Backpack Program Manual

Section 1: The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma and Food for Kids Backpack Program

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma is a private, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that acts as a link through which the food industry and community may donate food and other goods. The products are then distributed to more than 1000 charitable feeding programs and schools in 53 central and western Oklahoma counties.

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma’s Food for Kids Backpack Program provides chronically hungry elementary school students with a backpack of nutritious, kid-friendly food to sustain them over weekends and holidays throughout the school year. Started as a pilot project in 2003, the Food Bank originally served 180 children in 5 schools in Oklahoma City. During the 2014-2015 school year, the Food Bank served nearly 18,500 children among 514 schools in 53 central and western Oklahoma counties – and the need continues to grow. Many of these children have little or no food to eat between lunch on Friday and breakfast Monday morning at school.

The Regional Food Bank provides food and backpacks at no cost to the school. Food sacks are pre-packed by volunteers at the Food Bank. The schools identify children who need food on the weekends, place a food sack in each child’s backpack every Friday, collect empty backpacks on Monday, submit an online report to the Food Bank once a month, and have the opportunity to adjust their monthly food order by communicating with the Regional Food Bank staff.

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma serves 53 counties in central and western Oklahoma, a service area of approximately 45,000 square miles. The Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma, based in Tulsa, serves the eastern counties.
Section 2: Chronic Hunger

One of the most important roles of a Backpack Program Coordinator is identifying chronically hungry children, and helping fellow staff members to do the same. In the following section, we’ll take a look at the definition of chronic hunger, and how to distinguish these children from their peers. We’ll also look at identifying children who are not chronically hungry, and where to refer families for more help.

Chronic hunger defined

We define chronically hungry children as children who have little or nothing to eat outside of school. These children are often completely reliant on the free or reduced meal programs offered at their school as their only source of food, and are not getting sufficient, nutritious food on a regular basis outside of school. Without the Backpack Program, these children might possibly go the entire weekend without eating.

The Backpack Program is not intended to serve as a “snack program” - it is meant to provide a source of food for children who would have little to none without it.

Why is this program only for chronically hungry kids? We have made a commitment to provide food to those who are in the greatest need first. There are many kids across the state who come to school desperately hungry on Monday morning, having eaten only a few bites of food since Friday – or perhaps nothing at all. You can help ensure that all chronically hungry children in central and western Oklahoma receive food on the weekends by making sure that children who are not chronically hungry do not take home backpacks. We must respect our donors, volunteers, and community by adhering to our commitment of using our resources to serve chronically hungry children.

Signs of a chronically hungry child

While many growing kids will complain about being hungry, there are a variety of indicators that set chronically hungry children apart.

Behaviors

Chronic hunger can often be identified by observing a child’s interaction with food. The chronically hungry child:

- may stash or hoard food, especially on Fridays
- comes to school Monday morning with extreme hunger
- will eat anything placed before him or her
- continually asks for food
- asks for peers’ leftover food
- spends a lot of energy thinking about food
- may rush to the cafeteria line or show up early for breakfast

In addition to the behaviors above, you may see an impact on the child’s ability to function at school. Such behaviors include:
• excessive absences (unexcused or due to sickness)
• difficulty in forming friendships
• hyperactive, aggressive, and irritable behavior OR withdrawn, distressed, and passive behavior
• excessive sickness—sore throat, common cold, stomach ache, ear infection, fatigue
• short attention span, inability to concentrate.

Physical Traits

Certain physical features may be indicators of a vitamin and/or food deficiency:

• puffy and swollen skin (protein deficiency)
• very thin, bones protruding (calorie deficiency)
• redness around the lips, cracked lips, dry and itchy eyes (vitamin A deficiency)

Please note that the weight of a child isn’t always an indicator of chronic hunger. Obesity can be caused by extreme poor nutrition in a child’s diet.

