



GO Teams Guides: Food and Basics Giveaways

Addressing shelter and food insecurity in your community is one of the most impactful ways that your team can help improve the lives and wellbeing of those in your community. While advocacy and work towards long term and systematic change are necessary to end chronic homelessness and hunger, at the same time that work is being done for the future, filling bellies and access to basic needs today is vital.

Fundraisers, in-kind collections, and volunteer days for local NGOs are one way to have an impact. But if your team has the passion and commitment to organize regular giveaways that benefit unhoused and food insecure people in your community, you have an opportunity to have an important role in combating these issues—you can fill the holes and reach the people who currently do not have access to other services.

GO Humanity's [Food Security Project](#) provides monthly grants to groups that are addressing food insecurity in their communities. If your group is engaged in local food insecurity work and not yet part of the Food Security Project, you can learn more about it on the [GO Teams website](#).



Tips to get started

- 1. Identify who you need to serve.** Find where people experiencing homelessness gather in our community. Common places are near food banks and shelters, bus stations, large overpasses, and large wooded areas.



2. **Find a location.** This should be a public place that doesn't impede the right of way for traffic and is easily accessible. Make sure the place you pick is not private property. Public parking areas are good possibilities. A sidewalk may work, but you can't block foot traffic.

3. **Find out what the local laws are.**

Contacting a customer service or citizen line in your city is a good place to start.

Some questions to research in your community:

- Do you need a permit?
- Can you give away bottled water?
(Believe it or not, it is not legal to give away water in some places.)
- Can you give away "open foods"
(like homemade food and yesterday's items from bakeries) or refrigerated sealed foods (like lunchables)?



4. **Make sure enough people are committed.** You can serve 40-50 people with just a few people organizing. But you don't want to start a project like this just for it to last only a month or two.
5. **Consider starting by volunteering or partnering with another group.** An established group that is already doing giveaways will provide you an opportunity to learn more about the specific needs of your community and how to do a giveaway through hands-on volunteering. Then you can expand the scope of the giveaway by adding new locations or increasing the frequency of giveaways, increasing the impact of the work already being done.
6. **Scope out how many people you expect to serve.** Have sufficient supplies on hand for the number of people you expect. Do you expect to have 20 people come through your line? 50? 70?



7. **Pick a date.** Pick a date early in the process that is not too far away, but not too soon, and stick to that deadline. Without a deadline, you may plan and plan and plan without ever actually starting.

8. **Consider renting a PO Box and/or a storage unit.** To protect the privacy of yourself and your volunteers, getting a PO Box where donations can be sent directly is a good idea. You can safely post that address online. Just make sure someone regularly picks up packages. It's possible, especially at the beginning, that a volunteer will be willing to donate part of their garage or shed to collect and store your giveaway supplies. Eventually, you will outgrow the garage and will want a storage unit.

9. **Needed supplies (other than giveaway items themselves).**

- Tables (if you are using them)
- Coolers (for water bottles)
- Shallow containers (for organization on the table)--often the boxes that your supplies came in will work
- (Plastic) bags for people to take their items in
- Hand held tally counter (so you can keep track of your increasing impact)
- Tents for shade for your line (depending on the location you find)



10. **Figure out where to buy things cheaply.** Purchasing in bulk and shopping around will keep costs down. For example (at time of writing):

- Dollar General has toilet paper 6 packs for \$1
- Dollar Tree has 10 razors for \$1 and 24 toothbrushes for \$1 each
- Sam's club has 40 waters for \$5



- Amazon has 144 packs of things like travel size shampoo, shaving cream, toothpaste, and toothbrushes that come to 25 cents each or less

Amazon Wishlists are a good way for people that live further away, have no personal transportation, or can't make it to your giveaway, to support the events. It can also help people know exactly what you are running low on and help them make meaningful contributions. Someone in your group will need an Amazon account to create and manage a public wish list.

