

# A Guide to Bay Area Food Banks: Donating & Volunteering

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First-time volunteer Kathy Lam piles bags of baby spinach in the prep area of St. Anthony's Dining Room on Nov. 19. (Anne Wernikoff/KQED)

Bay Area food banks are bracing for their busiest time of year and, as has been the case in previous years, they're in need of funds.

Paul Ash, executive director of the San Francisco-Marin Food Bank, said the organization is spending \$1 million this month in preparation for the holidays. At St. Anthony's dining room in San Francisco, chef Pepe Sanchez says they're serving 100 guests every 10 minutes.

"Folks that are coming to our pantries and are using our services have a lot of challenges," said Ash. "And we're hoping that having a good holiday meal, being with the people they care about, gives them a chance to reflect and gain strength and move forward and make their lives better."

The issue this time of year is twofold: School's out and there are more demands on limited funds.

"We do see a spike in our call volume [on the emergency food help line]," said Mike Alfest, director of community engagement at the Alameda County Community Food

Bank. That's because families have to make up the two meals their kids would have gotten in school. And bills also start to add up in the winter holiday months—heat, gas, rent. "Healthy food becomes the one thing that gets sacrificed," he said.

The Alameda County Community Food Bank is an emergency response organization, so it has enough food on hand for about 2.5 million meals. But, like most nonprofits and food banks, it relies heavily on donations this time of year for a large portion of the annual budget. And that might be tougher this year, just because of so many deserving causes competing with each other. Ash, with the San Francisco-Marín Food Bank, said they're preparing for a dip in donations as people instead [give to victims of the Camp Fire in Butte County](#) — something they also saw last year after the deadly North Bay wildfires.

Volunteers are also particularly needed in the new year, from January to March, in order to process all the donations that come in over the holidays.

If you're looking to donate, money makes the biggest impact, said Altfest, because food banks can buy more efficiently and directly, making the dollars go further. If you're donating food, they're specifically in need of: high-quality proteins, such as peanut butter or canned meats; low-sodium and low-sugar canned fruits and vegetables; and "culturally appropriate foods," he said, to serve the diverse local community.

Here are some organizations that will be feeding the hungry over the holidays, and could use volunteers or donations. However, a number of popular volunteer spots fill well in advance of Thanksgiving.



A food pantry with staples such as tuna, bread and canned beans available to guests at St. Anthony's. The pantry began in 2008, but is a comparatively small program in terms of the dining room which serves hundreds every day. (Anne Wernikoff/KQED)

**To make a donation or volunteer:**



Bins full of cereal and other pantry staples at the Alameda County Community Food Bank. *(Anne Wernikoff/KQED)*

## East Bay

### **Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano**

The [food bank](#) delivers food both directly to people in need and to partner nonprofit agencies, which help distribute the donations.

Donate:

[Food donations can be accepted at both the Concord and Fairfield warehouses](#), which are particularly looking for fresh fruits and vegetables. Or use their [interactive map to find a local community food drive](#). You can also [donate online](#) or start a [Buy a Bag fundraiser](#).

Volunteer:

[Visit their website to find volunteer opportunities](#) based on needs and location.

### **Alameda County Community Food Bank**

The [Alameda County food bank](#) provides food for over 200 agencies around the East Bay through its distribution network. It also operates an emergency food hotline, CalFresh Outreach, and educational programs.

Donate:

[Check their website](#) to find food drive locations or food donation options. You can also run a [virtual food drive](#) or [donate money](#).

Volunteer:

[Check on their website for volunteer opportunities in the food warehouse or with the food emergency hotline](#).

### **Loaves and Fishes of Contra Costa County**

[Loaves and Fishes](#) provides meals to the hungry of Contra Costa County. They have five dining rooms that operate daily for lunch during the week and a food pantry for evenings and weekends.

Donate:

[Check online for needed donations.](#)

Volunteer:

Volunteers are needed to serve food, prepare it, pick it up and oversee projects. [Check their website for information on how to volunteer](#) Monday through Friday.



Volunteer Kristen Setterholm organizes donation barrels at the Alameda County Community Food Bank. (Anne Wernikoff/KQED)

## San Francisco

### SF-Marín Food Bank

[The Marin and San Francisco Food Banks](#) merged in 2011 to become the SF-Marín Food Bank, which distributes enough food for more than 100,000 meals every day. During this time of year, the organization collects nearly half of its annual operating budget through donations and gathers thousands of pounds of non-perishable food.

