

Food Project Neighborhood Coordinator Handbook

WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOOD PROJECT

Thanks for joining us. We hope this handbook explains everything you need to know about being a Neighborhood Coordinator (NC).

The first thing you need to know is...YOU are the key!

The Food Project is a grassroots group — which means it depends entirely on volunteers like you.

The Food Project is a revolutionary idea. It's a *donor* drive, not a food drive. Rather than asking for one-time contributions of food, volunteers enlist their neighbors to become long-term donors. People commit to giving a small amount of food every two months, which provides food pantries with a steady, year-round supply, and provides the donors with the ongoing satisfaction of making a real difference. NCs also get to know their neighbors, which builds a powerful sense of community.

Food All Year

We all know that around Thanksgiving and Christmas, the public traditionally tends to be generous with food donations. But at other times of year, when the public's attention is on other things, giving is spotty, and food banks struggle. So one of the most important contributions the Food Project will make to food distributors is to create an infrastructure that supplies food to them all year long.

HOW THE FOOD PROJECT WORKS

It's a remarkably simple system, built primarily around two types of volunteers:

- 1) **Neighborhood Coordinators** (NCs), who organize a small group of their friends and/or neighbors to become Food Donors.
- 2) **Food Donors**, who agree to give food every two months.

The Process

It begins when a Neighborhood Coordinator (NC) takes a supply of information cards and some green Food Project bags to neighbors to explain the program and

invites them to join in helping to feed hungry people in their community.

Generally, NCs build their “neighborhoods” by knocking on doors, introducing themselves as neighbors, and asking if people want to participate. It’s a great way to get to know the folks who live nearby.

Each NC can decide for him/herself what constitutes their “neighborhood.” Many NCs begin by asking friends and acquaintances who live close by. They can choose to involve a few houses, a whole street, or several blocks. The most important thing is for them to feel comfortable with the area they pick.

What Happens When a neighbor says YES?

As an NC, you’ll give them a green FP bag to store food in, and suggest that they buy one extra nonperishable food item each week when they go to the supermarket.

Note: This is actually a metaphor for how easy it is to participate. It doesn’t matter if Donors actually do this — some will; others will wait until the night before, then rush out to the market to buy a bag of food. It’s all good.

A week before the pickup date, you’ll send a reminder email or make a phone call to each donor to let them know the date and what time you’ll be by for the bag. You’ll also send out a reminder the day before.

Every two months — on the second Saturday of each even month (Feb., April, June, Aug., Oct, and Dec.) — you’ll pick up each Donor’s bag of food, leave an empty one in its place, and bring all the bags you collect to our designated drop-off point.

Once the food has all been weighed, you’ll be notified about how much food was collected. Then you’ll contact your Donors to share the success and let them know when the next pickup date will be. This communication with Donors is essential. Knowing that they’ve made a difference is a big part of a Food Donor’s reward for participating.

NOTE: For detailed instructions about canvassing, see the Appendix

HOW THE FOOD PROJECT SHARES FOOD

Most communities in the U.S. have at least a few nonprofit agencies that provide free food. Senior centers may offer hot meals to the elderly; Meals on Wheels may bring food to shut-ins. Churches may sponsor food banks, or food pantries that distribute nonperishable food.

The Food Project wants to strengthen these groups, not compete with them. So we don't distribute food — we only collect it, acting as a bridge between individuals who want to share, and the groups that already distribute it. This means that on Pickup Day, all of the green FP bags full of food are delivered to these groups.

This system works for everyone. It increases food supplies for all the groups and enables the FP to focus on doing one thing well. The better we do our job of collecting food, the more we reduce the burden on them.

NEIGHBORHOOD COORDINATOR FAQs

1) How much time does being an NC involve?

Being a Neighborhood Coordinator takes only a few hours a month. You might need to put a little more time in at the beginning when you're building your neighborhood. But it's a surprisingly small time commitment, considering how much of a difference you'll be making.

2) What, exactly, does a Neighborhood Coordinator (NC) do?

