



FOOD
4
KIDS
ARKANSAS
FOOD BANK

TOOLKIT
Backpack Program

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Backpack Program Toolkit

This Backpack Program Toolkit is intended to serve as a guide for any school or organization that wishes to improve, expand or begin their own self-sponsored backpack program. Backpack food programs are commonly run by volunteers and sustained by donations from community members and private foundations.

Hunger is a national problem, and even more so an Arkansas problem. 1 in 5 Arkansans are food-insecure, which means they struggle to find sufficient access to nutritious food. 25% of Arkansas children are facing hunger, and in some rural areas, it's even higher. Statistics like these are what ranks Arkansas second in the nation for food-insecurity. (*Feeding America, 2018*)

Food insecurity is not simply about missing meals – instead, it describes a household's inability to provide enough food for every person to live an active, healthy life. Food insecurity is one way that we can measure and assess the risk of hunger in our neighborhoods, cities and entire state.

Research proves that by providing nutritious food to children, not only do academics improve, but emotional, and behavioral advances are made as well.

ABOUT BACKPACK PROGRAMS

Every backpack food program is unique to the community and school it serves. Generally, backpack food programs provide a bag of nonperishable child-friendly food to students in need that they can take home and eat when school meal programs are unavailable. These bags are often distributed at school to participating children in plastic bags as they leave Friday or before a long break. Distributing the food on Friday helps to ensure that the food is eaten over the weekend and not through the week.

The contents of the bag can vary depending on the food and donations available. Backpack programs do not have any state or federal legislation around the contents of the bags being sent home, this means that federal reimbursement is not available for the food provided by backpack food programs. Each bag contains breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snack items for one day. One day's worth of food equals one bag, so distribute two bags per child every Friday.

Distribution can be handled in many different ways. Depending on the type of school or age of the students, food may be distributed at the school office,

counselor's office, or in another central location inside or outside of the school. Some schools drop the bags off at the last class of the day and the teachers help with distribution. Schools may distribute the plastic bags of food by placing them in secondary backpacks, or they may even place the plastic food bags directly into the child's primary backpack if space allows.

WHEN TO CREATE A BACKPACK PROGRAM

The free or reduced-priced school meal information can help you determine whether or not to create a backpack food program. Children who receive free or reduced-priced school meals are commonly considered high need and likely participants for your backpack food program. A good tool for estimating need at a school is to use 20% of the number of students that are currently enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program.

Many children who are eligible to receive free or reduced price school meals may be left without an adequate supply of nutritious food on the weekends or when school is not in session. Other likely participants are McKinney-Vento students, this is a federal law that ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth.

The Backpack Program is specifically targeted toward chronically hunger children. The term "chronically hungry" refers to children who, for whatever reason consistently have little or no access to food at home on the weekends.

The term Backpack Program is trademarked by the national organization Feeding America.© Unless you are working directly with Feeding America,© it is recommended you create a new unique name that considers the characteristics of your community and mission of your program.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- When choosing the school to launch a backpack program with, consider how the program will affect the children of the school.
- If it is a high need school (40% or more of students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals), you may be serving a large number of students.
- If it is a non-high need school (less than 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals), you may be serving a small group of children.
- No matter the type of school you work with, think about the possibility of unintentionally creating a stigma for the children that receive the

food bag. Additionally, children who may not receive a bag may feel bad themselves and envious of the other children. Consider how you can hand out the bags so no child feels bad about participating or sad for not participating in the program.

IDENTIFYING CHRONIC HUNGER IN CHILDREN

A child who complains about being hungry is not necessarily a child who is chronically hungry. Growing children will have an appetite and say they are hungry at periods throughout the day. However, in the case of a chronically hungry child, certain questions can be asked to assess their need. Asking if they ate breakfast, or if there is enough food in their home on the weekends may provide needed information. By listening to students and maintaining contact with parents, needs can be assessed to help determine if the child should receive a backpack.

Chronic hunger impacts a child's ability to function at school. Be mindful of these warning signs, a chronically hungry child may exhibit excessive absences, have difficulty forming friendships, exhibit irritable behavior, excessive sickness, and an inability to concentrate.

