

Toolkit: How to Reduce Food Insecurity + Support Basic Needs in Your Local Community

Everything you need to host a successful community drive and make meaningful contributions in Massachusetts.

1. Why It's Important to Support Food Banks and How to Make the Most Impact

Help fight hunger and provide basic needs in our communities by hosting a drive and/or making meaningful contributions in our community! Drives are fun and easy to set up and run. By collecting nonperishable and personal care items for your local food bank, you'll help support families in need.

- The federal government is refusing to release emergency food funds to fill the gap during the government shutdown, leaving millions of Americans with fewer or no food options, right as we approach the holidays.
 - Regardless of a shutdown or a SNAP freeze, if and when these benefits return, they will be implementing new eligibility requirements, making access more restrictive and still resulting in significant needs.
- Every 10 lbs of food collected provides up to 8 meals!¹
- Your participation builds community and spreads awareness about food insecurity at a time when the federal government is not doing its job.
- Food banks often also collect basic care and hygiene items because these products are essential for maintaining personal health, dignity, and overall well-being. Items such as soap, toothpaste, deodorant, laundry detergent, diapers, and menstrual products are not typically covered by government nutrition assistance programs like SNAP.

 **Tip:** In addition to hosting a drive, **consider making and promoting monetary donations to your local food bank.** Why? Food banks can purchase what they need, often in bulk, at lower prices. You can also consider supporting and promoting the United Way of Massachusetts [United Response Fund](#), which is deploying direct emergency financial assistance to individuals and families, as well as flexible funding to community organizations, to meet critical needs across our state.

2. Start Planning Your Drive

Food Banks gather, transport, store, and distribute food and personal care items to people through local partners such as food pantries, community meal programs, and other food assistance providers.

- Find a local food pantry, community meal program, or other food assistance provider via one of the following regional food banks:

¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/ways-to-give/faq/about-our-claims>

- [Greater Boston](#)
 - **Note:** The Greater Boston Food Bank provides a helpful [map tool](#) to locate over 500 food assistance providers in Eastern Massachusetts. Please contact the food pantry you would like to donate your collected items to and confirm their food donation procedure.
- [Worcester County](#)
 - **Note:** The Worcester County Food Bank (WCFB) kindly asks that anyone planning to donate to their food bank please fill out their [food drive form](#) to help streamline the drop-off process at WCFB.
- [Western Massachusetts](#)
 - **Note:** The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts **does not** process donations at their Chicopee facility. Instead, they kindly ask that anyone planning to donate food to one of the many food assistance providers in Western Massachusetts please fill out their [food drive form](#) and **they will connect you** with a local food pantry to receive the food items directly.
- [Merrimack Valley](#)
 - **Note:** The Merrimack Valley Food Bank (MVFB) provides a helpful [map tool](#) to locate food assistance providers in Merrimack Valley. The MVFB kindly asks that you give them a call or send an email to let them know that you are hosting a food drive. They will gladly help with promotion! Call 978-454-7272 or email Laurie at lmcanespie@mvfb.org.

 **Choose Your Dates:** Most drives run for 1–3 weeks.

 **Pick a Location:** Office lobby, school hallway, apartment lobby, or local event.

 **Make a Delivery Plan:** Determine how you will sort, transport and deliver your collected items. This is a great volunteer opportunity for folks to get even more involved.

 **Register Your Drive:** Fill out this [Google Form](#) so we can track progress and recognize everyone's hard work.

 **Tip:** If your drive is multiple weeks or you are anticipating it will be large, try to identify a secure location near your collection bins to store items once they are full.

3. Supplies You'll Need

- Sturdy and large labeled boxes, bins, bags, or barrels for gathering donations
 - Tables and signage for drop-off locations to display key information (like donation wish lists of most needed items)
 - Flyers and posters (see templates below)
 - Email/social post templates to promote your drive (see templates below)
 - Tape, labels, and markers for sorting and organizing collected items by type
 - Digital scale for recording your collected weight (optional)
 - Transportation supplies—vehicle access, loading equipment, or dollies for delivery to the final site.
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4. Most Needed Items – Food and Personal Care

