

# 5 TIPS FOR ENGAGING PANHANDLERS



## 1. Have grace and understanding for those on the streets.

Individuals who are on the streets asking for money every day are not bad people; they are just folks with incredible challenges who need help. Recent studies have shown the highest percentage of panhandling is done by people with mental illness and physical disabilities. Start from a place of compassion when thinking about or interacting with those on the streets.



## 2. Be warm and treat each person with kindness.



Many times the most important thing you can give someone panhandling on the streets is a kind disposition and a smile. Look them in the eyes, and acknowledge them as a human beings when you walk by.

## 3. Think twice about giving them money.

The vast majority of those you see panhandling on a regular basis are people with substance abuse issues. Again, this doesn't make them bad people, but it does mean that the vast majority of the money you give to a frequent panhandler is going to be used to buy drugs and alcohol. Giving a panhandler cash, in most circumstances, will not benefit that person long-term. When approached by someone soliciting a donation from you, consider giving that person food or some other essential item as a substitute for cash.



## 4. Know what's available in the community.



Your community provides a regular regimen of publicly available meals that are cooked and served by passionate volunteers. In addition, community centers offering clothing and other essential items to homeless individuals, and shelters are available for most people who need help finding refuge. Be aware of these resources, and help steer people toward them, if asked. Many panhandlers may not be interested in these options, but your knowledge of them will empower you to direct people to sources that can help provide their most basic needs.

## 5. Push community leaders to invest in solutions.

Long-term investments in shelters, permanent housing, and social and mental health remedies are the only way to fix the underlying causes of panhandling. Use your voice to let elected and civic leaders know how you feel, and express your support for continued homeless solutions, even if those solutions cost money. Remember that many of the most frequent panhandlers are people with physical and mental disabilities that make it impossible for them to just "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." The most vulnerable among us need our help getting off the streets, and many of them will need our help staying off the streets. Your voice will be critical when it comes to helping our community's leaders understand this reality.