Ask Questions

It’s very important to talk to children who are candidates for the program. By asking a few questions, you can better assess whether or not the child is chronically hungry. Good questions to ask include:

• “What did you eat for breakfast?”
  o If they say they skipped breakfast, find out why. Did they wake up late and not have time for breakfast or was there not enough food in the house?
  o If they did eat breakfast, was it enough to fill them up?
• “What did you have for dinner last night?”
  o Was it enough to fill them up?
• “What did you eat over the weekend?”
  o Did they have the correct number of meals?
  o Was it enough to fill them up?
• “Who prepares your meals at home?”
  o Is a parent cooking for them, or is it a sibling or someone else?
  o Do they cook their own meals?
  o Do they typically count on one particular person to make their meals?

Be a Good Listener

Listen for cues regarding the child’s home environment. Some traits may indicate that chronic hunger could be an issue, such as:

• the child often cooks their own meal, or has a sibling who does
• the family moves frequently
• several family members live in the same household
• the child mentions the loss of household income (loss of job)
• the child mentions a family crisis (illness, death) or disaster (fire)
It is important that the entire staff understands these cues to hunger. Insight into a child’s home situation may come from a teacher, counselor, coach, cafeteria worker, bus driver, teacher’s assistant, or custodian. Each interact with children in a different way. Cafeteria staff often have great feedback on a child’s relationship with food and their eating habits. PE teachers can detect physical problems as they perform athletically. Bus drivers may have a first-hand look at their living conditions.

Children should not be automatically enrolled in the Backpack Program because they receive free or reduced meals. A majority of families receiving free or reduced meals have food in their homes and the children are not at risk of going hungry over the weekend. Our experience has shown that approximately 10% of these children are chronically hungry. Conversely, children who do not qualify for the free or reduced meals at school may still have need for food over the weekends because of neglect or because they stay at a different family member’s home when on a school break. Some parents may also refuse to enroll in the lunch program but still have need for the Backpack Program.

**Signs of a child who is not chronically hungry**

Kids who are chronically hungry are typically very careful to follow the rules of the program- they want to make sure they receive their food each week. With that in mind, children who are not chronically hungry may:

- repeatedly forget to return the backpack on Monday morning
- forget multiple times to pick up the backpack Friday afternoon
- leave food at school
- eat food before leaving school or on the bus ride home
- complain about the flavor or variety of food
- discuss what food they have eaten over the weekend

If a child does something on this list it does not necessarily mean you should remove them from the program immediately. Some students may show these signs because they are:

- very young
- special needs children
- children who switch between multiple homes on weekends
- children who are embarrassed about receiving the food, or may be teased

**Use your best judgment**

The best way to determine continued need is to speak face-to-face with the child. Ask some of the questions about their home situation again. Do they forget because the Backpack Program food is not important anymore, or is something else going on? The most important thing is to assess the reason behind the behavior. If a child forgets their backpack but you feel they don’t have food resources at home, please continue sending food home.

If you decide that the child’s situation has changed or they have misused the program, you may use your discretion and withdraw the student from your list of participants.

*You are welcome to send the food home in plastic bags or to use the child’s regular school backpack if that helps cut back on tracking down Food Bank backpacks.*
In addition to helping us reach all chronically hungry children across our service area, effective targeting will help the program run more smoothly at your school. The number of kids on the program will become unmanageable for you if children are not screened appropriately.

Additional help for families

If a family is in need of more help, you can use our website to locate partner agencies in your community. Go to www.regionalfoodbank.org and click on ‘Get Help.’ This is also a great tool for any family who may not fit the criteria of chronically hungry, but still needs assistance.

Whenever possible, the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma staff will communicate information to you that may be beneficial to your families: for example, pantries with extended hours for holidays or programs providing food to students over school breaks.

For your students with older siblings: We offer the School Pantry program for middle and high school students. Please visit the Regional Food Bank’s website or call 405-972-1111 for more details.

Section 3: Role of the Backpack Program Coordinator

This section discusses the six main functions of the Backpack Program School Coordinator:

- serving as a liaison for staff, students, parents, and any volunteers you use to assist with the program
- approving referrals, maintaining documentation, and overseeing children on the program
- communicating order information with Food Bank staff and completing online monthly reports
- coordinating pickup of the food from a drop site or acceptance at your school and properly maintaining your inventory
- distributing backpacks of food to chronically hungry kids
- occasionally assisting with evaluations, surveys, and special projects

Liaison

As the Backpack Program Coordinator, you will be the liaison, or point person, who connects the Food Bank to the school. You will undergo training and be familiar with all necessary information about the Backpack Program. You will also need to make sure the school staff, including faculty and support personnel, understand the program and how to identify children for the program.

