

Fighting for Food

A Guide to Running Successful Food Drives In High Schools

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About This Guide

This guide is a how-to for high school students who want to run food drives. It specifically addresses campaigns that involve physical cans and boxes of food. Financial drives are also extremely helpful and are definitely an option. We have chosen to focus on physical drives, however, because they deviate from a typical high school fundraiser and are a tad more difficult. (But, in our opinion, they are also more rewarding.) You can use this guide as a step-by-step manual or more of a place to get suggestions. No matter how you use it, we're glad you're taking the first steps to helping feed your community. A little bit of commitment on the part of a few can lead to a lot of good. Thank you for getting involved and good luck!

Why Run a Food Drive?

If you're reading this guide, you're probably a high school student leader looking into potential fundraisers or ideas for a charity event. This is probably also not the only guide, information sheet or download you've read today. We get that. We know there's a lot to sort through, and there are also a ton of great causes and campaigns out there. We're writing this to help you pull off one of the most unique in an easy, fun manner that also makes a big impact.

You might be totally new to hunger issues, or it may be something you're really passionate about. Either way, the statistics are pretty startling. According to Feeding America's 2013 data, one in six Americans is food insecure. This means they don't always know where their next meal is coming from. These are our neighbors, friends, peers and coworkers. One of the amazing things about hunger is that it hides - in cities, in small towns, in suburbia. Every single county in the U.S. has food insecurity. No matter where you live, this is a problem that affects someone you pass on the street or even see in the halls.

The good news is that no matter where you live, you also probably have the chance to help. Nearly every community in this country has a food shelf or food pantry - a place where people struggling with hunger can go to get help putting meals on the table. These awesome charities aid people at their most vulnerable. Unfortunately, rough economic times can also leave food shelves themselves nearly defenseless. Relying on donations and assistance from larger food banks, these charities often lose funding as the economy takes a downturn - which is when they are needed the most.

This is where you can come in. High school food drives can do incredible things for a local food charity. Even a modestly sized school with a student body of five hundred can donate a literal ton of food if everyone chips in four cans. You can do a lot with not a lot of individual giving if everybody lends a hand.

There are lots of fun ways to get your peers and even your teachers involved in both helping their community and engaging in a little friendly competition, or earning rewards you can use in class. This guide has a ton of tips for pulling off a successful food drive, right down to the last can. We hope you choose to aid your local community in this way, and we wish you the best of luck with your fundraiser. We hope you have as much fun as we do!

Maria and Tariro

p.s. If you want to know more about hunger, what you can do to help, who we are, or need to remember what all those technical terms mean, we've included a glossary and a bunch of information in the last pages of this guide. Happy driving!

Before You Start

So you've decided you'd like to run a food drive. Yay! Now you need to get started.

Before you get anywhere, talk to your principal, student council advisor, dean, or whomever in your school will need to approve such a campaign. Bring a relatively defined plan to the table to show that you are able to handle such an undertaking. It does not have to be a masterpiece - even a one page outline on a piece of notebook paper will do. Having something to show an administrator that you have done some thinking on the topic will prove that you are serious about running a food drive - and that will make your administrator take you seriously.

Once you have administrative approval, you'll need to contact your local food shelf, to make sure what you want to do will be helpful and to get a better grasp on how you can help. We'll address this on the next page. Before you do this, though, you need to move on to building a team. Involve service clubs or groups in your high school. Chapters of National Honor Society, Key Club, religious groups or other service organizations may be very willing to jump in and help. The Student Council will probably also be on board. Have one group take the lead and clearly define who will be doing what - nothing bogs down a project quite like confusion or fighting over whom exactly is in charge. Pick a student leader and staff advisor to captain your "team", and fill in the other roles as necessary.

Once you've corralled your crew, start picking a name for your campaign, dates and incentives. (We'll cover more on motivating your peers, picking times and publicity in a few pages.) Have these discussions as a group and work democratically to make choices the whole team can live with. Also be sure to have a staff member or administrator in on these meetings so that you are sure that what you've chosen will fly with the teachers. To further ensure everybody's on the same page, take notes over every decision that was made. It's a lot to remember if you've got a big team, and if an issue arises you will have a definitive record of what was decided by whom.

Contacting the Food Shelf

The next step in running a food drive is to ask your local experts - the people who run your food shelf. These are usually found in community centers, houses of worship or local nonprofit centers. Use your favorite search engine or ask around to find the nearest one. If you live in a larger city, proximity to your school building may be more important than if you live in a small town, as these smaller communities usually have only one food relief charity. No matter your circumstances, find who you want to help and then go ask if they want or need it.

