE HELPED YOU BEFORE?			YES		NO
PLEASE EXPLAIN YOUR SITUATION AND WHY YOU NEED FOOD.					
WHAT CURRENT BENEFITS HAVE YOU APPLIED FOR OR ARE RECEIVING?					
OTHER INFORMATION PERTINENT TO YOUR CASE					
INTERVIEWERS NAME					
DATE					
HELP PROVIDED					
HELP DENIED/REASON					
REFERRED TO					

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EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE REFERRAL FORM

CLIENT NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

PHONE _____

NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN FAMILY _____

ADULTS _____ CHILDREN _____

This family is being referred to:

AGENCY NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP CODE _____

PHONE _____ CONTACT PERSON _____

FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS: _____

SURVIVE FOOD BANK REPRESENTATIVE _____

**[THIS AGENCY HAS BEEN CALLED AND HAS AGREED TO TAKE THE REFERRAL AND HELP
WHERE POSSIBLE]**

CLIENT SIGNATURE _____