As a liaison to staff, your role is to:

- inform ALL employees about the program
- ensure they know where to get a referral form and how to return it to you

To inform staff members about the program, you can make a presentation at a staff meeting, send an all-staff email, or put together a bulletin board in the teacher’s lounge. The Regional Food Bank will provide you with materials and resources you may use to educate your staff on the program, including a sample PowerPoint presentation and handouts on identifying chronically hungry children. All of these resources are available online at http://www.regionalfoodbank.org/backpackprogramforms.

As a liaison to parents and students, your role is to:
• explain the program to participating students
• send home information to parents of students referred to the program, if applicable

Let students know they have been invited to join the Backpack Program. Explain that the program is to ensure that they have enough food to eat on the weekends. Let them know that if they have enough food at home on the weekends, they will be removed from the program so another child may take their place.

Schools may choose if and how to inform parents, and whether or not to require parental consent. The Food Bank provides sample letters informing parents about the program. One version requires a parent’s signature, and the other is written as an information letter. Both versions are offered in Spanish. These forms are online at http://www.regionalfoodbank.org/backpackprogramforms. Some schools prefer to talk to parents one on one rather than send a letter home. You may decide how the program will operate best for your school and families.

This may also be a good opportunity to encourage a family to enroll in the free/reduced lunch program if they do not already participate.

When communicating with parents, be sure to discuss any food allergies. Find out how they would prefer to handle the issue. Sometimes removing an item from the sack is sufficient. Make a note in your records of any children with allergies, and what their parent’s preferred method of addressing the issue is. You may want to use school records to identify children with food allergies (peanuts, milk, etc.).

Due to the differing types and severity levels of food allergies, we are unable to provide an allergen-free food sack.

Only parents whose children have been referred by a teacher or staff member should be contacted. Do not send home information to every family at your school. You will have many children sign up who are not chronically hungry and do not need the program. This will make it difficult for you to identify which families truly need the program, will cause the number of children on the program to be unmanageable, and will create uncomfortable situations requiring you to turn a family down for inclusion in the program.

As a liaison to volunteers, your role is to:

• communicate necessary information to volunteers, such as needs, responsibilities, expectations, and important dates
• send background checks to the Regional Food Bank for any non-staff volunteers who will have contact with children

While volunteers are not a requirement to run the program, you may find that additional help makes program administration an easier task to manage. Any non-school employee who volunteers and has direct contact with the students will need to complete a background check. The Food Bank can provide you with a form for the volunteer to complete, and we will run the check for your school free of charge.

Documentation and Program Oversight
At any time, you may add a child to the program that you believe to be in need of the food. You will complete a referral form for that child and keep it on file for the rest of the school year. For other staff members, they should follow the referral process outlined in this section.

**Backpack Program Referral Process**

Any staff member can refer a child to the program. The person making the referral should use the Backpack Program referral form. After completing and signing the form, it is sent to the School Coordinator for approval. Note: Not all referrals have to be approved. If you feel the child does not fit the criteria, you do not have to approve the child for the program.

When you receive referrals, please keep them organized in a notebook or file. You do not need to send them to the Food Bank, but it is required that you keep them on file for the duration of the year in a secure location. These referrals should never be sent home or viewed by anyone other than the person writing the referral and you as the Coordinator.

**Distribution Log**

A weekly distribution log is available for you to keep track of food given out each Friday. Like the referral form, it is not required to send the Food Bank your copy of the distribution log. However, it will be much easier to complete monthly reports having this information available on the form.

**Keeping and Destroying Records**

We recommend keeping a binder with all of your program information and documents (referrals and distribution logs) in one place. This will not only help you stay organized, but will make it much easier for someone to fill in for you if you are ever unavailable.

At the end of the school year, please destroy all of these forms as you would any other confidential document.

**Adding Children to the Program**

Once approved for the program, a child can start receiving food the following Friday, provided the school has sufficient food available. Please keep in mind that you will probably need to wait until your next delivery day to begin distributing to the newly added children so that they can be accounted for in your food order. Starting them immediately may result in you running short on food. Always check your inventory before you start sending home food with a newly referred child.