Emails are an acceptable form of communication, but if you can find a time to meet with a food shelf administrator in person, do it. You can send your team captain or the whole group. Either option shows a food shelf that you are very serious about working with them and also helps you better understand the impact you're about to make. Once you've met your contact, ask what you specifically can do to help. Every town and every food shelf is different, and what they need varies widely. Factors ranging from the time of year to shortages to food prices to the demographics of a shelves' clientele determine what they need, so ask. Getting a specific list of goods they are looking for ensures that you're really being helpful, and helps them better serve their clients.

Also ask the food shelves if they have any campaigns they would like you to publicize. They may also be looking for coats, school supplies, toiletries or other basic needs to further assist struggling families. Compliment your drive with theirs by aligning goals.

Another good reason to visit a shelf in person is to see how they sort their goods. Depending on the size and who is in charge, the organizational system can vary widely. Some food shelves will simply have one spot or box for soups, while others will have it broken down into broths or noodles, while others may have it down to specific flavors and even brands. Take note of how your local food shelf sorts and do the same when you start going through your own goods. Then when you take it over, there's no transferring to do. This small amount of planning saves both you and the food shelf lots of time, energy and frustration.

Keep in touch with this administrator throughout your drive process. When the time comes, make sure you are very clear on when you will be dropping off donations and if you need boxes or crates to move it all. Get this time set as soon as possible so that last-minute planning won't create a big inconvenience for the people you're trying to help.

*We know – this is a lot to remember!
We've made a checklist with all of this
for you to take to your meeting. You
can find it on page 15.*

Incentives

In high schools, you basically have two options for incentives: class or individual. We have found that individual overwhelmingly works better at this level, but every school is different, and for you whole-class motivation may be more effective.

If you choose to do individual, you have lots of choices. One of the most successful options is to provide students rewards on a per-can basis. One particularly effective model involves giving students 10 points of extra credit for every 10 cans they bring in. Other rewards in the same model included the option to delay an assignment's due date, retake a test or get out of a detention. All of these are obviously up to the school's discretion, and you need to talk to the teachers about this before you go for it. The extra-credit option is extraordinarily popular, and if you time it near Christmas or the end of the school year, you create a win-win scenario for students and shelves. The two times of year food pantries need the most help are around the holidays and summer, and the two times of year students need the most extra credit are when semester exams or finals roll around. These times coincide beautifully, and what results is a boost for both your grades and the inventory at the food pantry.

The trick to pulling off this win-win is to communicate with your teachers. It is a model we've seen used very successfully, but you need to be very clear and intentional about asking every teacher about whether or not they'd like to offer extra credit, delayed assignment dates or test retakes. In our experience, most will be fine with it, but you may have a few who choose not to participate at all. That's ok. Just make sure to put the names of the nonparticipating teachers on your fliers so your fellow students know they can't use your coupons in one or two specific classes.

Your other incentive option is to reward classes of students. You can either pit grade against grade or students against teachers. For grade against grade competitions, you can do many of the same things you probably already do for Homecoming - have the seniors take on the freshman, pit the upperclassmen versus the lower, etc. Classes can earn longer lunch hours, extended breaks, a half-day of games, or other reward. One option that works well is to give the winning class a party - and make the lowest-raising class pay for it out of their treasury. This bites into prom and senior picnic money, and no class is going to give that up without a fight. Again, just make sure that every incentive that you pitch to students has already been cleared by all involving staff members and the administrators. Communication is key to a successful food drive!

For a staff vs. students competition, you can do raw poundage (which can prove pretty difficult, unless you've got easy access to some massive scales) or use the cans to "vote" for a particular event or reward. One great model of the latter is called "Dancing With The Staff", and it's a lot like what it sounds like - a certain reality dance competition except with teachers instead of celebrities. Every can is a vote toward whom stays in the competition, and after two

Can Sculpture

Here are some extreme (but awesome!) examples of can sculpture.



or three rounds, you've had both the joy of watching your Bio teacher attempt to samba and the sense of accomplishment from raising cans for a great cause. You can also vote with cans toward which staff member gets a pie to the face, or has to do something else mildly to very embarrassing. Again, you really need to clear this with the teachers before you go for it.

