



**Best Friends**  
ANIMAL SOCIETY

# How to Organize a Four-Legged Food Drive in Your Community

An action kit to help communities gather pet food to help families in need keep the pets they love

[www.bestfriends.org](http://www.bestfriends.org)



## Our Mission: No More Homeless Pets

Best Friends is working with you and with humane groups all across the country to bring about a time when homeless, unwanted animals are no longer being destroyed in shelters, and when every healthy dog or cat can be guaranteed a good life in a caring home.



### The First Home Forever Home Campaign

The Best Friends First Home Forever Home campaign focuses on all aspects of helping people make and honor a lifetime commitment to their pets.

Millions of companion animals die every year in crowded shelters because their families decided to let them go for some reason. Through education, intervention and action, First Home Forever Home provides guidance and resources to help people care for their pets and keep them as loved members of their families.

The goal of First Home Forever Home is to help individuals and families understand that bringing a pet into one's life requires a commitment of time, energy and resources to ensure that the animal has the quality of life he or she deserves. We create awareness about the need for careful consideration of the lifetime care required when someone gets a pet. We promote accepting responsibility for providing for pets' needs, and

we offer help and support for handling a wide variety of potential challenges. This campaign is designed to help people and their pets stay together happily.

To read more about the First Home Forever Home campaign, visit [foreverhome.bestfriends.org](https://foreverhome.bestfriends.org).

#### Questions about our campaigns or this action kit?

Contact us:

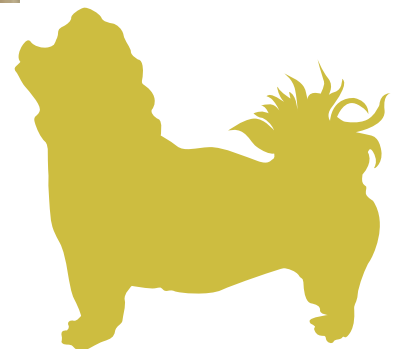
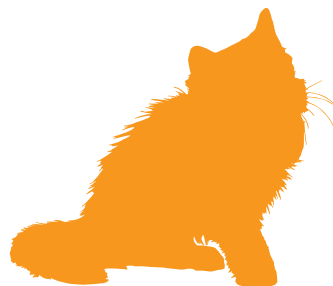
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# 1. Why do a four-legged food drive?

Most communities have a homeless pet problem, and in 2008-09, the number of pets who became homeless via relinquishment and abandonment increased because of the economic downturn, foreclosures and joblessness.

Increased rates of abandonment or relinquishment to already crowded shelters results in an increased euthanasia rate for pets.

With or without the downturn in the economy, some families who are struggling financially will see their pets as extra mouths to feed and will therefore decide to let them go. On the other hand, some people will choose to go hungry themselves in an effort to keep their pets.

During 2009, we saw a nationwide increase in the number of organizations providing free pet food to help families in need.



Providing temporary assistance with pet food removes one potential reason for families considering relinquishing or abandoning their pets, and will help people keep the pets they love. Every day that these families can feed their pets is one more day those pets stay at home.

In the summer of 2009, the First Home Forever Home campaign sponsored what may have been the largest pet-food drive in history, collecting more than 70,000 pounds of pet food in 13 cities with the help of our network of volunteers.

## General goals

The general goals of a four-legged food drive are:

- To collect donated pet food to help stock the shelves of a local food pantry that acts as a distributing organization to those in need
- To assist individuals and families facing economic difficulty by providing pet food to help them keep their pets
- To increase awareness about homeless animals, adoptable shelter animals, and community resources such as low-cost spay/neuter and other veterinary services, such as microchipping

## Setting your local goals

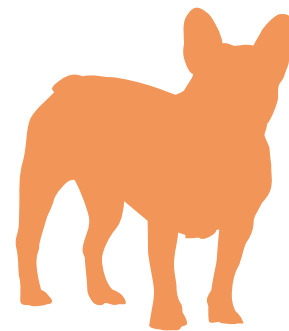
When planning your project, it is important to set goals and milestones. Having a clear idea of what you want to achieve helps everyone involved stay focused on the project. Consider setting some simple goals. For example:

- To collect a total of 10,000 pounds of pet food at one large event
- To collect 500 pounds of pet food every week for a month
- To have five collection sites for one month
- To hold a collection event once per month for a year

Remember to set realistic goals that reflect the resources and demographics of your community.