**Removing a child from the program**

The school may use their discretion and withdraw a student from the program at any time if a student’s situation changes or if the student misuses the program. Let the child know that they are being removed from the program, and that another child in the state will now be able to take their place.

Some children who are removed from the program enjoy remaining involved. They can volunteer to pack or distribute backpacks. It is often very satisfying for them to have a chance to give back.

Chronic hunger can be a long-term or short-term issue. Children who are in difficult situations may be on the program the entire year. Those situations may include poverty, neglect, abuse, or homelessness.
Children whose parents have been laid off, have been evicted from their homes, or are experiencing other temporary conditions may be on the program only as long as the situation lasts. As a result, it is very normal for children to come on or off the program. Throughout the school year, each child’s situation should be assessed, and the child should remain enrolled in the program only if they are determined to be chronically hungry.

Children should not automatically be enrolled in the program simply on the basis of having participated the previous school year. Many things in a child’s situation can change over the summer.

**Backup Coordinators**

You need to train at least one person to back you up in case you are unavailable for any reason. The Backup Coordinator is not required to view the online training video, but it is encouraged. If you leave the school or become unavailable for an extended period of time, please contact the Regional Food Bank with the name and contact information for the substitute or replacement coordinator. This will help ensure that we may continue serving your school as usual in your absence.

If you are not an employee of the school, your Backup Coordinator MUST be a school staff member. It is important that someone at the school is familiar with the logistics of the program.

**Orders and Reports**

The order process with the Food Bank takes place over e-mail. It is essential that you provide an e-mail address that is checked regularly. If you do not have an e-mail address for your school, or you are not able to check the inbox for that address, please consider providing an alternate e-mail address. This can be a personal account, or the account of someone you work closely with who can pass on information to you as it comes in.

*This cannot be stressed enough: if you do not check your e-mail address regularly, you may not receive your food orders each month.*

**E-mail Order Process**

Each month, you will receive an e-mail one week before the Food Bank places your order in our system. This e-mail will ask you to reply and provide us with important information. We must know if you need an order that month, and how many children you are serving. **If you do not respond to this e-mail, you may not receive your order that month.** We will make every attempt to contact you, but we will not send an order if you have not confirmed your school’s need for a delivery and the number of students you are currently serving.

Orders are finalized in our system three business days before your delivery date. Changes to your order cannot be made after this time. Replying immediately to the e-mail we send each month is the safest way to ensure your food arrives every month.

There may be months that you have extra food from the previous delivery. **This is OK.** We understand that numbers fluctuate, and sometimes mistakes are made when estimating how many children you will serve. That is the purpose of the monthly order e-mail. If you have too much food, let us know so we can adjust your order. We can cancel the order if you don’t need any additional food. This does not
take your school off the program, and will not affect your status with the Food Bank. It simply skips the
delivery for that month.

We want to know the actual number of children you are serving each week. Do not attempt to adjust
your number served to account for extra inventory. Tell us that you are serving xx number of children
and you have xx number of extra boxes in your inventory. We will adjust your order so that you use up
the extra boxes in your inventory.

Backpacks will be sent on your first order every year unless otherwise requested. Typically we will send
the same number of backpacks as the number of children you estimate serving. We may sometimes
round this number up in order to send a full box of backpacks rather than a partial box. At any point
during the year, you may ask us to send extra backpacks. We will not automatically send new backpacks
because you have increased your number of children served.

**Monthly Reports**

Our monthly reports are completed online. An e-mail will be sent to you with the link for the newest
report following the last distribution day in the month for which you are reporting (we will not send it
out before all of the distribution days in that month have passed). Each month’s report link is unique.
Be sure to read all of the information presented on the report. We may pass along important
information before the questions begin, such as delivery information for the Christmas holiday season.
Additional questions may be asked on some months, requesting inventory information or stories from
your program.

If you do not submit the final page of the report and see a confirmation screen acknowledging your
submission, the information may not reach us. It is very common for us to receive incomplete reports.
Please be sure you continue the survey until you see a submission confirmation.

