



## **HOW TO START A SOUP KITCHEN**

Soup kitchens provide free meals to low income individuals and those who are homeless. They are often affiliated with nonprofit agencies, churches or homeless shelters. Starting a soup kitchen is a great way to help give back to the community and offer a healthy meal to those in need.

### **Step1**

Become incorporated as a nonprofit agency. Contact the Charity Registration Office in your state to fill out the needed paperwork to become a nonprofit agency. Because you will want to accept grants, donations and raise money you will also want exemption from paying federal income tax. Contact the IRS for specific forms to fill out.

### **Step2**

Seek funding to support your soup kitchen needs. Check with your local library, community college or nonprofit resource center for classes on writing grant proposals. Various foundations, state and federal governments have funding available for nonprofit agencies. Grant proposals usually include a mission statement, an explanation of the problem a case statement and how your soup kitchen would help. Look to the local community for support, local businesses, individuals and community groups. You may also choose to host events to raise funds.

### **Step3**

Find a location. The soup kitchen should be located in an area where low income and homeless individuals can access it easily (consider areas where there is available public transportation). Contact churches, civic centers and other community organizations to determine if they have a location you can use.

### **Step4**

Call your local newspapers, radio and television stations. Write press releases and public service announcements. Inform them about the opening of the soup kitchen. Explain the need and how people in the community can help by volunteering, donating product and funds. Creating public awareness may assist with obtaining donations.

### **Step5**

Contact local restaurants and food establishments. Ask restaurants if they would donate excess food that is not used or sold to customers at the end of the day.

### **Step6**

Recruit volunteers. Volunteers are needed to prepare and serve meals. They can also work on fund-raising events and perform clerical duties. Contact colleges and senior centers to look for volunteers. Speak at churches and community organizations to get the word out about the need for volunteers.

### **Step 7**

Collaborate with other nonprofit agencies helping people who are poor and homeless. Contact program directors to determine if they would be interested in working together to open the soup kitchen. They may be able to help you raise funds and write grant proposals. These associations might also be helpful in getting the word out to those in need about your soup kitchen.

There are many types of community-based organizations working to end hunger and poverty. Indeed, while food pantries and soup kitchens are among the most familiar, day care cooperatives, homeless shelters, community gardens, and job-training programs—to name a few—are all integral components of both the anti-hunger and community food security movements. Because each program is unique, there is no master formula for success. The following, however, are some key considerations that would benefit anyone looking to start a program.

- **Know the Community**

Before you begin designing your program, you should familiarize yourself with the local community. What organizations are already active in the area? What services are already being provided? Which needs are going unmet? Such knowledge will help you avoid the duplication of services and ensure that your program is filling a critical gap.

- **Know Your Resources**

You should also familiarize yourself with sources of funding and support, which can be found at the local, regional, and national levels. Fundraising can be a job unto itself, but if done well it can yield high returns.

- **Build Partnerships**

Community-based organizations are more likely to experience success if they collaborate with each other. Partnerships allow organizations to learn from each others' experiences, increase program efficiency, and improve the breadth and quality of services provided.

For those looking to start or improve a pantry or kitchen, we have an information packet of publications which we mail, free of charge, upon request. We also encourage prospective entrepreneurs to connect with as many federal nutrition programs and/or national service networks as are relevant to their interests.

### **Federal Nutrition Programs**

The federal government has implemented various nutrition programs which it administers through the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the USDA. These programs are intended to provide a formal "safety net" through which low-income Americans are protected from outright starvation. In many programs, assistance is channeled through community-based organizations. Your program could greatly expand the breadth of services provided by participating in any of these programs. To learn more, visit the FNS website at [fns.usda.gov](http://fns.usda.gov),

or contact NHC to obtain a copy of the USDA's *National Nutrition Safety Net* (see "Publications" section below for more details).

### **National Service Networks**

The private, nonprofit sector has also assumed a pivotal role in the mission to end hunger and poverty. In fact, there are numerous national networks whose efforts have done as much to build a common awareness of hunger and poverty as the federal nutrition programs. Before you begin designing your program, you should determine whether any of these networks are active in your area and what insights and/or assistance they might have to offer. The following are several such networks;

- **Feeding America**

The nation's largest network of food banks (agencies that receive large donations of food and redistribute them to food pantries and other community-based organizations). It includes over 200 food banks and serves every county in the U.S. Island Harvest is an active member of this organization and through its membership offers many additional resources to its member agencies on Long Island.

- **United Way**

Works in partnership with community-based organizations; a good source of local information and referrals.

- **Catholic Charities USA**

Provides direct services, regardless of religious affiliation.

- **Community Action Agencies (CAAs)**

Public and private nonprofit organizations established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to help people achieve self-sufficiency. They provide direct services, are governed locally, and usually work in partnership with other community-based organizations. The **Community Action Partnership** is a national forum that oversees the nation's 1,000 CAAs.

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- **Word Hunger Year**

is an organization that seeks to address the root causes of hunger and poverty.

### **Publications**

The National Hunger Clearinghouse has various publications that can help guide you through the design and management of a program. Contact us to receive free copies through the mail, or view them online.

- **Serving up Justice: How to Design an Emergency Feeding Program and Build Community Food Security (WHY Publication)**

A resource guide for those looking to start or improve emergency feeding programs. It outlines the logistics of design and management, as well as the various avenues through which emergency food providers can promote-self reliance among clients.

- **Going Beyond Emergency Food (WHY Publication)**  
An abbreviated version of Serving Up Justice, this pamphlet discusses ways in which emergency feeding providers can implement measures that help people move beyond dependence on emergency food.
- **Building the Bridge (WHY/CFSC Publication)**  
Highlights the efforts of food banks whose methods of providing food assistance include measures that promote community-building, sustainability, and self-reliance.
- **National Nutrition Safety Net (USDA Publication)**  
Designed to help community-based organizations—and communities themselves—assess whether or not they are taking full advantage of federal nutrition assistance programs, to identify barriers to community food security, and to seek opportunities for improvement.
- **A Citizen's Guide to Food Recovery (USDA Publication)**  
A resource guide on food recovery and gleaning programs for community-based organizations, businesses, citizens, and public officials. It describes current food recovery and gleaning practices and suggests how communities can support existing programs or begin new efforts.
- **Community Food Security Resource Kit (USDA Publication)**  
Designed to help communities find funds, technical assistance, and other help for community food security-related activities from a wide variety of sources.