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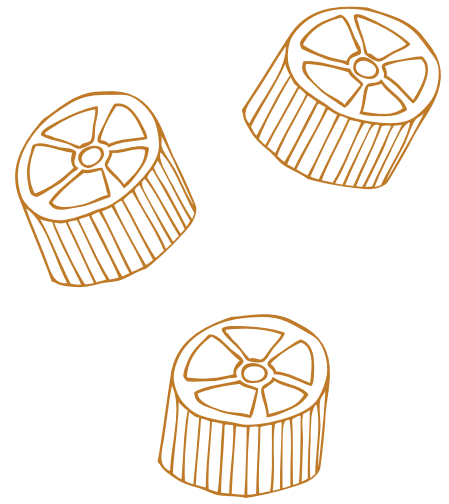
FOOD BANK



# SCHOOL PANTRY TOOLKIT

*Creating a community where no one has to go hungry!*

# Welcome to the School Pantry Toolkit!



**H**ere you'll find everything needed to launch a successful pantry in your school. As you read through please know that while it may not seem easy, it's worth it. A good school pantry is a vital resource for families in need and can result in a happier, healthier, school full of children who are ready to grow, learn, and thrive.

The **School Pantry Program** is a part of the Arkansas Foodbank's **Feed Our Future Today** initiative to create seamless access to nutritious food for children who are food insecure. We are working to answer questions such as: If a child is food insecure, how often do they have nutritious snacks or meals when they are not in school? How can we make sure children have access to nutritious food on weekends, holidays, and during the summer?

Our focus remains on effective, cost efficient, and replicable hunger relief programs targeting children. School pantries have become a vital solution we feel will lead toward reducing childhood hunger in Arkansas. Read on to see how your school or organization can have an impact on children in your community.

Together we can help create a community where no one has to go hungry!



## Hungry Children...

are sick more often and are more likely to be hospitalized than food secure children.

have lower academic achievement than food secure children.

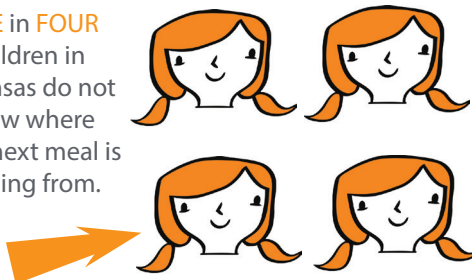
have more behavioral problems.

can also have long-term issues because hunger impairs physical and intellectual development.

# 90,180

children are food insecure in Arkansas Foodbank's 33-county service area.

**ONE** in **FOUR** children in Arkansas do not know where their next meal is coming from.



# 3

national ranking for child hunger

# What are school pantries?

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School pantries are readily accessible sources of food assistance for low-income children aged 0-18 and their families. School pantries operate much like other food pantries, with the exception that the pantry only serves school children and their families. Sites are either located on a school's campus or close by, have set distribution schedules, and offer ongoing food assistance services. The mission of a school pantry is to help alleviate child hunger through the provision of food to school children and their families.

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The **Foodbank** has experienced tremendous success over the past few years in fighting child hunger with school pantries.

Traditionally, school pantries operate through volunteers (from the school and community) and provide food to children enrolled in the school district and their families referred to the pantry by school counselors or teachers. Families pick up

the food boxes once a month, two times a month, or weekly, depending on the operations of a specific pantry. Food is picked up from or delivered to the pantry by the Foodbank, and volunteers work to sort the food and put it in boxes for distribution.

Each pantry must be inspected annually to ensure the food is safely stored and handled.

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# Starting a School Pantry

## Site Eligibility for School Pantries

Schools eligible for a food pantry must have **40% or higher** free or reduced lunch rates in their school.

Schools must plan and be able to serve at least **25 families per month**.

## Grant Opportunity

Schools with more than 75% free and reduced lunch rates or in counties with 30% or higher child food insecurity (as measured by Feeding America Map the Meal Gap) are eligible for a one time, matching start-up grant in the form of a food credit. (Limited availability)

Applications are reviewed on rolling basis from Jan. 2nd through Sept. 30th each year.

