



# Backpack Program Manual

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## Introduction

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Because of you, thousands of Oklahoma children receive not only food, but a reminder that they are loved and cared for. The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma is honored to join you in that vital work.

The Backpack Program started in 2003 with a pilot program at five elementary schools. The Backpack Program is now at more than 400 elementary schools in central and western Oklahoma. This program is available at no cost to all elementary schools in the Regional Food Bank's 53-county service area. It provides shelf-stable, child-friendly food for weekends and holiday breaks to children identified by school staff as food insecure. Pre-packaged sacks of child-friendly food are distributed by school coordinators on a weekly basis.

If you have questions after reviewing this information visit [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp), or call Jhonhenri Lee, Food for Kids coordinator, at 405-600-3127 or [jlee@rfbo.org](mailto:jlee@rfbo.org). If you would like to schedule a meeting or call back with Jhonhenri, please use the following link: [calendly.com/jhonhenri](https://calendly.com/jhonhenri).

Thank you so much for joining us as we envision an Oklahoma where no one goes hungry.

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## Section 1: Program Registration & Agreement

Schools interested in partnering with the Regional Food Bank's Backpack Program are required to complete training provided by the Regional Food Bank in Oklahoma City. Training will provide coordinators with the tools and information needed to operate the backpack program successfully. Training must be completed once a year.

The registration, agreement, and training must be received and completed before a school can begin the program.

### **How long is the agreement valid?**

The registration, agreement, and training are valid for one school year as long as the information provided on the forms is current and up to date. This includes personnel information, and school demographic information. If any of the information changes at any time during the school year, updates will need to be made to the registration and/or agreement. Updates can be submitted to

Jhonhenri at [Jlee@rfbo.org](mailto:Jlee@rfbo.org). At the beginning of every school year, coordinators and principals will be asked to renew their program documents which will be done online. You will receive more information via email at the beginning of every school year.

### **Non-Compliance**

Any partnering school that fails to follow any policies and/or procedures outlined in training may be at risk of their school's program being put on temporary hold or suspended until issues are resolved.

## **Section 2: Regional Food Bank Policy**

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

The food 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.

The Regional Food Bank holds the right to request copies of all documentation, and to physically visit the school to monitor programming (storage, food and delivery). Visits may be made unannounced or scheduled. Failure to comply will result in a dismissal from the program.

Schools that do not order for three consecutive months without communication of reasoning, will forfeit their place in the Backpack Program.

### **Media**

Occasionally, the Regional Food Bank, our associates, or the media may contact schools about the Backpack Program. If you are asked by any Regional Food Bank staff or associates we contract with, 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, at any time you may refuse to do an interview. You may also contact the Regional Food Bank to confirm the interview or ask questions. While we realize that each school district has distinct policies and procedures that must be followed to protect your students, we cannot keep track of all of the different policies across our service area and therefore expect the school coordinator to take responsibility for any decisions regarding media.

Schools are encouraged to take photos of food distributions or other relevant areas of programming to be used for internal Regional Food Bank materials. Photos of children to be used for external purposes will need to be approved through a parental consent form. Media release forms and parental consent forms will be provided by the Regional Food Bank, if it is a Regional Food Bank project.

### **Notices and Special Requests**

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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.

## Notices

The Regional 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.

## Special Requests

There are many organizations that contact the Regional Food Bank in order to partner on an event. For the past several years we have helped the Oklahoma City Thunder 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 which was working on a story about childhood hunger. In cases like these, we will send an email asking for schools to nominate a family or families that we can forward on to these entities for consideration in their program. The Regional 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 school and/or district.

The Regional Food Bank's marketing team utilizes children's drawings in a variety of promotional materials that we distribute to volunteers and investors. 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 seen here.



## Section 3: Identifying Participants

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### Identifying Chronically Hungry Students

Chronically hungry students are those who have little to no access to food at home.

### Signs and Symptoms of Chronic Hunger

There are several signs and symptoms that a student may be suffering from chronic hunger. The Regional Food Bank provides school staff with vital tools for identifying the most vulnerable students.