One last option for classes or teachers is a sculpture contest. Construct a structure out of all the donated cans, and see which class can build the biggest and most beautiful creation. Create a rubric and have staff and student officials "judge" to see which class can earn a reward. This works well in smaller schools where grades have few enough members that each could feasibly contribute to planning or building your can creation.

Whether you choose one of the incentives above as is, twist it in a new creative way, or create one of your own, make sure it is something you think will work with your students. Nobody knows your school environment better than you. Discuss all this as a team, pull in some teachers and make the decision based on what you think will be the most successful. Good luck!

Publicity

Publicity for a food drive is probably going to be no different than publicity for any other charitable event you've hosted in the past. You know the drill and you've done this before - posters around the building, a brief mention in the announcements, mass school email and the like. Again, this is all about your school and what works best. If no one ever checks their school account or listens to the principal when they get on the intercom in the morning, don't rely on those means of communication alone. Do what you know works for your school, whether that's flyers on the lunch table or signs over the drinking fountains. If your school has a Facebook or Twitter page (and students actually follow it), it may not be a bad idea to plug your drive there as well. You could even start a Facebook group of your own to display your progress as the campaign goes.

Of course, you can't do any sort of publicity if you don't have the details down. At this point, you've determined that you are allowed to do a food drive and decided how you're going to motivate your peers to participate. Now you need to figure out when you're going to run your campaign.

We've found that two weeks is an optimal length for most size high schools. It is long enough to build momentum but not too long to create what we like to call "I'll Do It Later Syndrome". "IDILS" is common in all teenagers, including us - what we do not have to do today, we often put off until tomorrow. Giving students two weeks to participate doesn't let them delay bringing goods in too long but does allow them the time to put some thought into what they're donating. If you want to avoid a giant push in the last several days, make your incentives worth more in the first week, and gradually drop the value as the deadline looms. Even if you do this step, still be ready for a huge influx on the last day. We highly suggest ending on a Friday if at all possible - it makes getting the goods to the food shelf a lot easier, and gives you a weekend buffer to get it all out of the school should any issues arise.

Pick a theme or slogan for your campaign. "The Hunger Games", "Bag Hunger" and "Feed the Families" are all pretty popular. Have some fun with the name and/or logo. It is, after all, your creation!

Finally, do some hunger education in your school. Many students have no idea how prevalent and widespread the issue is in our country. Putting facts or information about the problem in the same places you promote your drive can fill two needs with one poster or blurb. We've enclosed some fact sheets and references we think you might find helpful for this. (They're on page 16.) Some schools also take their efforts to other buildings in their district. Drama clubs or classes can put on skits for younger students, and depending on your level of involvement and commitment, you can also facilitate drives in your elementary level buildings.

The Day Before

Hooray! You've almost made it to day one of your drive. You've set the pieces in place, and it's about time to unleash your project upon the world.

Your first day will probably be the most challenging, even if it is not even close to the busiest in terms of donation numbers. Day one can be either triumphant or tough because you find out quickly if the system you set up to receive product works or not.

Regardless of the incentive system you decided on, set yourself up in a conspicuous location at a convenient time. Right before school in front of the office or in a main lobby seems to work very well. If you are doing individual rewards, recruit team members to log donations and develop a stamp, specific coupon or other authenticating detail that ensures no one can falsify a reward for cans they never brought in. If you are doing a class reward, place boxes or bins in the same conspicuous location and have an impartial staff member like the principal keep watch to ensure there's no cheating. For either one, find as many spare boxes, bags and carts lying around as you can. the bigger and more numerous, the better! NEVER throw out the plastic bags, paper sacks or boxes people bring donations in, unless they are broken. You are really going to want those later for when you have to haul it all to the food shelf.



KEEP THE BAGS AND BOXES DONATIONS COME IN!

Make sure you have a place to keep all the donations after you've received them. Find a spare classroom, closet or other area to keep food until you can deliver it. If you are doing class contests, be sure to properly segregate each grades' donations. Depending on the size of the area you've found to store your food and the number of donations you're getting, you may want to make a few smaller runs to the food pantry to drop it off before it becomes too much to handle. We speak from experience. You do not want to be responsible for moving 5,000 cans in a single afternoon. You and your back will thank us .

Managing Donations

Your drive is now in full swing. Congrats! Most of your work is done. Now you just need to be doing a few things to ensure you don't end up overwhelmed later.

