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Connecting with our community to end hunger

HOW TO ORGANIZE A FOOD DRIVE

The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank links a vast supply of food—that otherwise might go to waste—to people in need. It receives donations from food manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers; the USDA; farmers; and community efforts such as food drives and then distribute the food to places where hungry people turn for help. The Food Bank:

- Distributes 1.5-million pounds of food and grocery products annually to local nonprofit agencies and faith-based groups.
- Supplies food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, child-care centers, senior citizen sites and programs for the disabled.
- Relies on volunteers to organize food drives, distribute food and raise funds.

Hunger is all around us. It affects people we know and people we see every day. Sometimes it seems too big a problem for one person to really make a difference. But you can do something to help stop the pangs of hunger. Running a food drive is the perfect opportunity for the community to work together to gather food for our hungry neighbors.

Food drives make a difference!

- Food drives bring people together
- Food drives help to feed the hungry
- Food drives reduce food waste

When should I organize a food drive? You can organize a food drive at any time of the year. Many people choose to run food drives during the holiday season from Thanksgiving to Hanukkah and Christmas. This is a fantastic way to share the spirit.

But remember, **hunger knows no season.** Food drives are needed all year long. Collections held during winter, summer and early fall help stock the shelves of many food pantries and meal programs with much needed canned food and staples.

How do I organize a food drive? It's easy. A food drive can be run anywhere that people gather—schools, business, offices, places of worship, apartment complexes, stores, and more! All you need to run a food drive are containers or boxes for the food, a location for the food drop-off and publicity. The following are general steps to help you get started running a food drive.

- Step 1:** Call the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank at (609) 396-1506 when you decide to run a food drive.
- Step 2:** Establish a committee or coordinator to help plan the drive.
- Step 3:** Choose start and end dates for your drive.
- Step 4:** Publicize! Flyers, posters, newsletters, e-mails and electronic bulletin boards postings will help get the word out.

What makes a food drive successful? Getting your message out is essential to making your drive a success. Community awareness is the key to success! Let everyone know you are having a food drive. Keep announcing the dates, times and place of the collection. Here are some ideas to help promote your drive:

- **Choose a theme** for your drive. Be creative. *Pounds of Peanut Butter, Tons of Tuna, Oodles of Noodles (and Other Pasta), Raise the Roof with Rice, Food of the Month.* Have a contest for the most food collected.
- **Educate** people about the extent of the hunger problem in our community. The Mercer Street Friends Food Bank can provide speakers and information.
- **Provide** a list of most needed food items (see below).

What do I do with the food that is collected? One of the most rewarding parts of being involved in a food drive is seeing where your good work will be put to use. We encourage the organizers to bring their donated food to the Mercer Street Friends Food Bank warehouse. We welcome your visit. If you cannot deliver the food, call us in advance and we will arrange a convenient pick-up.

Most Needed Food and Personal Hygiene Products:

- *Peanut Butter*
- *Rice*
- *Pasta sauces*
- *Fruits (canned)*
- *Vegetables*
- *Soups*
- *Tuna*
- *Beef stew*
- *Cereal*
- *Pasta (all varieties)*
- *Common spices (i.e., oregano, dill)*
- *Ensure in cans*
- *Toothpaste*
- *Deodorant*
- *Bath soap*
- *Disposable diapers (all sizes)*

Due to food safety issues, we cannot accept home-canned food, open packages or expired baby food. *No glass containers, please!*