



PROGRAM HANDBOOK

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Southeast Missouri Food Bank is to end hunger and leverage the power of food to build healthy communities.

Founded in 1985, SEMO Food Bank serves 70,000 individuals each month through our network of partner agencies and programs, including Backpacks for Friday, across our 16-county service area. The food bank is a member of Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger-relief organization, and Feeding Missouri.

The area served by SEMO Food Bank has some of the highest rates of hunger in the state of Missouri; five of our 16 counties are in the top 10 most food insecure in the state and three counties are in the top 100 for food insecurity nationally. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap for 2019, 17,160 children in southeast Missouri live in a home without enough food. One in five children in our area is food insecure.

For many of these children, the only meals they can rely on eating consistently are provided by school lunch and breakfast programs. But on the weekends and school holidays, these children are at greater risk of hunger. Children who experience even occasional hunger may have trouble concentrating, show aggressive tendencies, experience stunted growth and have increased likelihood of obesity. For these reasons, there is a need to feed children when they are most at risk of not having access to food: **when school is out.**

Food Insecurity

is a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members and limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate food. Food insecure households are not necessarily food insecure all the time. Food insecurity may reflect a household's need to make trade-offs between important basic needs, such as housing or medical bills, and purchasing nutritionally adequate foods.

PURPOSE & DESCRIPTION

The purpose of Backpacks for Friday (BFF) is to fight childhood hunger in southeast Missouri by providing food-insecure children with nutritious food at times when school meals are not available, such as weekends and school holidays. The program has grown from one school to serve 1,200 students in 26 school districts across 13 counties.

Southeast Missouri Food Bank partners with schools in our service area for the BFF program. The program's success is dependent on this partnership. Participating schools work with the Program Manager to develop a fundraising strategy to help finance the schools' BFF program.

The food bank acquires food and supplies for BFF that are delivered to schools monthly. Each school is responsible for identifying students who may be facing food insecurity and distributing food to these children each Friday of the school year. Communication between the school and SEMO Food Bank is essential to keeping the program running smoothly.

BECOMING A BACKPACKS FOR FRIDAY SCHOOL

School personnel or community members can initiate the process of becoming a Backpacks for Friday school by contacting the food bank's Program Manager. From there, the Program Manager can work with individuals and school administrators to begin offering BFF at that school.

To participate in BFF, a school must have a secure place to store food. Food must be stored 6 inches off the floor, 4 inches away from the wall and be safe from pests. The food bank will work with the school to create a monthly delivery schedule for the year.

The Program Manager will visit the school to assess the storage site and assist with making any necessary changes before the food bank and school enter a formal agreement. The food bank will also assist the school with developing a fundraising strategy for the school and provide additional support when needed.

It is important that one person be designated as the site coordinator. The site coordinator may be, for example, a school nurse, guidance counselor, parent or a community member. Schools may find a community volunteer to be the coordinator (or assistant coordinator) helps alleviate additional stress on school staff.

Chapter 2

LOGISTICS

Schools and SEMO Food Bank are partners in the Backpacks for Friday program. The program's purpose is to provide food to children facing food insecurity when other resources, like school breakfast and lunch, is not available.

BFF planning starts in the spring of the previous school year. It is advised to have most, if not all, of the fundraising done before the preceding school year ends. (The food bank can provide fundraising resources if desired.)

At the end of the school year, the school's Site Coordinator will inform the food bank's Program Manager how many students will be in the program for the next school year and submit payment to the food bank.

We know things don't always go to plan. We know it is likely not possible to account for all students who may transfer in and out of a school district, or when a family's circumstances mean they no longer need the program (or the reverse). This is normal. The Program Manager will ask for an ***estimate*** of how many students you will have in the program and check if you have met your fundraising goal at the beginning of the summer. Menus are planned and food ordered over the summer so children begin receiving food at the start of the school year.