Some items to consider including:

- Non-perishable, no-cook, single serve foods such as granola bars, apple sauce cups, slim jims, shelf stable milk, and nuts (cans should not require a can opener and packages should not require scissors)
- Water (remember to follow local laws)
- Toilet paper
- Razors and shaving cream
- Toiletries such as shampoo, toothpaste (and individually packaged toothbrushes), deodorant, mouthwash, lotion, floss, and hand sanitizer.
- Nail clippers
- Chapstick
- New socks (adult size and unisex)
- Hand warmers
- Unscented baby wipes and/or sanitizer wipes
- Tampons (pads too, but they are more often available making tampons highly sought after)





- Garbage bags (in some places these are very useful to protect belongings from the elements and are there for highly sought after, but in some places they are not as high on the list--something to ask people coming through your lines about)
- Reusable water bottles (need will depend on location)
- Small first aid kits
- Grocery store gift cards or pre-paid debit cards
- City transit passes
- Pet food
- Reading glasses (various strengths)
- Warm hats, gloves, and blankets or sleeping bags
- Tents

11. Find or create a homelessness coalition. An important reason for these coalitions to exist is to coordinate community action to support those experiencing homelessness and ultimately end homelessness in your community. Joining a local coalition will help you know where the holes in the support structure are and how you can fill them. You may find partners for certain parts of your work such as acquiring food or partnering for certain events to increase your impact. You may also be the only secularly identified group in the coalition and will provide a needed secular voice.

Practical suggestions

- 1. Have a line with a beginning and an end.** Line up your tables with a logical path to follow. Volunteers can stand on one side of the tables to help folks and restock as needed. On the other side of the tables folks can line up at the start of the line, walk the length, and take what they need. Put the bags for people to take their items in first.
- 2. Organize your items in a logical manner.** Put related items near each other. Put things





that could easily fall off the table and disrupt the flow into containers. Don't put things that shouldn't get squished by heavier things — like bananas — at the beginning of the line.

3. **Count the number of people who go through your line.** Station one volunteer at the beginning of the line to count the number of people that go through it. Having a hand held tally counter will make it much more likely to get an accurate number. Take a picture of the final number before you reset it so you don't forget the number before you can record it.
4. **Set up a donation portal.** If you don't already have a way for people to donate online, GO Humanity affiliates have a donation portal on their team profile. Your donation page will have information about your team and activities and we will send any donations we receive for you to you once a month. Learn more about becoming a [GO Team](#).
5. **No strings attached means no strings attached.** Humanist values ask us to do what we can to leave the world a better place than we found it regardless of the religious beliefs of the others in our community. Unlike many religious organizations that require participation in prayers and other religious activities--explicitly or implicitly--you should not require anything of the folks who go through your line.

Tips for once you get going

- **Talk to the people who come.** Ask the folks who benefit from your giveaway what they need. Where are the holes? Over time friendly conversations will build relationships and trust and they can contribute to better mental health and well-being. Keep in mind, however, that **NO ONE** owes you a conversation. Your giveaways should have no strings attached. No exceptions. Some folks will not want to interact beyond receiving items, and that is just fine.
 - Folks who come through your line can tell you where else they receive food and items, how often, and what





items they find useful that they rarely receive.

- If an unhoused person has a phone and is willing, you can take down their contact info so you have a direct link to the situation on the ground. You can create a free Google Voice number for this purpose, should you wish.
- **Organize special giveaways when you learn of specific needs.** The folks who come through your lines will tell you what they need and have trouble finding.
 - If there is a big ticket item that you learn is needed but won't easily be covered by your regular donations, you can run a special drive in your community and approach businesses and partners for a special donation for this cause.
 - You can also let us know at GO Teams. We may be able to do a special grant and we can promote your drive to the larger GO Teams network and GO Humanity community.
- **Find and attend city and coalition meetings related to addressing homelessness.** You will learn about the specific needs and obstacles in your community. You will find potential partners. And you will make space for a humanist voice at the table (if it isn't there already.)
- **Keep a list of needs online.** If you have a website, make a page for your giveaways that includes a live list of what your current needs are for the giveaway. A good way to organize this list is to keep all your regular giveaway items listed at all times, but after each giveaway, update the list to indicate which items you are running short on. That way people know what to purchase to have the most impact. You can also indicate which items you are currently stocked up on. If you have an Amazon Wishlist, make sure there is a link on this page. It's important that this list is regularly updated or it won't serve its purpose.
- **Get your giveaway on local resources lists.** Many local doctors, shelters, and social services have lists of resources that they provide to people who could benefit from them. Make sure these people and organizations know about your giveaway to help get the word out.



For more ideas check out GO Teams fundraising idea guides on our [resources](#) page!

Questions or Concerns?

If you need help with planning your event or have additional questions, the best way to contact GO Humanity is to use the [contact webform](#), which enables us to track the resolution of your question.