Acceptance will be determined based on need, capacity of the applying partner, and other factors.

## Determining Readiness

School Pantries can differ greatly in operation in order to meet the unique needs of each school community, but they all start with the same first step – community partnership. Schools cannot be direct members of the Arkansas Foodbank because they are local government organizations and the Arkansas Foodbank is a non-profit, so schools must partner with a local non-profit or church. We recommend that schools find a community partner and discuss with them some of these key issues prior to starting the process of opening a school pantry:

- 1.) What is the need at our school and does a pantry seem like the best fit?
- 2.) Is the school administration in full support of the program?
- 3.) Can you identify a space in the school that will respect student's privacy and store food safely?
- 4.) Is there a team of individuals invested both at the school and in the community to make the school pantry successful and sustainable?

## School Support

We recognize that every community in Arkansas is different and the necessary contacts for program support are going to vary. However, it is extremely important to get complete support from the school administration as early as possible. As such, we require a signed letter of support from the Superintendent stating s/he is aware of the partnership and supports the program.

## Community Support

Arkansas communities care deeply about the food-insecure children in the state, recognizing that it truly does take a community to raise a child. The support of a community partner in the School Pantry Program is not only a practical manner of membership, but it serves to build community support that will help the school in establishing the necessary connections to funding and volunteer sources. Often times there is an organization in the community that is already a member of the Arkansas Foodbank and can be a great community partner and resource in the development of the School Pantry Program, but other organizations can also play a supporting role.





## Step One:

### Finding a Community Partner

## Finding a Community Partner

Finding a non-profit or church in your community to sponsor your program from the start will only improve your chances of success. Planning is smoother if the community partner and school are both involved early on. As mentioned previously, there may already be an organization that is a member of the Arkansas Foodbank and working on hunger relief that may want to be your community sponsor. It will make on-boarding with us that much simpler with less paperwork and people already knowledgeable on working with the Arkansas Foodbank, safe food handling and distribution. If no current member exists in the community, is unable to partner, or if the school has another organization in mind, new organizations just have to submit our member agency application and specify they are sponsoring a school pantry. Churches are often eager to help, but there may also be a 501c3 non-profit in the community that works with children and families that would like to be involved.

## Working Out the Relationship with your Community Partner

Within a community there will likely be many options to look for 501(c)3 or church partnership. Churches, food pantries, and 4-H clubs have proven successful already with the program. It is helpful to have a lead person from each organization to enable a smooth working relationship between the community partner and the school. They can be seen as Co-Coordiators. The role of the community partner can range from heavily involved in all operations to simply serving as the member of record for Foodbank membership requirements.

## Building the Connections

When choosing a community partner it is important to involve our Children's Services Coordinator to ensure everyone involved is completely aware of their roles and responsibilities. We recommend organizing a planning meeting once potential partners are identified to discuss logistics and operations, from funding to administration, and determine whether your group has the resources necessary to make the program successful. You'll want to make sure the following people are in attendance: school principal, school site coordinator, community partner representative, and if necessary other school or partner representatives. Some first meetings are simply informative on program operations and expectations, others result in paperwork being signed and the scheduling of inspections and/ or training.



### Step One:

#### Finding a Community Partner

### Step Two:

#### Fill out the Paperwork

## Complete Arkansas Foodbank Membership Application.

The Arkansas Foodbank Membership Application is required for community partners who are not already members of the Arkansas Foodbank. Applications will be accepted and reviewed on a rolling basis from January 2nd through September 30th. A copy of our application can be found on the Arkansas Foodbank website. If you have any questions about the application or the acceptance process, please contact Cathrine Schwader at 501-569-4327 or [cschwader@arkansasfoodbank.org](mailto:cschwader@arkansasfoodbank.org).

