hunger free
ALEXANDRIA

Opening a Food Pantry in Alexandria

Food pantries are not all the same, however there are similar actions and considerations taken during the start up process. Follow these first steps to help you open and successfully manage your food pantry. Partnering with other interested organizations is another great option, don't feel like you need to do it alone. Organizations who have sustained pantries are available to help during this process. You can learn much from others; don't be afraid to reach out with any questions and concerns.

Consider and Plan

- Does the community need a food pantry – Identify gaps in service and establish the need in the surrounding community. Reach out to Hunger Free Alexandria about locations needing food programs.
- Research resources in the area and talk to the people who live in that community about the need and their thoughts.
- Reach out to Department of Community and Human Services and SNAP administrators to get their thoughts.
- Review data, for example rates of free and reduced lunches in the surrounding schools.
- Develop a planning committee and identify roles.
- Identify your target audience and mission statement. Your community's culture and religion will determine the type of food you will distribute.
- Coordinate with Hunger Free to determine time and day of the week that a pantry is most needed.
- Identify sources of funding and develop a budget. Reach out to Hunger Free Alexandria for information on grants from the Hunger Free Fund.
- Identify a nonprofit partner to be the lead agency and accept responsibility for financial accounting.
- Identify sources of donated food and gleaning opportunities in the area.

Your Facility

- Visit multiple food pantries and determine the best model
- Identify location that is ADA accessible, is on a bus route, and ideally with a parking lot and entry that are well lit.
- Identify location that has adequate electricity, a water source, working restrooms, that is dry, well ventilated, and can be retrofitted as needed to provide adequate shelving and storage that meets CAFB requirements. Ensure there is not a problem with flooding, insects or rodents. Storage should be able to be locked.
- Determine if Rebuilding Together can partner to retrofit the space if needed.

Preparing to Open

- Approach local businesses about donating and partnering and establish fundraising strategies.
- Establish on-going leadership in areas of food inventory, volunteer management, fiscal management, etc.
- Recruit volunteers, starting with Hunger Free Partners, and develop volunteer orientation and training.
- Develop a communication plan for the community and the press.
- Determine if the pantry will provide additional resources and referrals to other community organizations.
- Consider becoming a member of the Capital Area Food Bank.
- Reconvene with your planning group as needed.

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Types of Food and Donations

- Pantries must determine what type of food they're able to accept & accommodate based on storage, refrigeration, etc. Non-perishable foods only? Non-perishable and perishable foods (produce, milk, eggs, meats, etc.)? Prepared meals? Pantries will need to present these needs to grocery stores, farmers' markets, and businesses when approaching to ask for donations.
- Establish an ideal food inventory that is culturally relevant to the community and that attempts to meet the Wellness Guidelines established by the Capital Area Food Bank.
- When holding food drives, pantries should publish a list of the most-needed foods. Most donors are willing to stick to the guidelines and this will stock your shelves with the items you need most.
- Encourage volunteer groups to organize their own food drives. Neighborhood and grocery store drives are quite successful. Work with grocery store managers in order to have volunteers solicit food donations in front of the store on weekends.

Operational Policies

- Establish policies and guidelines for the operation of the pantry, course correct as needed.
- Establish and disseminate policies for clients regarding access to the pantry, required documentation, how frequently they can get food, etc. to ensure clients are informed and empowered.
- Identify what information you will collect from clients and how it will be used. Determine what data is important for your partners, for planning and for fundraising.
- Do clients need to show ID or proof of address to gain access? Are clients served on a walk-in basis?
- Do clients need a referral from a county or nonprofit social worker or social service organization? If so, how long does the referral last and can it be renewed?
- How frequently can an individual or family receive groceries from the pantry (once per month, once per week, etc.)? How will you track clients and/or log each individual/family's visit to the pantry?
- Consider having a log that is completed each time the pantry is open that tracks questions, concerns, and needs of the volunteers.
- Make plans for providing a safe environment, including how to handle potentially difficult situations.
- Decide how to respond to individual requests for money, clothing, transportation, and other things.

Additional Resources

- ALIVE! Food Program – Charlotte Martinsson, will assist with startup food and ongoing food support – ckmarti@me.com
- Christ Church Alexandria Food Bank – Melanie Gray – mgray@historicchristchurch.org
- CAFB Regional Coordinator – Johnnie Dunlap – jdunlap@capitalareafoodbank.org – (571) 482-4733
- ACPS School Nutrition Services – Sonya Grant – sonya.grant@acps.k12.va.us
- www.HungerFreeAlexandria.com
- www.RebuildingTogetherAlex.org
- www.CapitalAreaFoodBank.org
- www.Alexandria.gov/DCHS