Monthly reports are required. The numbers and stories submitted online help us to keep this program
running. We use your reports for projections, budgets, and as a measure of our success. This
information holds us accountable to those we report to: media, funders, and Feeding America, the
nation’s network of food banks like our own.

We are able to offer this program free of charge to schools because of our donor base. We are
frequently asked to provide donors with data regarding the schools, cities, and counties that we serve.
We depend on you to provide this data so that we may maintain strong relationships with our donor
base. This is very important to the sustainability of the program.

If two consecutive monthly reports are not received from your school, a hold may be placed on your
account that will prevent future deliveries. This hold will not be released until we have the information
requested on those reports.

**Food Deliveries and Storage**

While you may not personally accept deliveries at your school or go to the drop site to pick up your
order, you need to be aware of the process. You will be our first point of contact for delivery issues or
changes.

**Deliveries**
You will be provided with a delivery day for your school. It will be in the format of “1st Tuesday” or “3rd Monday”. If your delivery day is 1st Tuesday, you can find your actual delivery date each month by looking at a calendar for the 1st Tuesday in the month. You will also be given a delivery time, which is discussed further below.

Your school’s food will be delivered in one of two ways: direct delivery or delivery to a drop site. Direct delivery schools will receive their food delivered directly to their location. All other schools will go to a regional drop site in order to pick up their order. The Food Bank would love to deliver directly to all of our schools, but unfortunately this is not possible. A large majority of our schools have to pick up from a drop site, and we are unable to accommodate requests for direct delivery. Our transportation department covers over 48,000 square miles and makes over 8,500 deliveries each month.

Direct delivery schools are required to follow our “In the Door” policy. Drivers will deliver items inside the front door of your school, but cannot go further once inside the building. This policy was created in response to many school districts not allowing visitors or delivery personnel into the school buildings. Upon agreement by the school and the driver, it may be possible to declare a different door that the driver enters. This is only possible if it is agreeable to both the driver and the school.

Direct delivery schools will be given a delivery time of 8:00am. This is not an exact delivery time; Your delivery will occur during the school day on your delivery day.

If our delivery method involves delivery to a drop site, and that drop site utilizes volunteers to transport boxes to your school, please follow this policy as well. The person delivering food to your school, whether paid driver or volunteer, should NEVER be asked to take boxes to a storage room, put boxes on a shelf, or rotate your inventory. This is your responsibility as a coordinator, and you may assign the task to school staff or students.

Schools that will be picking up from a regional drop site will be given the address of the site, and the day/time of the delivery. The site may be a commercial business, church, food pantry, or even a rural intersection. Please be familiar with the site before your first delivery, and make sure to arrive on time. We would advise you to arrive 15 minutes prior to your delivery time.

Many schools utilize community partners to help them with the pickup of food at delivery locations. Check with local civic groups, church groups, or your PTO/PTA to see if they would be willing to help the program in this way.

When you receive your delivery, you will receive a delivery slip with the order. Immediately verify that the number of boxes on the delivery slip is the same as the amount of boxes you actually received. If there is a discrepancy, alert your delivery driver and the Food Bank’s Backpack Program coordinator immediately. We will make every attempt to correct the situation as soon as possible.

The delivery slip that you will receive has the word “invoice” at the top of the page. Please note that this is not an actual invoice. You do not owe any amount for the food being delivered.

Storage

Backpack Program food is shelf-stable and does not need to be refrigerated. The food should be stored in a place that is secure, clean, pest free, and allows for food inventory to be rotated.
• Secure: The food should be stored in a locked location where it cannot be taken by children, faculty, staff, or other people who use the building.

• Clean: The storage area should be clean and dry.

• Pest-free: Food must be stored at least 6” off the ground for pest control purposes. The food sacks should remain in the Food Bank box in which they were delivered. The boxes can be stored in a cabinet, on a table, or on a pallet. You can request a pallet for your food by talking with Food Bank personnel – including our delivery drivers or the Backpack Program Manager. Ask the pest control service that monitors your kitchen area to also monitor the food storage area.

• First In, First Out (FIFO): Food should be stored in a way that makes it easy to use the oldest food first. This will ensure that no food sits in your inventory any longer than necessary. A sticker on the end of the box should indicate what date that box was packaged. Use this date in determining which food should go out next.