## Additional Paperwork For Accepted School Pantries

School Pantry sites whose applications are accepted will be contacted by the Children's Services Coordinator and the following paperwork will be required before your site can begin receiving food from the Arkansas Foodbank.

### ***Letter of Support from the Superintendent***

***A Memorandum of Understanding:*** This document is between the community partner and school. If you would like a template memorandum, you can request one from Arkansas Foodbank.

***Program Agreement with the Arkansas Foodbank:*** signed annually before the beginning of each school year between community partner, the school, and the Foodbank.

## Pass Pre-approval Inspection

The storage space for the school pantry must pass a pre-approval inspection to make sure there is enough space to store food safely. At the time of the inspection we will need to see proof that pest control such as a copy of the site's most recent pest control service invoice. It can often take some time to get them from the school maintenance staff, so make sure to start asking for it early.

## Attend Program Training

New agency orientation is offered by our Agency Relations Director from 1 to 3 pm on the 3rd Thursday of the month at the Arkansas Foodbank. If this time or location does not work for your school pantry, the Children's Services Coordinator can schedule a time to come to your site to offer the training, such as at the time of the pre-approval inspection. Any site where the training takes place must have access to Wi-Fi and a place where a projector can be plugged in and displayed on a screen or blank white wall. Participants in the training will need to bring a laptop to practice ordering from our online food ordering site (Agency Express). Not everyone must have one but it is a good idea for there to be at least 1 computer for every 2 people so that it is easier to follow along.



### Step One:

**Finding a Community Partner**

### Step Two:

**Fill out the Paperwork**

### Step Three:

**Establishing Program Structure**

## Organizing Program Support

Prior to applying to become a School Pantry it is important to identify the people who will be supporting your program.

### School Pantry Site Coordinator

The School Pantry Coordinator acts as the contact person for the Foodbank and has the key responsibility to ensure that the pantry operates smoothly. Some school pantries have co-coordinators (one from the school and one from the local organization) to share the responsibilities. Additionally, this individual is expected to remain in touch with school administration as the program advances and changes are made. This person is mostly an individual who is involved in all levels of the program structure.

### School Pantry Volunteers

There can be quite a bit of work in a school pantry sorting and packing food and volunteers will be a valuable resource. Volunteers can be parents, staff at the school, community volunteers, or whomever the pantry sees fit. Being aware of the amount of time a volunteer is going to spend with children will help to determine if background checks are required.

### Record Keepers

The Foodbank will provide with the proper forms (School Pantry Monthly Report and sample intake form) so you can collect information about your school pantry and the clients you serve. This is necessary in case of a recall of any of the food items or you need to determine how much food should be provided based on family size. Additionally, each time you order from the Foodbank, you will receive an invoice documenting what product you received, how many pounds, and the total cost and/or shared maintenance fees. We recommend keeping invoices for your school pantry for at least 1 year.

### Site Coordinator Responsibilities:

Attend required AF orientation and training sessions

Arrange food pick-ups or deliveries with AF staff

Order food from Agency Express

Ensure food is distributed to clients on the days and times advertised

Ensure food is distributed in a safe way.

Communicate necessary info to the program participants.

Maintain and submit all necessary records and reports

Communicate with AF staff if problems arise.

Make sure food is properly stored off the floor and on shelves or in refrigerated/frozen appliances.

Keep the stock rotated using oldest items first.





### Step One:

**Finding a Community Partner**

### Step Two:

**Fill out the Paperwork**

### Step Three:

**Establishing Program Structure**

## Pantry Location Requirements

Food safety components are the primary concerns around the pantry location requirements. However, a critical component is also to ensure control of the pantry. This requires that the location can be closed off and locked to prevent any unwanted actions.

### Temperature

To ensure food in your school pantry is served safely, maintaining a safe temperature is critical. Finding a space within the school where the temperature can be controlled between 40-78 degrees is a requirement. If the pantry is utilizing a refrigerator or freezer then the temperature of each of those must be recorded on a daily basis. We will provide a temperature log sheet that is a helpful tool to ensure consistency. Our Program Services team at the Arkansas Foodbank will be monitoring your School Pantry once a year. A temperature log of some sort must be present as part of this monitoring.

