



InstaGrants

2017 Gratitude Grant Edition

Gratitude Grants offer Lodges endless opportunities to meet local community needs. Grant funds can be split between multiple projects so if you're looking for a few ideas, consider adapting one or more of these highly successful projects in your own community.

Project #1: Back Pack Program: Many children from food-insecure households depend on their school's breakfast and lunch programs for their most nutritious meals and, in some cases, their only meals of the day. Elks are helping to meet the needs of children at risk of hunger by providing them with nutritious, child-friendly food to take home on weekends and school vacations when other resources are not available.

How to get started.

Is there a school in your area that has a need for a backpack program? Contact school personnel to schedule a meeting with the principal.

How to make this project a success.

A strong and dependable group of volunteers will be essential to keeping your program organized and successful. Consider working with youth groups such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Elks scholars and/or Antlers who may also be available to volunteer with the program.

How to make it your own.

Depending on the needs of the community, Lodges can consider providing school supplies, toiletries, or even adding additional food for younger children in the weekly back packs.

Elks in Action: Okmulgee, Okla., Lodge No. 1822 supports the local Back Pack Buddy Program by shopping, storing, and packing bags for distribution. The program serves children from Okmulgee and Preston elementary and middle schools.

Project #2: Local Gardens: In addition to increasing the availability of fresh produce, community gardens provide several benefits such as fostering positive community ties and improving neighborhood safety. By supporting local community gardens, Elks help promote the health and well-being of their communities.

How to get started.

Determine if there is a need for a garden. Who will the garden serve? Examples of groups that may benefit from a partnership include schools, food banks, hunger relief organizations, nonprofits and churches that prepare meals for people in need. Form committees to accomplish tasks such as construction, marketing, youth activities, equipment storage or financial management.

How to make this project a success.

Contact local organizations to assist with daily support of the garden such as routine garden maintenance, cooking demonstrations and gardening classes. Consider reaching out to a local hardware store or service organizations for additional support. The Lodge's municipality

may also provide community development block grants that would support the cost of sustaining a community garden.

How to make it your own.

Depending on the primary purpose of the garden, Lodges can create a specific garden to meet community needs. For instance, youth gardens can provide outdoor educational opportunities for children and adolescents. Job training gardens assist individuals with learning job skills for future employment and community gardens can supply supplemental food for food pantries.

Elks in Action: Blairsville, Pa., Lodge No. 406 partnered with the Borough of Blairsville and the Blairsville Community Development Authority to establish a community garden to meet local food needs. In addition to building the garden shed and performing routine garden maintenance, the members delivered harvested produce to a local food pantry.

Project #3: Soup Kitchen: The USDA defines "food insecurity" as the lack of access to enough food for all household members. Food insecurity affects every county in America and current statistics show that 17.5 million households experience food insecurity. Elks can join the fight to end hunger by supporting local soup kitchens.

How to get started.

Begin by contacting your local food bank, pantry or soup kitchen to see how the Lodge can be of assistance.

How to make this project a success.

In addition to enlisting the support of Elks members, invite local youth groups such as Boy and Girl Scouts, and other youth service groups to assist with serving meals.

How to make it your own.

The Lodge can support the local soup kitchen by repairing or replacing equipment, helping cook or serve meals, or even elect to serve meals at the Lodge.

Elks in Action: More than 25 Elks from Shenandoah, Iowa Lodge No.1122 assist in getting food to approximately 4,000 people each month. Working with Shenandoah Community Food Pantry and Feeding America food partner, Walmart Stores, Inc., members help pick up, pack and distribute groceries to families in need.

Project #4: College Food Pantries: Food insecurity has become a growing problem on college campuses as students struggle to manage the rising costs of tuition, textbooks and rent. Research indicates that more than 25 percent of community college students and 20 percent of students attending four-year universities experience food insecurity.

How to get started.

If your Lodge is near one, reach out to your local college and see if there is a food pantry in place and how the Lodge can play a role in the pantry's success. Depending on the campus, these programs are run by the student government association, the Office of Student Affairs or another student organization.

How to make this project a success.

Contact your regional food bank for support. They may be able to assist with fundraising, offer training on health and safety practices or provide food at a reduced price. Build support for a

food pantry by partnering with student government, service-oriented student groups, fraternities, sororities, and campus administrators from offices such as Student Activities, Student Affairs and Community Engagement.

How to make it your own.

Lodges can offer pre-packaged boxes or choose to operate a shopping-style pantry, where users can choose from a variety of options. The food pantry may be located on campus or even at the Lodge.

