



SNACK in a BACKPACK

STARTER TOOLKIT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Snack in a Backpack would like to thank Hunger Free Colorado for allowing us to use and share their toolkit as a guideline.

INTRODUCTION:

One in five Georgia families reported that there was at least one time in the past year they did not have enough money to buy the food they needed. Children are at risk for hunger and many families struggle to provide them the nutrition they need to thrive. As a result, many children are coming to school too distracted by their empty stomachs to focus on doing well in school.

Local backpack food programs are one way to provide needed food to children who would otherwise not have adequate access to food on weekends. Many of the children we serve get most of their meals at school and have little or nothing to eat on the weekends.

A backpack weekend 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 your community!

WHAT IS A BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM?

Every backpack food program is unique to the community and school it serves. Our backpack program provides a bag of nonperishable food to children who have little or nothing to eat on the weekends. This food may help feed other members of the family as well. These bags are distributed at school to participating children in plastic or reusable bags by their teacher or counselor on Fridays.

Backpack food programs are commonly run by volunteers and sustained by donations of community members and private foundations. Often, backpack food programs are run through food banks or food pantries that are already providing emergency and supplemental food assistance for families in need.

We suggest you create a unique name for your program which helps make it “your own” and very special.

HERE ARE YOUR 9 STEPS for SUCCESS:

1. _____ Identify the school where you want to start a new backpack food program.
2. _____ Schedule a meeting with the principal of the school you hope to serve.
3. _____ Plan the specifics of your program.
4. _____ Make a budget considering all of the resources and materials you will need for your program.
5. _____ Recruit volunteers and begin fundraising.
6. _____ Plan your food bags and purchase food.
7. _____ Confirm a start date and launch your program.
8. _____ Measure the success of your program.

READY TO GET STARTED?

1. Identify the school where you want to start a new backpack food program.

A helpful way to learn more about the need in your community is to explore the percentage of children in a school who qualify to receive free or reduced-priced school meals. We recommend contacting your school nutritionist for information.

We believe the more people you speak with about your program, the more successful it will become. Sharing our program with others has been the key to the success of the Snack in a Backpack program.

YOUR NOTES:

2. Schedule a meeting with the Superintendent of Schools.

If you are in a small community, we recommend starting a dialog with the superintendent of schools; if you are in a larger community, start with the principal of the school.

Your program is to be run by volunteers so there will be no added responsibilities placed on the school staff.

Don't get discouraged. Remember, there are hundreds of these programs throughout the US.

You must be aware of the importance of the Privacy Act, so no child will be identified as being a participant in your program.

YOUR NOTES:

3. Schedule a meeting with the principal and counselor.

A meeting with the school principal and counselor is essential in determining what works best for their school. In our program, we serve 5 schools, and each school has a somewhat different plan.

The plan which seems to work best for us is:

- Volunteers have a map of the school with names of teachers and classroom numbers.
- Volunteers are given a pre-determined number of food bags needed for each classroom.
- On Fridays, the volunteers drop off the food bags inside the door to each classroom for students to take home as they leave the school.

YOUR NOTES:

4. 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:

- How many children will most likely be involved in your backpack food program? (We received the number of students signed up for our program from the school counselors. In the beginning of our program, several parents who signed up their children for the program realized later their children really didn't need the food and returned the food bags suggesting it be given to another child).
- Teachers sent out a permission slip to all parents of students explaining the program and asking if they would like their child to participate. See attached form.
- How and where will you package the food? When we started our program, one of our churches warehoused our food. As we grew it was apparent we needed a facility which had easier access and longer hours. Our local food pantry donated a room to warehouse food and backpacks.
- What day of the week will you pack the food bags? As our program grew, it was decided to invite the entire community to get involved. We now pack the food bags every Wednesday at our local food pantry where we warehouse the food. This is a great way to get the community involved and those who cannot commit on a regular basis can be a part of our program as well. We have different people come every week to help and we also have regulars.
- What day of the week will you distribute the food bags? Bags are usually distributed by volunteers on Thursdays. We believe Thursdays are best in case there is a problem you need to solve before you hand out food bags on Friday.
- Are you going to distribute additional food or resources for extended breaks? On holidays, we generally pack extra food in the bags. Discuss this option with the school.

YOUR NOTES:

5. Make a budget considering all of the resources & materials you will need.

There are many resources you will need to secure before you begin your program, including:

- food
- large containers
- bags
- a dolly or cart
- storage space

FOOD: Food will likely be your largest cost for your program. Due to the possible inconsistent availability of food, try to maintain a three to five week storage of food. Each bag should cost \$2.00 to \$5.00. Bags full of healthy food can easily be made for \$2.50 per child, per week.

Example:

$\$2.50 \times 100 \text{ students} = \$250.00 \text{ each week.}$

$\$250.00 \text{ per week} \times 36 \text{ weeks per year} = \$9,000.00 \text{ each year for 100 students.}$

When we started our program we were receiving donated food, only to learn later that some of the children were feeling slighted because they weren't getting the same food as the others. We then arranged to purchase food at our local food bank at considerably lower prices, and now each child gets the same food. You must go through a 501-C-3 in order to purchase food from the food bank. I suggest meeting with your local food pantry or church and invite them to be a part of your program. This is also a great way to recruit volunteers.

LARGE CONTAINERS: Once the food bags are packed, they can be stored in 30 gallon plastic storage tubs in each classroom ready to be distributed on Friday. Have one container, like a plastic tub or large plastic laundry basket, for each participating classroom. Each tub should be labeled with the teacher's name and should stay in the teacher's room except when you are filling them with food bags.

