Best Practices for Engaging Student Workers

Engaging student workers in the campus pantry promotes program sustainability and increases campus community buy-in. Many students work on campus as part of their financial aid, making them ideal candidates. Understanding the specific work-study processes on your campus can greatly enhance the pantry's success.

Work Study Basics

If your campus pantry is interested in starting to utilize student workers or would like to expand the number of student workers employed in the program, the following steps can be useful:

- Confirm the campus department that manages work study
- Determine the process and timeline to request new or additional work study support
- Confirm campus hourly wage and hours parameters for potential work study students

Student Worker Roles at the Campus Pantry

Whether the campus pantry is just starting with student workers or has roles already in place, it can be helpful to assess on a regular basis the best ways to utilize student workers in the management and outreach of the campus pantry program. Given students' need for flexible schedules, determine which tasks must be completed on-site during pantry hours and which can be handled remotely or during closed hours.

Key questions to ask when assessing campus pantry needs:

- What are the ideal hours per week that the pantry would be staffed by student workers?
- What are the most important tasks for student workers when the pantry is open?
- How might student workers be able to help with outreach and campus pantry promotion?
- What role could student workers play in supporting food and/or fund drives?
- What other areas of pantry management could student workers help with outside of pantry hours and managing daily service?
- How can flexibility be built into the role so that student workers can focus on areas of work that are important to the pantry and set the individual up for success in the role?

The Dreams & Wishes Activity resource can be useful to brainstorm the student worker role:

Recruitment for Student Worker Positions

After a campus pantry reflects on current and future needs for student workers, it is important to ensure that new responsibilities are written down in a new Position Description or used to update the current Position Description for the role. Ensure that content is in line with any overall student worker guidance at your institution.

Key aspects to include in the Position Description may be:

- Campus Pantry mission statement
- Purpose of student worker position connected to the Pantry mission
- Key position duties, including both responsibilities to be accomplished at the pantry and tasks that could be flexible and/or driven by student interest
- Identify experience needed, if applicable
- List out benefits of the student worker position; benefits can be tangible or intangible
- Include hourly rates as well as other required content from your college

As an additional reference, see Sample Position Description from another campus pantry.

Once position descriptions are confirmed and approved (if needed), cast a wide net to engage individuals who might be most interested in the role. Campus pantries often recruit student workers through tabling on campus, inviting student shoppers to apply, and posting on the work student website.

Student Worker Training and Orientation

When training new student workers at the campus pantry, identify what materials can be consistently shared with all individuals and what could be done together to streamline the orientation process. Ensure that student workers have a clear understanding of why the campus pantry exists and how their role is important for a welcoming and supportive experience for students accessing food and resources.

Potential topics and corresponding documentation could include:

- Campus pantry purpose and values
- Campus pantry operations and logistics guidance for service
- List of tasks to be done when campus pantry is slow or closed
- Food safety training as needed
- Civil Rights training
- Discussion and practicing scenarios for difficult situations that might occur at the pantry

As an additional reference, see Example Food Cupboard Training from a peer campus pantry.

Student Worker Supervision and Appreciation

Good supervision and appreciation can ensure that the campus pantry program runs as smoothly as possible. While campus pantry leaders might have experience supervising other staff on campus, it can also be valuable to reinforce some best practices in supervision.

- Develop clear expectations and share them with student workers at the beginning
- Address any concerns immediately and with a supportive approach
- Identify a clear and accessible point of contact when student workers have questions
- Prioritize regular check-ins to help identify opportunities for further leadership or address areas of improvement and support
- Understand how each individual student worker wants to be recognized for good work and tailor appreciation to their preferences (verbal praise, a written thank you note, etc)

As an additional resource, see the Experience and Expectations Worksheet to brainstorm campus pantry needs and student worker needs. Can be used individually or together.