Elks in Action: Goodland, Kans., Lodge No. 1528 worked with school administrators to establish a campus food pantry at Northwest Kansas Technical College. Additionally, the Lodge continues to purchase and distribute food items to students in need.

Project #5: Operation Stand Down: According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, on any given night, nearly 50,000 veterans are homeless. In partnership with organizations across the nation, Elks are working to reduce that number.

How to make this project a success.

Find out if there is a Stand Down in your community. Reach out to organizers to see how the Lodge can play a role in the event's success.

How to get started.

Invite local organizations that serve veterans to attend and offer their services. Successful Stand Downs require the help of volunteers. Consider contacting high schools and colleges for volunteers looking for hands-on community service opportunities.

How to make it your own.

Lodges can provide meals for veterans at the event or distribute duffel bags filled with items such as socks, hats, soap, and deodorant. Some Lodges have even provided transportation so that veterans experiencing homelessness can attend.

Elks in Action: Houston, Texas, Lodge No. 151 works with the Veterans Affairs Commission of Houston to host the annual Stand Down. The event brings veterans experiencing homelessness into a safe area and where they are given an opportunity to register with the VA, receive medical attention and a meal. During the event, approximately 50 members help purchase, prepare and serve lunch to homeless veterans at the Latino Center Houston.

Project #6: Adapting to Deployment: Statistics show that anxiety rates among military children in addition to emotional and behavioral difficulties are higher than national averages. Such issues are exacerbated the longer parents are gone, especially when it is the first time a parent is deployed. Elks can support a local KUDOS event (Kids Understanding Deployment Operations) to help children understand their parents' experience before deployment.

How to get started.

If the Lodge is close to a military base, contact the Airman and Family Readiness Center, which oversees family programs during deployments and organizes the KUDOS program to see how the Lodge can assist with the event.

How to make this project a success.

Once the Airman and Family Readiness Center informs the Lodge of what is still needed to

hold the event, partner with local businesses to provide items such as food or supplies for the mock deployment.

How to make it your own.

Elks can contribute to a KUDOS event by distributing school supplies, purchasing mock deployment supplies or serving the meal. Enlist the support of Boy and Girl Scouts to make decorative Welcome Home signs when the children return from “deployment.”

Elks in Action: In addition to serving as the “Back to School Brigade” responsible for distributing school supplies to children of military personnel, Lompoc, Calif., Lodge No. 2274 served lunch for more than 250 military families at the Vandenberg Air Force Base’s annual Operation KUDOS event.

Project #7: Care Packages: By sending care packages to American troops overseas, Elks help to boost morale and express gratitude for the sacrifices military personnel make every day.

How to make this project a success.

Find out if there is a troop currently on tour in your community. Reach out to the base to find out what are the most commonly requested items.

How to get started.

Contact local businesses that may offer donations. CIP Grants must help the local community, so be sure to complete this important step. Reach out to youth service organizations to get youth involved in community service opportunities. Also, consider partnering with organizations coordinating a similar project to increase your impact.

How to make it your own.

Get creative! Care packages can include a variety of items including snacks, entertainment, toiletries, or sentimental items such as a homemade card from students or a video.

Elks in Action: Working with students from Kickemuit Middle School, Bristol County, R.I., Lodge No. 1860 shipped care packages to local troops overseas. As part of the project, students organized a month-long donation drive to collect additional items to send. adapting one or more of these highly successful projects in your own community.

Project #8: Visiting Senior Veterans: Elks promote the health and well-being of residents in care homes by offering important opportunities for socialization.

How to get started.

Consult with the activities director at the local nursing home to assess real needs. Working with the staff will help ensure that your activity has the greatest, most lasting impact.

How to make this project a success.

Let the activities director know that the Lodge is coming at least two weeks in advance. Since visitors may be rare, the activities director will probably add your visit to the calendar of events so that residents can look forward to it.

How to make it your own.

Elks can coordinate a wide array of activities including hosting arts and crafts, planning a barbecue with musical performances or even delivering much needed toiletries to residents.

Elks in Action: Plymouth, Mass., Lodge No. 1476 hosts an annual cookout for the veterans who reside at the V.A. Boston Healthcare System, Brockton Campus. Each summer, the Lodge opens their doors to two busloads of residents for an afternoon of fun and camaraderie.

Project #9: School Supply Project: An analysis of 2013 federal data shows that a majority of U.S. public school students currently live in poverty. Consequently, many children may attend school without essential school supplies leaving schools districts and teachers to absorb the cost. Research from the Education Market Association indicates that 99.5% of public school teachers surveyed spend an average of \$400 on supplies each year. Elks can support students and ease the financial burden for teachers by organizing a school supply event.

How to get started.

