

# The why and how of food pantry donations

## The Salem Pantry

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### What is the Salem Pantry?

The Salem Pantry's mission is: "to eradicate hunger in the Salem community by providing residents in need with nutritious foods in an atmosphere of dignity and respect." (The Salem Pantry, n.d.)

The Salem Pantry has seen tremendous growth in the past year due to COVID-19. They have built new partnerships such as:

- North Shore Community Development Coalition
- Salem State University
- Lifebridge
- Peabody Essex Museum

Due to COVID-19, the Salem Pantry has given out a larger volume of food and is working harder than ever before to provide for the community. They have provided food to 2,200 households and 6,500 individuals so far. With the addition of new pop up site locations such as the Salem public schools and home deliveries, the pantry has provided approximately 75,000 pounds of food to the local community.



### Literature Review

Food pantries have had a significant impact on people, even more so during the COVID-19 pandemic. More people are accessing the food pantry for the first time due to unforeseen financial challenges in the setting of the pandemic economy and increased unemployment. During times like this, food pantries are focusing even more on providing healthier food options and fresh food to people, not just prepackaged canned food. (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020)

### Objectives

- Explore the reasons why people are donating
- Investigate how people prefer to donate
  - Are more people donating online
  - Do people prefer donating by sending in a check
- Develop solicitation materials to be sent to past, current and new potential donors.

### Methods

What I did

- Reviewed and supported the online database and contacts of donors.
- Assisted with preparing mailing and updating contact lists
- Analyzed previous donation materials to study why people are donating
- Putting the donations into the database
- Utilized past donation records to determine the preferred method of donation (on-line versus check)
- Updated donations into the database
- Focused on a sub-group of donors through the Peabody Essex Museum, to determine preferred methods of making contributions.

Example of the thank you letter explaining how much each donation means to the Salem pantry.

Dear [Enter Donor Name],

On behalf of The Salem Pantry, I write to thank you for your generous donation on [Enter Date of donation] of \$[Enter total donation].

The Salem Pantry relies on donors like you. The demand for our services in Salem and the Greater North Shore continues to rise sharply, and we could not meet it without the help that you and others provide. COVID-19 makes your support all the more timely since this urgent public health crisis is costing people their jobs and making it all the harder for them to secure the food they need for their families.

We know there are many charitable organizations to which you can donate; so, we thank you for your consideration and donation to The Salem Pantry.

Sincerely,

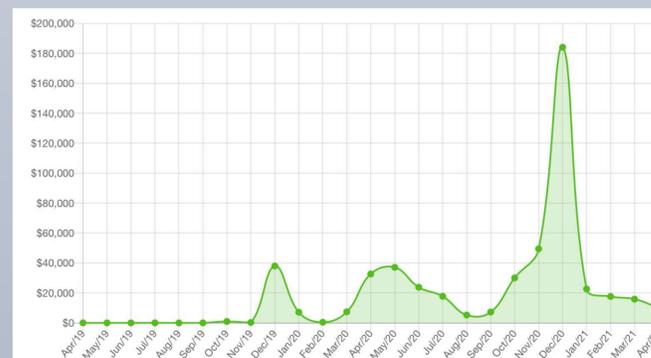
Robyn Burns  
Executive Director

### Results

One of the major partners with The Salem Pantry is the Peabody Essex Museum. A total of 107 people have donated to the pantry through the Peabody Essex Museum. After sending them all a thank you letter, five people have contributed again. All five donated on-line the second time.

Additional analyses were done to investigate the average donation amounts and the preferred method of payment (on-line versus by check).

The table below charts the donations starting from April 2019 through April 2021. Clearly there was a significant rise in donations at the height of the pandemic and now the donations seem to be leveling out.



### Conclusion

Surprisingly, due to COVID-19, we can see that people became much more generous with their donations. People understand that it is important to help the Salem Pantry in any way they can and make sure people are getting the food they need.

It was found that when a donation was placed into the database and a thank you letter was sent, people chose to donate online. On-line donors even utilized PayPal to set up recurring monthly payments. As noted previously, of the 107 individuals at the Peabody Essex Museum, the five people that had donated again chose to donate online. Online payments with today's technology help make donating more accessible.

### Why people have donated

Quotes of why some people are donating.

- "COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the lives of many working people. A monthly donation will help many to get back on to their feet"
- "I've followed the work of the Salem Food Pantry over the years and have seen how it makes a big difference to individuals and to the community."
- "I'm fortunate that I have enough to eat and it's heartbreaking that others don't in these trouble times."
- "In support of the Salem Pantry during this crucial and stressful time for kids and families."
- "No one should go hungry in this day and age..."

### What I have learned through this experience

My time at the Salem Pantry opened my eyes to the services a food pantry provides for a community. I learned that the Salem Pantry fosters a sense of unity and dignity among its residents, just as their mission statement strives to do. I found that the offerings through the pantry are more wholesome and complete than perhaps the general public is led to believe. As opposed to canned, prepackaged meals, residents are provided with a variety of nutritious options to promote health and wellbeing. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to work with this organization and have learned so much. My hope is that as the public continues to learn of these organizations, as I have, donations will continue to rise and with it the services that these pantries provide may continue.

### References

The Salem Pantry. (n.d.). *The Salem Pantry (food)*. <https://www.thesalempantry.org/>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *Considerations for Food Pantries and Food Distribution Sites*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/food-pantries.html>.