



National Service Project: Fighting Hunger

Guidance for Conducting a Food Drive

For Girl Scout troops who decide to host their own food drive as a part of the *Fighting Hunger National Service Project*, we have a few suggestions to help you plan your virtual and/or socially distant food drive.

Questions for your troop to answer as you begin your planning:

- When will the food drive begin and end?
 - Consider using a 2–3 week window to maximize participation and allow for quick turnaround.
- Where will your troop donate food?
 - Make sure to check that your local food bank or pantry is accepting food drive donations and to see if they have specific guidelines or requested items.
 - Consider creating signs to easily instruct others where and how to donate most-needed food items.
- How much food do you hope to donate? What is your troop's goal?
- Who might you ask to contribute to your food drive? How will you reach out to them?
- How will you collect food in a COVID-safe manner?
- Where will you store the food that is collected?
- How will the food be dropped off?

Information to get started—what is the difference between food banks and food pantries?

- **Food banks are** nonprofit organizations that safely store millions of pounds of food that will be delivered to local food programs, like food pantries, kitchens, or shelters. While food banks vary in size, most are very large warehouses. The food they store is donated from food manufacturers, grocery stores, farmers, and growers. In most cases, families facing hunger would not come directly to food banks for help—they would visit a food pantry or food distribution program in their community to get food, groceries, and other support.
- **Food pantries are** nonprofit organizations that provide families facing hunger with food and other resources at a specified distribution site. These sites can be located in churches, schools, or other community centers. The food pantry gets a portion of its food from the food bank—but many also solicit food donations from other community partners to ensure that they can meet the needs of families facing hunger. Food pantries typically have specific hours/days of operation and guidelines about the services that they offer.

Both types of organizations may need food donations! If your local food bank does not accept food collected from food drives (due to COVID or other concerns), ask whether there is a food pantry in your area that you might work with—or check out Feeding America’s [resource pages](#). Once you find your regional food bank’s listing, you can drill down into distribution points in your neighborhood.

How might this food drive be different due to COVID-19 safety restrictions?

Due to COVID, it is harder to gather food from individuals in your community, both because of social distancing guidelines and because we are not gathering in large groups for community activities.

Therefore, it is especially important for your troop to answer each planning question with safety and ease in mind:

- **Create a plan to give the food to a local food bank or food pantry following their guidelines.**

Once you have selected the food bank or food pantry you will donate to, it is important to check with them (by phone or email) to find out if they have any specific donation or safety guidelines to follow. For example:

- What foods does your food bank or pantry need most? Do they have food donation guidelines for you to follow?
- Are there particular rules the organization follows in order to allow for a COVID-safe, socially distant drop-off?
- Does your food bank or pantry have a preference on how food donations are delivered to them? Does the organization ask that you pre-sort donations?

When you contact the food bank or food pantry, start by telling them you would like to organize a food drive. Ask to speak to the person who oversees food drives so that you can learn more about their process, needs, and guidelines for donation. You can also ask if they have food drive resources or specific safety guidance for conducting drives during COVID—many organizations may have useful tools already developed to help your troop get started. If your troop contacts an organization that is not currently accepting food drive donations (due to COVID or other considerations), ask if they can point you towards another organization that you could work with.

While not required, if your troop chooses to organize the donations before delivering to the food bank or pantry, make sure you follow safety guidelines (such as wearing masks and gloves, maintaining social distance, and washing hands thoroughly before and after touching the food). If your troop is meeting outside to do this, make sure to wear masks, maintain social distance, and follow other local health and safety guidelines.

Also be sure your troop has a plan to deliver the donations to the food bank or pantry, whether by car or other mode of delivery.

- **Make a plan for how to spread the word through phone calls, emails, and more.**

As a group, determine how each Girl Scout will generate support for the food drive within your community.

- Can you send emails or make calls to ask for donations?
- Is there a local newsletter where you can promote the food drive or a neighborhood Facebook page or other social media page or network?
- Will your troop contact local community groups (e.g., houses of worship) or stores to ask for donations or help spread the word?

Use our [email template](#) or [flyer template](#) for help spreading the word.

For more safety guidance for National Service Project activities taking place during COVID-19, refer to Girl Scouts' Safety Activity Checkpoints. Please make sure that your troop complies with health and safety guidelines given by the CDC, your local government, and your local Girl Scout council.