As a Neighborhood Coordinator, you will:

- Knock on your neighbors' doors, explain the Food Project, and invite them to join.
- Write down new donors' names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. (The email and phone are critical, because that's how we stay in touch and send reminders.)
- Give each new donor a reusable MFP green bag and a Food Project information card that includes the next Pick-Up Date and your contact information.
- Pick up your donors' bags of food every two months, leave empty ones, and bring all the bags you collect to our drop-off point.
- Stay in touch with your donors by email or phone, and send reminder emails

or make reminder phone calls the week before and the day before pickup.

That's all there is to it.

3) *How much food will people donate?*

Some folks will donate a lot, some a little. The amount is not important -- as long as they're participating, the FP is a success.

4) *How do I pick the area that's MY neighborhood?*

Within some limits, your "neighborhood" is wherever you say it is, and it's as big or small as you want it to be. It can be a few houses, a whole street, or several blocks. But it's entirely up to you how much you want to canvass and how many donors you want to recruit.

5) *How many food donors should I be signing up?*

That's entirely up to you. There's no quota. There's no special number of food donors needed to make your work a success. We're building this organization one person at a time — so you don't have to "think big." The success and sustainability of the FP is based on personal contact, not on numbers of people. Adding just one committed person to our list of donors is a huge step forward.

AFTER CANVASSING

After signing up new Food Donors, log onto your page on the Food Project web site. and enter to the contact information for your food donors.

This information becomes the Food Project's database. You can assure people that it will NEVER be used for anything except food collection. But it's very important to have in one place. If anything happens to any of our NCs, or anyone's data gets lost or destroyed, we'll have a backup.

SENDING REMINDERS

Your only other responsibility will be to stay in touch with your Food Donors, and send them reminders a week before the pickup and a day before. Reminders are important, because part of your job as a neighborhood coordinator is to make the food pickup as easy as possible for your food donors.

It's easier to send email reminders, but not everyone has email. And even for those who do, a phone call is actually more effective. The day before, it's always better to call them, because they may not get the email message until too late. But

that choice is entirely up to you.

A Week Before Pickup

Contact your donors to remind them of the pickup date. Give them a time range (e.g., 9am – 10am) when you'll be by, and provide instructions where to leave the bag (e.g., "Just put it on your porch.")

Sample Email:

Hi, Fellow Food Donors:

This is a reminder that in about a week, I'll be stopping by to pick up food for the Food Project. I'll be there between 11:00 and 1:00 on Saturday, date. Please put your food outside by your front door. If it's raining hard, please make sure your bag is covered. If you're not going to be in town, just let me know and we can make other arrangements. I'll let you know next week how much food we collected. Thanks so much for being part of this great project!

Your neighbor,
YOUR NAME HERE
PHONE # & EMAIL

The Day Before Pickup

One more reminder is essential. Even people who've been filling their bag for weeks sometimes forget if we don't remind them the day before. We've found that it's much more effective to call than to email — and it's pretty quick, because you'll usually wind up leaving a message. If you email the reminder, you may want to send it on Thursday instead of Friday, as many people don't check their email every day.

WHAT HAPPENS ON PICKUP DAY?

What you'll need:

- 1) Replacement bags.** For every bag of food you pick up, you'll need to leave an empty replacement MFP bag, so your food donors will be able to start saving food for the next pickup.
- 2) Thank-you cards.** We supply these pre-printed cards. There's a place to write your name, contact info and the next pickup date. Every empty bag you leave should have a thank-you card attached. We recommend that you

fill out cards and attach them to bags the day before pickup. Attach them with a paper clip, a staple, or by punching a hole in the card and tying it (with yarn or string) to the bag handle.

- 3) **“Sorry we missed you” cards.** Another preprinted card. In general, about 30% of food donors won’t leave a bag out. Some people forget, some are out of town, some change their minds. Don’t let it bother you; it’s all part of the process. This card is for the “no-shows.” It gives them a chance to call you if they’ve simply forgotten, or serves as a reminder for next time. Fill in your name and telephone number and leave the card in a prominent place. You might, for example, punch a hole in it, thread a rubber band thru the hole, and leave it on their door knob. Once again, it’s a good idea to fill out and prepare these the day before pickup.
- 4) **Tally Sheets.** This is the form you use to keep track of donor activity. As do your pickup, you’ll check off whether bags have been left or not at each home. This information is very useful for planning, applying for grants, and deciding whether to continue picking up at people’s houses.
 - If there’s other info you want to share (eg, they’re out of town, or moved, or whatever), write it in the comments section.
 - When you deliver your bags, someone will take your tally sheet and give you more supplies. Tally Sheets are also a good way to update your donor list and make any changes to emails or addresses. If you make the changes on the form you give us, we will be able to make those same changes in our master list.

