

BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM STARTER-KIT



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If you have further questions or need additional support, please reach out to Susan Frantz, LiveWell Greenville Food Security Coalition Coordinator: sfrantz@livewellgreenville.org

INTRODUCTION



In 2020, approximately 50% of Greenville County School children were eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, food insecurity is projected to have increased by at least 38% in Greenville County and it is now estimated that food insecurity affects almost one in five children. Food insecurity is particularly detrimental to children. Not having enough healthy food can have serious and long term effects on a child's physical, mental and emotional health.

Local backpack food programs are one way to provide needed food to children who would otherwise not have adequate access to food during the weekends or school breaks. A backpack food program requires the cooperation and support of the entire community, including school officials, community organizations, faith-based organizations, parents and children. Thank you for taking the initiative to support the health and education of the children in our community!

What is a Backpack Food Program?

Every backpack food program is unique to the community and school it serves. Generally, backpack food programs provide a bag of nonperishable food to children in need that they can take home and eat when school meal programs are unavailable. Many programs strive to provide enough food to replace the meals that children would receive at school.

GUIDE TO CREATING A BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM

Step 1: Identify and connect with the school where you want to start a new backpack food program

Perhaps you already have a history of partnering with a particular school. If not, we encourage you to reach out to [Whitney Hanna](mailto:whanna@greenville.k12.sc.us) (whanna@greenville.k12.sc.us), Coordinator of Community Collaboration at Greenville County Schools or [Susan Frantz](mailto:sfrantz@livewellgreenville.org) (sfrantz@livewellgreenville.org), Food Security Coalition Coordinator at LiveWell Greenville. They will be able to connect you with the appropriate contact at a school with a need for a backpack food program.

If a school has more than 25-30 students who would benefit from participation in a backpack food program, it may be beneficial to partner with one or two other community organizations or churches to support the program. LiveWell Greenville is available to help connect you with partner organizations so please do not hesitate to reach out to Susan Frantz.



Step 2: Plan the specifics of your program

When you connect with the school contact person, find out more about their needs, referral process, anticipated challenges and ideas for overcoming those challenges. Ask for a school calendar so that you are able to plan your program around school breaks.

Tips for Program Success:

- Work with the school to establish clear criteria for backpack recipients.
- Advocate that this program maintains a level of confidentiality—this can help prevent problems related to program participants feeling singled out or embarrassed by their participation.
- It makes a big difference if you develop strong relationships with the staff at the schools. If allowed, consider going on site visits to the school. Through your observations, you will have a better understanding of what does and does not work for your program.
- Decide ahead of time whether you will provide food for siblings—in some programs, they allow the school to provide extra food for siblings of a student. Be aware that adding too much food may make it difficult for the student to carry the bag, especially if they walk to and from school.

Be sensitive to the school environment—it is important to make the program adaptable and tailor the program to work best for the school.

Other School-Based Food Assistance Options:

The goal is to be adaptable and support the school community in the way that works best for them. Consider these other models if the backpack food program is not the right fit for a particular school:

- *School Food Pantry*: some schools that have the appropriate storage space might prefer to keep a well-stocked school food pantry
- *Family Food Box Delivery*: when schools were closed at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, some schools partnered with churches who packed family food boxes and delivered them to the homes of families enrolled in the program

Once you understand the needs of the school, begin planning the details of your program. Here are some questions to consider:

- 1) How many children will most likely be involved in your backpack food program? Usually the school social worker or guidance counselor will have an idea of need but the number of children involved might fluctuate throughout the school year based on current students moving or new students being identified.
- 2) How do you want children to join the program? There are two effective ways to sign up children for backpack programs:
 - Opt-In: A letter is sent home to parents describing the program and providing parents with a form to fill out and return to the school office.
 - Opt-Out: Ask teachers to identify students who they think would benefit from the program and send a letter home to parents explaining the program and giving them the option to opt-out if they choose to.
- 3) What languages does the school community require? Make sure to provide flyers and handouts in all languages needed.
- 4) How and where will you package the food? Many programs pack the food at a central location outside of the school and then deliver bags to the school to be distributed. Others partner with Harvest Hope Food Bank who is able to order prepacked food bags and deliver directly to the school.
- 5) What day of the week will you package and distribute the food bags? Packaging is commonly completed on Thursdays and delivered to the schools on Fridays. Work with the school and your volunteers to determine the schedule.
- 6) Does the school have a room or space available for you to store the food for the program?
- 7) How will food bags be distributed? Most programs work with teachers, guidance counselors or school social workers to distribute bags to the students. Other programs distribute the food in a central location like the front office. Think about the model that will work best for your program and that will make the children feel best about receiving the bags.
- 8) Are you going to distribute additional food or resources for extended breaks?