Steps for conducting a food drive

1. Decide which food bank or food pantry you will support.

- Have your troop research food pantries and food banks in your community (check out schools and houses of worship). *(For troops of younger Girl Scouts: consider enlisting the help of a few troop families to gather this information.)*
- You can also check out Feeding America's [network of local food banks](#).
 - To research food pantries, you can check out food bank websites and look for *agency partners or partner organizations*—pantries often receive food to distribute from larger food banks.
- Contact them first to see what their time frame and requirements are for food drives.
- See our tips above! It's important to check all details about accepting food donations before your troop starts to collect donations.

2. Set a goal for how much food your troop wishes to collect or donate and when you will begin and end your collection. You might set a goal to give your community and troop something to work towards. If your troop has ten members, for instance, you might set a collection goal of five cans and five boxes per Girl Scout or a troop total of 75 packages of food.

3. Decide how you will collect and donate your food—and enlist the help of your community!

Some options to consider include:

- **Front yard or lobby food drive:**

Organize an easily accessible collection point for those who contribute to your food drive. This might be a box or bin in front of a troop member's house or in the lobby of an apartment building, as is allowed and appropriate. (Make sure your box or bin is in a secure and weather-safe location!)

- Make sure that you mark this box with clear instructions for food donation and that your troop has a plan to safely retrieve the food. Use a [food drive flyer](#) or create a sign that shares instructions for food donations and information on where the food will be donated.
 - Notify families in your community (using your neighborhood listservs, Facebook pages, [flyers](#), and [emails](#)) when and where they can drop off food. You could ask your neighbors to contribute on a certain date/time (for example, on Saturday mornings from 9:00 AM–1:00 PM).
 - Plan how you will transport donated food to the food bank. For example, will each troop member's family take food to the food bank? Will you collect food and transport it?
- **Drive-thru food drive:** If you live in a community where many people have cars, think about setting up a drive-thru food drive.
 - Your friends and family can drive by at one or two designated times to drop off food from their cars.
 - Your troop may also decide to set up a drive-thru food drive at a local grocery store or other location for people to donate food. Get permission beforehand. Inside the store, post a flyer listing what items are most needed. Set up your pickup location outside the store, post signs, and determine how you will staff the pickup.
 - Plan for how you will collect the items and transport them to the food bank—for example, will you need a trailer? You may get more food donations using this option.

4. Thank your food drive participants.

After you've completed your food drive, consider sending a follow-up email or posting on the listservs where you promoted your food drive. A simple thank-you to everyone, letting them know how much food you collected with their help and where you donated the food, would be appreciated!

What food can your troop donate?

Needs and donation practices can vary by food bank and by community, so before you get started, we suggest contacting your designated food bank or food pantry for their list of preferred donations.

In general, most food banks accept donations of canned and dry foods. These foods are nonperishable (items that can be kept in your pantry and do not need to be refrigerated) and will not go bad, or may have a sell-by date that is far in the future. Some food banks may also collect personal care items like diapers, feminine care products, toothbrushes, soap, etc.

In general, donate items like:

- Canned soup
- Canned fruits
- Canned vegetables
- Canned stew
- Canned protein—tuna, chicken, poultry
- Beans—canned or dry
- Peanut butter
- 100% juice
- Macaroni & cheese
- Pasta sauce
- Grains like:
 - Pasta (most prefer whole grain)
 - Rice (most prefer brown rice)

What food items not to collect due to food safety and other concerns:

- **Refrigerated or frozen food**
 - Some food banks and pantries may have limited freezer or refrigerator space, making it hard to keep things fresh. Because of safety and storage concerns, food that is not shelf-stable cannot be accepted at food drives.
- **Food that is expired or close to expiring**
 - It's important that all food donations are fresh and safe for those who receive them. Food that is close to or past its expiration date may be unsafe for consumption and will not be accepted.
- **Homemade food, including leftovers and baked goods**
 - To ensure that all food distributed by food banks and pantries is safe for the people who will eat it, organizations aren't able to accept food made in personal kitchens where they can't verify the ingredients or preparation process.
- **Food with packaging concerns or fragile packaging**
 - This includes items in glass containers or packaging that can break easily, or damaged packaging, including anything partially open and dented or bloated cans. If you wouldn't consider buying the item for your own family, don't donate it.