



How to Have a Successful Food Drive

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The Post-Holiday Food Shortage

It is common for food banks and pantries to see a large increase in food and cash donations between Thanksgiving and Christmas. The abundance of food is quickly diminished by January and February and not easily replenished. Many people have just recently given to the organization but don't think about the fact that demand is still high. Late winter and early spring are great times to plan a food drive or solicit other organizations to sponsor a food drive for your organization. Below are some good tips on how to make sure your food drives are successful.

Planning

Food drives are easy and rewarding projects that everyone can participate in. They can be sponsored by your organization or you can have other groups such as schools, clubs or youth groups take the lead.

Your first task is to select a date. Contact your local food bank to see if other large food drives are occurring at the same time. It would be wise to plan your drive at a different time to avoid confusion. Some food drives are centered around a particular event and only last one day; others last for several weeks. The option is yours, but note that publicity is important and you want to make sure you can afford to publicize the event for the duration of the drive.

At the beginning of the planning process, assign jobs to all members of the committee. Have volunteers to assist with planning, publicity, set-up, collection, sorting and delivery and make sure that the bulk of the work does not fall on one person. Have a idea about how you want to collect the food and make sure you have a plan to get it moved from the collection site to the distribution site.

Publicity

Spend the time and money it takes to publicize your food drive. It will be worth it in the end. While there are many free sources, paid advertising is an excellent way to get the word out. Start publicizing at least two weeks prior to an event and at the start of the food drive (if it lasts for more than one day). Signs and fliers should list the date/s of the drive, where the food will go, what types of food are needed, and where the collection boxes are located.

There are many different types of food drives. Many are admission-based food drives centered around an event where people can give a can and get into an event for free or at a reduced price. Multi-day events often have competitions

Strengthening Alaska's Anti-Hunger Network

between teams, clubs and organizations. Food drives can have a food-specific theme (eg. peanut butter and jelly) as well or be associated with a grocery store or other food related business.

Most Requested Items

If you are having the food drive for your own organization, it is likely that you'll know what items you need the most. If you are hosting the food drive for a larger food bank, here are a list of the most commonly requested items.

Canned vegetables and fruit

Canned meats and fish

Pasta and tomato sauce

Beans

Rice

Peanut butter

Cereal/oatmeal

Powdered milk

Nutritional beverages

Collecting the Food

Whether your food drive is an in-house event or one in which the public will participate, collection sites should be convenient and highly visible. Well-traveled locations are excellent spots to collect the food but remember to check containers often so they don't overflow.

Food safety is also very important. Many people clean out their pantry to give to food drives, so it is vital to check expiration dates on canned items and remove any badly dented or rusted cans. Contact the Alaska Food Coalition at afc@foodbankofalaska.org for more information on food safety.

From Cans to Cash

Be sure to announce your success to those who participated and also to the public. Thank everyone involved and make note of ideas that might help you be successful in your next food drive.

While food drives are always a good way to get more food on the shelves and connect people to your organization and mission, they are not the most effective use of time. Cash donations can be used more efficiently to purchase food from food banks or in bulk. When conducting your food drive, get contact information from donors. Stay in touch with them and continue to ask for their support in the future.

For more information on turning your cans to cash, contact the Alaska Food Coalition Manager at afc@foodbankofalaska.org or 907.222.3103.

**Next Month:
Summer Food
Service Program**