- ✓ Canned proteins: tuna, chicken, salmon, beans (protein-rich and shelf-stable)
- ✓ Cooking essentials: oil, flour, sugar, canned sauces, spices, salt, and pepper.
- ✓ Canned fruits & vegetables (low sodium or juice-packed items)
- ✓ Peanut butter and nut butters (high protein and versatile)
- ✓ Shelf-stable milk and milk alternatives (powdered or UHT milk)
- ✓ Rice, pasta, and grains (whole grain preferred for nutrition and gluten free options)
- ✓ Breakfast cereals (whole grain, low sugar)
- ✓ Low-sodium broths, soups, stews, chili
- ✓ Dry beans (all varieties)
- ✓ Applesauce or fruit cups (unsweetened preferred)
- ✓ Baby formula and baby food

⚠ Please try to avoid sugar-sweetened beverages such as soda and non-fruit juice, as well as candy products and energy drinks.

🚫 **Please avoid glass containers, perishable items, open items, and expired items.**

- ✓ Toothpaste and toothbrushes
- ✓ Soap and shampoo (including bar soap and body wash)
- ✓ Deodorant
- ✓ Feminine hygiene products (pads, tampons, liners).
- ✓ Laundry detergent (small bottles or pods preferred)
- ✓ Toilet paper and personal wipes
- ✓ Diapers and baby wipes
- ✓ Paper products (tissues, napkins)
- ✓ Other items: razors, shaving cream, hair ties/brushes, incontinence products

🇺🇸 Gift cards, *if accepted by the benefiting organization*, are often very useful to collect as they are easy to distribute and enable people to purchase items they personally need the most.

💡 **Tip:** Look on the benefiting entity's website, social media, and/or contact them to identify which items they are in need of most and what items they may or may not accept. Promote those items to your participants.

5. Promote Your Drive

Use the included materials or make your own!

- Email Template: “Join us in supporting our local food bank!”
- Social Posts: #FeedMass; #MassFoodDrive; #[OrganizationName]MAFoodDrive
- Poster Template: Editable PDF/Canva link provided

 **Tip:** If organizing the food drive at work, school or anywhere you can create teams, consider setting a friendly challenge (e.g., “Team that collects the most by the end of the food drive wins a pizza lunch!”). You can also set a clear, achievable goal for quantity and type of donations (e.g., “100 hygiene kits,” “500 pantry items”) and promote progress throughout your drive.

 **Idea:** You can make an even greater impact with **donation matching** so food pantries can purchase items that aren't donated. Find a donor who will partner with you for the food drive. For example, your donor could contribute \$1 to the food pantry for each item you collect for the food drive. At the end, you give the food pantry all the goods you've collected, and the donor gives them a check. Not sure who will match your donations? Ask the food pantry if they have any donors who would be interested in partnering with you. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- your manager or CEO
 - your school principal or dean
 - your city councilors
 - local police or fire department
 - local business owners
 - the bank your workplace uses
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6. Collect, Sort & Deliver

- Keep donations in a cool, dry, and secure place.
- When full, weigh boxes or count items if possible.
- Assign volunteers to collection sites, sorting, and final distribution.
- Deliver to your regional food bank, local food pantry, community meal program, or food assistance provider, following their drop-off instructions.

 **Tip:** Arrange a final delivery and communicate with your partner organization for a smooth hand-off.

7. Wrap-Up

- Post your food drive results on social media and tag your regional food bank, local food pantry, or community meal program
 - Share photos with Mass 50501 and [insert partner orgs helping to prepare and push out this toolkit] by tagging us—we love featuring community heroes!
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Included in This Toolkit

Flyer templates (editable PDF)

- Merrimack Valley Food Bank - [MVFB Food & Fund Drive Flyer](#)

Email & social media text

- Hey! I am organizing a food drive to help fill the gap caused by the federal government refusing to fund SNAP (formerly known as food stamps), leaving thousands of people around the state and millions around the country hungry for the entire month of November. I will leave a box at [insert clear description of location] and would love it if you would consider donating some nonperishable canned or dry food items. The food drive will run for [insert length of drive] and I will drop off the collected items on a weekly basis at [insert name of food bank or pantry]. Anything you can give would be greatly appreciated to help feed hungry members of our community! [***optional if running friendly competition***: “the team with the most donated items by the end of the food drive will win a pizza lunch.”].