BAGS: Choose a type of bag that you want to distribute the food in. One bag is needed for every child, each week. Plastic bags work well because they can easily be collected and do not require a child to return the bag the following week. Reusable bags are environmentally friendly, but you risk children or families losing the bag and require you to purchase more.

This year we are changing the type of bags we use. A local merchant has donated 1,000 washable "hiker" bags which can be put into the students' regular backpack or can be worn as a backpack. We require the students to return the bag on Monday to be reused. We hope this might teach the children responsibility. Some schools will tell the students that if they do not return their bag, they will receive their food in a plastic bag. We also allow the students to keep their bags at the end of the year if they return their bags on a regular basis.

CART OR DOLLY: To easily collect and deliver the large containers of the bags to the classrooms each week, it is helpful to have a cart, dolly or wagon (donation). Ask your school if they have one you can use each week for your program.

STORAGE SPACE: Should have a non-leaking roof, dry and extremely clean. No other items should be stored in this space other than the food and supplies for your program.

5. Recruit volunteers and begin fundraising.

A strong and dependable group of volunteers will be essential to keeping your program organized and successful. Generally, each school requires between seven to nine volunteers to work well. Because of the lifting and labor required to package and distribute the bags, it is recommended most volunteers are able to lift 25 pounds. Volunteer responsibilities include:

DESIGNATE ONE VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR for EACH SCHOOL

This person will be responsible for recruiting additional volunteers, and coordinating the pickup and drop off of food to their school and fundraising. Work with teachers and counselors to learn when children involved in the program leave the school and when new children join the school. Communicate with the school administration, staff, and teachers about the program. Be the general eyes and ears about the progress of the program at a school. Coordinate fundraisers for your school.

SIX to EIGHT WEEKLY VOLUNTEERS

These people will help your School Coordinator package and deliver food bags to the children each week. The time commitment is about one hour per week (usually every Thursday); volunteers could easily rotate depending on their availability.

Their responsibilities include:

- Volunteering every week to pack food bags at the designated location and deliver to your school.
- Communicating with the coordinator if there are any changes in scheduling

CONSIDER THIS:

- Have you already gathered a group of community members excited to help start and volunteer for this backpack food program?
- Or, how will you recruit volunteers?
- Local community clubs (i.e. Lions, Rotary, or Kiwanis Club) and faith-based organizations can help you find volunteers or host fundraisers.
- The best time to package food bags is during the day so retired or available community members may have the time to help.
- Additionally, explore your local high school or middle school groups (i.e. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, service clubs) who may also be available to volunteer and help with the program.

YOUR NOTES:

6. Plan your food bags and purchase food.

Once you have gathered information about the number of children you will be serving and the community resources. Your local food bank may already have a weekend program, ask if you could piggy back on their program. We have found each program provides different amount of food items, depending on your budget. Our food bank provides 8 items in each pack, our program provides ten items.

2 Breakfast Options,
2 Lunch Options,
Snack Options,
Fruit Options

Very healthy bags containing complete whole grains and fruits and vegetables are great options to provide children, especially when they have little to no access to them at home.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING A MENU:

- The weight of the bag
- The packaging of the food
- DO NOT include foods in glass containers as these could be a safety risk for the child
- Consider the cooking utensils and tools the child has available
- If parents are working and the child will be preparing 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 microwave
- Only include NONPERISHABLE food (we will be providing fresh apples this year when in season) *If you do wish to include fresh food, be sure to make sure the teachers are comfortable storing fresh food that may smell and pack and distribute the bags on the same day to ensure food safety.*
- Give every child the same brand, type, and flavor of food. Providing every child 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.

YOUR NOTES:

6. Confirm a start date and launch your program.

- Meet with the school principal/counselor and decide on a start date (usually a Friday) to distribute your first bags.
- Have teachers send permission forms home to families with information about the start date and encourage them to sign up.
- Create a final volunteer schedule making sure you have a reliable School Coordinator and enough volunteers to pack the bags the day before the start date.
- On Thursday, meet your six to eight weekly volunteers to package at a convenient time or schedule a day of the week and invite your community to join your program and pack food bags.
- Create an assembly line with your volunteers to package food.
- Ask your lead volunteer, usually the School Coordinator, to introduce everyone, introduce the program, and explain the packing instructions by making an example bag to share. The person at the end of the assembly line will close each bag with a knot and place bags in storage containers. This is a great job for a limited mobility volunteer.
- The volunteers picking up the containers will return each one full with bags to each participating classroom.
- Work with your counselor or school contact person to ensure they are able to hand out the food bags on Friday or on the last day before break.
- Continue this weekly schedule working within the school's calendar.

YOUR NOTES:

7. Measure the success of your program.

After a few months running the program, begin thinking about how it is running. For example:

- Are you coordinating well with the school and teachers?
- Are you reaching all the children who need the program?
- Could you expand the program?
- Are the children enjoying and benefiting from the food?
- Are your volunteers enjoying their work?

Create a strategy to measure the success of your program that incorporates feedback from parents and teachers, volunteer appreciation, and continued marketing and managing of participants.

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. See sample Follow-Up Survey for teachers. This survey 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. Encourage them to ask the children what their favorite food have been in the bags, 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 the amazing and dedicated work of your volunteers. Consider organizing a volunteer appreciation event like a breakfast or lunch to thank each one for their work. Additionally, use these events to brainstorm more ideas of how to improve or expand your program. Your volunteers will be incredible resources for community information and assistance, in addition to the hours of time they give directly to the program.

CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR SCHOOL:

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

Measuring the success of your program not only helps you evaluate your impact on the school and children in your community, but it also prepares you for writing grants or finding additional financial resources for sustaining or expanding your program.

YOUR NOTES: