



**COMMON PANTRY**  
Healthy food and support for a strong community.

## Common Pantry Volunteer FAQ

Common Pantry is the oldest continually operating food pantry in Chicago, having been active in the fight against hunger and food insecurity in our community since 1967. Through direct relief efforts, access to and assistance with related social services, Common Pantry aims to provide support to overcome poverty-related challenges.

Since March 2020, the fight against hunger and food insecurity has only become more apparent, as there has been an increase in the number of neighbors we serve ever since. To meet the needs of our community, we depend on the generosity and goodwill of our outstanding volunteers. Common Pantry has a limited staff and engages volunteers to achieve the weekly needs of accessing food.

We understand that prior to volunteering with us, there may be a few questions. Please look below at the frequently asked questions that we have compiled. This of course is not a comprehensive list and should you have any additional questions please contact the Community and Operations Coordinator at [sheal@commonpantry.org](mailto:sheal@commonpantry.org).

### What kinds of volunteer shifts does Common Pantry offer?

Common Pantry offers many opportunities for individuals, families, and groups to volunteer their time to benefit the community. Some of the opportunities include:

- Food sorting and restocking
- Home Delivery
- Grocery Distribution
- Hot lunch support
- Produce Mobile
- Office Support
- Donation Pick-ups
- Seasonal/one-time volunteers
- Group Opportunities (organizing a food drive, hosting a fundraiser, etc.)

Shifts for individuals and families can be found on our website [here](#). For group opportunities, please contact our Community and Operations Coordinator.

## What would I do during a volunteer shift?

The following provides a brief description of what volunteers can expect to do during some of our common volunteer opportunities:

- **Restocking:** Occurs on Wednesdays and Thursdays prior to food distribution. Volunteers can expect to sort, stock, and organize food items onto pantry shelves as well as to help unload deliveries and get the pantry fully stocked.
- **Grocery Distribution:** Occurs on Tuesday evenings, Wednesday afternoons and evenings, as well as Thursday afternoons. Volunteers can expect to interact and assist our guests in their monthly shopping of groceries.
- **Bagging Groceries for Home Delivery:** Volunteers will bag standard groceries, fulfilling any food requests that are possible for our home delivery clients. These groceries are then delivered to elderly clients who cannot get to the pantry. Shifts occur throughout the month.
- **Home Delivery:** Home delivery happens a few times throughout the month. Volunteers will deliver grocery bags directly to elderly clients who cannot get to the pantry. Access to a vehicle and a valid driver's license are required.

If there are any further questions about one of the shifts listed above, please reach out to the Community and Operations Coordinator.

## Is there an orientation I need to attend before volunteering?

No! At Common Pantry you don't have to attend an orientation. If it is your first time volunteering with us, we recommend watching this [video](#) that will provide you a preview of what to expect. Additionally, please come at the time the shift starts so that we can show you around and explain what you'll be doing during the shift.

## Is there anything else I need to know before I can volunteer?

For safety reasons we do not allow open-toed shoes during any function at the Pantry. We also ask that you dress comfortably -- during the summer the pantry can get quite warm, and during the winter quite cold, and some tasks take place outside and require that you dress according to the weather.

We also expect all volunteers to treat our clients, staff, volunteers, and others with dignity and respect while volunteering for the Common Pantry.

## How old do you have to be to volunteer?

Common Pantry has opportunities for every age! Children and adults ages 14 and older are welcome to volunteer on their own. Children 9-13 are also encouraged to volunteer for restocking or Common Kids-designated shifts, but must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Grocery distribution shifts are for people ages 14 and up only.

For other opportunities perfect for children ages 5-12, please check out our Common Kids program [here!](#)

## How do I sign up to volunteer?

Volunteers can sign up for a shift on our website or via an email to [sheal@commonpantry.org](mailto:sheal@commonpantry.org). Volunteers can sign up for any of our shifts for up to two months in advance.

## Something came up and I am no longer able to come to the volunteer shift I signed up for, what should I do?

We completely understand that schedules can change due to a number of things. Please cancel the shift that you were signed up for on the volunteer website. You can also reach out to the Community and Operations Coordinator to inform them that you will be unable to make it to your shift.

Furthermore, we understand that depending on the situation you may not be able to inform us before the shift, however, if this becomes a recurring issue, we may ask you to refrain from volunteering with us as we depend on our volunteers to operate and want to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to come.

## I have a group that wants to volunteer, what should I do?

Common Pantry welcomes teams from business organizations, communities, or simply friends and family! Please contact our Community and Operations Coordinator to schedule a group opportunity.

### **I'm a student and need service hours, what do I do?**

Student volunteers are welcome! Please sign up through the normal process and record the time spent volunteering. The Community and Operations Coordinator can provide a signature, confirm the service hours completed and can serve as a contact person if further confirmation is needed; however, *it is the responsibility of the volunteer to record service hours and/or provide the required documentation.* If a letter is needed, please reach out to the Community and Operations Coordinator. We recommend to start the hours early as shifts do fill up quickly and there might not be opportunities when needed.

### **I have court-ordered service hours, can I complete them at Common Pantry?**

We determine the availability and opportunity to complete court-ordered hours on a case-by-case basis. Please reach out to the Community and Operations Coordinator or our Executive Director to find out more.

### **What does the Common Pantry Board do?**

Common Pantry is governed by a board of volunteer leaders. We have a President, Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer as well as members-at-large for a total of 12 positions. The Board works with the Director to set the Pantry's strategic direction and oversees staff, financials, operations, and space as we work toward achieving that vision. Board members share a love of service and typically come from all walks of life; common backgrounds include food service, non-profit management, social work, legal, real estate, corporate philanthropy, human resources, and volunteering.

### **I'm interested in serving on the Board, what should I do?**

We suggest that you first familiarize yourself with our mission and operations by volunteering with us. You'll be able to get to know our clients, staff, and other volunteers. If you ever see another volunteer wearing a "Board Member" name tag, be sure to ask them any and all of the questions you may have; they will be more than happy to answer!

## I'm interested in serving on the Board, what should I do? Continued.

At the same time, reach out to the Executive Director or another staff member who will connect you with the Board President. They will get to know you better, answer any remaining questions you may have, and inform you of any open positions and of particular skills that the board might need at that time. If positions are available and/or if you have skills and experience that are a good fit, you will be asked to sit in on a board meeting. Prospective board members are required to join three meetings to ensure a mutual fit before the board votes to welcome new member(s).

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Any additional questions please contact the Community and Operations Coordinator at [sheal@commonpantry.org](mailto:sheal@commonpantry.org).

We can't wait to see you at Common Pantry!