FUNDRAISING

The Site Coordinator is responsible for providing the food bank with the number of students who will be in the program and raising funds to pay for their participation. For the current school year, the cost for schools is \$145 per student for the 36-week school year. The food bank shares the cost of the program with participating schools and does additional fundraising for the program. The cost is considerably more than the \$145 per student.

Each school district is unique; some have a handful of students in the program while others have dozens of backpack recipients. Additionally, individual communities have different resources available that may support the program. The Site Coordinator and Program Manager can work together to find community partners to support a school's program.

PROGRAM & SCHOOL AGREEMENT

Each year the Site Coordinator and Program Manager will sign a Program-School agreement. The agreement outlines expectations of each party in the partnership.

To maintain compliance with Feeding America, any individual having repeated contact with children through the BFF program should pass a National Background Search. The safety of our children is a priority.

The Site Coordinator is responsible for deciding eligibility guidelines for his/her school. Information about students selected for the program must be kept confidential. In the agreement, the word "identify" is used as a synonym for "locate" and does not mean "to disclose." ***Identifying information about students in this program should be confidential.***

Information about your school (number 6) refers to demographic information. This may be used for monitoring purposes or for funders. We will provide an explanation for any information request. If we ask for information you do not want to disclose, a written refusal and explanation is acceptable.

Record-keeping (number 15) refers to the number of students served, food received and food distributed. This is for quality assurance; some funders require assurance that the food purchased and delivered go to the intended children.

Other questions about the agreement can be addressed individually. Please contact the Program Manager (contact information on front of handbook) with additional questions.

STUDENT REFERRAL

The Site Coordinator works with teachers/staff to identify children to participate in the Backpacks for Friday program. BFF is specifically targeted toward children living in food insecure households. Some indicators to look for include:

- Pocket or hoard food on Fridays for the weekend
- Will eat anything placed before them
- Lingers around food and asks for seconds
- Anxious for meals to be served
- May rush to cafeteria or show up early for breakfast
- Exhibits extreme hunger every Monday morning
- Puffy and swollen skin (protein deficiency)
- Very thin with protruding bones (calorie deficiency)
- Red or cracked lips, dry and itchy eyes (vitamin deficiency)
- Obesity, caused by extreme poor nutrition

In addition, you may also take note of the child's ability to function at school. A child facing hunger may also exhibit excessive absences, difficulty forming friendships, irritable behavior, excessive sickness and inability to concentrate.

A child who complains about being hungry is not necessarily food insecure. Growing children will have an appetite and say they are hungry at points through the day. However, in the case of a food insecure child, certain questions can help determine need. Ask if children if they ate breakfast, what they had for dinner the night before or if there is enough food in their home. Their answers may indicate if they are living in a food insecure home. Some children may be very open about what is going on at home. By listening to students and maintaining contact with parents, a family's needs can be assessed to help determine if a child needs to receive a backpack.

Definitions

Food security = access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life

Food insecurity = lack of consistent access to enough food for all members to be active and healthy

Hunger = uneasy or painful sensation caused by lack of food

It is the Site Coordinator's responsibility to ensure all school personnel are aware of the Backpacks for Friday program and properly identify children to participate in the program. Food insecurity can be long- or short-term. Children should not automatically be enrolled in the program on the basis of having previously participated or being in the free/reduced lunch program. Depending on your school size and community, you may want to use forms we provide or you may want to develop your own system.

If a child or his/her family needs additional food assistance, please direct them to Southeast Missouri Food Bank (573-471-1818 or semofoodbank.org). SNAP (formerly food stamp) application assistance is also available through the food bank.

If you are aware that a student has a food allergy, please take the following steps:

1. Obtain documentation of the allergy from a physician.
2. Once the allergy is confirmed, contact the Program Manager, who will make accommodations for the child's meals. (The food bank does not need to see the physician's note or the child's name.) Allergies will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

DELIVERY & STORAGE

The Site Coordinator is responsible for providing the Program Manager with the delivery address and any additional instructions the driver will need when making the delivery. A delivery contact and phone number is helpful in case of unforeseen circumstances.

