Food Drives: A Coordinator’s Guide

Here's why you're coordinating a food or donation drive:

Because you’re necessary! In Washtenaw County, 1 in 7 people suffer from food insecurity. More than 51,000 of our neighbors have to make choices between paying bills and having enough to eat, and they need your help. Food Gatherers succeeds only because of responsible organizations and caring individuals like you, who enable our efforts to alleviate hunger and the causes of hunger. Without donated food, financial gifts and the heroic efforts of our volunteers we wouldn’t have the crucial nongovernmental support system that exists here in Washtenaw County. Food Gatherers has a comprehensive approach to fighting hunger where we live, and you are a crucial part of the plan. Organizing a food or donation drive is how you take care of your neighbors.

Here’s how you’ll do it yourself (It’s easy!):

We’ll give you everything you need! Register your food drive at www.foodgatherers.org/fooddrive; if you’ve requested supplies or logistics (pickup or delivery) we’ll contact you to confirm the details. We’ll provide printable posters and brochures; you can pick up boxes or containers to collect the food or order them to be delivered in Washtenaw County. We’ll tell you what the most-needed food items are, and give you information about hunger and the Food Gatherers organization and programs so you’ll be ready for questions that you’ll get from your friends and coworkers. Once your food drive is complete, if you can’t drop the food off to us here on Carrot Way, and if you have over 100 pounds of food, you can request a pickup and we’ll send a truck to your location.

Or, here’s how you join in with an existing Food Drive:

You don’t have to do it all yourself. Add the food or donations you gather to an existing food drive-Here are some of our biggest food drives, but check our website for other drives all year long:

1. **Busch’s Season of Sharing**: at the end of November, donate funds or food, including pre-packed bags of nonperishables at any Busch’s store in Washtenaw County,
2. **Rockin’ for the Hungry**: we’ll be live on the radio with Ann Arbor’s 107one, broadcasting from Kroger Stores for the whole first week of December. Food and financial donations can be dropped off at any Kroger Store in Washtenaw County anytime during the event.
3. **Rotary Spring Food Drive**: the Ann Arbor Rotary Club teams up with Food Gatherers in March to hold a food drive with multiple convenient drop-off locations at local businesses. See their website for a complete list and details (www.annarborrotary.org).
Frequently Asked Questions:

Q: Where can I get the information to start a food or donation drive?
A: Our website is the place to start. Go to www.foodgatherers.org/fooddrive. You can fill out a quick form to register your food drive with Food Gatherers, order containers from us to hold the food you collect, and print out some useful documents like a list of most-needed items, information about Food Gatherers, hunger facts and other materials. We’ll work with you to make your food drive successful and simple for you.

Q: How should I promote my food drive?

A. Ideally, start at least a couple of weeks before you begin collecting donations. Read up on hunger facts on the Food Gatherers website and the marketing materials that we’ve provided, and familiarize yourself with the most-needed items list.

B. If the drive is at your workplace, get your senior staff involved, and make sure they’re aware of your efforts (many companies will match the donations you raise, so you might want to ask them about that).

C. Print the food drive posters and other materials that you’ll want to put up & distribute. We recommend that you start promoting the collection at least a week before you start collecting to give people time to pick items up during their usual shopping trips.

D. Make sure everybody knows all your contact information as the food drive coordinator, and where and when the food or donations will be collected.

E. Be clear about exactly how people can help: keep that most-needed items list available, be clear about exactly who will collect and be responsible for financial donations, and how people will get acknowledgement for their gifts. You might also want to set specific goals: i.e. “we’re going to raise 500 pounds of food!” or “please bring in at least 3 non-perishable food items”.

F. Be friendly, persistent and make sure the message gets out again and again! The more you tell people about it, the more likely they’ll remember to pick up some extra groceries when they’re at the store, and the more successful your food drive will be.

