

Backpack Program Tool Kit

Hunger is a national problem, and even more so an Arkansas problem. 19.7% of Arkansans are food insecure, meaning one in five struggle to provide enough food for their family. For most households, food insecurity is a measure of food access problems, anxiety and poor nutrition, rather than “missing meals.” It is far worse for children and senior citizens; 28.4% of Arkansas children have limited access to adequate food, and 25.4% of seniors face the threat of hunger, the worst average in the United States. Our mission is to improve the lives of hungry Arkansans. We empower and provide dignity and hope to families, and contribute to improved academics for children by providing nutritious food.

Food For Kids is now in its 20th year of serving Arkansas students, grades K-12, who display educational, physical, or emotional problems at school due to hunger at home. Food For Kids does this by providing backpacks filled with kid-friendly, nourishing food. As the need continues to grow, Arkansas Rice Depot will be redeploying our resources to where the need is greatest. This will allow us to focus on a few schools where the need is extremely high and there are very few, if any, other organizations available to feed these children.

We realize the need still remains in your school and we hope you will find this tool kit helpful as you work to meet those needs. Continuing the backpack program for your students will require the cooperation and support of the entire community! This tool kit will provide you with suggestions and tips on ways to engage school officials, community organizations, and faith-based organizations.

The backpack program tool kit includes:

1. How to identify new partners
2. Advice on how to sustain your backpack program
3. Templates and sample documents to easily set up food and fund drives
4. Suggestions on how to collaborate with other community minded organizations

All that you do to support the children in your school and community is a gift! We know your efforts will continue to be blessed! If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact us!

Where do we start?

Step 1. Determine how many students your backpack program can serve and how frequently.

Initially, you may need to serve less students or with less frequency than you have previously. This may mean that you only send home weekend backpacks, you no longer offer snacks, or you only serve students with extreme need. Referring a family to a local food pantry is an easy way for an entire family to receive assistance while reserving backpack food items for students who have no other alternative.

Once you know how many students you will serve and how often, determine what kinds of food your backpack program will offer.

Step 2. Create a food wish list or menu for your program.

Developing a food wish list and/or menu provides consistency to the types of food your backpack program provides. Items that are shelf-stable, easy to open, and are single servings tend to work best. Your wish list and/or menu can be updated as needed. A sample food wish list and menu is provided in the enclosed *Tools for a Successful Food Drive*.

Step 3. Determine how much food your school will need and ways to obtain it.

It is important that you **try and maintain three to five weeks worth of food** for your backpack program. This will allow you some flexibility in purchasing food and/or coordinating food drives. A weekend bag will cost around \$5. If your program serves an average of 40 students that is about \$200/weekend or \$800/month. Food will be the largest expense for your backpack program. There are several ways to offset the expenses of the backpack program.

- **Hold a food drive or ask others to hold a food drive on your behalf!**

Engage your local community clubs, faith-based organizations, or PTO to host food drives. Provide them with your food wish list or ask them to collect a single food item, for example Beanee Weenees. Civic groups can also help assemble weekend food bags. More tips can be found in *Tools for a Successful Food Drive*.

- **Ask for donations!**

Reach out to local grocers and see if you can purchase food items at a discounted rate. They might even donate food items to you!

- **Seek out sponsors!**

Your school can work with local churches, civic groups, or businesses to sponsor your backpack program. Encourage potential partners to support your backpack program for an entire school year, a month, or for a particular item.

- **Partner with other community focused organizations!**

At any given point there are numerous community focused organizations doing good work right in your community! Your backpack program and these organizations can work together in a variety of ways. For example, have attendees bring a food donation as an entrance fee or get a \$1 off a ticket when you bring a food donation to a local sporting event.

Step 4. Share your success!

Let your sponsors and supporters know how they have made a difference in your backpack program. Invite your students to write thank you notes or draw pictures as a way to say thank you. Share them and other stories about the program with your sponsors and supporters.

FAQs

How many students should my program serve?

We recommend you serve students that face extreme need. Initially, you may need to serve less students or with less frequency than you have previously. This may mean that you only send home weekend backpacks or you no longer offer snacks. Referring a family to a local food pantry is an easy way for an entire family to receive assistance while reserving backpack food items for students whose parents are not willing or able to access local pantries.

How much does a backpack program cost?

Food will be the largest expense for your backpack program. A weekend bag will cost around \$5. If your program serves an average of 40 students that is about \$200/weekend or \$800/month.

My school can't afford a backpack program! What do I do?