PICKING UP BAGS

Official pickup day is the 2nd Saturday of every even month (Feb., April, June, Aug, Oct. and Dec.)

- You’ve already sent an email to your donors letting them know what time (between 10:00 and 2:00) you’ll be by for their bag, so they should have them ready by the door.
- Each Food Donor puts their green FP bag outside by his or her front door. You pick up each bag of food and leave an empty one and a "Thank-you" card
- Then you take the filled bags to our drop-off point.
- If you deliver your food on our "official" pickup day, food bank volunteers will be there most of the day to accept, weigh, and sort it. If you need to deliver it on a different day, check with us to find out where to drop it off. (This is fine with

us, by the way, the FP is set up to give you as much freedom as possible. If you'll be out of town on the official pickup day, or prefer to do it the week before or after, you can come up with your own date and work that out with your Food Donors. The most important thing is that you keep us and your Donors informed.)

- When we know how many pounds of food have been gathered we'll let you know so you can let your Food Donors know how much of an impact their generosity and the FP is having. On our community.

APPENDIX

THE ORIGIN OF THE FOOD PROJECT

The Food Project was created in January 2009, by a small group of Ashland residents who wanted make it easy for people to donate food to the Ashland Emergency Food Bank. They realized that many of their neighbors wanted to help fight hunger in their community, but for one reason or another, never got around to it. So they created a simple, door-to-door food collection system to make it easy for everyone to pitch in.

They had three goals:

1. To provide a regular supply of food that would help feed hungry neighbors all year round.
2. To create new neighborhood connections and strengthen their community
3. To serve as a model for other communities

Armed with brochures that proclaimed, “You want to help, We want to make it easy!” Ashland Food Project (AFP) volunteers canvassed their neighborhoods, knocking on doors and inviting neighbors to participate. Whenever people said, “Yes,” AFP volunteers suggested that they buy just one extra nonperishable food item each week, and store it at home. Volunteers promised to stop by their homes every 2 months, pick the food up, and take it directly to the food bank.

The project started with a core group of 10 volunteers picking up food. About a year later, there were over 150 in the towns of Ashland & Talent. The first Pickup Day, in 2009, netted about 600 pounds of food. By December, 2010, the collection was over 28,000 lbs! At this point, Food Project spin-offs have already blossomed in Medford, Oregon...Paradise, California...Olympia, Washington...Cummings, Georgia, and several other towns. But the most important new Food Project is the one you’re helping to create. Why? Because we’re ready to show the world that the food project model works in cities that are larger and more diverse than Ashland. Once it’s established in a few new places, the next step will be to make it a national program. This means that when you canvass your neighborhood, sign up food donors, and collect food, you’ll not only be doing it to strengthen your community — you’ll be helping to build community in hundreds — maybe thousands — of other American towns as well. Our work here can literally change the entire country! You are the ones who make it happen.

CANVASSING: MEETING NEW NEIGHBORS

You may feel a bit nervous about canvassing (knocking on doors and meeting new neighbor donors). Don't feel alone; most of us do at first.

Here are a few things to keep in mind that can make it much easier:

- 1) ***It's best to be relaxed, informal and friendly.*** Remember that you're neighbors and you're there to help them, to give them the gift of community, of being involved. It's a valuable gift: Most people want to feel connected to their community and to feel like they're giving something back.
- 2) ***You're not really going to ask your neighbors to do anything.*** You're just going to explain what the Food Project (FP) does...which is to make it easy for people to share food. You're not "selling" anything. All you're doing is giving people an opportunity to say yes or no.
- 3) ***Of course, that doesn't necessarily mean people will say yes.*** Some will, some won't. The truth is that unless you have a spectacular (or spectacularly bad) approach, it almost doesn't matter what you say. People make up their own minds about something like this. However, if you're direct and clear in describing the FP, you'll be able to save a lot of time and tell pretty quickly how they feel.
 - People who want to share food will immediately be intrigued and ask you questions.
 - People who already share food in some other way will inform you of that
 - And people who aren't interested will almost always politely bow out right then.
- 4) ***Again, Remember that there's no "quota."*** Any "Yes" that you get moves the FP in the right direction. Some days it will feel like lots of people say yes, some days it will feel like no one does. And some days it will seem like nobody's even home to ask. But just by going out and knocking on your neighbors' doors, you're already changing our community. As one of the Food Project's most prolific canvassers says: "The act of knocking on people's doors and inviting them to join in sharing food is an essential act of community-building. The key is to see the door as the barrier in our society...And when the door opens the real adventure begins."