### Storing

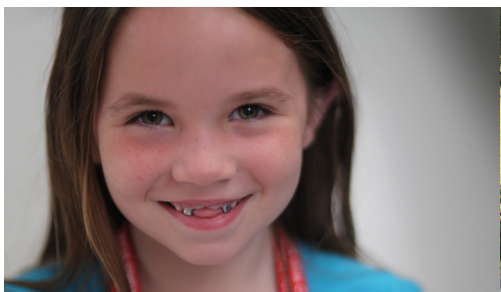
Chemical products absolutely cannot be stored in the same area as food. If space is limited, food and non-food items including cleaning supplies or other chemicals can be stored in the same area as long as the food is stored above the chemicals or other non-food items. The food must be stored at least 6 inches off the ground, this includes intermittent times when food is waiting to be sorted or distributed. Food must also be 1 inch away from the wall and 6 inches below the ceiling at all times, both of these measurements are in place to avoid pest problems. Pest control is mandated as well, though your school regulations should already ensure that.

### Cleanliness

Managing dirt and debris in the pantry is important for both pest control and other risk factors such as allergies. Regular sweeping and dusting of product is highly encouraged. Cans can become rusted as a result of dirt in advance of the time frame of spoiling if not sorted in a clean space.

## Transportation Considerations

One important part of your School Pantry Program to consider is how you will get food from the Arkansas Foodbank. While delivery may be an option in some communities it cannot be guaranteed for every school pantry. Picking up orders at our main warehouse in Little Rock or our branch warehouse in Warren is a great way to utilize community volunteers who are available to help out during school hours. For more information about the warehouse closest to you and their hours of operation, or if you would like to inquire about possible delivery options please call our Children's Service Coordinator at 501-569-4327.





## Distribution Models

The School Pantry Program operates in schools all over the country resulting in an array of creative distribution models. Below are popular distribution models utilized by current Arkansas Foodbank School Pantries. If you think of a model that is not included here, please reach out to our staff to talk through logistics.

### **Open Door Policy**

Many schools decide that their school pantry will serve children at any hour while school doors are open. This ensures that food insecurity can be met at any level. Understanding the difference between chronic food insecurity and situational food insecurity may help to determine whether an open door policy is necessary. This model gives teachers the freedom to see a need in one of their students and respond to it immediately. In this situation it is best to have the pantry located in a place where it is constantly monitored to assure access and security. Some successful locations have been in nurse's offices, guidance counselor's offices, or the front office.

### **Set Distribution Times**

Most current school pantries offer food to families at set distribution times. It is required that food be distributed at least once a month, but some school pantries opt for twice a month or weekly distributions. In order to accommodate the number of families you will be serving we suggest that distributions to be at least 2 hours.

### **Backpacks**

Many schools have heard of or previously operated a backpack program where students receive food in pre-packed bags every Friday before the weekend. Backpack programs are not the same as a school pantry. The style of this program is appealing to many, but it is not cost effective and cannot provide food to adequately meet the need of all the household members in need. It also does not allow the distribution of fresh produce or other perishable and often healthier items. However, sometimes school pantry models do not work with the needs of certain families such as those who lack transportation and live in a rural area or when children are homeless. For these cases, please talk to our Children's Service Coordinator about ways these families can be reached.

### **Important factors to consider for Distribution Model...**

are access, timing, distribution and population.

How are families going to gain access to the pantry, through referral or self-selection?

When will food be distributed?

How will food be distributed? Pre-packed or client choice are traditional models.

Will you offer reusable grocery bags, boxes, etc.?

How often will you distribute food?

Finally, to whom is the food distributed, students or parents?

Determine how you will handle the issue of parental permission. School policy may require parents be contacted in advance for pantry participation.