STEPS FOR GETTING STARTED

PLAN THE SPECIFICS OF YOUR PROGRAM:

Once you understand the needs of the school and the resources you have, begin planning the details of your program. Begin to answer these questions:

1. How many children will most likely be involved in your backpack food program? - *Estimate the number of children in the program using the school's Free and Reduced Eligibility Data.*

Signs of Chronic Childhood Hunger

Behavioral Indicators

- Rushing food lines
- Extreme hunger on Monday morning
- Eating all of the food served
- Lingering around for seconds

Physical Appearance

- Extreme thinness
- Puffy, swollen skin
- Chronically dry, cracked lips
- Chronically dry, itchy eyes

School Performance

- Excessive absences or tardiness
- Hyperactive, aggressive, irritable, anxious, withdrawn, distressed, passive/aggressive
- Repetition of a grade
- Sickness
- Short attention span

Home Environment

- Often cooks own meal
- Moves frequently
- Loss of income

2. How many grades will participate in the program? *For planning purposes, some schools opt to serve children in lower grades before adding children in higher grades. This is up to your organization as to how you would like to proceed.*
3. What languages does your community require? English? Spanish? - *Make sure you provide flyers and handouts in all languages needed.*
4. How and where will you package the food? - *Many programs bring the food they purchase to the school to package. Other programs use a central location outside of the school to store and package the bags and then deliver them weekly to the school for distribution. Think about the model that will work best for you.*
5. What day of the week will you pack the food bags? - *Packaging is commonly completed on Thursdays.*
6. Does the school have a room or space available to store the food for the program?
7. Is the cafeteria or another common area available for you and your volunteers to pack the food?
8. How will you distribute the food bags? - *Many programs work with teachers to distribute the bags to the students. Other programs distribute the food in a central location. Think about which model will work best for your program and will make the children feel the best about receiving the bags.*
9. What day of the week will you distribute the food bags? - *Bags are usually distributed on Fridays.*
10. Are you going to distribute additional food or resources for extended breaks?
11. What month during the school year will the program begin?
12. As the school year comes to a close, what month will the program end?
13. How do you want children to join the program? Can families opt-in or opt-out of the program?

SCHEDULE A MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL:

For this meeting, you will want the principal, school food service professional(s) and counselor(s) present. All of these individuals play a role in a backpack program and it is important to have buy-in from everyone as early

as possible. Keep in mind, that unless, you already have funding, the program may not start until the following school year.

What are the school's requirements? This could include food delivery specifications, storage specifications, communication with parents, student confidentiality, background checks for volunteers entering school, and food restrictions, etc.

Cover details regarding properly storing food, safe food handling practices, First In First Out (FIFO - an inventory rotation method ensuring older items are used before newer ones), product dating, and expiration dates.

Discuss how many students could be served at the school. If this is a large number, talk about a tiered start. Just because the need is 200 students, does not mean you have to start off being able to feed that many students. You can grow into it. Coming up with some tiered potential benchmarks will help you later when figuring out costs, budgeting, and what you can afford.

Discuss the necessity for school staff members to help identify chronically hunger students. Who will be responsible for this task? Should there be communication with parents about participation in the program?

Don't be afraid to start small. We recommend serving as many students as you can with the initial resources you have available. Ask the partnering school to keep a waitlist of children identified as needing the program that are above and beyond the number you can serve. Sharing the number of students on a waitlist with potential donors is a powerful fundraising tool and you will be able to grow more fully to meet the demand after your initial launch.

SEEK OUT SPONSORS:

Corporate Sponsors - work with local corporations to fund the program. Most corporate sponsors continue to support year after year.

Community Sponsors - work with your local community, i.e. Rotary clubs, Kiwanis, places of worship, business leaders, and local companies to fund the program. With local sponsors you are able to get the community involved and invested, which is a great strategy for long-term sustainability.

- Your school or organization will need to identify sources of potential funding to sustain the backpack program. You will need members or volunteers who are comfortable with and willing to solicit donations or plan fundraising events on behalf of the program.
- Be ready to adjust what you ask for, if a potential sponsor is reluctant to support your program for an entire school year, ask if they will support quarterly, or monthly, or if they will purchase a particular food item.

PARTNER WITH OTHER COMMUNITY FOCUSED ORGANIZATIONS:

At any given moment there are numerous community focused organizations doing good work in your community. Your backpack program and these organizations can team up and work together in a variety of ways.

- **Grants** - work with a team to search for grant opportunities that focus on children. Grants are often a one-time donation.
- At a **sporting** or other **local event**, ask attendees to bring food donations as the cost of admittance or for a discounted ticket.
- Partner with a **Public Library** to host a “Food For Fines” event.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT:

The first step in launching a successful backpack program is making sure that your school or organization has the capacity to effectively manage the program.

