



Starting a Meal Program in Alexandria

Each meal program will differ and will reflect those you serve, your volunteers, and your supporting community. Take these first steps to help you explore the need and possibilities, and you will be ready to develop your program. Partnering with other interested organizations is another great option, don't feel like you need to do it alone. Others who have started and sustained meal programs are available to help during this process. You can learn much from others, but in the end you will make your own way.

First steps

- Determine the need in your area. Look for gaps in meals provided elsewhere. Reach out to Hunger Free Alexandria about locations needing food programs.
- Find your champion and core group. Who will follow this idea through the processes of getting support and approval?
- Obtain support from your organization (for program planning, space use, times, possible financial help). Ongoing communication and full support are important.
- Learn about the population you will serve. If possible, talk with those you would potentially serve. What do they need/want? Decide what your group can realistically do.
- Visit a meal program during serving hours. Talk to guests and volunteers. Ask how these program are funded, how they receive food, how they obtain volunteers. Contact programs in advance. Suggested programs in Alexandria:
 - Old Presbyterian Meeting House breakfast (Thursdays, 6-8 a.m., 323 S. Fairfax Street, 703.549.6670)
 - Meade Memorial lunch program (M-F, 11:30-12:30, 322 N. Alfred Street, 703.549.1334)
 - Christ House dinner (every day, 5-6 p.m., 131 S. West Street, 703.549.8644)

Program Development and Things to Consider

- Decide on your meal and service times. Make a commitment to always serve at these times with no exceptions for weather, school closures, or holidays.
- Decide what you will serve. Establish an ideal food inventory that is culturally relevant to the community. A simple menu in the beginning will be helpful.
- Will food and supplies be donated or purchased? If purchased, identify your funding source. Reach out to Hunger Free Alexandria for information on grants from the Hunger Free Fund.
- Offering healthy and nutritious food is important and can be challenging when relying on donations. Try to follow the Hunger Free Guidelines for Healthy Food Donations and publish a list of most needed foods for potential donors.
- Where will you store perishable and nonperishable food and supplies?
- Recruit your first volunteers and continue recruiting. Keep in touch with volunteers and your organization on a regular basis.
- Develop written procedures for food preparation and serving. Make sure all volunteers are familiar with these, including all new volunteers. Keep procedures updated and notify volunteers.
- Develop print material, such as a small card, with your program information that can be easily handed out to potential guests.



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- Feeding programs for the homeless or hungry sponsored by churches or other non-profits are generally exempt from health department regulation. Verify this. Consider inviting a city/county health department food-safety representative to meet with volunteers before starting your program.
- Make plans for providing a safe environment. Have volunteers available who can defuse a potentially difficult situation and have procedures in place for contacting police and emergency responders. Consider seeking out a mental health professional to speak with your volunteers.
- Decide how to respond to individual requests for money, clothing, transportation, and other things.

Additional Resources

- Old Presbyterian Meeting House - Susan Grandy, guidance on unique aspects of specific programs - (703) 549-6670, leave message or opentable@opmh.org
- Downtown Baptist Church Breakfast Program- Rev. Brian Hoysa - guidance on how to get started - (703) 549-5544 ex. 25 or bhoysa@downtownbaptist.org
- Washington Street UMC Open Table - Kelli Back, guidance on start up and ongoing operations - kdback65@yahoo.com
- www.HungerFreeAlexandria.com