

## Volunteer Recruitment, Delegation, and Management Strategies for COVID-19



The Food Bank and our partner agencies provide a critical human service. With your help, our network serves about 103,000 people each month. In a time of crisis, our clients -- current and new -- will increasingly rely on our support and compassion. Recruiting and retaining new volunteers will help during this crisis, and beyond.

**Your pantry may need to recruit more volunteers to support your COVID-19 response efforts!** This document shares how to: tap into new volunteer sources, delegate volunteer roles to keep your pantry running smoothly, and manage volunteers to keep them coming back. A COVID-19 volunteer waiver is also available.

### RECRUITMENT

Many partner agencies successfully recruit volunteers by spreading the word **in multiple ways** in the community. Take advantage of your network, neighborhood, and social media!

#### Use Your Network

You have likely developed relationships with individuals and organizations in your professional and personal life who can help recruit volunteers. Consider reaching out to the following people and groups to brainstorm volunteer sources and recruitment ideas:

- **Local nonprofit and community organizations** - Libraries, social service organizations, churches/places of worship, gyms or YMCAs, and community centers
  - **PANTRY TIP:** Some pantries have had great success sending a digital/email pantry volunteer “sign up list” to local schools and churches with young families.

- **Local clubs, groups, and teams** - hobby groups (i.e. gardening clubs), book clubs, sports leagues, Elks/Eagles/Ruritan, church/place of worship committees or small groups
- **Schools, educators, and students**
  - Local universities, technical schools, and colleges
  - Professors, public/private school teachers, and school staff
  - Local high school students
  - College student groups (sororities/fraternities, clubs, teams)
    - **PANTRY TIP: Connect with your local school's "community/family engagement" department or committee first**
- **Your friends** who may be on local boards or well-connected in the community
- **Individuals or organizations** who have helped your pantry in the past, who have offered to help, or who have been or are currently clients
  - If you invite former or current clients to volunteer, please make it clear that it is only an invitation, not an expectation or requirement. Make sure they know they are still welcome to receive food even if they don't volunteer!

### **Lord Fairfax Area**

- United Way of the Northern Shenandoah Valley, United Way of Front Royal, United Way of National Capital Area
- Colleges and Universities: Lord Fairfax Community College, Shenandoah University

### **Shenandoah Valley**

- United Way of Harrisonburg Rockingham, United Way of Greater Augusta, United Way of Rockbridge
- Colleges and Universities: James Madison University, Mary Baldwin University, Bridgewater College, Eastern Mennonite University, Blue Ridge Community College
- CAPSAW

### **Thomas Jefferson**

- United Way of Greater Charlottesville
- Move2Health Equity
- Charlottesville Food Justice Network
- Colleges and Universities: University of Virginia, Piedmont Community College

### **Lynchburg Area**

- United Way of Central Virginia
- Bridges to Progress

- Colleges and Universities: Central Virginia Community College, Liberty University, University of Lynchburg, Randolph College, Sweet Briar College

## Use Your Neighborhood

The businesses and organizations near your pantry can be a valuable source of new volunteers who live close by. These businesses may be willing to notify their customers, staff, boards, and supporters about your need for volunteers. Consider reaching out to:

- Other pantries nearby - Could you consolidate or collaborate? Share volunteers?
- Businesses
- Restaurants
- Schools
- Community Organizations

## Use Social Media and Digital Options

Social media is a wonderful way to spread your message quickly and broadly. Consider sharing your need for volunteers via:

- Facebook (pages and groups), Twitter, Instagram
  - Keep social media posts positive in tone, short and action oriented. Link directly back to where individuals can sign up to volunteer. Make sure that posts are marked as “public” so anyone can see and share them.
- Email and e-newsletters
- Website updates

## Recruitment Messages

Begin by calling or emailing individuals or groups above. If they are willing to help, consider asking them to share your volunteer opportunities:

- With their e-newsletters, on their websites, and via social media accounts
- With a paper sign in their window or a chalkboard sign outside their business

It is important to clearly explain **how** an individual or organization can help you recruit volunteers. Be sure to clarify:

- When and where volunteers are needed
- The job(s) the volunteer could participate in
- Age and ability expectations of volunteers
- Requirements regarding health, recent travel, and social distancing
- Contact information for the volunteer coordinator

**Consider using or sharing one of the messages below. Just copy, paste, and add your information!**

**General message:**

Help our local food pantry stay open during COVID-19!

(Insert name of pantry here) in (insert town/city here) needs volunteers to stay open and provide food to our community members. This is an urgent need, and we're asking those who are healthy and low-risk to lend a hand. We welcome brand new or existing volunteers age 17 and older who have not traveled out of state in the last three weeks. You can make a big difference by providing neighbors with food during this difficult time! Volunteer shifts are (insert day of the week, time, and length of shift details here). We are seeking healthy volunteers who are able to lift 30 pounds willing to follow safe social distancing protocols. If you can volunteer or have questions, please contact (insert contact person's name) at (insert phone number or email address). Thank you!

**Message for younger people, gyms, or YMCAs:**

Got energy and joy to spare? Your local food pantry needs you!