If you find any of the food is damaged, it will need to be disposed of as soon as possible. If possible, take pictures of the damaged food AND the sticker on the end of the case indicating on what date it was packed. These photos can be e-mailed to the Backpack Program Manager.

The Regional Food Bank staff goes to great measures to ensure that all food distributed is safe to consume, but please contact us if you have questions or concerns.

Many of the foods we put in the backpack sack have dates on them that can be confusing. The dates are not necessarily expiration dates. They can be “packaged on” dates, “best by” dates, or “sell by” dates. The Food Bank is very cautious about the foods we use for the Backpack Program. Please be assured that all food delivered to you should be good to distribute up to six months after the date on the outside of the box.

NEVER keep food from the program over the summer. All of the food in your inventory should be distributed to children before school is out of session for the summer months. If necessary, you may send extra food home as the school year comes to a close so that all of your inventory is depleted before the break. The food sacks are not to be used for any other program running over the summer, such as summer school or day camps. These sacks are only to be used for distribution through the Backpack Program during the school year.

Cardboard boxes

The boxes we deliver backpack food in are purchased specifically for ease and reuse at the Food Bank. You will notice that the boxes seal without using tape – a flap on one side of the top of the box folds under the two side flaps. To break these boxes down, you do not need to cut them with a knife or tear apart the glued sections. Simply press up in the middle of the box bottom and the cardboard will easily fold flat.

Each month before your delivery, please gather all of your empty cardboard boxes that the food sacks were delivered in. If your school receives direct delivery, please leave the collapsed boxes near the door where your boxes are delivered so the driver or volunteer can retrieve them. If you pick up your food from a drop site location, please bring the boxes with you each month. By reusing the boxes, we are able to keep our costs down and serve more children.
The best way to store and transport the empty boxes is to combine them as shown in the photos below. Leave one box open and place several flattened boxes on end in the box. If you stack them well, you can get 20 flattened boxes into one open box. Once full, place another open box over the top. This will keep them from scattering in your building or vehicle, and makes them easy to pick up together for transport.

Distributing Backpacks

The most gratifying part of your role is distributing food to chronically hungry kids. Food is pre-assembled in sacks and sent to schools in boxes (or “cases”) of 6 food sacks each. Your responsibility is getting that sack of food home with the children on your program.

If you have previously coordinated the program, you may recall two separate varieties of sacks. We will now only send one type of sack on each delivery, and will rotate through a variety of items included in the sacks throughout the year.

Sending Food Home

Place one food sack in each backpack for distribution on Friday (or on the last day before the weekend). This can be done anytime during the week before distribution. You have the option of using the child’s regular school backpack to send the food home. Please use whatever method works best for your school and students.

Coordinators are allowed to send two sacks home for children with a younger, at-home sibling provided they are not attending school and have the ability to eat solid foods. This sibling should be accounted for in the number of children served that you provide to us on the monthly order e-mail and the monthly report. For example, if you serve ten students in your school, and three of them take home an extra sack for a sibling, you are serving 13 children and distributing 13 sacks of food each week. Only
one extra sack may be sent home with each student, regardless of the number of at-home siblings the student has.

If your school has a break of one week or longer (five consecutive days, Monday through Friday), you may send home two sacks with each child. You will not do this if your break is less than one week. If your school is out Wednesday through Friday, you will distribute your normal amount on Tuesday. If you distribute two sacks in the previous scenario, you will run out of food before your next delivery.

If you are doubling your sacks because of a holiday, each child will receive a total of two sacks. Children who normally receive two sacks because of an at-home sibling should NOT be doubled to four sacks. The most sacks any child should ever take home at one time is two sacks.

Some coordinators number their backpacks to make distribution and record keeping easier. If this works for your school, please do so. The backpacks are yours to handle and distribute as you see fit. At the end of the school year, you will not return the backpacks to the Food Bank. You may give them to the children to keep or use them in some other capacity at the school. You will receive a new set of backpacks the next school year.

