

VOLUNTEER PROJECT IDEA

FAMILY TEACHING KITCHEN



The increase in American obesity rates over the last three decades has sparked nationwide conversations about healthy living and nutrition. In 2012, more than two-thirds of American adults and almost one-third of American children were considered overweight or obese, and rates are higher among low-income individuals. In a time when many busy families sacrifice nutrition for the convenience and economy of prepared foods, family teaching kitchens put healthy eating at the center of activities children and parents can enjoy together.

Often organized through schools or community centers, family teaching kitchens and other nutrition-education programs provide hands-on explorations of new foods, new cooking techniques and new ideas about living an active, healthy lifestyle. For children, cooking activities engage all five senses while imparting valuable lessons about foods and how to eat healthfully. For adults, they can offer tips for planning well-rounded meals, shopping for healthy foods on a budget, and involving the whole family in preparing as well as eating meals. They also are an opportunity for volunteers with experience or interest in cooking, nutrition, gardening and similar areas to connect with other local experts and share their knowledge with members of the community.

United Ways can engage volunteers in helping achieve our goal to increase the number of healthy youth and adults and also can add value to corporate and community relationships by providing an outlet for company or individual volunteers to utilize their love of cooking, become more involved in their children's school communities, or simply have fun while helping families learn about healthy living. Whether setting up cooking stations and activities, teaching children and their parents about nutrition, or packing grocery bags for participants to take home after class, volunteers at family teaching kitchens play an important and rewarding role in providing valuable resources for a healthier community.

GETTING STARTED

United Ways can tailor the experience of managing a family teaching kitchen or nutrition-education activity to fit the interests and needs of the volunteers as well as the families who will participate in the programs. A few key steps include:

- **Brand the effort as a United Way experience.** Managing a family teaching kitchen should be branded a United Way experience as much as possible – from the first promotion of the activity to the recipes and resources participants take home after each event. If you are partnering with other organizations or companies, be mindful of joint branding opportunities on materials such as banners, grocery bags and nutritional literature used during each class. Volunteers setting up cooking stations or staffing activities during
- the class can wear “Live United” t-shirts to increase visibility. Keep track of volunteer contact information as well as notable expertise in cooking, nutrition and other relevant areas for future events.
- **Partner with or recruit knowledgeable people.** Family teaching kitchens rely on the expertise of chefs, cooks and nutritionists for success. Reach out to local restaurants, cooking schools, adult education programs or community enrichment courses to find chefs who can lead classes of adults and children as well as answer questions in a knowledgeable and engaging manner. School nutrition programs and cafeterias, family health agencies, and cooperative extension offices are also potential contacts

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for nutritionists skilled in working with children and families. If family teaching kitchen activities are being promoted through local schools, consider asking for parents with experience in cooking or nutrition to volunteer their time.

- **Identify a location and the beneficiaries.** The location for a family teaching kitchen needs to be large enough to accommodate several cooking stations safely. It also must be properly equipped for food storage and preparation with materials such as cooking utensils, electric skillets, ovens, refrigerators and dishwashers. Community centers, schools, restaurants or company kitchens with adequate space and access might be considered. Work with local schools and community centers to distribute information about the program and recruit participants. Make sure chefs and class leaders are aware of special needs, language abilities, dietary concerns and the ages of children participating so they can plan lessons accordingly.
- **Set the date(s).** Allow ample time to recruit a chef and nutritionists to lead class activities, determine a menu, and procure the necessary ingredients and supplies. Consider how frequently classes can be offered given the availability of the location, class leaders and volunteers. Determine a schedule that balances interest in the classes with the resources available to host them.



- **Recruit Volunteers.** Volunteers can be recruited from partner agencies, local companies, online volunteer centers or schools. The size of the teaching space and expected number of attendees will help determine the number of volunteers needed for setting up cooking stations, assisting with activities, packing grocery bags and cleaning up after class.
- **Purchase or solicit donations of supplies.** Supplies will include recipe ingredients for preparing in class as well as for packing into take-home grocery bags, plates and eating utensils, activity sheets and informational handouts, and decorations for the space. Consider asking local grocery stores or food banks to donate foods or ask volunteers to conduct a food or supply drive to donate what is needed for the class. Depending on the location, additional cooking utensils and appliances such as spatulas, cutting boards, knives, oven mitts, aprons, small skillets or burners might also be required.

Additional Resources

The following pages include an example of how a United Way has organized family teaching kitchens and other activities focused on family nutrition in their community. Learn more about how other organizations are bringing families and children together for hands-on cooking and nutrition education:

- **ChopChop Magazine** <http://www.chopchopmag.org/>
- **Cooking with Kids** <http://cookingwithkids.net/about/>
- **D.C. Central Kitchen Cooking Classes**
<http://www.dccentralkitchen.org/how-were-teaching-kids-through-cooking-classes/>
- **Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters**
<http://cookingmatters.org/>
- **United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, Kids in the Kitchen** <http://supportunitedway.org/book/get-healthy-now/family-outreach-materials/ts-13-kids-kitchen>



PROJECT EXAMPLE

United Way of Metropolitan Nashville

Troubled by their city's ranking as one of the most obese in the nation, the United Way of Metropolitan Nashville and a team of partner organizations launched an initiative called Family Teaching Kitchens to inspire Nashville residents to make healthy and budget-friendly changes to their diets. The kitchens, which operate from multiple community center locations in the city, are the result of a partnership among United Way Women United in Giving, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt, Metro Parks & Recreation and the Nashville Public Library.

The kitchens offer classes geared toward helping families in at-risk neighborhoods learn the basics of healthy eating on a budget. Parents and children alike are invited to take part in the classes, which are advertised through United Way Family Resource Centers and local pre-schools. Stations staffed by volunteers guide families through topics such as picking and preparing new ingredients, reading nutrition labels, comparing store brands and generic brands when shopping, and making favorite recipes lighter by substituting less wholesome ingredients with

healthier alternatives. The classes culminate in a hands-on cooking session where volunteers guide participants through preparing a meal and answers questions along the way. At the end of the class each family receives a copy of the recipe they prepared during the class and a bag filled with the ingredients needed to make the dish at home and enjoy the meal together. Families also leave with information about United Way's new statewide initiative, eat:together. A campaign designed to bring families back to the dinner table three times per week.

The Family Teaching Kitchens in Nashville are staffed by volunteers from the community as well as from United Way's local corporate partners. The classes are led by a cast of chefs that has included local celebrity Cynthia Tinnel, a cafeteria manager for Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools who won a cooking competition against other school chefs during an episode of "Chopped," which is televised on the Food Network.

<http://www.unitedwaynashville.org/give/family-teaching-kitchen-volunteers/>

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