### Signs

Observation of behaviors and/or patterns

- Anxious for meals to be served.
- May rush to the cafeteria line or show up early for breakfast.
- Will eat anything placed before them.
- Extreme hunger every Monday morning.
- Lingers around food and asks for seconds.
- May try to "stash" or "pocket" food on Fridays to store up for the weekend.

- Excessive absences (unexcused or due to sickness.)
- Difficulty in forming friendships.
- Hyperactive, aggressive, and irritable, or withdrawn, distressed and passive.
- Excessive sickness—sore throat, common cold, stomachache, ear infection or fatigue.
- Short attention span, inability to concentrate.

**TIP:** If you have an increase in the number of students you are serving, wait to add them until you place your next order to make sure you have enough food for the new students. By adding students too early, you run the risk of running out of food before your next delivery.

### **Symptoms**

There are certain physical features which are indicators of a vitamin and/or food deficiency:

- Very thin, bones protruding (calorie deficiency.)
- Redness around the lips, cracked lips, dry and itchy eyes (can be a sign of vitamin A deficiency.)
- Puffy and swollen skin (protein deficiency.)

\*Please note that the weight of a child is not always an indicator of chronic hunger. Some obesity can be caused from extremely poor nutrition in the child's diet.

### **Referral Process**

Before a student participate in the program, they must be referred by the coordinator or other school staff. Not all referrals need to be approved, but the coordinator is responsible for collecting and keeping a record of all referrals. You can find a copy of the Backpack Program Referral Form [at atrfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://atrfbo.org/foodforkidshelp).

### **Parent permission forms**

The Regional Food Bank does not require parent permission forms for participation in the Backpack Program. It is up to the school to decide whether forms will be used.

### **How long should students participate?**

Because chronic hunger could be temporary, there are several indicators that help staff determine how long a student should participate in the program.

- **Short Term**
  - Parents in financial trouble due to crisis event.
  - Family evicted from home.
  - Other temporary situations.
- **Long Term**
  - Family consistently lacks resources for food.
  - Family is homeless.
  - Child is on his/her own.

### **What if a student no longer needs help?**

If a student has demonstrated signs of no longer needing the program or if the family's situation has changed, the coordinator may choose to remove the student from the program. Be aware that while a family's situation may have changed, food resources may still be limited. We recommend talking to the student about your decision. You will want to make sure that the student has enough food at home on a consistent basis before you make a final decision regarding removal from the

program.

### **Are there resources for the entire family?**

There are resources for the entire family should they need it. If a student and or their family needs more help, you can direct them to 405-972-1111 or our website where you will find resources for some of our emergency pantries in their area. Simply type in their zip code and a list of agencies will be provided. Go to [fbo.org](http://fbo.org) and click on the “[Get Help](#)” link.

## **Section 4: Program Management**

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### **Coordinator’s Role**

Schools need at least one point person at the school who manages certain elements of the program. This is generally the school counselor, a teacher or in some cases a dedicated community member. Non-school staff wanting to coordinate the program must pass a national background check conducted through the Regional Food Bank.

The school coordinator serves four main functions in the school:

### **Identifying/referring students**

Section 3 discusses signs to look for when identifying program participants. The lead coordinator is the main point person for identifying and referring chronically hungry students to participate in the Backpack Program. The coordinator will want to verify that referrals received and approved are for chronically hungry students.

**TIP:** Documentation should be kept in a safe place to keep all papers confidential. Documentation is to be kept on site at your school. **A separate distribution log should be created for every month of the school year.**

### **Program Liaison**

Coordinators are encouraged to utilize other school staff to help ensure this program is reaching students in need. The school coordinator will be responsible for acting as the program liaison to staff and students. Your school may choose to use fliers, send out an all-staff email, share information at a staff meeting, PTA announcement, etc. to make sure everyone is aware that the program exists at your school.

### **Record Keeping/Documentation/Reporting**

The school coordinator is responsible for keeping track of **program referrals** and the **distribution log**. Maintaining referral forms is the sole responsibility of the coordinator. We encourage other staff to assist in identifying students who qualify for the program. However, before students can participate, referrals must be approved by the main coordinator.

**Use of the distribution log is required** as it will help the coordinator to keep track of how much food has been distributed at your school. This is done by keeping track of the number of students that receive food each week. The coordinator will report these figures to the Regional Food Bank via reports completed in November, February and at the end of the school year.

**When recording your number of students in reports, please remember:**

Students and their siblings should be counted each month. It is simpler to add the sibling to your roster. It is recommended that a binder with this information be kept in a safe place either in the coordinator's office or where food is stored. You will be asked to report program numbers for each month when surveys are sent out. A copy of the distribution log can be found [here](#) or on [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp).

### **Backup Coordinators**

You need to train at least one person as a backup coordinator in the event you are unavailable for any reason. The Backup Coordinator is not required to review the manual and other program documents, but it is highly 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.

### **Pickup Person**

If someone other than the coordinator is transporting the food to your school from the drop site, they are considered a pickup person. The primary responsibility of a pickup person is to collect the school's order from the designated location and take it to the school. Coordinators should equip them with proper invoices and communicate any changes.

### **Storing and Distributing Food**

The 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 six inches off the ground for pest control purposes. The food sacks should remain in the Regional 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 Regional Food Bank personnel – including our delivery drivers or the Help Desk. 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 Help Desk ([helpdesk@rfbo.org](mailto:helpdesk@rfbo.org)). 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 sacks 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 Regional 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.

### **Reporting**

The Regional Food Bank requires periodic reports that will be collected online. **You will be required to report in November, February and End of Year.** Requests for increases in caseloads will only be considered during the November and February report periods. No other increase requests will be considered. It is imperative that you keep all records to ensure accurate reporting. You will receive an email containing the report link and the due date. The information that you provide in these reports is important to people who are interested in the value of the program, such as the media, our investors, and Feeding America, the nation's network of food banks. We ask that you keep good records of your program as Regional Food Bank staff may periodically ask you questions regarding the program at your school.

This report will ask questions like but are not limited to:

- How many unique children have you served so far this school year?
  - Count each child once, whether they have received food 10 weeks or 1 week. This number will always be as high, or higher, than the average number you serve each week.
  - A simple way to obtain this number is to count the number of approved referrals you have received.
- How many children you serve per month?
- How many cases do you have in inventory?
- How many students are on your waitlist to begin receiving food? (Please note: We will do our best to provide enough food to serve your chronically hungry students but cannot guarantee we can accommodate all requested increases. The Regional Food Bank will contact you to confirm an increase if we are able to provide one.)

Please remember that we are only able to offer this program free of charge to schools due to the generosity of many donors, supporters, and volunteers. Without these reports, we are unable to provide information to sustain the program. Missing reports result in an underrepresentation of the program's impact and reach in our state and your community.

***If you do not complete these reports by the due date, your account will be placed on hold and deliveries may be cancelled until the report is completed and the next delivery is scheduled.***

## **Section 5: Logistics**

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### **Site Approval**

For new sites, before your school can be recognized as a Regional Food Bank partner, you must first pass a pre-site approval visit. Upon initial training, a Food for Kids staff member will be in contact with you to discuss setting up a visit. A new site is a site that has not participated in the program within the last school year.

### **Program Set up/Storage**

As stated in Section 4, the food can be in a closet, an unused classroom or a cabinet. You will want to make sure that your school's program is in a secure location. All food should be stored at least 6 inches off the floor, on pallets or shelves and 3 inches away from the wall.



## General Storage

- All Regional Food Bank products must be stored in a location that has been visited and approved by an employee of the Regional Food Bank. Contact the Regional Food Bank if your location changes.
- Order no more food than you can properly store, use and/or distribute in one month.
- Non-food items must be stored separately from food items. Cleaning supplies and other chemicals must never be stored above or near food.
- Secure all storage areas to protect against theft and vandalism.

## Dry Storage

- Keep dry-storage areas cool and dry.
- Keep the temperature of the dry-storage area between 50°F and 70°F to keep food at its highest quality and to assure food safety.
- Store dry food on pallets or shelves away from walls and at least six inches, off the floor.
- Make sure dry-storage areas are well ventilated to help keep temperature and humidity constant throughout the storage area.

## Pest Management

- Deny pests access to the facility. Screen all windows and vents and keep all exterior openings tightly closed. Seal all cracks in floors and walls.
- Deny pests food and shelter. Throw out garbage quickly. Clean up food and beverage spills immediately. All areas including cleaning tools and supplies should always be kept clean and dry.
- Work with a licensed pest control operator to eliminate pests that do enter the facility.