## Alternative goals

Although the Best Friends First Home Forever Home Four-Legged Food Drives have been targeted at helping provide pet food to food banks that work with individuals and families in need, a food drive could also benefit animal shelters or rescue groups. If your goal is to help a rescue organization or shelter, most of the information in this action kit is still applicable.



## 2. Find a food pantry partner.

Working with an existing food pantry helps support the community network and allows food to be distributed by an organization that has experience and expertise in this area.

Some food pantries are large city or statewide organizations, such as the Three Square Food Bank in Las Vegas ([threesquare.org](http://threesquare.org)) or the Oregon Food Bank ([www.oregonfoodbank.org](http://www.oregonfoodbank.org)). Most large food banks do not distribute food directly to the public but instead work with smaller partner agencies by supplying food to them for distribution.

Some communities have numerous smaller food pantries that operate in conjunction with animal rescue groups or shelters, or small organizations that provide human social services.

First Home Forever Home keeps an updated list of known food banks under “Tools You Can Use” on the campaign site at [foreverhome.bestfriends.org](http://foreverhome.bestfriends.org).

Before undertaking a food drive, identify and contact an existing food pantry in your community and establish that they will be willing to take the pet food you collect.

Questions to ask them:

- Do they provide collection bins?
- Can they pick up the food you collect? When? How often?
- If not, what are the drop-off hours?
- Are there any other requirements or guidelines to follow?

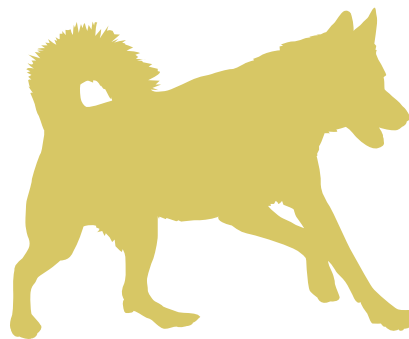
### 3. Decide your collection strategy.

A one-day event held in a prominent location with colorful signage and manned by enthusiastic volunteers generates excitement. Retailers that sell pet food or provide pet services are often eager to host an event and being at a location where people can easily purchase food to donate will increase collections.

On the other hand, an ongoing effort with un-manned collection bins available provides

flexibility and allows you to collect food for a longer period of time. Retail or service businesses may like to have a collection bin, and some businesses may want to hold an in-house employee pet-food drive.

A combination of an event and ongoing collection bins is your best bet!



### 4. Build a support base.

One person sitting at a table collecting pet food can make a difference, but if you want to gather a lot of food, you're going to need help. Ideally, you'll find allies who will commit to the cause. Church groups are often willing to help. Schools or parent-teacher associations may like a community service project. Scout troops or service clubs are often willing to get involved. Realtors know all too well what happens to pets when families are forced to move.

You can also consider partnering with rescue groups, nonprofits and other animal lovers who are dedicated to helping animals stay with their families.

Here are some other suggestions:

1. Ask your friends and family, neighbors and co-workers. Start with the people you know; they might know others who want to get involved.

2. Try the Best Friends Network ([network.bestfriends.org](http://network.bestfriends.org)). The Network, which is focused on "social networking that saves lives," attracts pet lovers from across the country and is an ideal place to find people who share your desire to make a difference for the animals in your community. Create your own group or post on your Go Local forums. It's fun, it's easy, and it's free.

3. Use free, popular social networking sites to get people involved. Be sure to include the pertinent details (when, where, contact information) and a compelling description of the project that will make people want to join you. Try Facebook ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), Twitter ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)) and MySpace ([www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)).

## 5. Get the word out.

Getting the word out about your efforts to collect pet food will help ensure the success of your project. Start by creating a flyer that provides the details of who, what, where, when, how and why. Post your flyers all over town (with permission, of course). E-mail copies to everyone you know and ask them to post the flyers in their workplaces and the businesses they frequent.

Create smaller versions of the flyer to use as bag stuffers for retailers, especially if you will be holding an event-style collection there.

Create a press release to send to local TV, radio, newspapers and bloggers.

Sometimes staging a promotional event and inviting the media can be helpful. For example, find someone who has received – or would like to receive – pet food from the food pantry and who is willing to talk to the media. Then invite the press to meet you at the food pantry to interview the client and the food pantry coordinator. You can talk about what it means to get help with pet food.