PRACTICAL TIPS: GETTING STARTED

You'll need:

- Your badge (in plastic holder, attached to lanyard)
- Brochures (or cards)
- Green Food Project bags
- A sign-up sheet with clipboard & pen

Use a Simple Approach

- Introduce yourself as a neighbor.
- Wear your identification badge. Hold it up and say you're with the Medford Food Project.
- Once you've introduced yourself as a neighbor and communicated the idea behind the Food Project, you've established a connection that allows interested people to respond to your introduction.

A typical opening line at the door:

“Hi how are you, my name is **** and I'm your neighbor from *** street. I'm part of a new community organization, the Medford Food Project. Have you heard of it? Well, our sole purpose is to make it easy for people to share food with local food banks.”

How People Respond

In our experience, it's important to say this briefly, and just let people respond. You'll soon have an indication about whether they're interested.

If they are, they'll start asking questions. So it's important to know the answers. A few common questions you'll be asked:

- How does that work?
- Do you want food now? (Answer: No, we pick up food every two months)
- Do you take money? (We prefer not to. We're not fundraising — the MFP is about building community by sharing food. But if you really want to make a donation, we'll accept it gratefully and use it for more bags)
- Who gets the food? (We give it to local groups that distribute it to our hungry

neighbors in Medford and surrounding communities.)

Or, they'll just say, "Tell me more." And here's what you say:

"We make it easy for you to share small amounts of food on a regular basis. We give you this bag; you put as much nonperishable food into it as you want, and then every two months — on the 2nd Saturday of each even month — I'll come pick it up and leave you a new empty bag. That's all there is to it.

You can add:

"We suggest that each week, when you go to the supermarket, you pick up one extra nonperishable food item -- something you'd want to share with a neighbor. But really, that's up to you. The important thing is that every two months, on the second Saturday, I'll come by and pick the bag of food up from your porch and leave you an empty bag. You don't have to worry about forgetting the date – I'll remind you with a few emails.

"The only thing we need is your name, address and email address (and /or phone #) so we can communicate with you about the next pickup"

Next Step:

Let them digest that and they'll ask more questions...or they'll say it sounds great and they want to sign up. We'll reiterate: The main thing to remember when talking to your neighbors is that you're not there to convince them as much as you're allowing them to recognize what it is you're offering. If they're inclined to share, they'll come to it on their own. If they already share food through their community of worship or at the store, you should always recognize and honor that. All the people who share food are part of the same community, no matter how we do it.

If they say Yes:

Be sure to write their contact information legibly (so you'll be able to read it when you get home), and double-check their email address to make sure you have it right. That's the easiest part to get wrong. This is critical

If they say No:

Thank them and leave. Make a note of their address on your sign-up sheet, so you won't accidentally bother them again. It's good to note a short explanation of the reason (e.g.. already give to their church) If they can't afford to participate, you might offer info about the food banks, if you think it's appropriate.

If they say Maybe:

Give them a brochure and tell them they can register on the web site, or you'll stop by another time.

Some Strategy on Covering Your Area:

To be efficient, you should list the addresses in order on your sign-up sheet as you go — even the houses where nobody was home. Sometimes it takes several visits before someone answers the door, or you've determined the house is empty, or they're on a long vacation. Also, write in the responses of those who decline to join. You'll want to keep a permanent record of the canvassing history of that street, because people move in and out, they change their minds, and you may end up turning over your records to another neighborhood coordinator somewhere down the line. Remember that we're in this for the long haul. Two, three or four years from now, your work today will still matter.