



Packing Party Planning Guide

Welcome to the party! Packing parties are fun group events to fill shoeboxes with a variety of items for children around the world as part of Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse. Operation Christmas Child partners with churches and other ministries in more than 100 countries each year to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with millions of children and invite them to follow-up discipleship.

This guide is an aid for planning Operation Christmas Child packing parties for small and mid-size groups packing 1,000 shoeboxes or fewer at each event. For groups assembling more than 1,000 shoebox gifts at a packing party, Operation Christmas Child representatives can give individualized guidance. Email occinfo@samaritan.org to start the conversation.

CORE ELEMENTS FOR A PACKING PARTY

Create quality shoebox gifts

Quality shoebox gifts also can be cost-effective. Collect new, durable items to be treasured. Some items are meant for short-term use, such as pencils, but other gifts can last a lifetime, like a stuffed animal. Every shoebox gift should include a quality “wow” item, such as a soccer ball and pump, that brings instant delight. Make sure there are a variety of items to choose from so each shoebox is unique and packed from the heart for a child to feel special and loved.

Serve together as a church or group

Packing parties can create opportunities for members of a church, group, or community to work toward a common mission. All ages can contribute, such as collecting and organizing items or leading prayer times. Wide-ranging involvement can create momentum for future packing parties and community outreach events.

Share the Gospel through community outreach

Shoebox gifts provide opportunities to share the Gospel on both sides of the gift. Invite people outside of your church or group to participate and tell them about the Good News of Jesus Christ in a fun setting. Share that children receive a gift to illustrate God's gift of Jesus Christ. Explain that the Gospel is presented at outreach events and give a [simple Gospel presentation](#). Invite someone from your church or group to give the presentation or show a short video. Offer an avenue for responses.

Include moments dedicated to individual or group prayer. These times can include sharing testimonials from past shoebox recipients about the spiritual impact on their lives.

- Examples of [spiritual impact stories](#) available as project leader resources
- Examples of Operation Christmas Child videos at video.samaritanspurse.org

CHARACTERISTICS OF QUALITY SHOEBOX GIFTS

Fun—Include a quality “wow” item that will last and other fun items, such as toys.

Full—Add school supplies and personal care items to fill in empty spaces so the shoebox is filled to the brim. A full gift delights the child and makes maximum use of the available space in the box.

Personalized—Make sure every shoebox gift is unique by encouraging people to pray as they fill each shoebox for the child who will receive this gift and ask the Lord for guidance on what to pack. Selecting gift items for a shoebox can be like “shopping” with a specific child in mind. Emphasize that including a custom letter for that child as well as a personal photo often makes a lasting impression. You could encourage participants to bring photos to the packing party, or consider setting up a photo area.



Packing Party Planning Guide

STEPS IN PLANNING A PACKING PARTY

Packing party planning includes:

- Praying throughout the process
- Setting a goal and budgeting
- Collecting items and donations
- Preparing for the party and gaining volunteer support
- Promoting the event
- Hosting the event

**“SHOEBOX
GIFTS ARE LIKE
SNOWFLAKES—**

no two are alike!”

— *Franklin Graham*
President, Samaritan's Purse



Praying throughout the process

Invite God into every step of the packing party process. He cares about every detail. Trust Him to lead, guide, and provide everything needed. Prayer is the most important step in planning a packing party.

Setting a goal and budgeting

To help determine your church or group goal for the number of shoeboxes filled during the packing party:

- Think through what number is doable for your church or group. Estimate the number of attendees. A rule of thumb is to estimate two to three shoeboxes packed by every attendee. More experienced groups can pack more. If you think there will be 30 people at the packing party and you want to set a goal of 150 shoeboxes, that would be five boxes packed per person.
- Calculate what the [\\$10 suggested donation per shoebox](#) would be for the shoebox goal. For 150 boxes, the suggested donation would be \$1,500. If your shoebox goal is 1,000 boxes, the suggested donation would be \$10,000. Making this calculation first can help you put the goal into perspective. This donation should be viewed just like another item that will complete the box. It's like the fuel that runs an engine! It helps cover collecting, processing, shipping, Gospel materials, and training ministry partners around the world for evangelism and discipleship.
- Consider how to collect the suggested donation.
 - Ask your church or group if it can be included in its budget.
 - Plan one or more fundraisers.
 - Seek donors to adopt a set number of boxes.
 - See the [\\$10 Donation Ideas resource](#) for other possibilities.
- How much will a packing party cost?
 - Shopping year-round is one of the best ways to host a cost-effective packing party. For example, school supplies can be less expensive during back-to-school sales. Project leaders share deals on shoebox items in the [project leader Facebook group](#).
 - Form a budget based on your shoebox goal and the number of items to be collected or purchased.



