



BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM

STARTER TOOLKIT

Updated March 2011



CONTENTS:

- I. Introduction
- II. What is a Backpack Food Program?
- III. Guide to Creating a Backpack Food Program
- IV. Program Expansion and Sustainability
- V. Conclusion and Next Steps
- VI. Tools for a Successful Program
 - ❖ Sample Description of a Backpack Food Program
 - ❖ Information for Teachers
 - ❖ Letter to Parents (Opt-In)
 - ❖ Letter to Parents (Out-Out)
 - ❖ Follow-Up Survey for Parents
 - ❖ Follow-Up Survey for Teachers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Hunger Free Colorado would like to thank Mary Ross of Arvada Community Food Bank’s “Feeding the Future” program and Peggy Halderman of Golden Rotary Kids’ Backpack Program for their assistance with preparing this Toolkit.

INTRODUCTION:

In Colorado, nearly 60 percent of the children that participate in the National School Lunch Program receive their meals for free or at a reduced price. Additionally, in 2010, one in five Coloradan 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.¹ 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 during the weekends or school breaks.

This Backpack Food Program Toolkit includes:

1. A step-by-step guide for creating and sustaining your own program,
2. Templates and sample documents to easily implement your program,
3. Ways to incorporate this new program with other child nutrition programs in your community, like the Summer Food Service Program and School Meals,
4. Advice on how to create a program that addresses the needs of your community, school, and most importantly children.

The 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 your community!

¹ FRAC. *Food Hardship - 2010: Data for the Nation, States, 100 MSAs and Every Congressional District*. March 2011. Food Research Action Center. 2011.

WHAT IS A BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM?

HISTORY:

The first backpack food program began in 1995. The program was developed in Little Rock, Arkansas out of the concern of a school nurse who was seeing a large number of children in her clinic tired, sick, and falling behind in class because of hunger and food scarcity in their homes. She approached her local food bank, the Arkansas Rice Depot, to help her address the problem. Together, they launched the Food for Kids program which provided food for kids discretely in bags or backpacks to take home during the weekends when school meals were unavailable. Today, there are hundreds of backpack food programs across the country serving thousands of children.

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. These bags are often distributed at school to participating children in plastic or reusable bags by their teacher as they leave Friday or before a long break. Depending on the type of school or age of the students, food may also be distributed at the school office or in another central location inside or outside of the school. The contents of the bag can vary depending on the food and donations available. Many programs are able to provide enough food to replace the meals that children would receive at school (e.g. two breakfast options, two lunch options, two snack options, one can of fruit, and one can of vegetables).

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. Federal reimbursement is not available for the food provided by backpack food programs.

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.

CONSIDER THIS:

Are you a food bank or food pantry? Are you affiliated or in touch with your local food pantry?

Food banks can be effective allies with food sourcing and organizing your program. Contact your local food bank to learn more about resources and assistance available.

GUIDE TO CREATING A BACKPACK FOOD PROGRAM

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

Whether you have a school in your community in mind or you wonder which school to reach out to begin a new backpack food program, learning more about the schools in your community can be a great way to choose a school.

DETERMING NEED:

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. In order to qualify for free meals, a child must come from a family who makes 130 percent or less than the federal poverty line (FPL). In order to qualify for reduced-priced meals, a child must come from a family who make 185 percent or less than the FPL. For example, a family of four can only make \$28,665 annually to qualify for free meals. Children who receive free or reduced-priced school meals are commonly considered high need and likely participants for your backpack food program. Use this information to begin thinking about how many children you may be serving and how much your program will cost.

The free or reduced-priced school meal information can help you determine where to create a backpack food program. When you are ready to contact your district superintendent or specific school principals come prepared with this information to share.

HOW DO YOU FIND INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL?

You can easily find data and information about the schools in your community online.

1. Go to www.cde.state.co.us/index_nutrition.htm.
2. Find and click on the **References** tab on the left side of the screen.
3. Click on the **Free and Reduced Eligibility Data (October 1 Count)** link.
4. Scroll down to the **SCHOOL LEVEL DATA** heading. There will be various files available (in both Excel and PDF file formats). Find and choose *K-12 Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility by District, and School*.
5. School data is organized alphabetically by district. Explore your district and the schools in your community.
6. Find out which schools are severe need and non-severe need. Use this information to begin thinking about how much your program will cost.