Step 3: Identify where you will source the food and make a budget

There are many resources you will need to secure before you begin your program. They include: food, storage containers, labels, access to a computer or printer, dolly or cart, storage space and transportation related costs. Food will likely be your largest costs for your program.

Due to the possible inconsistent availability of food, try to maintain three to five weeks' storage of food. Depending on where you source your food and what you include in the bag, each bag might range from \$2 to \$6 each.



Example Food Budget:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & \$2.50 \times 100 \text{ students} = \$250 \text{ each week} \\
 & \$250 \text{ per week} \times 36 \text{ weeks per school year} = \\
 & \hline
 & \$9,000 \text{ each school year for 100 students}
 \end{aligned}$$

Helpful Tips for Sourcing Food:

- Purchase food from Harvest Hope Food Bank: They order pre-packaged bags at \$6 per bag and may include transportation to the school depending on the availability of their trucks.
- Consider purchasing food at bulk retailers like Costco or Sam's Club to cut down on costs.
- Ask your local grocery store if they have any special deals or are willing to donate some food.
- Community Food Donation Drives: Programs work best when they are able to provide every child with the same food (type and brand). Food donations are helpful if you can secure large quantities of similar types and brands of food to ensure consistent food bags.

Step 4: Recruit Volunteers

A strong and dependable group of volunteers will be essential to keeping your program organized and successful. The number of volunteers needed will vary depending on how you source your food and how many students you are serving. Because of the lifting and labor required to package and distribute the bags, it is recommended that most volunteers are able to lift at least 25 lbs.

Responsibilities include:

- One lead volunteer to be your school liaison and responsible for coordination of program
- 3-8 weekly volunteers to help pick up food, package bags and deliver to the school

 **COVID-19 Precautions:** Be mindful of the COVID-19 risk and take appropriate precautions to keep all volunteers, students and school community safe. Here are some tips:

- Budget for all of the necessary sanitation expenses (hand sanitizer, face masks, gloves, etc.)
- Volunteers should not come if they feel sick; it is recommended that volunteers take their temperature before they begin the packing process.
- Make sure to communicate COVID-19 safety protocol with volunteers prior to arrival
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, Greenville County Schools maintains strict protocols to keep its students safe. Be aware of and adaptable to the standards set by the district and school.

Step 5: Plan your food bags and purchase the food

Once you have gathered information about the number of children you will be serving and the community resources available, begin planning the food you want to include in the food bags. It is a good idea to provide food options similar to those that would be available to the child during their school day:

- 2 breakfast options**
- 2 lunch options**
- 2 snack options**
- 1 fruit option**
- 1 vegetable option**



Healthy Kid-Friendly Sample Menu:

Breakfast:

- 2 individual packets of oatmeal
- OR 1 full box of cereal and shelf stable milk

Lunch:

- 1 jar of peanut butter and 1 plastic jar of jam
- OR 2 cans of low sodium soup or stew

Snack:

- 2 small bags of goldfish crackers
- OR 2 small bags of popped popcorn

Fruit:

- 1 can of peaches in 100 percent fruit juice
- OR 1 fresh apple

Vegetable:

- 1 can of green beans, carrots or corn

Things to consider when planning a menu:

- Consider mostly nonperishable food items as fresh food can create difficult food safety or storage problems.
- When including fresh food, be sure to include items that do not require refrigeration (e.g. apples, bananas) or make sure to pack and distribute the bags on the same day to ensure food safety.
- Although challenging when limited to mostly nonperishable food items, consider choosing the healthiest options to include in bags (e.g. cereals and snacks low in sugar; whole grain snacks; lower sodium canned goods). Since this may be the main source of nutrition for students participating in the program, it is important that bags include healthy choices.
- Do not include food in glass containers as this could be a safety risk
- Make no assumptions about the cooking tools the child has available including can-openers (if including cans of food, try to use pop-top cans if at all possible).
- Include foods that are ready to eat or require little to no cooking as the child may at times be preparing foods without adult supervision.
- Try to give every child the same brand, type and flavor of food to reduce envy among children and maintain nutritional consistency among your menus.
- Consider including information in bags about additional community resources like free health screening, information about WIC, and United Way's 211 helpline.
- As per Greenville County Schools "Public Schools and Religious Expression" policies, please refrain from including religious material in the bags.

Step 6: Measure the success of your program

- *Parent and Teacher Evaluations:*

A great way to measure the success of your program is through surveys to the teachers and parents asking for honest feedback about the program. Included in the appendix are sample surveys. Both parents and teachers will provide you with great information about how the program is impacting the children involved and the needs that still exist in your community. Also ask the teachers to informally survey their children about the program, asking them what their favorite foods have been, how easy it is to carry the bags home and other questions about their experience with the program.

- *Volunteer Appreciation:*

Your program would not be possible without a group of dedicated volunteers. Consider organizing a volunteer appreciation event to thank them for their work. You can use this event to also brainstorm ideas for how to improve or expand your program.

- *Continue to Communicate with Families:*

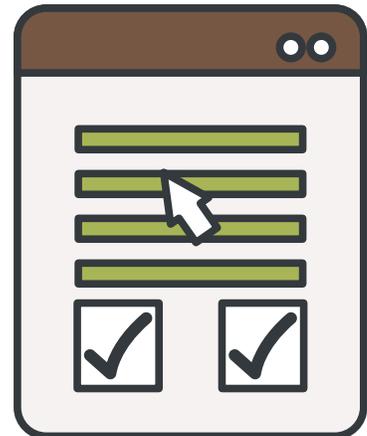
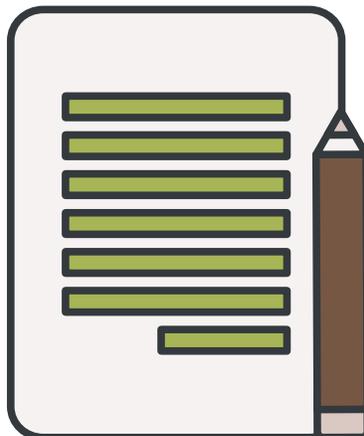
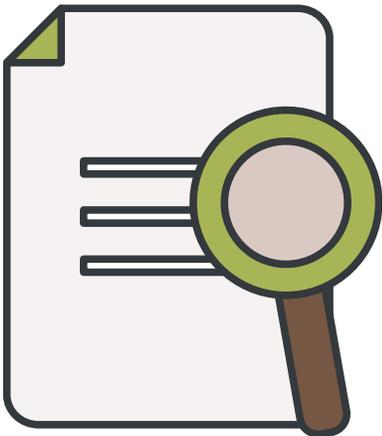
The program is only successful if you have accurate information about the families and children you are serving and need to serve. Encourage your contact at the school to let you know when a child leaves the school or when a new child joins the school who may benefit from the program



Appendix: Tools for a Successful Program

1. Sample Description of a Backpack Food Program
2. Information for Teachers
3. Letter to Parents (Opt-In)
4. Letter to Parents (Opt-Out)
5. Follow-Up Survey for Parents
6. Follow-Up Survey for Teachers
7. Links to community resources to include in bags

Following pages contain these tools.



Appendix 1- Sample Description of Backpack Program:

[Insert Name of Your Program]

The [Insert the Name of Your Program] provides a weekend supply of nutritious food for children when school lunch and breakfast is unavailable on a weekend or school holiday. Each food bag contains 2 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 2 snacks, and 1 can of vegetables and 1 can of fruit. All food is nonperishable and provided to children free of charge. It is our hope these resources will support the health, behavior, and achievement of every student that participates.