Packing Party Planning Guide

Sample packing party budget

This estimate is based on 14 items per shoebox used for gifts built online through samaritanspurse.org/buildonline. The number of items in gifts will differ, depending on the size of some toys. Including at least 14 items per box is a general guide to avoid leaving empty space (fill any gaps so the box doesn't rattle).

Number of participants: 30

Number of shoeboxes packed per participant: 5

Total number of shoebox gifts: 150

Suggested donation: \$1,500

SUPPLIES



Preprinted shoeboxes, 3 cartons = \$99 + shipping

Standard shoeboxes also could be collected. Consider providing additional boxes for people to take home and pack on their own.

Adhesive labels, \$0

Adhesive and printable labels are available free of charge at samaritanspurse.org. Activating Follow Your Box labels involves an online donation of \$10 per shoebox.

\$ 99
+\$ 25
\$124

ITEMS FOR EVERY BOX

(AT LEAST 6 PER BOX)

- Notebook
- Pencils
- Pencil sharpener
- Colored pencils or crayons
- Toothbrush
- Washcloth or comb



150
x \$3*
\$450

150
x \$6*
\$900

WOW ITEMS

(AT LEAST 1 PER BOX)

Soccer ball and pump, \$6



150
x \$10
\$1,500

SUGGESTED DONATION

\$10 per shoebox

OTHER/FILLER ITEMS

(AT LEAST 7 PER BOX)

- Toy cars
- Small ball
- Flashlight
- Sunglasses
- Drawstring bag
- Fidget toy
- Small stuffed animal
- Plastic animals
- Water bottle/cup
- Hat



150
x \$10*
\$1,500

TOTAL ESTIMATE
\$4,474*



*These shoebox item prices may vary.



Packing Party Planning Guide

Collecting items and donations

- List items to collect for your packing party—"every box" items, wow items, and other/filler items. See [gift suggestions](#) as a starting point. Determine what age ranges you will include. See the appendix for event set-up ideas based on one or all of the age ranges.
- Determine how to collect these items. Here are three popular ways churches and groups collect items:
 - Designated shopper(s)—A person or small group shops for all of the items from funds that have been raised, donated, or budgeted.
 - Designated shopper and participant shopping—A person purchases "every box" items from funds that have been raised, donated, or budgeted, while participants purchase and donate the "wow" items and fun filler items in advance.
 - Participant shopping—Participants purchase and donate all items needed for the packing party in advance.
- Monthly shopping is one way to find deals. The group can create a private Facebook group for members to share deals each month.
- Use our [packing party planning tool](#) to guide you in what types of items to collect for your packing party. It creates sign-up lists to send to participants via email to manage the items needed for the event. This can include links to where you suggest they purchase items.
- Create a display for your church lobby or group common space that will encourage members to commit to provide certain items. For example, create a tree with tags that have a shopping list on the back that members can take and return with the items. The pastor encouraging participation from the pulpit, or group leader to members, tends to increase traffic to the display.

Gift Suggestions



Planning Tool



Preparing for the party and gaining volunteer support

Before you begin promoting the event, be sure to consider the following questions:

- Who, if anyone, will need to approve this event on behalf of the church or group?
 - If you need to get approval from church or group leadership, review the [Sharing the Vision](#) resource to help you prepare for this meeting.
 - If you are unable to get approval for a church- or group-wide event, don't be discouraged. Start with a smaller group. Some project leaders have shared how churchwide participation began with youth groups.
- Where and when will our event be?
 - This will depend on the number of shoeboxes you plan to prepare and the number of people who will be involved. Many churches use their fellowship hall. Some church and groups use outdoor spaces in the summer or fall to pack shoeboxes.
 - When setting the date, make sure you allow plenty of time for shopping. Collecting items six months to a year in advance is recommended.
- Where will I store items that have been purchased or donated?
 - This is important to think through, as storage space can be limited. You will need designated space to sort, prepare, and store items. It is common to host packing parties close to National Collection Week, the third week of November, so shoebox gifts can go directly to a drop-off location and do not have to be stored. Plan whether you will store or donate any leftover items that weren't packed in shoebox gifts.