CONSIDER THIS:

When choosing the school to launch a program with, consider how the program will affect the children of the school:

If it is a **Severe 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-Severe 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 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.

2. Schedule a meeting with the principal of the school you hope to serve.

Once you have a good idea of the needs your community and school, you are ready to schedule a meeting with the principal of the school. It may even be appropriate to schedule a meeting with the superintendent and district food nutrition director to secure additional support for a program, especially if you hope to launch a larger multi-school program. If you hope to launch a larger program involving many schools, beginning with one or two pilot programs can be a good way to learn how to create a sustainable program before you decide to expand.

In the meeting with the school principal, begin by describing why you want to create a food backpack program and what the program would mean and require of the school. Additionally, ask for four things:

1. Ask to present at a school staff meeting with teachers and staff.
2. Ask for a mailbox or basket in the front school office specifically for the backpack food program.
3. Ask to include an article or description of the program in the school newsletter or website.
 - ❖ A *Sample Description of a Backpack Food Program* is provided in **Tools for a Successful Program** on page 20.
4. Ask for a School Calendar so you are able to plan your program around school breaks, in-service days, and extended weekends.

CONSIDER THIS:

Will your program provide food over long extended breaks like Spring Break or Winter Break?

You may or may not want to continue the program over long breaks. If you do, effective ways to continue assistance over longer school breaks include:

1. Provide more food for the additional days on break in the bags before the children start their break.
2. Coordinate with the school, families, and children to hand out additional bags periodically throughout the break.
3. Provide referral information for additional food assistance resources in the community like food pantries or child meal programs. AND, refer participating families to the statewide **Hunger Free Hotline** which can connect families with food assistance programs and resources near to where they live.

HUNGER FREE HOTLINE
855-855-4626 (Toll Free)
720-328-2920 (Local for Metro Denver)

3. Attend a school staff meeting with teachers and staff.

Teachers and staff of your school can be great advocates for your backpack food program. Teachers are commonly your direct connection with the children as they distribute the bags every Friday. Additionally, they see the benefits of the program through the improved health and performance of their students. By presenting at a staff meeting, you can describe the program, answer any questions or concerns staff may have about the program, and describe the teacher's role with the program. Reassure teachers that the only request of their time is the distribution of the food bags. Please see the *Information for Teachers* handout in **Tools for a Successful Program** on page 21, for more information.

It may be helpful to attend a Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) meeting. Ask the principal if presenting at a PTA meeting would be helpful to create the program.

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:

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.*
2. How many grades will participate with the program?
3. How do you want children to join the program? Can families opt-in to the program?
4. What languages does your community require? English? Spanish? Somali? Russian?
 - ❖ *Make sure you provide flyers and handouts in all languages needed.*
5. 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 to be distributed. Think about the model that will work best for you.*
6. What day of the week will you pack the food bags?
 - ❖ *Packaging is commonly completed on Thursdays.*
7. Does the school have a room or space available for you to store the food for the program?
8. Is the cafeteria or another common area available for you and your volunteers to pack the food?
9. 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, like the front office. Think about which model will work best for your program and will make the children feel the best about receiving the bags.*
10. What day of the week will you distribute the food bags?
 - ❖ *Bags are usually distributed by teachers on Fridays.*
11. Are you going to distribute additional food or resources for extended breaks?

CONSIDER THIS:

How should you market the program to families and get participants?

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 template *Letter to Parents (Opt-In)* is included in **Tools for a Successful Program**, on page 22.
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 template *Letter to Parents (Opt-Out)* is included in **Tools for a Successful Program**, on page 23. **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.

5. Make a budget considering all of the resources and materials you will need for your program.

There are many resources you will need to secure before you begin your program. They include: food, large containers, bags, labels, access to a computer and printer, a dolly or cart, and storage space.