Q: Can I use Food Gatherers logo and artwork to promote my food drive?
A: Sure! Our logo is available for download at www.foodgatherers.org/fooddrive. We do ask to review any promotional material that uses our logo or artwork, to keep our messaging coordinated, so please send any materials you make up to the Manager of Food Donor Relations, at sebastian@foodgatherers.org before you circulate them. Food Drive posters are downloadable from the website, too- you don’t have to make those up yourself.

Q: Would you rather have food donations or financial donations?
A: We love both! Food donations give you the option to choose the items that you want to give your neighbors, and people frequently choose to give high-quality, healthy food that’s really popular with the recipients. It’s a personal way to give people the specific foods that you think they’d like and need.

Financial donations allow us to purchase lots of food at bulk rates, greatly reducing the cost per pound when compared to what individuals pay for food: for every $5 donated, Food Gatherers can provide 15 meals to our neighbors in need. Monetary donations also allow us to support our programs (like the Community Kitchen Job Training Program and our Healthy School Pantry Program) and organizational expenses (like fuel for our trucks, staffing, and facility costs for our warehouse).
Q: Is there a season for food drives?
A: Not really! Hunger takes no holidays - it’s a problem all year long. The fall and winter holiday season is when we see the most food drives, and you might find that people have an especially generous spirit of giving at that time, but we could use support any time you’re available.

Q: What kind of food should I gather?
A: Good, non-perishable food, full of proteins and nutrients. We’ll provide you with a list of the most-needed food items, so you can ask for the foods that will provide the most help. If you’re interested in donating fresh produce, meat or dairy, call the Manager of Food Donor Relations at 734-761-2796 or email sebastian@foodgatherers.org for crucial food safety requirements.

Q: Can I get containers to hold the food?
A: Here are your options: You can collect food in your own sturdy copy paper-size boxes if you’re having a smaller food drive, or you can buy 5, 10 or 15 boxes from us when registering your food drive. Please keep it to 50 pounds or less per copy paper-size box. For larger food drives, you can pick up a Food Gatherers Big Box (The size of a big trash can, square: they’ll fit in the back seat of most SUVs), or we’ll deliver GIANT PALLET-SIZED BOXES to you. Please see our online registration form for more information on container options.

Q: What if I get more donations than I expected, and I need more containers?
A: If it looks like you’re going to go into extra rounds with your food drive, call our Transportation Coordinator Dan Calderone at (734) 761-2796 and he’ll arrange to pick up the containers that are full and bring you new empties, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays or Thursdays: sometimes it can take a couple of days to coordinate our trucks to make those exchanges, so give him as much notice as you can.

Q: Do you accept non-food items?
A: Our primary focus is on hunger, but we can take some limited personal care items: diapers, soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and disposable razors are all needed. Please make sure they are in unopened packages.

Q: Can you accept opened packages or expired items?
A: No, containers must be sealed, the packaging has to be intact, and the foods can’t be past their printed expiration dates.

Q: What other items can’t you take?
A: We can’t take anything homemade, it has to be produced at a licensed commercial food business. We can’t take anything without a printed ingredient list. We can’t accept alcohol or energy drinks. We can’t take any medicines, not even the over-the-counter kind, and we can’t take non-food items like clothing, pet food, detergent, furniture, toys, etc.

Q: How long should my food drive last?
A: It’s entirely up to you. Some organizations have food drives for a month at a time, and others have one-week or even one-day events. We generally like to get our Big and GIANT Boxes back within 3 to 4 weeks. If you think that you could go longer than that, call our Transportation Coordinator Dan Calderone at (734) 761-2796, and we’ll talk about your specific plan. Keep in mind that people sometimes will bring things in for a day or two after the event is over, so you might want to plan to drop off your donations several days after your food drive completes.
Q: Where do I drop off my donations?
A: Wow! Thanks! If you can drop it off yourself at our warehouse and we don’t have to pick it up, we save a ton of resources that we’d rather expend on getting the food out to the people that need it. Food and financial donations can be dropped off to us at the 1 Carrot Way, Ann Arbor, MI, 48105. Donations are accepted 9AM-5PM Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, or we’re open late on Wednesday: 9 AM-7PM. Carrot Way is off Dhu Varren Road near Pontiac Trail. Feel free to call for directions: (734) 761-2796. Financial donations by check or money order can be mailed to Food Gatherers at P.O. Box 7971, Ann Arbor, MI 48107.