Donate:

You can drop off food donations at any of [the locations listed](#) in San Francisco or Marin. You can also [host your own food drive](#).

Volunteer:

[Sign up to volunteer on their website](#) either in Marin or San Francisco.

### St. Anthony Foundation

[St. Anthony's](#) Dining Room serves 2,400 meals every day of the year. It also provides a number of programs, including medical assistance and a free clothing program.

Donate:

[Food can be dropped off during weekdays](#). There are also [ongoing donations](#) needed.

Volunteer:

[Volunteer positions](#) are available in the dining room and free clothing clinic, with a

heavy demand around the holidays. They're also in need of highly skilled volunteers in the technology lab and medical clinic.

### **Glide Memorial Church**

[Glide's](#) mission is to welcome everyone into their community and help those in need. That happens through a number of programs, one of the biggest of which is a daily meal program that serves up breakfast, lunch and dinner (as well as special holiday meals).

Donate:

[Donate on their website.](#)

Volunteer:

[Serve meals or help prep the daily free meal program](#), though spots often fill up around the holiday season. More [volunteers](#) are also needed long-term.

### **Curry Without Worry**

[Curry Without Worry](#) started in 2006 to serve hot meals to hungry people. Today, it serves tasty vegan meals every Tuesday in both San Francisco and Kathmandu.

Donate:

[Donations can be made online.](#)

Volunteer:

Weekly shifts are available to help prepare meals, serve them and clean up. [Sign up online.](#)

### **Food Runners**

There's often tons of leftover food after the holidays. Fortunately, it doesn't need to go to waste. [Food Runners](#) picks up excess food from businesses and delivers it to local food banks and charity programs.

Donate:

If you're a business, you can donate excess food with [their online form or app](#). [Monetary donations](#) are also accepted.

Volunteer:

To pick up and deliver all that food requires volunteers. [Become a regular or an on-call runner.](#)

## **North Bay**

### **St. Vincent de Paul Society of Marin County**

Although [St. Vincent's](#) is an international Catholic charity organization, the Marin chapter is independent; all donations to Marin stay in Marin. The chapter provides a number of programs, such as a free dining room that serves daily meals and housing assistance.

Donate:

You can [donate online](#) or drop off donations at the San Rafael kitchen. Check their [food and donation wish list](#) to see what's needed. You can also [sponsor a person in need](#).

Volunteer:

People are needed every day to prepare food, serve food, organize the pantry, and clean up after meals. [Check online to see what volunteer positions are needed and to sign up for a shift.](#)

### **Community Action of Napa Valley**

Among its many programs, [Community Action of Napa Valley](#) operates [a food bank](#) for the region. It provides seven pantry locations, as well as running distribution programs to seniors and low-income Napa residents.

Donate:

[Donate online](#) via their website.

Volunteer:

[Contact the food bank director](#) to volunteer to pick up food, help sort or work in the pantry. You can also contact the other programs directly to volunteer for those programs.

### **Redwood Empire Food Bank**

[The Redwood Empire Food Bank](#) distributes nearly 15 million pounds of food to Sonoma County residents annually through its pantry, emergency food program, grocery boxes to seniors and meals for kids.

Donate:

Drop off food at the food bank on weekdays or [check online for other drop-off locations](#). You can also [donate online](#).

Volunteer:

[Sign up online for volunteer shifts and upcoming events](#).



Volunteers pass trays down the cafeteria line at St. Anthony's. (Anne Wernikoff/KQED)

## **South Bay**

## **Second Harvest of Santa Clara and San Mateo**

Since 1974, [Second Harvest](#) has been distributing food to low-income residents of San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. It now hands out 1 million pounds of food every week, half of which is fresh produce.

Donate:

[Donate food](#) at the warehouse or distribution center or [host a food drive](#). You can also [donate online](#).

Volunteer:

Check [the calendar online to volunteer for a food sorting or distribution shift](#).

## **Martha's Kitchen**

Started as a little soup kitchen in 1981, San Jose's [Martha's Kitchen](#) now serves dinner on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and breakfast on Thursdays. They also prepare meals for other nonprofit organizations and distribute food.

Donate:

[Donate online](#).

Volunteer:

[Volunteers are needed in the kitchen program](#).