Once you’ve confirmed that your organization has the capacity needed to successfully launch and manage a self-sponsored backpack program, you’ll need to foster positive relationships with community members, set fundraising goals, and recruit volunteers in order to be successful.

Your organization will need a base of volunteers and/or staff who can assist with packing the food into bags for distribution. The amount of people needed will depend upon the amount of bags you are packing. For 100 bags or less, we recommend between 5 and 10 volunteers. Packing sessions usually take 1 to 2 hours to complete.

Recruit volunteers for packing sessions from businesses that have made financial donations to your program. Many companies are looking to engage their employees with the community beyond just financial gifts, so providing volunteer opportunities to funders is often a great way to build donor loyalty and deepen their commitment to your cause. Also reach out to volunteer groups at local high schools such as National Honor Societies and Key Clubs. These students are often looking for community service opportunities.

A strong and dependable group of volunteers and/or staff will be essential to keeping your program organized and successful. Because of the lifting and labor required to package and distribute the bags, it is recommended most volunteers are able to lift 25 pounds.

ACQUIRING & STORING FOOD

CREATE A FOOD WISH LIST & MENU:

Developing a food wish list or menu establishes consistency for the types of food your backpack program solicits and provides. Items that are shelf-stable, easy to open, and are single servings tend to work best. Your wish list or menu can be updated as needed. Here are some important considerations:

1. The weight of the bag. Each bag should be five to seven percent of the child's body weight. For a 65 pound child, each bag should be about four pounds.
2. The packaging of the food. DO NOT include food in glass containers as this could be a safety risk for the child.
3. Consider the cooking utensils and tools the child has available. If parents are working and the child will be preparing her/his own food, include cans with pop-off tops that do not require a can opener. Include foods that are ready to eat or require little to no cooking as the child may not have access to a kitchen, stove, or a microwave.
4. Only include NONPERISHABLE food. Including fresh food, like fresh produce, can create difficult food safety and storage problems. If you do wish to include fresh food, consider how you will safely store it until it is distributed. Will you need a refrigerator? Will you pack shelf-stable and fresh items on the same or different days?
5. Give every child the same brand, type, and flavor of food. Providing every child with the same option reduces envy among children and maintains nutritional consistency among your menus. This is done best by purchasing food as opposed to depending on food donation drives.
6. Consider the possible allergies, health issues, diverse religious, and cultural backgrounds children may have that would affect their food

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
- Beanie Weenies
- Macaroni and Cheese

Sides

- Canned Vegetables
- Pork and Beans

Snacks

- Cheese Crackers
- Granola Bars
- Fruit Cups
- Applesauce
- Pudding

Breakfast

- Individual Cereal
- Instant Oatmeal
- Fruit/Cereal Bar

preferences. Ask parents to provide information about their children’s allergies and/or cultural food preferences. Budget for allergy and/or cultural replacement foods. These food preferences may change the cost of your food. Be sure to budget a little extra each month for these food replacements.

Sample Menu: Select items from the appropriate categories.

Number of Items	Category
2	Breakfast
4	Meals
2	Snacks
4	Sides

The Sample Food Wish List and Sample Menu are meant to give organizers an idea about what types of food items and amounts are appropriate to include in the backpacks. Schools and organizations are encouraged to create menus that are sustainable and make sense for their students and communities.

Remember it is okay to start small and grow your program slowly. A manageable approach might be to offer limited snacks and sides and only serve students identified as being in extreme need. Distribution is normally weekly, on Fridays, but initially you may distribute less frequently.

HOST A SUCCESSFUL FOOD DRIVE:

Step 1. Get Organized

- Set a date for your food drive. We recommended holding your food drive over the course of one or two weeks, this gives people ample time to donate. But your food drive can be held on a single day during a set time period. Consider an event related food drive, like a sporting event or concert, and set up collection sites at the event.
- Decide on your drop-off location. To maximize collection efforts, consider offering multiple locations for people to drop their donations off at.
- Determine who will pick up the food once the drive is completed. Determine how many vehicles and volunteers will be needed, and where the donated food will be delivered to.