First and foremost, go through all your donations for expired goods. It takes a lot of work if you wait to do this all at once, but if you find team members willing to give up a day or two's study hall, you can sort each day and it won't take too long. You can also offer the same incentives for students in or outside your team who are willing to do the same. This makes sure that you aren't inadvertently punishing food insecure students who cannot bring in food, because they need it themselves. This puts everybody on a level playing field, and you'll be glad for the help.

It's really important to go through all of the goods and toss the expired stuff. Trust us - you'll find some. It's embarrassing to your school to give blatantly bad goods, especially when it's really obvious that someone knew something was expired and donated it anyway. Additionally, a relatively high percentage of donations - around 5 to 10% in our experience - are expired, and you don't want these gross goods reflecting poorly on your school. You don't want to be remembered as the people who gave the soup from 1995. (This has actually happened multiple times. We know. Ew.)

Sometimes dates are hard to find, so trust your gut. If you can't touch the can without feeling somewhat grossed out and you can't find a date, toss it. It is against the law for food shelves to give clients expired goods, and you're saving them a ton of work by giving up a little bit of your time to sift for them. They will really appreciate this!

Also be keeping track of how much you're taking in. You don't need a number down to the can, but a good estimate and data collection can help you the next year you run a drive. Each can or boxed good is considered to be around one pound, so if you can fit about 10 cans or boxed goods into a grocery sack, count each sack as 10 pounds. It adds up quickly and can also be really motivating to sit and realize how much food you'll be giving to families in need.

Charting Your Progress

As your drive goes on, sometimes students can lose motivation to help. Combat this by publicly tracking how much you bring in. Put up a poster board and make a running graph of all the donations. Even a simple, 4th-grade-math style pictograph – one can on the chart equals one hundred pounds – can help both you and your students see the impact you're making and fight apathy toward the end of your drive.

Celebrate Your Success

The food shelf is stocked, you've pulled down the posters, and the last can has left the hall closet. Now what?

It's time to recognize your success. Release the statistics you've been tracking about amounts, along with the photos you took earlier. Announce the winners if you've done a class competition and arrange the rewards.

You may also want to have a thank-you banquet, dinner or potluck. Invite all the members of your team and the teachers who helped you pull it off. Recognize exceptional student leaders and their contributions, and acknowledge everyone who helped in any way. You may also want to contact your local paper. You deserve the recognition, and so does the food shelf.

Drop It Off and You're Done!

Your campaign is finished, you're loaded with cans, and now you're ready to take it over to the food shelf. Congrats on a drive well done! You're in the final stretch.

Gather your entire team. You're going to want every last person. Also recruit football players, track throwers, and anyone else around that can lift very heavy amounts. Sometimes P.E. teachers will let hauling cans count as a class make-up. Propose this to yours and see what they say. You'll be happy to have the extra manpower and those kids will definitely get a workout!

Load up cars, school vans, or whatever vehicles you have and make your way to the food shelf at your predetermined time. Unload everything and get started! Your expired goods should already be gone, and depending on what you've already done, your items are either already sorted or still jumbled. If they are still all mixed together, use the organizational system of the food shelf to sort it all out. This is where you will be exceedingly happy to have all those people. A large crew makes for lighter work.

Depending on how many donations you have and how long of a process sorting becomes, be ready to feed and fuel your manpower. Your group probably has some spending money of some kind. Use it! Order pizza for your team out of gratitude, even if sorting doesn't take that long. They'll appreciate it, and people are less grumpy on full stomachs. Bring music and speakers, get a pump-up playlist going, and set to sorting. If everyone works together, it goes by much faster. Also be sure to be taking pictures – they make for great yearbook material!

When all your goods are sorted, talk to your food shelf administrator to see what they would like you to do from there. Follow their instructions to the letter. By doing so, you're not only giving goods, you're also providing the labor that can be equally challenging for food shelves to find.

With all this accomplished, you're done! Congratulations!



“Food is the moral right of all those born into this world.” – Dr. Norman Borlaug

Some Final Thoughts

You did it! You pulled off a food drive. Congratulations on a job well done.

Dr. Norman Borlaug once profoundly stated that “Food is a moral right.” (Not sure who Norman Borlaug is? Google him. He’s credited with saving more than a billion lives through his anti-hunger work.) The man understood that everyone deserves one of the only things human beings truly need to survive - food.