## Determining Your Caseload

Once you are registered for the program, your caseload will be assigned for your school based on your three-year average distribution and the information that is provided on the registration. A helpful formula for determining how much food you will need is  $(X \text{ students} \cdot Y \text{ Weeks for the month}) \div 6 = \text{Total Cases (Boxes)}$ .

*Note:* Increases in caseloads can only be made after reports (November and February) are submitted and processed.

## Ordering

Training for ordering is provided upon registration of the program. **The primary coordinator is responsible for placing food orders once a month.** We recommend that the backup coordinator also be trained if the lead coordinator is not available to place orders. Often you may have a surplus of food from the previous month, but you will want to use your best judgment on whether you have enough food to last the entire month.

You will be sent a reminder via text message when your ordering window is open 8 days prior to your delivery date. **If you do not submit your order by 8:30 am two business days prior to your delivery date, then your order will not be accepted.** You must contact the Help Desk immediately to look into options for you to receive food. Late orders will not be accepted.

## Agency Express: The Exclusive Ordering Method

The Backpack Program recognizes the importance of streamlining the ordering process to ensure efficiency and accuracy in distributing resources to participating partners. To achieve this goal, we have implemented Agency Express as the exclusive method for placing orders. Agency Express is



a user-friendly online platform specifically designed to facilitate the ordering of backpacks and related supplies.

#### Why Agency Express?

1. **Enhanced Efficiency:** Agency Express offers a streamlined and automated ordering system, eliminating the need for traditional paper-based methods or phone calls. By utilizing this digital platform, schools can save valuable time and effort.
2. **Order Tracking and History:** With Agency Express, agencies can easily track the status of their orders, from placement to delivery. The platform also maintains a comprehensive order history, allowing agencies to reference previous orders, track trends and plan for future needs.
3. **Improved Communication:** Agency Express fosters efficient communication for the Backpack Program. Through the platform, agencies can send inquiries, request assistance, and receive timely updates, ensuring a smooth and collaborative partnership.
4. **Secure and Confidential:** Agency Express prioritizes the security and confidentiality of agency information. The platform employs robust data encryption measures and safeguards against unauthorized access, ensuring the protection of sensitive data.

As the Backpack Program evolves to meet the growing demands and challenges of providing assistance to children, it is essential that all participating partners adhere to the exclusive use of Agency Express for ordering purposes. By embracing this standardized approach, we can collectively optimize our operations and enhance our ability to support children in need efficiently. For any queries or support related to Agency Express, please refer to the dedicated help section within the platform or contact our program support team, who will be delighted to assist you.

#### Delivery

All participating schools receive deliveries once a month. There are two types of delivery: direct delivery and drop site delivery. Please note that direct deliveries are not possible for most schools.

For drop site deliveries, a designated delivery point will be assigned to your school. These are often a local church, fairgrounds, large parking lot, etc. School representatives meet at the same location every month to receive their food delivery. For these deliveries, the school representative is responsible for being prompt to every food pick up as the food bank drivers often have multiple deliveries to make. **If a school arrives late at a drop site, this will result in the order being returned and you will have to pick it up from the Regional Food Bank warehouse.** Call the Help Desk immediately to determine the next step.

For direct delivery schools, the driver will drop the order just outside the front entrance of the building and the site coordinator or office staff will be asked to sign off on the order. **Per the “Direct Delivery Policy,” drivers are not permitted to bring orders into the school for any reason. This policy follows Regional Food Bank Safety Regulations and no exceptions will be considered.** Upon agreement by the school and your regular driver, it may be possible to declare a different door for the driver to drop your order in front of. *This is considered a courtesy* and is only possible if it is agreeable to both the regular driver and the school. Upon receiving a substitute driver, please note that due to additional routes and time constraints, this driver will not be able to accommodate dropping your order at any door other than the front entrance to the building. Once the order is dropped off, it is then the coordinator’s responsibility to ensure the order is put in your school’s designated storage area.

Please set aside any pallets you would like to return for the following month’s delivery.

