Foundation for Essential Needs (FFEN) is a non-profit providing operations support and resources to food shelves.
For more information, visit www.ffen.org.

Targeted Food Drive Guide

A food drive is an organized effort to collect **non-perishable food items** from a community to help stock the shelves at your food shelf. These food drives supplement existing food resources, help food shelves save money on items that are in high demand, and engage the community in combating food insecurity in local communities. Requesting certain "targeted" items will ensure that your food shelf gets the items that are most needed and costly.

Step 1: Assess current food drives happening in your community

Which organizations implement food drives in your community?

- Learn what you can about the time of year and find out what food drives may already be planned in your community. Consider local groups including churches, schools and civic organizations like Lions clubs or a Chamber of Commerce and/or local retail stores. If they typically plan a food drive for a specific time of year, get in touch with them ahead of the drive and discuss a strategy to fill the needs at your food shelf.
- Identify organizations in your community that could make for good food drive partners:
    - Local businesses
    - Churches
    - Schools
    - Youth service organizations, such as scouting troops or 4-H
    - Sports organizations
    - Civic organizations such as Lions, Jaycees, United Way, or other charitable groups.

Assess food drive strategies:

- If you have conducted food drives in the past, what have you done that has been successful?
- Occasionally review current food drives. Make changes if needed to get the foods to match your top needs.

Step 2: Planning your Food Drive

Choose a Title and Theme for your Food Drive

- Creatively titled and themed food drives are fun and make it easy to get partners and donors involved.
- Plot out a calendar that asks for a certain item each month, ie, September is peanut butter month.
- See Food Drive Theme Ideas document with suggestions and examples.
- See links at the end of this document for creative examples of Titles and Themes from other food shelves.

Resources are developed and reviewed regularly with input and insights from food shelf leaders and sector partners. Additional feedback on tools can be shared with programs@ffen.org. (Last updated: 11/5/2025)

Clearly identify the characteristics of your food shelf and what a food drive can mean for the food shelf.

- Donors want to feel connected to the people in the community served by the food shelf.
- Include statistics about the food shelf and those who benefit from it in your marketing materials to help donors understand the impact of their contributions.

Establish clear goals for the Food Drive

- Goals are most often expressed in pounds of food, but you can also identify goals in terms of the number of donors, kinds of donations, or any other goals that may engage potential donors.
- Ensure goals are realistic and measurable to create excitement and avoid discouragement. If this is your first food drive, be modest with your goal; you can always increase it for future food drives once you have a baseline.

Establish concise and clear instructions regarding acceptable donations

- Share instructions as a part of all marketing and communications regarding the food drive. Typical instructions include only non-perishable items (do not need refrigeration or freezing) in cans, jars, or boxes. No expired foods.
- Create a short list of foods to donate that are the most desired by your shoppers AND cost you the most money.
- Communicate how food should be donated - where and when it should be dropped off.

Step 3: Marketing and Promotion

Create a consistent and recognizable template to use to announce the food drive

- Set up a QR code or a weblink and use it on all printed communications to provide more detailed information about the food drive.
- Make sure you identify partner organizations in communications, marketing materials, and messages to highlight their involvement.
- As part of the communications messages, include information on how cash donations can be made instead of food donations. Also, be sure to highlight the benefit of cash donations and how your food shelf can stretch dollars further.

Utilize a wide variety of communication on various channels (e.g., email, social media, posters, radio announcements) to raise awareness and encourage donor participation

- Ask your partners to broadcast through their communications/social media channels as well.
- For examples of Facebook posts, see the “examples” section below.

Step 4: Thank Donors

- If donors or partners bring donations directly to the food shelf, invite and offer to give them a tour to see the space and ask questions.
    - Tours can also be scheduled and advertised to the public throughout the food drive to create interest and relevance to motivate donations.
- Send a quick thank you note to the group organizing the donation.
- Think about snapping a photo when a group drops off a large donation and then putting a thank you on social media and highlighting the total pounds collected.
- Post the results of the food drive and tag the food drive partner organization in your post. Encourage the partner org to share your post on their own page and then be sure to comment on each other's posts.
- Food shelf shoppers may appreciate knowing that the community is contributing to their family's nutrition and well-being.

Examples & Links:

- Food Drive Theme Ideas
- Social Media Graphic examples for Food Drive Themes
- Examples of Successful Food Drives
- Cultural Foods List from Leah's Pantry - identifies the top foods people of different cultures may seek from a food shelf and some they may avoid. (Includes Filipino, Russian, Cambodian, Somali, Haitian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Armenian and Ukrainian lists).
- These food shelves do a great job of promoting themed food drives and/or the food donations they're currently seeking. Check them out to spark your own ideas:
    - Bountiful Basket Food Shelf - has an entire site dedicated to downloadable posters for their community to use to host a drive, along with themed ideas
    - Big Lake Community Food Shelf - list of commonly needed items and a good explanation of how cash goes further
    - St. Peter Area Food Shelf - offers a robust list of needed foods
    - Valley Outreach (Stillwater, MN) - offers a good list of needed items with cash at the top, as well as a complete downloadable tool kit for community members to use to host a drive (everything from gluten-free food drives to feminine hygiene drives).
    - Gather and Grow (Waconia) - a reverse Advent calendar to encourage donations during the holiday season.