If you are tired of being cooped up at home and ready to help your local community, WE NEED YOU! Consider volunteering at (insert name of food pantry). Due to the COVID-19 crisis, we are short on volunteers. You can help provide neighbors with food during this difficult time. We need help (insert day of the week, time, and length of shift details here). We are seeking volunteers who have not traveled out of state in the last three weeks, are healthy (no fever or respiratory symptoms) and low-risk, able to lift 30 pounds, and willing to follow safe social distancing protocols. If you can help, please contact (insert contact person's name) at (insert phone number or email address). Thank you!

**Message for local businesses and organizations:**

Can you lend a hand to our neighborhood food pantry during COVID-19?

You may or may not know that you have a local food pantry near (insert name of business). We are the (insert name of pantry here) and we serve around (number of families) each month. Due to COVID-19, we at the food pantry are low on volunteers. We're asking for community volunteers, so we can continue to provide food to neighbors in need. We need help (insert day of the week, time, and length of shift details here). We are looking for volunteers who have not traveled out of state in the last three weeks, are healthy (no fever or respiratory symptoms), able to lift 30 pounds, and willing to follow safe social distancing protocols. If you can help, please contact (insert contact person's name) at (insert phone number or email address). Thank you!

## DELEGATION

*“These younger [volunteers] we’re now getting have no problem with taking on responsibility. I can SOOOO let go so I’m loving it!”- Local pantry leader*

Take this opportunity to consider where your pantry needs support now **and potentially into the future**. Think broadly about client needs and volunteer gaps. Consider the following possible volunteer roles:

- Volunteer coordinator
- Ordering and inventory
- Partner Pick Up (retail donations)
- Food box/bag packing
- Food distribution
- Pantry sanitization and maintenance
- Client connections – relationship-building, signage, emails, phone calls
- Home delivery – Coordinator and drivers
- Communications – Website, social media, connections with other organizations

Ensure volunteers know what the volunteer role options are (via email, on your website etc) so they can sign up for the job(s) they are most interested in.

## MANAGEMENT

### Volunteer Communication and Maintenance

*“We need to plug [volunteers] in while we’ve got them with the hopes that they will want to continue when this crisis is over.” - Local pantry leader*

Individuals and groups are likely to volunteer multiple times if they feel like their skills are utilized, they understand their role, and they feel like they are helping their community. To support volunteer communication, engagement, and maintenance:

- **Write a clear and specific job description**
- **Pair volunteer skills and interest with pantry jobs** when possible
- **Provide detailed information** to volunteers so they know **where** to go, **when** to arrive, and **what** to expect
- **Collect contact information** from all volunteers so you can track who volunteers, thank them afterward, and contact them to volunteer again

- **Provide a brief orientation** at the beginning of their first shift to convey valuable information to volunteers. Demonstrate how to complete each job, provide details about your client population, include safe hygiene and social distance protocols, and invite volunteer questions.
- **Thank volunteers** - The MOST important of all - Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank each volunteer individually while volunteering and as a group at the end of the volunteer shift to ensure they know their time is valued.
- **Recap as a group after the shift** so volunteers can share positive experiences and/or discuss any difficult situations that may have happened.
- **Share future opportunities** with volunteers before they leave and/or follow up with volunteers after the shift to share upcoming opportunities.

## Volunteer Awareness of Client Experience

Volunteers you recruit during this crisis may be new to interacting with your client population. Sharing information about your clients' daily lives can help to promote dignified and enjoyable interactions for volunteers and clients. Keep all information confidential and refer to clients generally. Consider sharing the following during your volunteer orientation:

- **People who come to the pantry for food are human beings**, just like you. These individuals are facing difficult circumstances right now and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.
- Some clients have experience with food pantries while others are new and coming for the first time due to COVID-19 or a job loss. Client attitudes will differ depending on their previous experiences (or lack thereof) with food pantries. **We can help create a positive, dignified experience for all our neighbors in need.**
- **Daily challenges** clients may be experiencing:
  - Homelessness
  - Job loss
  - Health concerns (including mental health and addiction) and medical bills
  - Getting settled as an immigrant or refugee
  - Limited English proficiency
  - Low-paying jobs which do not allow enough money to pay bills and purchase nutritious food for the family
  - Lack of affordable childcare—please have extra patience for clients with young children!

## Volunteer Waiver

The Food Bank has developed a specific COVID-19 volunteer liability waiver as a resource for pantries. The “Volunteer Assumption of Risk, Waiver of Liability & COVID-19 Agreement” asks the volunteer to confirm that they are not sick or experiencing symptoms, do not believe they have been exposed to someone with COVID-19, have not traveled to high-risk areas recently, will follow safety and hygiene protocols, understand the scope of their volunteer role, and release the food bank and food pantry of any liability. To access the waiver, contact your PSC or log onto <https://www.brafb.org/agency-resources/covid-19-planning/> .

### SUMMARY

Recruiting new volunteers during the COVID-19 crisis will support your pantry operations now and potentially into the future. Within our network, new volunteers have proven to take responsibility, work efficiently and collaboratively, and use technology to strengthen pantry operations. **Spread the word about your need for volunteers in multiple ways within your community. Make sure new volunteers are informed and appreciated** while volunteering to keep them coming back again and again in support of your mission and your community members!