**Weekly Distributions**

Backpacks should be distributed as late as possible on Friday afternoon, or the last day before the weekend if it is a long weekend. The program is flexible enough to accommodate a variety of ways of distributing backpacks. Each school is free to develop its own plan. There are two primary methods of distribution: the school calls children to a central location to pick up their backpacks; or the backpacks are distributed to children in their classrooms during the last hour of the day.

If distributing from a central location, an announcement is typically made towards the end of the day on Friday. Students will then proceed to the pickup site. Many schools give the group a name, like Mrs. Brown’s Backpack Club, the Blue Tigers (or other mascot), or the Backpack Buddies. Please do not include anything related to food in the name of the group. This method can be easier for record keeping purposes, and gives you a chance to check in with each child weekly.

Some schools choose to deliver the food to each child’s classroom for distribution. During the day, the filled backpacks are taken to the classroom, and the teacher gives them out or places them in the student’s locker before the school day ends. This approach makes record keeping more difficult, as you may not know that a student is absent or did not receive their backpack that week. The coordinator will need to make an extra effort to accurately report distribution each week. You will also miss out on the face-to-face interaction with program participants.

Food is to be given to kids by approved adults each week. Approved adults are any school faculty or staff member (those people who have already undergone a background check in order to work at the school). Community volunteers, including PTO/PTA representatives, parents, or civic groups may participate, but the Food Bank requires them to pass a background check. A form can be sent to you for completion and signature. We will then process the background check for you, free of charge. Allow two weeks for the background check to be processed.

**Collecting Empty Backpacks**
Children should be instructed to return their empty backpacks on Monday. Each school can determine the best place for children to return their backpacks. Marking the bags with a number will help to know who has turned their backpacks in and who hasn’t.

Forgetting to return the backpack can be an indicator that the child is not chronically hungry and may no longer need the program – but this is not always the case. If this occurs, be sure to talk to the child to reassess their need for the program. Use your best judgment. The students should be aware that returning the backpack each week is essential to continue receiving food from the program.

Evaluations, Notices, and Special Requests

We respect your busy schedule and multiple duties at the school. From time to time we may need additional information from you or have opportunities that we feel may interest you and the students you serve. We will keep these extra e-mails to an absolute minimum.

Evaluations

You may periodically be asked to provide additional information to help the Food Bank assess the program. This may include end of year surveys for you, the students, or their parents. These surveys ask coordinators, principals, school staff, and/or program participants to provide feedback to the Food Bank that will be used to improve the program. Please consider taking the time when asked to complete these surveys so that we can provide the best possible service to your school.

The Food Bank is always looking for stories about the students and families you are serving at your school. Story requests will be included on some of the monthly reports. If you have something you would like to share with us, we would greatly appreciate receiving these narratives. We share these stories with community groups and individuals who support the Backpack Program to let them know their donations and time are making a difference. Names of students and schools will never be connected to the stories, only county identification. A sample of stories we have used in the past are below:

- From a coordinator in Texas County: We had a couple of students whose parents told us that they didn’t need for their children to receive the food anymore. They expressed how much they really appreciated us “standing in the gap” for them during this hard time in their lives.
- From a child in Caddo County: I love the applesauce and fruit bars. We never get fruit at home. I love Backpack for Kids.
- From a Coordinator in Oklahoma County: I recently had a girl around the 4th grade age tell me that her food sack was all she had in her house to eat over the weekend. She was crying and told me thanks for loving her enough to care that she had food to eat.

Notices

The Food Bank will send information along to our coordinators that we feel would be beneficial to the school or the students. An example would be information for feeding sites open during school breaks. We will keep these notices to a minimum and try to make them location specific (schools in Lawton are not notified about feeding sites open in Oklahoma City during fall break).

Special Requests
There are many organizations that contact the Food Bank in order to partner on an event. For the past several years we have helped the Thunder basketball organization and Homeland Stores identify families in the metro area for their annual shopping spree promotion around Christmas time. We have also received requests from Oprah Winfrey’s organization who was working on a story about childhood hunger. In cases like these, we will send an e-mail asking for schools to nominate a family or families that we can forward on to these entities for consideration in their program. The Food Bank does not participate in the selection process in these situations, but simply facilitates the connection between the organization and families who meet the criteria they are looking for. We understand that many schools have policies that would not allow you, as the coordinator, to disclose personal information to an outside organization. Participation in these special promotions is completely voluntary and you are not required to do anything that would violate the rules of your schools and/or district.