- ❖ **FOOD:** Food will likely be your largest cost for your program. Due to the possible inconsistent availability of food, try to maintain 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 x 100 students = \$250.00 each week.
 - \$250.00 per week x 36 weeks per year = **\$9,000.00 each year for 100 students.**
- ❖ **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.
 - Purchase 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. *Additionally, you can host a **plastic bag drive**, which can be a great outreach tool to raise awareness about hunger in your community among other schools, churches, or community organizations.*
 - Reusable bags can be environmentally friendly, but you risk children or families losing the bags and require you to purchase more.
- ❖ **LABELS:** Labels on both the bags and containers help volunteers and teachers distribute the food.
 - Every week, every bag of food distributed should be labeled with the name of each child participating in the program, their grade, and teacher's name. Labeling helps teachers quickly and easily distribute the bags.
 - The large container for each classroom should be labeled with the name of teacher and grade.
 - Using the updated list of participants, you can print simple mailing labels to stick on each bag (and classroom container) each week.
 - Use Mail Merge or similar tools on the computer to help you quickly create the labels.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR BUYING FOOD

1. **Purchase food from your local food bank:** Food banks know best how to purchase food cheaply and can provide you with advice of where to purchase food OR can allow you to purchase food directly from them.
2. **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.
3. **Ask your local grocery store if they have any special deals 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.
4. **BE CAREFUL WITH RECEIVING PERSONAL FOOD DONATIONS:** Programs that are able to provide every child with the same food (type and brand). Accepting individual food donations makes getting this type 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.

- ❖ **ACCESS TO A COMPUTER:** Common computer programs like Microsoft Word and Excel (or similar drafting and computing programs) are highly recommended.
 - For example, Microsoft Excel can help you keep an up-to-date list of your participants and can allow you to create labels each week for the food bags.
 - Access to a printer is also recommended to print the labels, letters, flyers, and other resources you will need for your program.
- ❖ **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 or dolly.
 - Ask your school if they have one you can use each week for your program.
- ❖ **STORAGE SPACE:** 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 your 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, on the ground level 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.
 - Do you need a large vehicle like a truck, SUV or van?
 - Would a volunteer be able to donate their time and vehicle to help with delivery?
- ❖ **WHAT ELSE YOU WILL NEED?**
 - Depending on what your community needs and what your school or other organizations can provide, your program may need additional or different resources.
 - Consider your transportation needs and the additional nutrition needs your community may have.

Customize the program to meet the needs of your community while using the resources you have available!

Recruit volunteers.

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:

- ❖ One Lead Volunteer to be your School Liaison:
 - This person will act as your main contact between you and the school.
 - The time commitment is generally at least 10 hours per week.
 - Their responsibilities include:
 - Collecting the mail and forms from parents opting in or out of the program.
 - Creating and maintaining an up-to-date spreadsheet of all children participating in the program.
 - Working with teachers to learn when children involved in the program leave the school and when new children join the school.
 - Printing and providing the labels each week.
 - Distributing and collecting program evaluations to children, teachers, and parents.
 - Communicating with school administration, staff, and teachers about the program.
 - Being the general eyes and ears about the progress of the program at a school.
- ❖ Six to Eight Weekly Volunteers:
 - These people will help your School Liaison package and deliver food bags to the children each week.
 - The time commitment is weekly for about one hour (usually every Thursday), but volunteers could easily rotate depending on when they are available.
 - Their responsibilities include:
 - Volunteering every Thursday (or when available) at the school to package food bags.

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.

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 available, begin planning the food you want to include in the food bags. It is a good idea to mimic the food options that would be available to the children during their school day. This means you will need to provide:

- ❖ 2 Breakfast Options,
- ❖ 2 Lunch Options,
- ❖ 2 Snack Options,
- ❖ 1 Fruit Option (usually a can),
- ❖ 1 Vegetable Option (usually a can).