Step 2. Be Creative

- Pick a theme or slogan. A theme is one way to build excitement around your food drive. Encourage participants to bring just one kind of item (canned fruit or vegetables) or make each day its own category (breakfast, snacks, or meals). 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 share your progress during the food drive on flyers/posters, Social Media, radio, and/or local news sources.
- Generate Interest. Have contests between schools, classes, and departments to see who can collect the most food items. Challenge organizations and business to collect food items too. Make the food drive an engaging service project that will get groups 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. Be sure to include all the important details: *date, drop off location, types of food collected*. You can also let people know about your food drive through email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and any local media outlets specific to your community.

Step 4. Share Your Success

- You completed your food drive. Let people know how successful it was. Send a thank you note, call or email those who participated. Let them know how much food was donated and the impact it will have on the program. Let your sponsors and supporters know how they have made a difference in your backpack program.
- Keep in mind that hunger is a sensitive and personal issue. Invite students to write anonymous thank you notes or draw pictures as a way to show their appreciation. It is important to maintain student confidentiality, as students who will be a part of the program will probably be low-income and/or food-insecure and are therefore a vulnerable population. Share pictures and stories about the program

with your sponsors and supporters. Use social media platforms to highlight your program.

SAFE FOOD STORAGE & SPACE:

You will need storage space where food can be safely stored before it is packaged and distributed.

It is important that you **try and maintain three to five weeks' worth of food** on hand for your backpack program. This gives you some flexibility in purchasing food and/or coordinating food drives. Each weekend bag will cost around \$5. If your program serves an average of 40 students, that is about \$200 per weekend or \$800 a month. Food will be the single greatest expense of your backpack program. If you purchase gallon size plastic bags to put the food items in, secondary backpacks, and/or items to store the food in or on - this will add to your total cost.

Having storage space at the school makes setting up food packaging and organizing delivery much easier for volunteers and program leaders. Ask your school if they have a closet or small room available where the program will be able to store food or materials. If you store food, make sure:

- To be in accordance with food safety rules and that food is four inches off the ground and six inches from the wall.
- Your storage space is rodent-proof, heated/cooled, and easily accessible to you and your volunteers.
- If a space is unavailable, consider what you will need to do to deliver food weekly to your school.

PLANNING TRANSPORTATION:

Is the food stored and packed on school property or offsite? If offsite, how will the packed food get to the school site? It is important to consider how often you will need to stock up on supplies, and how to transport the food based on where it is stored/packed/distributed. Does the school or organization have a vehicle? Would a volunteer be able to donate their time and vehicle? Do you need a large vehicle like a truck, SUV or van?

TIPS:

Buy food in bulk to reduce costs: Purchasing large quantities of food at bulk retailers, like Costco or Sam's Club, can cut down on costs. These retailers usually require a paid membership to shop.

Ask your local grocery store if they have any special deals and/or are willing to donate some food: Talk with your local food retailers and describe your program. They may be willing to donate or provide food at a lower cost.

Hold a food drive or ask others to hold a food drive on your behalf: Engage your local community clubs, faith-based organizations, or Parent Teacher Organizations to host food drives. Provide them with your food wish list or ask them to collect a single food item, for example beanie weenies or applesauce.

Be careful when receiving personal food donations: Accepting individual food donations makes getting consistent types of food more difficult. Food donations are helpful if you can secure large quantities of similar types and brands of food to ensure consistent food bags.

ENROLLING CHILDREN IN YOUR PROGRAM

There are two effective ways to sign up children for your program:

- 1. Opt-In:** A letter is sent home to parents describing the program and providing parents with a tear-off form to fill out and return to your mailbox in the school office. This letter should be distributed to families about two weeks before you hope to start your program. A sample *Letter to Parents (Opt-In)* is included at the end of this Toolkit.
- 2. Opt-Out:** Ask teachers to identify students who they think would benefit from the program and send a bag of food home with the children. Include a Letter to Parents with the first bag. A sample *Letter to Parents (Opt-Out)* is included at the end of this Toolkit. **DO NOT** tell the parents their teacher recommended their child to the program as it could create a difficult situation for the teacher and child.

Effective programs utilize both methods increasing program participation. The Opt-In strategy encourages parent engagement. The Opt-Out strategy encourages teacher engagement. Use both strategies when spreading the word about your program.

Depending on your school and its needs, you may decide to administer the backpack program without the need for parental consent. In this case, backpacks can be distributed to children at your discretion.

OTHER WAYS TO COMBAT CHILDHOOD HUNGER

A backpack food program is just one way to help chronically hunger children. Working with the other child nutrition programs available in your community, like School Meals, the School Breakfast Program, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Afterschool Snack and Meal Programs, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP - formerly known as Food Stamps), can help you serve your community even better in tandem with a backpack program can.

HELP YOUR SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE ADVERTISE AND COLLECT SCHOOL MEAL APPLICATIONS.

- The Free and Reduced Price Eligibility data comes from the information gathered in School Meal Applications. Additionally, information that qualifies schools for additional education funding, like Title 1 funding and E-Rate funding comes from these applications.
- Include a School Meal Application in the food bag at the beginning of each semester or year.
- Include additional community resources or event information like free health screenings, recipes, or free family events with the bags.

INCLUDE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM (SFSP) AS YOUR SCHOOL APPROACHES SUMMER.

- Free meals for any child 18 years old and under are available at various sites during the summer.
- Include summer food outreach materials with the food bags.

ENCOURAGE YOUR SCHOOL TO CREATE OR EXPAND THEIR SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM.

- Like lunch, breakfast can be provided to students free of charge or at a reduced price. If your school does not offer breakfast, advocate for school breakfast to be provided.
- Encourage a school that already has school breakfast to create a Breakfast-in-the-Classroom program, free to all students. Serving breakfast in the class either during homeroom or first period is one of the most effective ways of ensuring all children have access to breakfast.

ENCOURAGE SCHOOLS TO GET INVOLVED WITH THE AFTERSCHOOL SNACK AND MEAL PROGRAM.

- Some high need schools may qualify or may already operate an afterschool nutrition program that provides snacks or meals to their students during afterschool activities.

ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO SIGN UP FOR SNAP.

- Many of the children that you will serve may qualify for SNAP, which provides families with money each month to purchase supplemental groceries.
- Include a SNAP application or other resources like Women Infants and Children (WIC) in the food bags.

Eligibility requirements for the above programs can be found at the end of this document.

REFER FAMILIES TO A LOCAL FOOD PANTY OR SOUP KITCHEN

Build a relationship with your local food pantry or soup kitchen. Referring a family to a local food pantry is an effective way for an entire family to receive assistance while reserving backpack food items for students in extreme need.

START A SCHOOL PANTRY

If a child is hungry, chances are the entire household is hungry too. A **school food pantry** offers food to the entire family, and eases the guilt of a child having food on the weekends when others in the household are going without. School pantries not only serve as food distribution sites in vulnerable areas, but also function as vital community resource hubs where families feel welcomed, supported, and safe.

If after assessing your readiness to start a backpack program, you determine that you can better meet the needs of your students and their families by starting a school pantry, contact a member of the Arkansas Foodbank's Agency Relations Department at 501-565-8121 to ask about becoming an Agency Partner.

Who qualifies to become an agency partner?

- The organization must be a 501c3 nonprofit organization or a church.
- Serve schools with 50% or more of its students eligible for free or reduced priced meals.
- Order food at least 6 times a year.
- Hold regular distributions at least once a month, and display distribution dates and times outside the pantry.

Why become an agency partner?

Agency Partners get access to food at wholesale pricing rates without having to dedicate the staff or volunteer time to source it

independently. The Arkansas Foodbank often has food items available at zero cost. Agency Partners are offered safe food handling classes and other trainings. Partners are notified about food recall items and grant opportunities. Partnering with the Arkansas Foodbank can lend credibility to your efforts with local donors when applying for grants.

APPENDIX

The sample documents that follow are meant to give organizers an idea about what types of records they should be creating and keeping for their backpack program. This list of documents is not meant to be exhaustive and should be tailored to suit your organizational needs.

BACKPACK PROGRAM REFERRAL FORM

Child's Name: _____ Grade: _____

Age: _____ Teacher _____

The Backpack Program is only for children who are in danger of chronic hunger on weekends. The program provides backpacks of food on Friday to children who might otherwise not have food over the weekend. To refer a child to the Backpack Program, please check one or more of the following behaviors that the child displays on a *regular* basis. *At least one item on this list **MUST** be checked to refer the child to the Backpack Program.*

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rushing food lines morning | <input type="checkbox"/> Extreme hunger on Monday |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eating all of the food served seconds | <input type="checkbox"/> Linger around for or asking for seconds |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saving/hoarding/ food enough food | <input type="checkbox"/> Comments about not having enough food |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other information regarding the child's home situation that requires the need for food | |

(Be as thorough as possible in your explanation):

- Short attention span/inability to concentrate
- Chronic behavior problems (hyperactive, irritable, anxious, withdrawn, etc.)

Name/title of person referring the student: _____

Date of referral: _____

Completed by School Coordinator:

Date Approved: _____ *Approved by:* _____

Permission Form for Parents

After you have identified students who you think might be a good fit for the program, you may want to send home a parent permission slip. Below is an example of a template you might use.

Dear Parents,

Your child has been invited to participate in our Backpack Program, a program of the Arkansas Foodbank. The mission of the Backpack Program is to help solve child hunger by providing nutritious and easy-to-prepare foods to children to take home on weekends and school vacations.

Your child can pick up his/her backpack every Friday at the end of the school day at _____ (location). Backpacks must be returned the following Monday so they can be prepared for the next week.

Your permission is needed for your child to participate in the Backpack Program. Please indicate if you would like your child to participate by checking one of the options below:

_____ YES, my child may participate in the Backpack Program.

_____ NO, my child may not participate in the Backpack Program.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Contact _____ at _____ if you have questions about the Backpack Program.

Oernusi de los Padres

Queridos Padres/Tutores,

Nos gustaría informarles que

_____ puede participar en el Programa Mochila, un programa del Banco de Comida del Arkansas. Este programa, el cual se esta ofreciendo a la escuela de su hijo, se dedica a mejorar la vida de los niños del Este de Texas proveyendo mochilas llenas de alimentos que le gustan a los niños en edad elemental y que no necesitan refrigeración para los fines de semana.

Se necesita su permiso para que su hijo(a) participe en este Programa. Por favor indique una opción si le gustaría que su hijo(a):

_____ Si, mi hijo(a) puede participar en el Programa Mochila.

_____ No, mi hijo no puede participar en el Programa Mochila.

Firma del Padre o Tutor

Contacte a _____

al _____

si usted tiene preguntas acerca del Programa Mochila.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR OTHER NUTRITION PROGRAMS

The **National School Lunch Program** and the **School Breakfast Program** provide nutritionally balanced meals to children as part of their regular school day. These programs are federally assisted meal programs that operate in approximately 100,000 public and non-profit private schools and residential child care institutions.

CATEGORICAL ELIGIBILITY Children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR) as well as foster youth, migrant, homeless, or runaway youth, and Head Start participants are “categorically eligible” (automatically eligible) for free school meals and can be certified without submitting a school meal application. Schools can utilize data from the state to certify categorically eligible students or can coordinate with the school districts homeless and migrant education liaisons to obtain documentation to certify children for free school meals.

DIRECT CERTIFICATION Schools are required to directly certify children in households participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for free school meals through a data matching process. School enrollment records are matched with SNAP enrollment records either at the state level or school district level to automatically enroll students for free school meals without the need for an application or additional paperwork. States and schools may also utilize data on households participating in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, or students who are in foster care, migrant, or homeless to directly certify other categorically eligible children.

INCOME ELIGIBILITY If a child is not categorically eligible, the child may qualify for free or reduced-price meals based on household income. These households must fill out a school meal application. Applications may only require the information necessary for a school to make an eligibility determination including:

- the names of all household members;
- the amount and source of income each member received in the previous month;
- the signature of an adult household member; and
- the last 4 digits of the Social Security number of the adult household member who signs the application, OR if the adult does not have a Social Security number, s/he must write “NONE” in that space or check the box, “I do not have a Social Security number,” if provided.

The child's school then compares the household size and total income to the Federal Income Eligibility Guidelines, which determine who is eligible for free and reduced-price meals. Children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals.

For more information, see FRAC's [Reimbursement Rates and Income Guidelines for the Federal Child Nutrition Programs](#).

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) **Summer Food Service Program** (SFSP), also known as the Summer Meals Program, provides kids and teens in low-income areas free meals when school is out.

The SFSP is a federally-funded, state-administered program. The SFSP reimburses providers who serve free healthy meals to children and teens in low-income areas during the summer months when school is not in session.

There are three main players involved: State agencies, sponsors, and sites.

- State agencies administer the program and communicate with USDA.
- Sponsors enter into agreements with State agencies to run the program. Schools, local government agencies, camps, faith-based and other non-profit community organizations that have the ability to manage a food service program may be SFSP sponsors. Sponsors get reimbursed by the Program and may manage multiple sites.
- Sites are places in the community where children receive meals in a safe and supervised environment. Sites may be located in a variety of settings, including schools, parks, community centers, health clinics, hospitals, apartment complexes, churches, and migrant centers. Sites work directly with sponsors.

HOW CAN YOUR ORGANIZATION PARTICIPATE? Contact your State agency to see if you can become a site that serves summer meals. The State agency will help to see if you are located in an eligible area that can serve summer meals and connect you with a sponsor organization.

Resources:

- Check out the Summer Food Service Program website: www.summerfood.usda.gov

- Learn why organizations throughout the country serve Summer Meals:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U_93W0U3E8U&index=5&list=PLBccton6gOdp0d5Ydlil3TtRcSDtCdmzH
- Contact your State agency to talk about how you can get involved:
www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-contacts
- Find Summer Meals promotional materials:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/raise-awareness>
- Discover ways to recruit teens:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5A5KOqsVels&list=PLBccton6gOdp0d5Ydlil3TtRcSDtCdmzH&index=2>

The **Afterschool Snack Program** (ASSP) is an extension of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and may be administered by participating School Food Authorities (SFAs). Under the NSLP, the SFA may administer an afterschool care program which provides children with regularly scheduled activities in an organized, structured, and supervised environment; and includes educational or enrichment activities.

HOW DOES THE AFTERSCHOOL SNACK PROGRAM WORK? The Afterschool Program operates similar to the National School Lunch Program. Generally, public or nonprofit private schools of high school grade or under and public or nonprofit private residential child care institutions may participate in the Afterschool Snack Program. School districts and independent schools that choose to take part in the snack program receive cash subsidies from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for each snack they serve. In return, they must serve snacks that meet Federal requirements, and they must offer free or reduced price snacks to eligible children.

WHAT SITES ARE ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SCHOOL-BASED AFTERSCHOOL SNACKS PROGRAM? In order for a site to participate, a school district must run the National School Lunch Program and sponsor or operate an afterschool care program. This afterschool care program which must provide children with regularly scheduled educational or enrichment activities in a supervised environment. Contact your State agency for further information regarding program eligibility.

HOW IS AREA ELIGIBLE DEFINED? A site is area eligible if it is located at a school or in the attendance area of a school where at least 50% of the enrolled children are eligible for free and reduced price meals. For more

information, please review the afterschool snacks frequently asked questions at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/afterschool/>

WHAT ARE THE FOOD REQUIREMENTS FOR AFTERSCHOOL SNACKS?

Afterschool snacks must contain at least two different components of the following four: a serving of fluid milk; a serving of meat or meat alternate; a serving of vegetables or fruits or full strength vegetable or fruit juice; a serving of whole grain or enriched bread or cereal.

HOW DO CHILDREN QUALIFY FOR FREE AND REDUCED PRICE

AFTERSCHOOL SNACKS? Any child at a participating school may purchase a snack through the Afterschool Snack Program.

HOW MUCH REIMBURSEMENT DO SCHOOLS GET? USDA provides a cash reimbursement for each snack served to schools in the Afterschool Snack Program. For the latest reimbursement rates visit FNS website at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/rates-reimbursement>

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP- formally known as Food Stamps) helps people with low income get the food they need for good health. SNAP benefits are used in place of cash to buy food. Most people must spend some cash along with their SNAP benefits to buy enough food for a month.

SNAP is funded with United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Services dollars and is administered in Arkansas by the Arkansas Department of Human Services (DHS)

To be eligible for this program, you must be a resident of the state of Arkansas and fall into one of two groups:

- o A person or persons age 60 and over, or
- o A person with a disability (a child, your spouse, a parent, or yourself).

SNAP INCOME GUIDELINES

Household Size	Monthly Income Before Taxes & Deductions
1	\$1,383

SNAP INCOME GUIDELINES

Household Size	Monthly Income Before Taxes & Deductions
2	\$1,868
3	\$2,353
4	\$2,839
5	\$3,324

SNAP HELP CENTER

The SNAP Help Center is a team of trained Arkansas Foodbank staff and volunteers who walk people through their SNAP application, submit the application to their county DHS office, and provide information about SNAP application process, SNAP benefits and eligibility.

Contact us at snap@arkansasfoodbank.org or 501-569-4311 Mon. from Fri. from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Here's more information:

- Apply online with the Arkansas Department of Human Services ([DHS](#)) [online application](#)
- Print a DHS SNAP Application [English](#) or [Spanish](#)
- [SNAP Quick Reference Guide](#)
- [SNAP FAQs](#) (see the attached pdf for users to use as a link to access)



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