**Step One:****Finding a Community Partner****Step Two:****Fill out the Paperwork****Step Three:****Establishing Program Structure****Step Four:****Managing Your Pantry**

## Managing Your Pantry

After completing the process of determining the need in your community, finding a community partner, meeting with the Children's Service Coordinator, applying to the foodbank, receiving training, and designing your pantry model, you are now ready to begin serving your community. However, there are some very important key skills to keep in mind during the process.

### Identifying Hungry Students

First and foremost, you need to identify students that are facing food insecurity in your school. Some students will self-identify if you make the efforts to announce the new service over the intercom or send home notices. Other students might be identified by school staff such as the school nurse, teachers, or counselors. We want to make sure that everyone who needs help can get help so advertising the program is the best way to help that help. Some students will attempt to hide their needs. Share Our Strength is a national hunger relief organization which created a tool for schools to help identify hungry students. Please find the handout in the appendix.

### Making Students Comfortable

It is very important to take the time to familiarize the individuals you are hoping to serve with the new program. In the case of the School Pantry Program, this is the students and parents. The size of need in your school is going to dictate how you help to make students and parents feel comfortable asking for food. If the need at your school is relatively small, keeping the pantry discrete and private is traditionally more successful. However if the need at your school hovers around 75% or more free or reduced lunch students, then eliminating stigma is best done by making the resource very well known. For tips on this please feel welcomed to reach out to our staff and/or review the case studies in the appendix.

### Connecting Students to Other Resources

The School Pantry has been noted as building a stronger connection between parents and school staff because it allows the school to assist families in a new way. To take full advantage of that, it is fantastic when other information on resources in the community is available. Examples include; WIC, Food Stamps, Free or Reduced Lunch applications, health clinics, nutrition handouts, and many others. Your local Cooperative Extension and/or Health office should have resources and information to share.



# Successful Shopping

Arkansas Foodbank School Pantries will have the ability to order food online as often as once per week. Your site's authorized shoppers are responsible for selecting food that is both safe and nutritious to distribute to students at the site. It is critical that prior to shopping or ordering the individual(s) look at the current stock to ensure food is not wasted. Every shopper should be educated on the budget of the School Pantry and the allowance for an order. You will notice on our online ordering system (Agency Express) that there are different types of product available:



## Donated Product

This is product we receive through channels such as food donations, food drives, and donations from grocery stores around our service area. The item number on this product will begin with a D. This product may have a maintenance fee of 9 or 18 cents per pound or may be offered at no cost. Make sure to check if the item has limits on how much you can order.



## Fresh Produce/Dairy

The Arkansas Foodbank regularly receives donated fresh produce and dairy, and purchases at least 1 truck of fresh produce per month. Fresh produce and dairy is always available at no cost to our member agencies



## Purchased Product

The item number on this product will begin with a P. This food has been identified as priority items that pantries are always looking for but difficult to find. Our operations team is able to purchase this product at wholesale cost and turn that price around to you. Resulting in lower cost than in store but higher cost than donated product.

\* If donated in large amounts, product can be ordered by the case, but if it is donated during food drives or retail pickup it often has to be sorted by volunteers. It will show up as mixed or assorted product that can be purchased by the case or pound. For information about or assorted goods categories please contact us.

## Shopping Wisely

While we strive to provide a well-rounded inventory of products, availability does vary. The Arkansas Foodbank may not be your only source of food, and that is ok. We encourage you to seek as many sources of low cost, healthy food as possible. Here are some tips to save your school pantry money:

*Coupon clipping*

*Buying in bulk*

*Buy at food discount stores (Family Dollar, Dollar General)*

*Don't be afraid to ask if it is possible to buy food at cost and/or tax free because it is for a non-profit purpose.*

*Work with a local produce farmer*

*Start a school garden*

*Host a food/fund drive (Create a list of items your pantry needs and ask specifically for those so you can regulate what you are giving to the kids—nutrition is key!)*





# Questions?

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