Q: How do I schedule a pickup of food donations?
A: If you have more than 100 pounds of food and can’t bring it to the warehouse yourself, we can arrange for one of our trucks to come by and pick it up. After you register your food drive, we’ll schedule that pickup time. If something happens and the originally scheduled pickup time has to change, just call our Transportation Coordinator Dan Calderone at (734) 761-2796, at least a couple of business days before you need the pickup made, and we’ll reschedule it with you.

Q: If you pick up from my location, what kind of access do you need?
A: For safety concerns, we can’t carry boxes up and down stairs, so grade-level /flat/elevator access is required for all pickups (like handicapped access.) If a Big Box is full, we can’t go over dirt, paving stones, grass or gravel, because we have to use wheeled carts. If you’re collecting in GIANT SIZED BOXES we need the kind of paved, hard flooring (no carpet) that will allow us to use a big rolling pallet jack, like a concrete floor or a loading dock.

Q: What happens to the food once it’s donated?
A: Food Gatherers is the food bank for Washtenaw County. We take your donated food, rescued food from local businesses and food purchased with financial donations and distribute it to more than 150 partner agencies and programs, including food pantries, family meal programs, our own healthy School Pantry and Summer Food Programs, and other front-line providers of hunger relief. Last year we distributed more than 6.4 million pounds of food, equivalent to 14,000 meals per day.

Q: Will people have to pay for the food I donate to Food Gatherers?
A: Absolutely not. All donated food is delivered free of cost or associated charges to our partners and directly to the people we serve.

Q: What kind of receipt do I get for donations?
A: Food Gatherers provides every identified donor with a tax receipt for all financial donations, by mail or email, your choice. All we need is the donor information: amounts, names & addresses. Plus, we’ll provide you or your organization with the total poundage of food received, and the sum total of all financial donations raised, so you can see the results of your drive. Just make sure that the donations that you want reported are clearly marked with your identifying information: printable donation forms that you can send along with your donation serve that purpose, printable from www.foodgatherers.org/fooddrive.

Q: What is the cash value of donated food, for tax reporting?
A: Keep your receipt from the store when you buy food for donation: your donation value is the cost that you paid for it. Food Gatherers can’t determine that for you, because it’s dependent on what it is and where you buy it. According to a 2016 study by Feeding America, the nationwide network of food banks, the average value of the donated food that Food Gatherers actually distributes is $1.67 per pound, but your donations could be worth a different amount: a pound of beans generally costs less than a pound of beef. We can give you a receipt indicating the weight of foods that you donate, for your records.
Q: Can we volunteer at Food Gatherers?
A: Can you ever! Volunteers provide 70% of the hours worked here at Food Gatherers, and there are many different ways for you or your group to help, and see the full process of hunger relief: You can help us sorting and packing food in the warehouse, you can ride along and assist on our trucks doing pickups and deliveries, you can help at our fundraising events, like Grillin’ and Rockin’, you can volunteer in the Food Gatherers Community Kitchen preparing and serving more than 100,000 plates of food a year in downtown Ann Arbor. We needed 7,000 volunteers last year, and we need your help, too! For individual volunteering opportunities, go to www.foodgatherers.org/volunteer. For groups, call us at 734-761-2796.

Q: Can we come to Carrot Way and tour your warehouse?
A: Of course you can, and we’d love to see you. Tours are great way to kick off a food drive- once people see us in operation, they can see how serious and committed we are to fighting hunger where we live, and they’re inspired to help. We do need to plan ahead to have a leader for your tour, so call (734) 761-2796 to schedule it well ahead of time.

Q: I have read your frequently asked questions. Can I ask an infrequently asked question?
A: Of course! We’re here to help. Call us at Food Gatherers: (734) 761-2796, or email info@foodgatherers.org.