You will be notified during registration about which delivery system applies to your school. You will want to consider your school's holiday and break schedules. If you notice any conflicts with your delivery date because your school has a scheduled break, please contact the Help Desk as soon as possible so we can address any discrepancies with your delivery. Accommodations are approved on case-by-case basis. Please see the registration page for a list of Regional Food Bank celebration closures. Once food is delivered to your school, it cannot be returned to the Regional Food Bank for any reason. If there are any issues with your delivery or food, please contact the Help Desk for instructions on how to proceed.

Notice: All invoices are REQUIRED to be signed upon delivery. Invoices can be signed by administration, office staff, or school staff.

### **Boxes**

Please bring boxes to your delivery site or set them at the front entrance of your school on your designated delivery day. The Regional Food Bank reuses and recycles boxes to cut down on costs which allows more of our funding to go towards food costs. The best way to store and transport 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 other box. If you stack them well, you can get approximately 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. Please notify the driver during your food deliveries if you have boxes that need to be returned.



## **Section 6: Distribution**

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### **Distributing Food**

Food is preassembled in sacks and sent to schools in boxes (or "cases") of six food sacks each. Your responsibility is getting that sack of food home with the children on your program.

Give one food sack to each child in the program on Friday (or on the last day before the weekend); you should determine the best process for distribution based on your school's circumstances.

Coordinators are allowed to send sacks home for children with younger, at-home siblings 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 report via your distribution log. For example, if you serve 10 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.

If your school has a break of one week or longer (five consecutive days, Monday through Friday), you can provide each child with two sacks to take home. In the case of a break from Wednesday through Friday, you should distribute the usual amount of sacks on Tuesday. However, if your school is closed for an extended period, on the day of distribution, you should give out the number of sacks that the student would miss during that time, in addition to the sacks for that day. For instance, if we will be out of school for 3 weeks, which includes three Fridays, I will distribute a total of four sacks. This includes 1 sack for the weekend and three sacks for the Fridays we will miss.

### **Weekly Distributions**

Food sacks should be distributed as late as possible on Friday afternoon, or the last day before the weekend if it is a long weekend. During closures or extended breaks, please distribute early to cover the Fridays that will be missed. 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 food; or the sacks 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. Please use discretion with this model, as receiving the sacks can be portrayed as a stigma to some children. During the day, the food sacks are taken to the classroom, and the teacher gives them out or places them in the student's locker or backpack 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 children on the program each week by approved school staff. Community volunteers, including PTO/PTA representatives, parents, or civic groups may participate in programming assistance, but the Regional Food Bank requires them to pass a background check.

## Section 7: Volunteer Recruitment

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### **Finding individuals to help with your program**

While having volunteers is not mandatory to participate in this program, coordinators are encouraged to utilize volunteers to help with program logistics when needed. Some good sources for recruiting volunteers to help with your pantry include:

- PTA/ PTO
- Community service groups
- Student groups
- Local colleges or universities
- Local businesses
- Volunteer recruitment websites
- Volunteer Match
- AARP

### **Background checks for volunteers**

Any non-school staff volunteers that plan to have ongoing repetitive contact with students (i.e., assisting with distributions) are required to pass a national background check conducted by the Regional Food Bank. Please contact the Regional Food Bank if your volunteers need to be background checked. If the volunteer simply wants to assist with stocking shelves or packing sacks, having no interaction with children, a background check is not needed. Students may help stock shelves and/or prepare food sacks.

They are not permitted, however, to distribute food to other students participating in the program.

## Section 8: Community Engagement

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If you know someone who might be interested in making a gift in support of the Food for Kids Program in your community, please contact the Regional Food Bank or go online under "[DONATE](#)."

If you would like to host a Food and Fun Drive, please visit our [Students Against Hunger](#) page.

## Section 9: Appendix

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The documents included in this program manual are current as of the date of the publication of this document. The Regional Food Bank reserves the right to change these terms at any time.

For more information visit [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp/](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp/), [foodsafety.gov](http://foodsafety.gov), [fightbac.org](http://fightbac.org), contact Jhonhenri at [Jlee@rfbo.org](mailto:Jlee@rfbo.org) or by phone at 405-600-3127.