The easiest way to offset the expense of the backpack program is to hold food drives. Your school can also work with local churches, civic groups, or businesses to sponsor your backpack program. Be creative! Reach out to local grocers and see if you can purchase food items at a discounted rate. Ask for donations! Some businesses even offer grant opportunities you can apply for.

Tips:

- Provide items that are shelf-stable, easy for children of all ages to open, and are single servings.
- Do not include food in glass containers as this could be a safety risk for the child.
- Build a relationship with your local food pantry or soup kitchen. Referring a family to a local food pantry is an easy way for an entire family to receive assistance while reserving backpack food items for students in extreme need.

**Unsure if there is a food pantry in your area? Check the
Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance Membership Directory, <http://tinyurl.com/phhfsdr>**

- Include additional community resources or event information like free health screenings, information about SNAP or WIC, recipes, or free family events with the bags.

Tools for a Successful Food Drive

Step 1. Get Organized

- **Set a date for your food drive.**

We recommended holding your food drive over a week or two to allow time for people to get food donations. Your food drive could be for a single day during a set time period. Or consider an event related food drive - like a sporting event and set up collection sites at the event.

- **Decide on your drop-off location.**

Consider offering more than one location for people to bring their donations.

Step 2. Be Creative

- **Pick a theme or slogan.**

A theme is a fun way to build excitement around your food drive. Encourage participants to bring just one kind of item (fruit or vegetables) or make each day it's own category (breakfast, snacks, dinner). You can choose to collect any nonperishable food item or items specific to your food wish list.

- **Set a goal!**

Having a goal boosts participation, whether it's 500 pounds or 500 food items. Be sure to communicate your goal and if possible your progress during the food drive.

- **Have fun!**

Have contests between classes or departments to see who can collect the most food items. Make the food drive a fun service project that will get your group excited about helping others in a tangible way.

Step 3. Communicate

Let people know about your food drive! Create posters or flyers to advertise your food drive or use the enclosed template. Be sure to include all the important details in the space provided (gray box): *date, drop off location, types of food collected*. You can also let people know through email, Facebook, or Twitter.

Step 4. Follow Up

Congratulations! You completed your food drive. Let people know how successful it was. Send a thank you note, call or email to those who participated. Let them know how much food was donated and the impact it will have on your program.

Note:

After a successful food drive have volunteers assemble weekend food bags for your backpack program! Weekend food bags can be assembled using your menu or other assembly instructions into gallon sized reusable bags. Complete bags can be packaged in boxes for easier storage, this way they're ready to slip into backpacks quickly on Fridays. This is a great volunteer activity and makes packing backpacks even easier for the school!

Sample Food Wish List

Meats & Meals

- Vienna Sausage
- Canned Tuna or Chicken
- Canned Soups
- Chili
- Chef Boyardee Pasta Meals
- Spaghetti's
- Tuna/Chicken Lunch Kits
- Beanee Weenees
- Macaroni and Cheese
- Canned Soup
- Peanut Butter

Sides

- Vegetables
- Pork and Beans

Snacks

- Peanut Butter/Cheese Crackers
- Granola Bars
- Fruit Cups
- Applesauce
- Pudding

Breakfast

- Individual Cereal
- Instant Oatmeal
- Fruit/Cereal Bars

Sample Menu

Weekend Kit - Select items from the appropriate categories above.

Number of Items	Category
2	Breakfast
5	Meats & Meals
5	Snacks
2	Sides

Helpful Hints

Engage your local community clubs and faith-based organizations to host food drives. Food drives are great team building activities for businesses as well! Provide them with your food wish list or ask them to collect a single food item. Civic groups can also help assemble weekend food bags. Examples include, Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Boy or Girl Scouts, Mens and Womens Church Groups, or Youth Groups.

FOOD DRIVE

Will you help feed a child in need?

Please show your support and help feed students on the backpack program by donating food items from our wish list.

Meats & Meals

- Vienna Sausage
- Canned Tuna or Chicken
- Canned Soups
- Chili
- Chef Boyardee Pasta Meals
- Spaghetti's
- Tuna/Chicken Lunch Kits
- Beanee Weenees
- Macaroni and Cheese
- Canned Soup
- Peanut Butter

Sides

- Vegetables
- Pork and Beans

Snacks

- Peanut Butter/Cheese Crackers
- Granola Bars
- Fruit Cups
- Applesauce
- Pudding

Breakfast

- Individual Cereal
- Instant Oatmeal
- Fruit/Cereal Bars