Though the program is intended to help those children whose families find it difficult to have enough food for the entire month, all children are eligible for this program. Information to sign up for the program will be sent home with kids in the coming weeks.

The program is run completely by wonderful volunteers who help pack the food bags. The program is funded through the generous gifts of [list your funding sources.]

Look for more information about becoming part of [Insert Name of Program] soon. We look forward to working with staff, teachers, and you for your children!

For more information or questions, please contact [Insert Name of Program Leader] at [Insert Contact Information for Program].

Appendix 2- Sample Information for Teachers:

[Insert Name of Your Program] Information for Teachers

What is the [Insert Name of Your Program]?

The [Insert the Name of Your Program] provides a weekend supply of nutritious food for children, commonly for low income families, to replace the school meals that children miss during their weekend or extended breaks from school. Each weekend food bag contains enough food for two breakfasts, two lunches, two snacks, and one can of vegetables and one can of fruit. All food is nonperishable.

Though the program is intended to help those children whose families find it difficult to have enough food for the entire month, all children are eligible for this program. Children will be able to opt-in and opt-out of the program. We invite your help finding children who will benefit most from participating in this program!

The program is run completely by wonderful volunteers who help coordinate with your school to sign children up, pack food bags weekly, and find and organize fundraising and donation drives that keep the program running. The program is funded through the generous gifts of [list your funding sources.]

How teachers can help?

As teachers, you already go out of your way daily for your students. It is our intention that [Insert Name of Your Program] will not increase your workload or responsibilities. Please help us by:

1. Recommending any of your students that you think would benefit for having this food assistance and participating in this program
2. Handing out the food bags each Friday for your children on the weekend or before a longer school holiday
3. Allowing us to store the empty container for the food bags in your classroom throughout the week
4. Letting us know how the program is benefiting your children and let us know of ways to improve the program for your students.

We invite your feedback and collaboration with this program to make it a success. It is our hope that this program will improve the health, behavior and achievement of your students. Thank you in advance for your help! For more information or questions, please contact [Insert Name of School Liaison] at [Insert Contact Information for Program].

Appendix 3- Sample Letter to Parents (Opt-In) Letter

Free Weekend Food For Your Child Available through
[Insert Name of Your Program]

[Insert Name of Your program] is teaming up with the staff and teachers of [Insert Name of School] to offer a supply of nutritious meals and snacks for children over their weekends and extended breaks, free of charge. Bags are distributed by their teacher on the last school day before the weekend or break. Any child enrolled in [Insert Name of School] is able to receive these weekly bags of food.

If you believe your child could benefit from this program, we encourage you to sign them up by filling the form out below and returning it to the front office. Only one form is needed for all the children in your family, but include information for each child in the form below. This information is kept confidential between [Insert Name of Your Program] and [Insert Name of the School].

Once your child is signed up, they will receive bags of food each week until they leave the school or until you no longer wish to participate.

We encourage you to take advantage of this program for your family and your children. Questions or concerns? Please contact your school's front office.

[Insert Name of Program] Consent Form

Please sign my child(ren) up for the [Insert Name of Your Program]. I understand my child(ren) will soon start receiving a bag of food at the end of each week for his/her use over the weekend or school holiday.
PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.

Today's Date_____

- Child's Name, Teacher and Grade_____
- Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., food allergy, kosher, etc.)_____
- Child's Name, Teacher and Grade_____
- Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., food allergy, kosher, etc.)_____
- Child's Name, Teacher and Grade_____
- Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., food allergy, kosher, etc.)_____

Optional: Please check any box below, according to your interest(s).

Understand that by doing so, you waive confidentiality, and the school will share your contact information with [Insert Name of Your Program].

I may be interested in serving as a volunteer with [Insert Name of Your Program]

Parent/Guardian Name_____

Appendix 4- Sample Letter to Parents (Opt-Out) Letter

Your child is receiving this free bag of food through
[Insert Name of Your Program]

[Insert Name of Your Program] is teaming up with the staff and teachers of [Insert Name of School] to offer a supply of nutritious meals and snacks for children over their weekends and extended breaks, free of charge. Their teacher distributes bags to your child on the last school day before the weekend or break. Any child enrolled in [Insert Name of School] is able to receive these weekly bags of food.