Packing Party Planning Guide

- What items will be needed in preparation for packing?
 - Preparation for the packing party can provide additional fellowship and service opportunities for the church or group. Many of these projects can be done while seated, making them conducive to senior adult participation. Projects can include:
 - Folding and labeling boxes
 - Removing oversized packaging (Some packaging can help cushion items and add to the excitement of opening a gift, but if it takes up significant space in the shoebox and prevents other items from being included, removing it is recommended.)
 - Counting and sorting—counting purchased or donated items and sorting them by age and gender
 - Other miscellaneous preparatory projects, such as banding together a soccer ball with a pump and needle and making sure that batteries accompany battery-powered flashlights
- What supplies will I need?
 - Empty shoeboxes
 - Adhesive labels
 - Signage—Find downloadable sign templates on our [packing party resources](#) webpage.
 - Tables and bins
 - Thick rubber bands
 - Letter writing station
 - Decorations—Visit our [online store](#) for items to enhance your packing party.
 - Promotional items—[Free materials](#) to promote the project are available for order, such as posters, brochures, and bulletin inserts/flyers.
- How will the packing party be set up?
 - This will depend on the event size and age range of items. See the appendix in this guide for layout ideas.
 - Accommodate those with physical limitations, such as by providing wheelchair accessibility or preparing an option to stay seated at one table rather than moving from station to station.
- What are the different roles to be filled at a packing party?
 - Decorator—Creates a festive environment through decorations such as balloon garlands and playing Christmas music. Activities also can include a photo booth or area.
 - Host—Welcomes participants and kicks off the packing party with prayer and instructions. Also signals moments of prayer when work stops and participants pray over the boxes. Prayer times also can be individualized as a participant fills each shoebox.

Online Store





Packing Party Planning Guide

- Guides/stockers—In addition to instructional signage, a large packing party might have guides to answer questions as participants move from station to station. If item tables need to be refilled, designate individuals responsible for restocking items.
- Shoebox collectors at drop-off table—Encourage participants to check that they've visited all of the party's item stations, filling each shoebox with a variety of items, and are ready to hand in a completed shoebox that is fun, full, and personalized. Allot more than one person to this role, if possible, to manage the volume.
- Post-event team—Collect any leftover items not packed in shoebox gifts, clean up the area after the event, and store the completed shoebox gifts in a designated place. Determine who will transport the boxes to an Operation Christmas Child shoebox drop-off location the third week of November and how.

Promoting the event

- Who is being invited? Is it members of your church or group, or is the event open to guests? How will they RSVP so you can gauge the number of participants for planning purposes?
- How can the packing party serve as a Gospel-focused outreach event in your community?
 - If inviting other guests to the event:
 - Include someone you've been talking with about Jesus.
 - Encourage participants to bring friends and family members, including children.
 - Consider inviting a fellow community group, such as a youth sports team.
- How will you promote the packing party?
 - Consider these communication method(s): Email, group/pulpit announcement, signage, social media, newsletter article or announcement, lobby display, small group mentions, etc.
 - Include the date, time, location, shoebox goal, and collection instructions.

Hosting the event

In preparation for the big day, it's important to go over how you intend the event to flow from one activity to another, from beginning to end. This is a special opportunity to not only pack shoebox gifts but for people to understand the mission of Operation Christmas Child and why this is so important. Here's a sample schedule:

- Welcome
 - Open with a greeting.
 - Share the purpose behind the packing party and the mission of Operation Christmas Child.
 - Give acknowledgments to donors and volunteers.
- Training
 - Provide simple instructions for each step of packing a shoebox. Consider demonstrating the process, pointing out each station to visit. Explain who the gifts will be for—gender and age group(s) for the packing party. Emphasize making each gift fun, full, and personalized. Talk about including a “wow” item to instantly delight the child. Encourage participants to rattle the box they're packing to check for empty space to fill.



