

Promoting Your Agency at Thanksgiving



Use the increased attention given to food assistance programs at Thanksgiving to reach potential donors and volunteers, and to build awareness of your agency that can help you throughout the year.

Getting Started

- What is your objective? Be sure your message has a call to action:
 - Are you planning a food drive?
 - Are you looking for financial donations?
 - Are you hoping to engage volunteers?
- How will you share your messages:
 - Does your organization have a newsletter?
 - Does your community have a weekly newspaper?
 - Are you active on social media? Is there a community page on Facebook?
 - Are there community bulletin boards?
- Create your messages to suit your needs:
 - **Newsletter:** Share an update on your work this year and let people know what you're hoping to provide at Thanksgiving. Share details about ways to help (food drive details, financial donations, volunteering). Provide details about the drive or how to donate or how to volunteer and a way to learn more: an email or phone contact, a website.
 - **Community Newspapers** (print or online):
 - **News release:** submit news releases about upcoming activities and ways to help. Adapt the news release template provided with some details about what is happening at your agency and give a brief description of your situation – we have seen need increase x amount this year because of rising costs – and encourage community members to support their neighbors. Most community papers include information about how to submit stories for publication. If you already have contacts at the publication, make a call or send a personal note as well to talk in more detail and increase their interest.
 - **Letter to the Editor:** Sometimes, a letter to the Editor is a more effective way to get visibility if there is an actively read letters section. They are also a great way for you to engage a Board member or strong supporter by asking them to

submit a letter about your organization. You can modify the letter template provided to meet your needs. Remember that shorter is better for letters to the editor. The publication will list a way to submit letters.

- **Be mindful of deadlines!** Publications typically post submission deadlines in the same place as they provide submission information. Plan on submitting your material at least a week ahead of when you want it to appear.
- **Social media:** Use your Facebook, Instagram, or other social media outlets to share your story. Brief posts about your work and graphics or photos can get attention and engage supporters. You can share information to encourage volunteers at your agency or publicize upcoming events.
 - Facebook events are a good way to engage people: you can create an event for a food drive or other activity, providing details about when, where, and how and give people an easy way to indicate interest and add an event to their calendar. Consider designing a simple graphic using the free tools at Canva to design posts that are optimized for social media sharing.
 - Link to an active fundraising page like a #GiveHealthy Food Drive or a fundraising site you have created for your organization. Qualified nonprofit organizations can also take advantage of built-in Facebook fundraiser tools, but these fundraisers now have processing fees organizations must pay on collected donations. Other options are available at no cost.
 - If your organization does not have accounts, you and your supporters may be active. Use your own account to share your agency's needs and encourage other supporters to do so as well.

Creating your message

- **Newsletter articles:** if you already publish a newsletter, you've got this! Providing some background on what is happening and how people can help will engage those who are already interested in your organization. Remember: photos and graphics can help your story stand out.
- **News releases:** these messages should be brief and focused as much as possible on specifics about helping. Use a news release to introduce the challenge (increased need, the upcoming holiday), provide a call to action (give funds, support a food drive, volunteer your time), and give clear details on how to do each of these (an address to send donations; a website to donate; date(s) and time(s) for food drives; contact information or a website to learn more about volunteering).

- **Letters to the Editor** typically don't have links and specific details. Use a letter to provide a sense of need and encourage support. If you have a Board member or other high-profile supporter, ask them if they would be willing to sign and submit a letter. Confine a call to action to asking people to visit your website to learn more about your work. Try to be brief. Keep news releases to one page. Keep letters to the editor to 250 words or less.
- **Social media posts** are an opportunity to share brief messages and updates more frequently than by submitting press releases or letters to the Editor, so take advantage of that, but don't flood people with so much they tune you out. Consider one post every other day or every day if you are already active on social media. Use photos and graphics to grab attention and keep text brief.
 - Posts that share a fact can also include a call to action: Last year, we served 10% more neighbors than during Covid. You can help us meet the rising need with a donation of food, funds, or time! Visit www.xxxxx.xxx to learn more. A graphic here could be a chart with a rising red arrow, or an image of a crowd at your program (be careful and respectful with photos; avoid capturing faces of any guests that don't give you specific permission to use their image).
 - Make a short video – even a selfie video – standing outside your organization or in front of a poster provides details on an upcoming event. Make it brief and engaging. “Hi, I’m x from x, where we are serving more of our neighbors this year than ever before. Please consider helping us with a donation of funds, food, or your time. Help us make a difference during the holiday season and throughout the year. Learn more at www.xxxxxx.xxx.” Pair this video with a brief sentence that reinforces the “help now” message and provide a link to web page or a way to contact your organization.

General suggestions on messaging:

Focus on the importance of your work. Need is high right now and what we do is a vital support for people who are struggling, even though many of them are working one or more jobs. People have an opportunity to help you in this work and make a difference in the community. Avoid too much negativity. It's better to have people excited about getting you to the top of the hill, rather than keeping your lights on. Don't get lost in the numbers; one simple number (a percentage increase in your client base; a rise in a specific population – more seniors, more families with young children) has more impact standing alone. If you have a story about a neighbor that you can share, it's powerful. But be sure to do this respectfully. If you are using names or details that can identify someone, you must have their permission. The same goes for images.