This bag is a sample of what your child will receive by participating with the [Insert name of your program]. If you believe your child could continue benefiting from this program, we will continue providing this resource to your child each week until they leave the school or until you longer wish to participate. If you do not want your child to continue with this program, please fill out the form below. You only need to need to return this form if you do not want your child to participate in [Insert Name of Your Program].

We encourage you to take advantage of this program for your family and your children. Questions or concerns? Please contact your school’s front office.

[Insert Name of Program] Opt-Out Form

Please remove my child(ren) from the [Insert Name of Program]. I understand my child(ren) will no longer receive a supply of food at the end of each week for his/her use over the weekend or school holiday. PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY.

Today’s Date_____

- Child’s Name, Teacher and Grade_____

Parent/Guardian Name_____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____

If you would like to participate in the future, please contact your school’s front office. Thank you for considering the [Insert Name of Your Program]!

Appendix 5- Sample Follow-Up Survey for Parents

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

What do you think of the [Insert Name of Your Program]?

We want to thank you and your family for being a part of [Insert Name of Your Program]. We would love to learn more about your family and what your child(ren) like and don't like about the program. It is your hope to make this the best program for your family and your child. Please be honest and turn in this brief questionnaire to your child's home folder or the school's front desk when you are done. Thank you!

Your Name (optional):_____

Your Child's Name (optional):_____

1. What were your three favorite foods provided in the bags?

2. What was your least favorite food provided in the bags?

3. Please check any you have at home:

Oven Stove Top Microwave Toaster Toaster Oven
Refrigerator

4. Who prepares the food in your home?

5. On a scale of 1-5, how much do you like this program?

1 (Do Not Like It!) 2 3 4 5 (Love the program!)

6. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for the program?

Additional comments? Please contact [Insert Name of School Liaison] at [Insert Contact Information for Program].

Appendix 6- Sample Follow-Up Survey for Teachers

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

What do you think of the [Insert Name of Your Program]?

We want to thank you for your continued support and help with [Insert Name of Your Program]. We would appreciate your honest opinion about how the program is running and what we can do to improve the program.

Your Name (optional):_____

Number of children that participate in your class:

1. On a scale of 1-5, how easy is it to hand out the bags?

1 (Confusing & disorganized) 2 3 4 5 (Very easy!)

2. On a scale of 1-5, how easy is it to keep the food stored and clean in your classroom?

1 (Smell or storage of food disrupts class) 2 3 4 5 (Food is easy to store and doesn't smell)

3. Have you seen any improvements in the performance or behavior of the children participating? Examples?

4. What are the kids saying about the program?

5. What has been the response from parents? Good? Bad?

6. On a scale of 1-5, how much do you like this program?

1 (Do not like it!) 2 3 4 5 (Love it!)

7. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions for the program?

Additional comments? Please contact [Insert Name of School Liaison] at [Insert Contact Information for Program]

Appendix 7- Links to Community Resources to Include in Bags

Here are a few links to suggested community resources and information that you might consider including in bags:

SC Thrive:

<https://scthrive.org/for-you/apply-for-benefits/>

- One stop shop for learning if you are eligible and applying for several benefits including SNAP and others.

WIC:

<https://scdhec.gov/health/wic-nutrition-program/apply-wic-its-easy>

- WIC is a nutrition program that provides health education, healthy foods and other services free of charge to South Carolina families who qualify.

FoodShare Greenville:

<https://www.millvillagefarms.org/foodshare>

- Bi-Weekly subsidized fresh produce boxes are \$10 on a credit/debit card or \$5 with an EBT card

Greenville County Emergency Food Resource Guide:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nNG40HbI8gIBRSQbHGTOj9ZFypPddg_eKqzcESv2-yM8/edit#gid=1151267014

- A guide to all of the food assistance locations throughout Greenville County

211 Helpline:

- English: https://sc211.org/images/SC211PromoLit/SC211Brochure_English.pdf
- Spanish: https://sc211.org/images/SC211PromoLit/SC211Brochure_Spanish.pdf