Packing Party Planning Guide

- Take an empty shoebox and pray about what to give each child.
- Note the gender and age group of the child who will receive the box.
- Fill the box with a variety of shoebox gift items, different for each child.
- Personalize the gift through unique selections and by including a letter for each child.
- Display at least one sample shoebox, packed with a fun “wow” gift in a shoebox filled to the brim with a variety of toys, school supplies, and personal care items.
- Designate where participants drop off their completed shoebox gifts.
- Include directions on what to do after a shoebox is completed and dropped off, such as whether people return to the start of a line or go back to a designated table to assemble more gifts. If each participant is to pack one box, give them directions on what to do next, such as partake in refreshments.
- Encourage adults to accompany children in packing shoeboxes to reiterate the instructions.
- Point out directional signage.
- Identify a host or guides who will be available to answer questions.
- Pray as a group to open the event.
- Packing party begins.
- Share the Gospel and set aside moments for prayer throughout the event.
- Closing
 - Announce the completed number of shoeboxes.
 - Thank participants, donors, and volunteers.
 - Offer empty shoeboxes along with [How to Pack a Shoebox brochures](#) for people who would like to pack gifts on their own. Communicate a return date and location for those shoebox gifts.
 - Close in prayer.

“But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’”

—Matthew 19:14



Packing Party Planning Guide

PACKING PARTY PLANNING WORKSHEET

Setting a goal

- What is our goal?

- How much will our packing party cost?

Collecting items and donations

- Make a list of the items you will need to collect for your packing party.
 - “Every box” items

 - “Wow” items

 - Other fun items a child will love

 - Filler items

- How are we going to collect the items?

- How are we going to collect the \$10 per shoebox donation?



Packing Party Planning Guide

Preparing for the party and gaining volunteer support

- Who (if anyone) will need to approve this event?
- Where and when will our event be?
- What are the different roles to be filled to execute the packing party and who can fill these roles?
- Where will I store items as they come in?
- What items will involve preparation (folding boxes, removing excess packaging, etc.)?
- What other supplies will I need?

Promoting the event

- Who's being invited?
- How will we use this packing party as a Gospel-focused outreach event?
- When and how will we promote the event?