Post information about the event on your Best Friends Network Go Local page. Go to [network.bestfriends.org/GoLocal](http://network.bestfriends.org/GoLocal) to select your

Sample flyers and a sample press release can be viewed here:

**[foreverhome.bestfriends.org](http://foreverhome.bestfriends.org)**

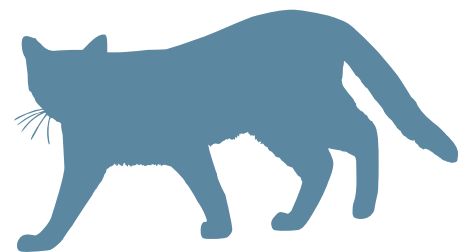
Click on “Tools to Use” and look under “Four-Legged Food Drive – Summer of 2009.”



Go Local community. Click the “Help” link in the top right corner if you need assistance.

Word of mouth is also very effective – and free! Encourage the members of your Four-Legged Food Drive team to spread the word to their friends, family, neighbors, co-workers and fellow animal lovers.

Keep the momentum going by posting pictures online and/or doing a follow-up story about the success of the project. To show how the food drive is helping keep pets in their homes, consider telling the story of a particular family and their pet.



## 6. Ready, set, collect: a few more details.

If you're doing an event, use signage – such as posters, sandwich boards and banners – that will call people's attention to your Four-Legged Food Drive. Streamers, flags, balloons, special T-shirts or costumes also can add a festive touch.

If you're setting up un-manned collection sites, make sure your containers are clearly marked and post flyers nearby that explains the project, including the name of the food bank or pantry you're working with.

Create a list of shelters and rescue groups in your area. Include each organization's location, website, e-mail address and phone number. Make copies to hand out to people at the food drive who want to get a pet and are interested in adopting. You can find organizations in your area by visiting [foreverhome.bestfriends.org](http://foreverhome.bestfriends.org) and clicking on "Adopt Your Next Pet." You can also try Petfinder.com.

The tally sheet can be viewed here:

[foreverhome.bestfriends.org](http://foreverhome.bestfriends.org)

Click on "Tools to Use" and look under "Four-Legged Food Drive – Summer of 2009."

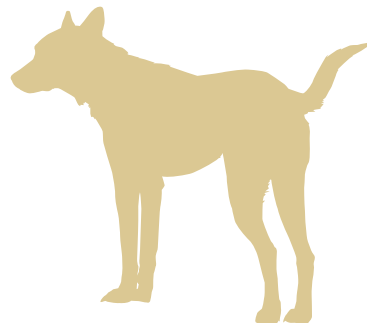


### Tracking the food donations

Some food pantries will weigh the food for you and report the total. (We recommend that you only use pet food that is sealed in the original manufacturer's packaging and is not expired.) If they don't weigh the food, you'll need to keep track yourself. We've created an easy-to-use tally sheet and sample for your use.

### Monetary donations

If you're doing an event, some people might want to donate cash, so be prepared to accept money. Have a donation jar or cash box handy. You can use this cash to purchase additional pet food. If you're going to be buying a large volume of food, talk to the store manager about a discount.



## Volunteers

If you're having an event, no matter how many volunteers you have, it's a good idea to designate roles so everyone feels comfortable and has a plan. You should have someone designated as the leader to keep things going smoothly, one or two people to greet the public and explain the project without being pushy, someone responsible for the donation jar, and one or two detail-oriented helpers to keep track of the quantities of food being donated. If the food bank is not able to pick up the food at the end of the day, you may also need help with moving and transporting.

If you're setting up collection sites, be sure to have someone check the bins often and take away enough of the food to prevent an overflow, which could create a problem in the place of business.

Finally, thank your volunteers sincerely and often.

## Pets at the event

Although bringing your well-behaved pets to an event may generate interest in what you're doing, having pets at your food drive could also create a distraction. Some people may crowd in to see the animals and keep you from interacting with potential donors.

Having your pet present also creates a possible hazard to him or her. If you're doing the event in a parking lot or in front of a store, traffic and exhaust fumes may be a danger. Some pets become stressed by meeting so many strangers. The weather may also be a problem (too hot or too cold), depending on the time of year and location of the event. You'll also need to be careful that your pet doesn't wander away while you're not paying attention.

In short, consider all potential hazards before deciding to bring your pet along and have a plan for someone to be able to take him or her home if necessary.