Things to consider when planning a menu include:

- ❖ 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.
- ❖ The packaging of the food.
 - DO NOT include food in glass containers as this 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 a microwave.
- ❖ 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, 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.
- ❖ Include community information or event flyers with the food.
 - Find additional community resources or events like free health screening, information about WIC, recipes, or free family events like days at the zoo to include with the bags.
 - Ask your volunteers if there is any information they would like to include. A good rule is that if they are willing to make the copies and the information is appropriate, you are willing to include the information.
- ❖ Consider the possible allergies and health issues children may have that would affect their food preferences. Also, consider children in your school with diverse religious and cultural backgrounds that may affect their food choices.
 - Ask parents to provide information about their children's allergies when they sign up for the program.
 - Ask parents to provide information about their children's cultural food preferences (e.g. kosher, vegetarian, Muslim and do not eat pork, etc.)
 - Budget for allergy or cultural replacement foods. These food preferences may change or increase the cost of your food. Be sure to budget a little extra each month, up to 40 percent more per bag, to pay for these food replacements for these children.

KID-FRIENDLY SAMPLE MENU:

BREAKFAST:

- 2 Individual Packets of Instant Oatmeal
- OR 1 Full Box of Cereal

LUNCH:

- 1 Jar of Peanut Butter & 1 Plastic Jar of Jelly or Jam
- OR 2 Boxes of Macaroni and Cheese
- OR 2 Cans of Soup or Stew

SNACK:

- 2 Granola Bars
- OR 2 Small Bags of Pretzels
- OR 2 Bags of Goldfish Crackers

1 OPTION OF FRUIT

- 1 Can of Peaches or Pears in 100 percent juice, not heavy syrup
- OR 1 Plastic Container of Applesauce
- OR 100 percent Fruit Snacks or Fruit Leather

1 OPTION OF VEGETABLES

- 1 Can of Green Beans, Carrots, or Corn

CONSIDER THIS:

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.

Consider the financial and organizational resources needed to provide every child this standard of food.

Could you feed more children with a cheaper, but still balanced bag of food?

Again, think about the community you are serving and what you hope to provide to the children.

6. Confirm a start date and launch your program.

- ☑ *Met with your schools principals.*
- ☑ *Gathered support with the teachers.*
- ☑ *Found the volunteers and funds you need for the program.*
- ☑ *Created a budget and purchased the food and materials you need.*

CONGRATLATIONS!

YOU ARE READY TO LAUNCH YOUR PROGRAM!

NEXT STEPS:

1. Meet with the school principal and decide on a start date (usually a Friday) to distribute your first bags.
2. Send information home to families with information about the start date and encourage them to sign up. See the *Letter to Parents (Opt-In)* in **Tools for a Successful Program**.
3. Finalize the list of participants and print individual bag and container labels.
4. Create a final volunteer schedule making sure you have a reliable School Liaison and enough volunteers to pack the bags the day before the start date.
5. Deliver the food to the school by Thursday or the day you plan to package the food bags.
6. On Thursday, meet your six to eight weekly volunteers to package at a time convenient for you and the school.
 - This would ideally be mid-morning (after breakfast but before lunch) and in the school cafeteria or a common area with open space to work.
 - Create an assembly line with your volunteers to package food:
 - Ask your lead volunteer, usually the School Liaison, to introduce everyone, introduce the program, and explain the packing instructions by making an example bag to share.
 - Ask two volunteers to collect the empty classroom containers using the carts or dolies.
 - The other four to five volunteers will organize an assembly line to package each food item.
 - The person at the end of the assembly line will close each bag with a knot and stick the label on the bag 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.
7. Work with the teachers to ensure they are able to hand out the food bags on Friday or on the last day before break.
8. Continue this weekly schedule working within the school's calendar.
9. Develop a program evaluation strategy.

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 EVALUTIONS:

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 **Tools for a Successful Program**, on page 24 and 25, is a sample *Follow-Up Survey for Parents* and sample *Follow-Up Survey for Teachers*. Both groups will provide you with great information about how the program is impacting the children involved and the needs that still exist in your community. For example, by asking the parents about the tools and responsibilities their family has for cooking you are able learn more about the types of food that will be most convenient and useful for their children.

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 FAMILIES:

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 Liaison know when a child leaves the school or when a new child joins the school who may benefit from the program.
- ❖ Send out a School Newsletter Bulletin or Letter to Parents at the beginning of each semester.
- ❖ Continue to keep track of the children who take a bag each week.
 - If a bag is not taken by a child for two to three weeks, they may have left the school and the program.
 - Follow-up with the teacher or front desk to see if they did leave.

