

So You Want to Start An Emergency Food Pantry...

Your organization or church may have been approached by individuals seeking food for their families, and you want to do something to help. Meeting the needs of the hungry is a noble and wonderful ministry. If you do want to start an emergency food pantry, perhaps with the plan of becoming a partner agency of our Food Bank, here are some things to think about to help you succeed.

Look Into Local Resources

Before investing your organization's resources in starting a food program, look to see if there are existing programs in your area already meeting the need. We can provide this information to you. Call Agency Services Department at (859) 288-5326 for this information. God's Pantry Food Bank can deny membership based on regional saturation (programs already serving your area). Learning to see what is already available will help you decide when and how you want to become part of the hunger solution. You might want to visit an existing food pantry program and observe their operation.

Mission

Have a mission to feed the needy. Identify the population you expect to serve and learn the level of need in your area.

501(c)(3)

Your agency must be an IRS 501(c)(3), not-for-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization. To get this Letter of Determination, you will have to contact the IRS and request Form 1023 ("Application for Recognition of Exemption") and its instructions. You may call (800) 829-1040 for information or (800) 829-3676 for the form. The application, and process, is also available on-line at www.irs.gov It will take at least 6 or more weeks to process and receive this letter.

Note: The 501(c)(3) letter is different from the Kentucky Certificate of Tax Exemption.

Storage Site

America's Second Harvest requires its partner agencies to be able to store food safely and securely on the premises of the agency. Locate a room with adequate shelving for accepting food by the case quantity. This room must be able to be locked. Appliances for storing frozen & refrigerated product must also be able to be locked if not located inside the food storage room. Food pantry food must not be accessible for general church or agency activities. The Health Department also requires that product is stored in a "food safe environment".

The following are basic, minimum guidelines for storing food and grocery items:

- Choose a storage space with locking doors, and if possible, no windows or outside entrances. The storage space must have climate control (heat/air-conditioning).

- Store all grocery products 6 inches away from walls and 6 inches off the floor. Food should never be stored on the floor.
- Use freestanding shelves or leave space between items and walls.
- Protect products from moisture by selecting a dry, well-ventilated area.
- Store non-food items separate from food items.
- Mark the date received on all cases and start a first-in, first-out (FIFO) system.
- Inspect all items. Do not distribute packages that are bulging, contaminated, rusted, or leaking.
- Use non-toxic insect and rodent traps and monitor them regularly.
- Use thermometers in all refrigerators, freezers, and dry storage areas. Check temps on a regular basis and record the results. Refrigerators (35 to 45 degrees), freezers (-10 to 0 degrees), dry storage (50 to 70 degrees).
- Do not repack food. Examples, do not cut meat into small portions; divide the contents of a #10 (large) can into different containers, re-bag or re-package flour, sugar, pasta, etc.
- On-site meal preparation programs must be inspected by the local Health Department, and employees must have attended a Food Manager/Handlers Licensing class.

Budget

You will need a budget to pay for your food pantry expenses. Your budget may come from a benevolence fund, donations, grants, or other sources. In no case can funds come from the sale of product you receive from the Food Bank (fund raisers, bake sales, etc.). You will need a regular source of money. In addition to the costs connected with getting food, whether through shared maintenance or purchase fees, you can count on some, or all, or the following expenses: staffing, transportation, pest control, photocopying of forms, cleaning supplies, thermometers, utility charges and storage containers.

Staffing

Your pantry staff may be comprised of volunteers or paid employees. You will need enough people to perform the following chores on a regular basis:

- Stock food on the shelves and make up boxes or bags of food
- Conduct client screening/intake
- Clean and maintain the facility

- Attend meetings and training sessions
- Maintain records and required reports
- Pick up food

Since most pantries are staffed by volunteers (many elderly), here are a few suggestions about keeping them happy. First, make them feel they are an integral part of your organization and that their work is meaningful. It often helps to have a volunteer job description so that they know where their responsibilities begin and end. You might also consider having a volunteer handbook with information they can refer to when they have or receive questions. Check on volunteers while they're working to make sure everything is going well. Finally, appreciate them! Recognize the important role volunteers play in your pantry. Of course, paid staff deserves appreciation too.

Transportation

You will need reliable and consistent transportation for collecting food. The vehicle must be large enough for the size of your program. Keep in mind that you will be receiving whole cases of product from the Food Bank and that the weight of that product can quickly add up. A typical pallet of food weighs approximately 1,500 pounds.

Client Eligibility

Your food pantry should set guidelines regarding whom you will help, how often and with how much food. While the IRS rules state that you cannot require your clients to make a donation, attend a church service, or work for food, you still need to decide on client eligibility guidelines. Keep in mind that, as a non-profit food pantry, you cannot limit your distribution to just members or your church or neighborhood. You should serve everyone in your service area that meet the requirements for emergency food assistance. Set up a geographical service area. We recommend following U.S. Department of Agriculture income guidelines to determine whom you will serve.

Record Keeping

You should account for all of the food you distribute (in the case of USDA commodity product, you must account for). This will let food donors know whom you use their donations, and it helps in hunger advocacy to be able to document who needs food and where emergency food is going. America's Second Harvest requires its partner agencies to record the date of distribution, the client's name and address, the number of people in the household and the number of days' food supply going out.

Getting Started

If you feel that starting a pantry is an appropriate response to hunger in your area, and you have all these components of your program worked out, then please do apply for Food Bank membership. We recommend starting small, so that you can work out any unresolved details, and be flexible. Be sure that the highest authority in your organization, whether director or pastor, is kept informed of your plans and your

pantry operations. Read the enclosed Manual for Food Bank Member Agencies and complete the application and contracts to get your application started.