

# BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM GUIDE

Backpack food programs provide nutritious, non-perishable, easy-to-prepare food to children to ensure they get enough food on weekends and holidays to avoid hunger.



## IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

### IDENTIFY THE SCHOOL YOU WANT TO START A NEW BACKPACK PROGRAM WITH

A helpful way to determine the need of the school is to explore the percentage of students that qualify for free or reduced-priced school meals. When 40% or more of students qualify, the school is considered to be a high-need school.

### SCHEDULE A MEETING WITH THE SCHOOL TO TALK ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This meeting may include the school principal, food nutrition director, and/or the school counselor. Each person will play an important role in your backpack program, and it is important to have support from everyone.

### ATTEND A SCHOOL STAFF MEETING WITH TEACHERS AND STAFF

Teachers and staff can be great advocates for your backpack program. Additionally, teachers serve as the direct connection with students and may be the ones distributing the bags each week.

### PLAN THE PROGRAM DETAILS

How many students will be involved in your program? Can families opt-in to the program? How and where will you package and store the food? What day of the week will you pack the food bags? How will the food bags be distributed?

### MAKE A BUDGET FOR THE PROGRAM

Necessary resources include food, large containers to store food, distribution bags, a cart or dolly, and storage space.

### RECRUIT DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS

Many backpack programs are run by volunteers and sustained by community donations.

### PLAN YOUR FOOD BAGS AND PURCHASE FOOD

Click to see sample shopping list and menu:

[Sample Shopping List & Sample Menu](#)

### CONFIRM A START DATE AND LAUNCH YOUR PROGRAM!

### MEASURE THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAM

Create a strategy to measure the success of the program that incorporates parent and teacher feedback, volunteer appreciation, and an up-to-date record of student participants.

There are 18 Feeding America Food Banks that serve Texas. Visit <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/texas> to see which Food Bank is near you.

Additionally, consider partnering with community organizations such as local food pantries or food banks, churches, community clubs, and grocery stores.

# SHELF-STABLE FOOD LIST

## PROTEIN



Pop-top cans of meat (tuna, salmon, chicken), single-serve trail mix or nuts, peanut butter, soups and stews, chili, beans, beef or turkey jerky

## GRAINS



Boxes of individual serving size cereal (whole grain or low sugar), granola bars, crackers (cheese, graham, saltine), microwave popcorn, envelopes of flavored rice, microwave mac n' cheese cups, instant oatmeal

## FRUITS



Dried fruit, 100% fruit juice, pop-top canned fruit, plastic single-serve fruit cups, applesauce/ pureed fruit squeezes

## VEGETABLES



100% vegetable juice, pop-top canned vegetables, instant mashed potatoes

## DAIRY



Shelf-stable milk

## OTHER



Boost or other nutritional shakes, pudding cups, jam or jelly

# 10 THINGS TO CONSIDER

- 1** Aim to provide students with: 2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 2 dinners, and 2 snacks
- 2** Aim to provide every student with the same options  
Request feedback from your school contact about what items are culturally appropriate and ask what items are popular and which are not
- 3** Only include non-perishable items
- 4** Do not include food in glass containers
- 5** Purchase food with sturdy packaging so foods do not get crushed
- 6** Consider including inexpensive can openers with your food bags if you can't find pop-top cans
- 7** Each food bag should weigh no more than 3-5 pounds
- 8** Ensure the food bags are distributed in a discreet manner to maintain student and family confidentiality
- 9** Make a note of any students with food allergies or intolerances



## FOR MORE INFORMATION, CLICK ON THE LINKS BELOW:

### Hunger Free Colorado Backpack Program Toolkit

<http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/HFC-Toolkit-for-Starting-Backpack-Food-Program.pdf>

### Information on Common Food Allergens

<https://www.foodallergy.org/common-allergens>

### USDA Choose MyPlate

<https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>

### USDA Safe Food Handling Fact Sheets

<https://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/safe-food-handling>

### USDA Smart Snack Guidelines

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/tools-schools-focusing-smart-snacks>