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.

PROGRAM EXPANSION AND SUSTAINABILITY

THINKING OF EXPANDING?

If you are just starting a program, expanding your program to multiple schools or districts may sound like an event far off in the future. However, it is good to start thinking about how and when you would expand your program so you will be prepared.

As you begin to consider expanding your program, think about:

- ❖ The feedback you've received from the teachers, parents, and children.
 - *Has the program improve the health, behavior, and performance of the children?*
 - *Do their parents appreciate the program?*
- ❖ The number of kids participating in the program.
 - *Would you have similar participation rates at a different school?*
- ❖ Your relationship with the teachers and school administration.
 - *Could they be advocates for your program at another school or with a monetary or food donor?*
- ❖ The resources you have available.
 - *Are you just "breaking even" or do you have extra funds (or resources to find extra funds) for a new or larger program?*

If you've created a successful program that meets the needs and concerns of your community and you have the resources (or can find the resources) to expand, begin looking into another school or organization in your community that you could partner with to launch a new backpack food program.

OTHER CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS:

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 Food Stamps, can help you serve your community even better. Outreach to these programs includes:

- ❖ 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 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 throughout Colorado during the summer.
 - Include summer food outreach materials (available

CONSIDER THIS:

How will your program contribute to the other child nutrition programs offered by your school or in your community?

Could your resources be used to support these other programs?

Could you use your passion and dedication about child hunger to push for change and action with the other programs?

Contact Hunger Free Colorado to learn about how to get involved with other great child nutrition programs.

from Hunger Free Colorado) with the food bags.

- Consider becoming a SFSP sponsor or site yourself to serve more children over the summer.
- Contact Hunger Free Colorado for more information.

❖ 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.
- For more information, please contact Hunger Free Colorado.

❖ 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 in afterschool activities.
- For more information, contact Hunger Free Colorado.

❖ Encourage families to sign up for **FOOD STAMPS**.

- Many of the children that you will serve may qualify for Food Stamps (also known as the Food Assistance Program or SNAP) which provides families with money each month to purchase supplemental groceries .
- Include a Food Stamp application or other resources to find additional food assistance in the food bags.
- For more information, contact Hunger Free Colorado.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

READY TO GET STARTED?

Here are your **NINE 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. Attend a school staff meeting with teachers and staff.
4. Plan the specifics of your program.
5. Make a budget considering all of the resources and materials you will need for your program.
6. Recruit volunteers.
7. Plan your food bags and purchase food.
8. Confirm a start date and launch your program.
9. Measure the success of your program.

We applaud your enthusiasm to create a backpack food program!
Thank you again for your interest in ending child hunger in Colorado!
Good luck on this exciting new program!

For more assistance with starting your new backpack food program or information about other food assistance resources in Colorado, please contact Hunger Free Colorado at (720) 328-1284 or info@hungerfreecolorado.org.

TOOLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

The following templates are designed to help you quickly create and publish outreach materials to launch your new program. Add to them and edit them depending on the needs of your program and community. Additionally, we encourage you to translate and create forms in all the languages your school and community require. The templates include:

- ❖ Sample Description of a Backpack Food Program
- ❖ Information for Teachers
- ❖ Letter to Parents (Opt-In)
- ❖ Letter to Parents (Out-Out)
- ❖ Follow-Up Survey for Parents
- ❖ Follow-Up Survey for Teachers

[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].

[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 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].



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., diabetic, food allergy, kosher) _____

Child's Name, Teacher and Grade _____

Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., diabetic, food allergy, kosher) _____

Child's Name, Teacher and Grade _____

Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., diabetic, food allergy, kosher) _____

Child's Name, Teacher and Grade _____

Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., diabetic, food allergy, kosher) _____

Child's Name, Teacher and Grade _____

Special dietary needs, if any (e.g., diabetic, food allergy, kosher) _____

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 helping to pack food bags.

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

Parent/Guardian Name _____

Telephone Number (if any) _____

Parent/Guardian Email Address (if any) _____



Your child is receiving this free bag of food through the [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]!

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]**.

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]**.**