The food bank will create a monthly delivery schedule, which will be emailed to the Site Coordinator. The Site Coordinator should notify the Program Manager immediately of any delivery concerns.

Food must be stored 6 inches off the floor (generally on a pallet) and 4 inches away from the wall in a clean, pest-free space. The storage space must be secure (lockable) and have a thermometer. The Program Manager will check the storage site each year; if the storage location changes, please notify the food bank. An online food safety course will be offered by the food bank; one representative from each school should take the course.

DISTRIBUTION TO STUDENTS

Backpacks for Friday food is packed in a sturdy, disposable plastic bag, which students can place in their personal bag. Distributing food in a traditional backpack led to various difficulties and large expense, including backpacks not being returned or being damaged beyond use. If your site would like to use backpacks, please discuss with the Program Manager. Holding a backpack drive or getting donations from retail stores may be options.

Food should be sent home weekly with students. If a student is absent on Friday, please give him/her the food the following week. Your school may change the distribution day to account for school closings or absences.

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW FOOD TO GO UNDISTRIBUTED. Make every effort to respect our donors by providing food to intended families. If you have an issue getting food home with students, please contact the Program Manager as soon as possible.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Feedback to improve the Backpacks for Friday program is crucial. Evaluation allows us to be accountable and provides us with necessary information to make change. When evaluations are conducted, the Site Coordinator's assistance is necessary. You will never be asked to disclose confidential information or to provide details that could threaten participant confidentiality. Informed consent will be sought in evaluations and participation is not mandatory.

MANAGING DIFFICULTIES

Communication is key. If you run into a difficulty that you can't fix, please contact the Program Manager. Backpacks for Friday is meant to help our children, and it should not be a burden on Site Coordinators.

The Program Manager is available to work with Site Coordinators throughout the year. Problems faced at each school are different because each community may face different challenges. There may be opportunities to learn from other schools.

Chapter 3

SITE COORDINATOR CHECKLIST

PROGRAM LOGISTICS

- Determine Site Coordinator. Who will be backup/assistant site coordinator if Site Coordinator is absent?
- Read, sign & return program agreement
- If using community volunteers: Will they have repeated contact with students and need to pass a background check?
 - Background check complete?
- Determine storage site
 - 6 inches off the floor & 4 inches away from wall
 - Pest free
 - Secure (lockable)
- Who will receive deliveries?
- Has school staff been educated about the program?
- How will children be referred to the program?
 - Referral slips?
- How will students receive packs on Fridays? Will food be picked up at a central location? Will teachers distribute in the classroom?
 - How will you maintain students' confidentiality?
 - How will you ensure food is going to intended students.
- Assign tasks to volunteers/staff as needed
- Provide feedback to food bank in regard to program quality and effectiveness

PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

- Communicate with participants and parents
 - Parent letters or enrollment forms?
- Explain when/where to pick up food
- Communicate that food packs should not be opened until children are home

HELPFUL TIPS

- Distribute food in a way that will not embarrass children
- Maintain a level of confidentiality to prevent potential problems
- If volunteers will have repeated contact with children, they need to pass a background check
- Avoid public announcements about program unless you call the program something like “Nutrition Club” or “Ms. Smith’s Club”
- Do not hand out food to a student while in a group of peers who are not a BFF recipient

Chapter 4

RESOURCES

SOUTHEAST MISSOURI FOOD BANK

573-471-1818 / www.semofoodbank.org

Jessica Espinoza, Program Manager
jespinoza@semofoodbank.org

SNAP Application Assistance
mosnap@semofoodbank.org

United Way emergency assistance: call 211

TEL-LINK, Missouri Department of Health: 800-835-5465

Mental Health Crisis Line (24 hours): 800-356-5395

Careline (4 to 10 p.m. daily): 573-651-3642 (in Cape); 877-626-0638