Very few people can say that they have done as much to feed the world as Dr. Borlaug. But even one food drive in one town can be a big difference for one family that would have otherwise gone hungry. A big push in donations can mean not having to turn needy people away - and your contributions might be the hope that a desperate mother, father or child needs.

Now imagine that hope multiplied by the many, many bags of food we know you just lugged to your food shelf. Running a drive can be mentally and physically tiring - but there is no greater reason in the world to have sore muscles. Food truly is a moral right, and by providing some for those who would have otherwise gone without, you are contributing to the well-being of your community as a whole. (We know. Deep stuff.)

If you want to learn more about hunger or what you can do to help, we’ve enclosed the links and contact information for several great charities that work both domestically and abroad. Congratulations once again on pulling this off. We are the next generation of hunger fighters - we’re glad you’ve joined the ranks.

Tariro and Maria

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Important Words to Know

Feeding America - the largest anti-hunger charity in the US.

Food Bank – large regional centers that supply food shelves with large amounts of products

Food Drive- a campaign to collect food (perishable or non-perishable) for charity distribution

Food Insecurity - the technical term for hunger. This refers to someone not knowing where their next meal is coming from.

Food Shelf (or Food Pantry)- a local center where food insecure individuals and families can go to get canned goods when they are struggling financially.

SNAP - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Often referred to as “food stamps”, this is the national program for hungry families.

Soup Kitchen- Also called food kitchen, bread line, or meal center. This is a place where prepared food is offered to the hungry for free or below market price.

Shortened Project Timeline:

Before You Start:

1. Get approval of school.
2. Contact the food shelf.
3. Assign duties.
4. Determine dates and incentives.
5. Publicize.
6. Find location to store food.
7. Communicate with your team, teachers, and administrators!

As The Campaign Runs:

1. Check for expiration dates.
2. Keep publicizing.
3. Run campaign.
4. Ensure rules are being followed.
5. Communicate with your team, teachers, and administrators!

When You're Done Collecting:

1. Sort.
2. Move inventory to food shelf.
3. Help food shelf if they need it.
4. Release results.
5. Pat self and school on back. Good work, team!

Checklist for Speaking With a Food Shelf Administrator

___ What specific foods do they need?

___ Do they have any campaigns they'd like you to publicize?

___ Are there certain items they cannot accept or have too much of?

___ Do you have their contact information?

___ Do they have yours?

___ When should you drop it all off?

___ Do they want you to organize it in a specific way?

___ Do they have any questions for you?

Hunger Infographics:

These images provide a general overview of hunger in America. To find statistics specific to your state or even county, check out Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap project at feedingamerica.org/mapthegap



Places To Learn More Or Take Action:

Feeding America, feedingamerica.org

The largest food relief charity in the United States.

The World Food Prize Foundation, worldfoodprize.org

A U.S.-based agency that offers youth education and internships.

A Place at the Table, takepart.com/a-place-at-the-table

Documentary film and advocacy program.

Share Our Strength, nokidhungry.org

Educational materials on nutrition and hunger in the U.S.

Bread for the World, bread.org

Faith-based advocacy group for domestic and international hunger relief.

Youth Service America, ysa.org/resources

General resources for service projects and outreach.

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About The Authors:

Tariro Makoni

Tariro Makoni is a rising senior at Our Redeemer's Christian School in Minot, North Dakota. Deeply invested in fighting hunger, she was the first ever North Dakota delegate to the World Food Prize Foundation's Global Youth Institute in 2012. Tariro was selected as a prestigious Borlaug-Ruan International Intern and travelled to India during the summer of 2013 to conduct independent research on childhood malnutrition. Tariro is the CEO and founder of the education charity "A Hoping Friend" in her native Zimbabwe and is the co-creator of the MEANS Database, a program for food shelves to better communicate about waste. She would like to thank Maria Belding for her incredible teamwork, amazing friendship, and inspiration to aim for longer strides in hunger eradication.

Maria Belding

Maria Belding is a rising senior at Pella High School in Pella, Iowa. Maria was also selected as a delegate for the World Food Prize Foundation's Global Youth Institute in 2012, where she was a finalist speaker. She was then chosen as a prestigious USDA Wallace-Carver Fellow for the summer of 2013, becoming among the youngest students in the history of the program to do so. Maria is also a recognized young writer, with more than a dozen national writing positions and publications to her name, including her debut novel. She is the other co-creator of the MEANS database. She would like to thank her dear friend and inspiration Tariro Makoni for her amazing attitude, patience and sense of teamwork in developing this guide.