The Food Bank’s marketing team utilizes children’s drawings in a variety of promotional materials that we distribute to volunteers and funders. Three or four times a year you may receive an invitation to participate in one of these activities. These are also voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate. We will provide you with templates and “prompts”, which children can choose from to create drawings like the one below. They can be completed by children other than those on the Backpack Program, and are convenient, short-term projects for them to create during the school day.

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**Section 4: FAQ**

“I don’t have enough food to distribute this week – what do I do?”

Being proactive is the key to preventing this situation. Check your inventory weekly; the sooner you can notify us of a problem or potential shortage, the more likely we can help you find a solution.

It may be possible for us to get food to you before your next delivery. This is not always the case. Again, letting us know of the shortage as far in advance as possible will give us more options to help you.
Check with other schools in your district or geographic area. If you need the name or number for coordinators at other schools, contact the Backpack Program Manager.

You will most likely need to wait until your next delivery to add a new child to the program. We send you enough food for a certain number of students. When you add to those numbers, you may not have the right amount of food. Be sure to respond to the email sent the week before your order day. This is your chance to let us know how many food sacks we need to send.

“How do I deal with bugs?”

Whenever you store food, the potential for pests to be present is a possibility. Remember to keep your inventory at a reasonable level. Don’t store food for longer than you need. Periodically check on your stock so that if pests are a problem, you catch it early. Always store the food at least six inches off the floor or in rubber totes. If you need a pallet from the Food Bank, you can ask your driver or the Backpack Program Manager. And always discard any leaking or damaged food sacked immediately.

Bugs are often attracted not by the packaged food that we send you, but to the opened packages and crumbs that are left in a child’s backpack after the weekend. Remind students that the backpacks should always be returned empty and that all food should be left at home. If you are able, washing the backpacks occasionally throughout the year will help. This is a great opportunity for volunteers or the PTO/PTA to help out.

If pests are a recurring problem that you cannot contain, please contact the Backpack Program Manager. Our Facilities Director may be able to give advice to your staff.

“What happens if there is severe weather and I have a delivery?”

Severe weather is a fact of life in Oklahoma, and the Food Bank will always do our best to know where in our service area there may be poor weather conditions. If the weather is bad enough to close your school, it’s likely that we will not be sending our trucks to your area. We value our drivers’ safety and do not want to put them in a situation that will require driving through snow, ice, or potentially severe storms.

We will attempt to be proactive in calling you if a future delivery is going to be rescheduled (when severe weather is forecast). You can contact the Backpack Program Manager if you are concerned about an upcoming delivery and have not yet heard from us.

If the Food Bank is closed, we will begin rescheduling deliveries as soon as we are open and trucks are able to navigate the roads. We’ll contact you as soon as we have a rescheduled delivery date and time. You can find out if the Food Bank is open by calling the main number: 405-972-1111. The Program Manager’s email and voicemail will likely contain this information as well.

If you anticipate severe weather that will likely result in a school closing at the end of the week, you may send the backpacks home early.

**Section 5: Policies**

**Program Policy**
Food, backpacks, and other materials from the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma are given to schools at no cost to provide food to chronically hungry children. Food received by the school for the Food for Kids Backpack Program can only be used for the purpose intended by the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma.

The food and backpacks cannot be sold, used for other school programs, used for fundraisers, given to staff, or used for any other purpose other than to provide food to chronically hungry children over the weekends during the school year.

**Media Policy**

Occasionally, the Regional Food Bank, our associates, or the media may contact schools about the Food for Kids program. If you are asked by any of Food Bank staff or associates we contract with (e.g., Brad Cecil and Associates), you, as the Food for Kids school coordinator, are responsible for following the media policies of both your school and district. While we appreciate your participation very much, at any time you may refuse to do an interview. You may also contact the Backpack Program Manager or a member of the Food Bank marketing and development team to confirm the interview or ask questions. While we realize that each school district has distinct policies and procedures that must be followed in order to protect your students, we cannot keep track of all the different policies across our service area and therefore expect the school coordinator to take responsibility for any decisions regarding media.