Packing Party Planning Guide

APPENDIX

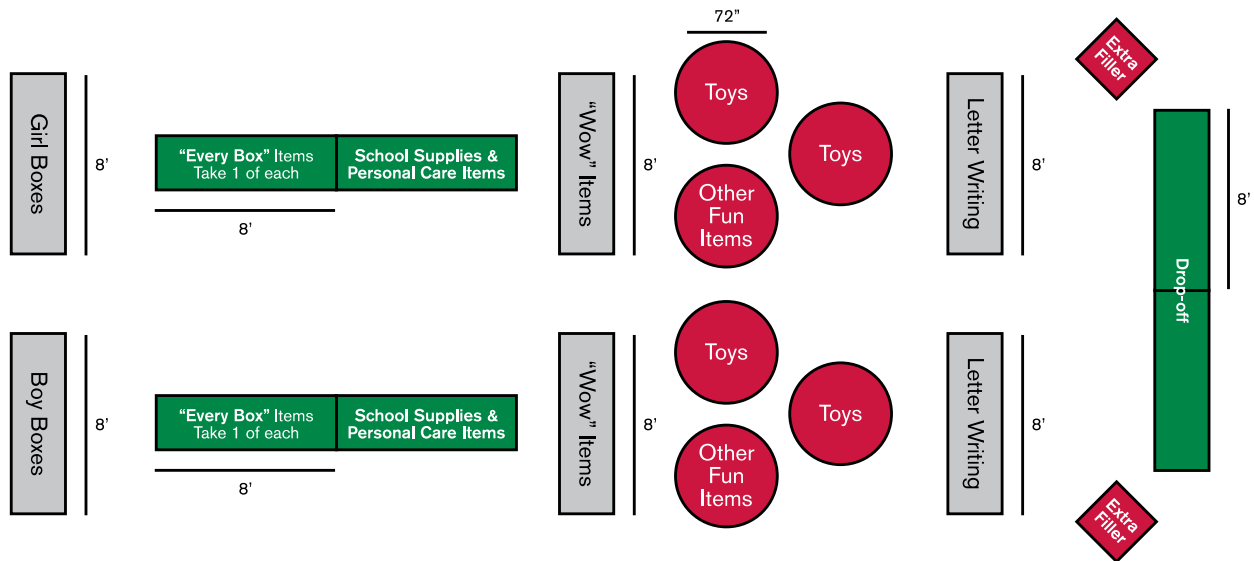
Packing party set-up ideas

Option #1: Shoebox item set up for boys and girls of one age range

Option #2: Shoebox item set up for boys and girls of all age ranges

Packing party layout

Both genders and one age range

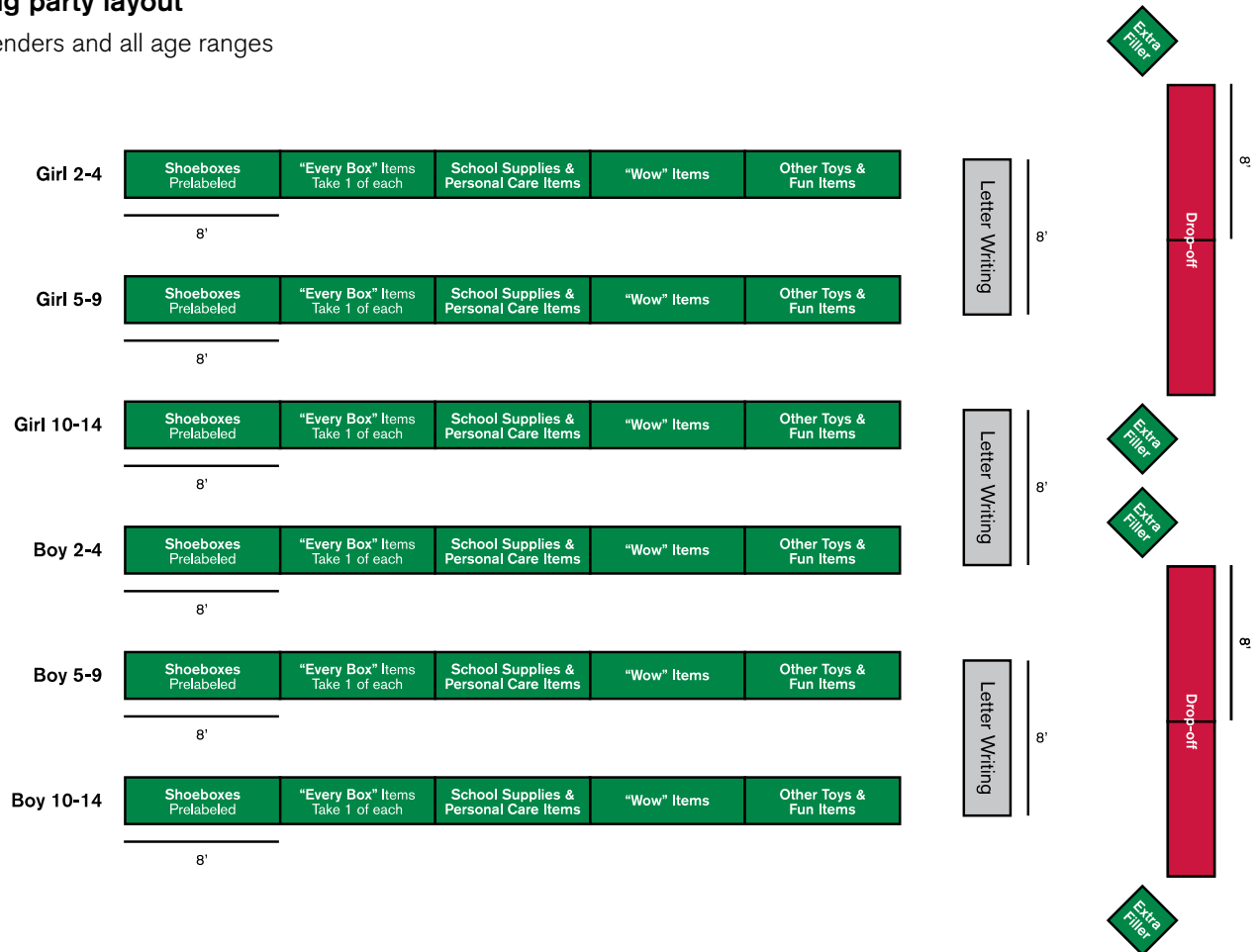




Packing Party Planning Guide

Packing party layout

Both genders and all age ranges



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