Contact a local school or district and ask what supplies are needed. Some school districts prepare a school supply list for each grade level.

How to make this project a success.

Identify potential partners such as local businesses, storage space providers, churches, school groups, and individuals to provide event assistance, donate items or provide low cost supplies. Purchase items in bulk to maximize buying power, set up collection sites to encourage donations, and enlist the help of youth groups.

How to make it your own.

Expand the event to include youth health services or social service agencies that can provide wraparound services. Consider organizing two school supply events—one during the beginning of the school year and another during winter break. Creating a year-round project allows students to finish the second half of the school year strong.

Elks in Action: Warrington, Fla., Lodge No. 2108 organized a *Tools for Teachers* program in which the town's elementary teachers were invited to the Lodge to "shop" for needed school supplies.

Project #10: Family Literacy Event: Family literacy programs are designed to improve language and literacy skills of both parents and children. Research shows that improving family engagement has a positive impact on children's long-term reading achievement and school success. By supporting family literacy, Elks can help enhance literacy skill development within the community.

How to get started.

Meet with your local elementary school to plan the program and to ask for volunteer assistance. The Lodge will need to select a theme before planning activities. Pick a general theme such as ABCs, animals, seasons, holidays, or a specific author such as Dr. Seuss. Send home flyers with students, put posters up at school or use an email blast to get the word out. Partner with larger organizations or corporations, colleges or universities, or other literacy groups, public or school libraries.

How to make this project a success.

Reach out to your community! Ask local businesses to donate refreshments or prizes. Recruit school staff, student teachers from the local college, high school and middle school students, public library staff, a local theatre group, and PTA members to volunteer. Form committees to

accomplish tasks such as marketing, developing activities for literacy stations, and handling logistics for transportation and childcare.

How to make it your own.

Choose the grade level(s) to focus on at your event. Some schools organize two separate events—one for K-2 and another for grades 3-5. This is especially helpful for parents with multiple children. If your community has a large population of nonnative English speakers, consider having a translator present to assist parents. Do what works best for teachers and families.

Elks in Action: Ravenna, Ohio, Lodge No. 1076 partnered with Crestwood Elementary to host *Dr. Seuss Literacy Night* for more than 450 children. Elks led fun activities which included storytelling, games, and arts and crafts. Additionally, the Lodge distributed Dr. Seuss books to each child in attendance.

Project #11: Bicycle Rodeo: As interest and participation in cycling has increased, so has the number of injuries. Researchers have found that cyclist behavior is the cause of many crashes. Organize a bike rodeo to encourage and develop safe cycling habits in young riders.

How to get started.

Choose a spacious location such as a playground, gymnasium or parking lot in which to hold the event. Local officials may be able to temporarily close a street to traffic.

How to make this project a success.

Contact local service organizations, parent-teacher associations, schools, the health department, bike shop owners, cycling clubs and emergency responders to participate.

How to make it your own.

Determine the age range for the course and include more challenging activities for older children. Other activities include having a bike maintenance station, bike washing and repair services, and a helmet fit check. Consider inviting the local hospital to provide tips on healthy eating and fitness, host a bike raffle to encourage participation or organize a bike parade to show off new safety skills.

Elks in Action: Centralia-Chehalis, Wash., Lodge No. 2435 partnered with the local police and fire departments to host a bicycle safety clinic for approximately 130 youth. In addition to conducting a bike skills course, members repaired bicycles and provided helmets for children.

Project #12: Summer Reading Program: Research has shown that students may lose one to three months of academic growth over the summer; with disadvantaged students being disproportionately affected. Summer reading programs prevent “summer slide” and provides an opportunity for children and teens to become more prepared for the following school year.

How to get started.

Discover what summer learning programs already exist in your community. Consider partnering with a local school’s summer program, the library, or a youth service agency such as the Boys and Girls Club.

How to make this project a success.

Promote the program in the community through class visits, lunchtime tabling, information on

the school website and distributing flyers to parents. Enlist the support of teen volunteers for your program. For example, teens can assist in registering participants, distributing prizes, and leading story time or activities.

How to make it your own.

Partner with a local hunger relief organization to include a summer lunch component. Invite guest readers such as firefighters, police officers, doctors, and other professionals in uniform to read favorite children's books. Consider coordinating a celebration at the conclusion of the program.

Elks in Action: In conjunction with Therapy Dogs International (TDI), Stamford, Conn., Lodge No. 899 hosted a youth literacy program at the local library. To provide a relaxing reading environment, TDI provided therapy dogs so that children can improve their reading skills without fear of judgement. The Elks provided participants with new backpacks, bookmarkers and reading lights.
