

# How to start an employee food pantry

## Make your case

Research and share the following with leadership:

### 1. Estimated need among your staff.

Use available data sets to define need. This may be financial health scores for your employers and/or members, or even community poverty statistics.

### 2. Associated costs

- Space
- Storage (shelving, containers and similar)
- Refrigeration (or offer shelf-stable foods only)
- Staff time (to manage)
- Supplemental food and supplies (budget funds for needed items that aren't donated)

### 3. Benefits

- Living the People Helping People philosophy
- Improved morale/productivity
- Stronger employee engagement
- Opportunities to uncover – and support – additional need

Plus, it's just the right thing to do!

### *Pro-tips from Suncoast*

Start small! A closet or even a drawer kept stocked with key essentials (canned meals and similar) can be a lifesaver for a hungry employee.

Have one centralized pantry. Suncoast knew this would be a more effective way to stock and manage food and give all staff access to a broader variety/quantity of food. Suncoast ships food through its courier or facilities – typically within 24 hours of getting a request.

## Determine parameters around using the pantry

- How employees/their managers can request assistance
- How often employees can use the pantry
- How users will “shop” your pantry. Will you give them set items or can they choose items for themselves? Suncoast recommends letting the employee shop on their own to avoid embarrassment and limit waste.

### *Pro-tip from Suncoast*

When an employee comes to your pantry for assistance, ask if their manager is aware of their situation. If not, have a conversation about ways they might share this information – knowing what an employee is dealing with can often explain absences, challenges at work and more.

## Stock your pantry

- Solicit food and monetary donations from your staff – intranet is a great tool.
- Investigate local food resources. For instance, many cities have a [Second Harvest Food Bank](#), which acquires and distributes bulk-purchased food for a very small shared maintenance fee.
- Consider allowing employees to donate funds through payroll deductions.

## Minimize food waste

- Have a designated employee manage product expiration dates.
- Share the wealth with other pantries. Send items with a shorter expiration date to local food banks with faster turnover.
- Allow employees to shop on their own to avoid embarrassment and limit waste.

## Compile data

- Track how many people are using the pantry – include the total number of household members.
- For larger credit unions, explore opportunities to capture departments and/or divisions.
- Do not track any personally identifiable information – the goal is to have general overall stats, nothing specific to an employee or their family.

## Just get started!

- Don't be afraid of the process and don't be afraid to try things.
- Learn from other credit unions but realize what worked for them might not work for you – and that's ok!