

School Pantry Program Manual

**Introduction**

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 purpose of the School Pantry Program is to provide supplemental food resources to chronically hungry middle and high school students who do not have access to food at home. The School Pantry Program began its pilot phase in 2010 at Putnam City West High School and Western Heights Middle School. After learning that a football team at one school had 19 players with broken bones due to malnutrition, the coach reached out to the Regional Food Bank for assistance with addressing the issue of child hunger.

This program has since expanded to 169 middle and high schools throughout our service area.

If you have questions after reviewing this information visit [,](http://www.rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp) or call Jhonhenri Lee, Food for Kids coordinator, at 405-600-3127 or jlee@rfbo.org. If you would like to schedule a meeting or call back with Jhonhenri, please use the following link: [calendly.com/jhonhenri](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Caprickett%5CDownloads%5Ccalendly.com%5Cjhonhenri).

Thank you so much for joining us in our vision of an Oklahoma where no one goes hungry.

# Section 1: Program Registration & Agreement

Schools interested in partnering with the Regional Food Bank’s School Pantry Program are required to complete training provided by the Regional Food Bank. Training will provide coordinators with the tools and information needed to operate the School Pantry 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, location of the pantry, 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 . 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

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 School Pantry 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 programing (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 School Pantry Program.

**Media**

Occasionally, the Regional Food Bank, our associates or the media may contact schools about the School Pantry Program. If you are asked by any Regional Food Bank staff or associates we contract with (e.g., True Sense Marketing), 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 food bank.

# Section 3: Identifying Participants

**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 can access your school-based pantry, 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 referral form at [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp.](https://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp)

**Parent permission forms**

The Regional Food Bank does not require parent permission forms for participation in the School Pantry 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 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 t[o](http://www.rfbo.org/) rfbo.org and click on th[e ‘Get Help’ link.](https://www.regionalfoodbank.org/get-help)

# Section 4: Program Management

**Coordinator’s Role**

Schools need at least one point person at the school who manages certain elements of the program. This is generally a school counselor, 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 school pantry 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 and the total visits to the pantry 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 visits in the report, please remember:** Number of visits is the total number of times the pantry was visited that month. The number served is the number of individual students who used the pantry that month. The number of visits should always be equal to, or higher than, the number of students.

It is recommended that a binder with this information be kept in a safe place either in the coordinator’s office or in the school pantry. You will be asked to report program numbers for each month when periodic surveys are sent out. A copy of the distribution log can be found at [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](https://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp).

**Storing and Distributing Food**

Ideally, your school pantry is set up so that students can come by and select the food that they need once a week. The pantry can be a closet, an unused classroom, or a cabinet.

The pantry should be in a secure location. You may refer to our storage guidelines in Section 5 for information about proper food storage. The coordinator should work with school staff when selecting a suitable location for the pantry. The coordinator is also responsible for placing monthly food orders and weekly food distributions.

**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 budget 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.

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

**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.

**Pantry Set Up**

As stated in Section 4, the pantry can be a closet, an unused classroom, or a cabinet. You will want to make sure that your school’s pantry is in a secure location. Shelving may be useful if you choose to select the client choice method of distribution, but shelving is not a requirement for participation. To increase the variety and types of food you offer, schools can utilize refrigerators and/or freezers. All food should be stored at least six inches off the floor, on pallets or shelves.

**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 50ºF and 70ºF 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.

**Refrigerated and Frozen Storage**

* Set the temperature of coolers to keep the internal temperature of food at 41ºF or lower.
* Set the temperature of freezers at or below 0ºF to keep products frozen.
* Monitor food temperatures regularly. Randomly sample the temperature of stored food to verify that the cooler is working.
* Place a thermometer inside each cooler and freezer. Check temperatures a minimum of once prior to distribution. Daily or weekly checks are recommended.
* Do not overload coolers or freezers. Storing too many food items prevents airflow.
* Keep freezers and cooler lids/doors closed when not in use.
* Use open shelving. Lining shelves with aluminum foil, sheet pans or paper restricts circulation of cold air.

**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.

**Program Budget**

Each school will be allotted a monthly budget with which to order food. **This budget is on a month-to-month basis and cannot be rolled over**. If you exceed your budget while placing your food order, the system will not allow the order to be submitted until the order falls within your budget.
*Note*: Increases in budget 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 eight days prior to your delivery date**. If you do not submit your order by 8:30 a.m. 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 School Pantry 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 School Pantry 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 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 School Pantry or storage area.

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

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.

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 email 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: Food

**Potential Items**

The school pantry may provide a variety of foods that can be easily prepared by students, depending on the equipment and facilities available at the school. Foods may be shelf-stable (dry goods) or perishable (frozen). Some foods will be ready-to-eat, while others require preparation. You will receive an ordering guide with item details and descriptions to assist you while placing your order. Please note that items will change throughout the year as they are available.

**Maximizing Your Budget**

Your monthly allotted budget is formulated to allow you to balance more expensive items with less expensive items while maintaining enough quantity. Please note that the “assorted” items listed on the shopping list will provide a variety of items commonly found on the list (and then some) at a much lower cost than ordering each individual item. For those looking for a wider variety of items and/or if your pantry allows students to shop for themselves, this will be beneficial.

**Safety**

To provide students with healthy nutritious foods, we want to ensure that food safety is a priority. Damaged food should be disposed of immediately. If there are any foods that were contaminated by the damaged products, you will want to throw those away as well. If you find pests in the boxes, contact the help desk immediately. We have provided a document from the USDA on the [rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp](http://rfbo.org/foodforkidshelp%20) describing the shelf life of perishable food items and information concerning safe distribution.

**Storage**

As previously mentioned, food should be stored in a secure location. Food should also be at least 6 inches off the ground and not flush against a wall for food safety purposes and to prevent pests. To keep food off the ground, schools can use a closet, cabinet, table, or pallet. We recommend you adopt the “first in, first out” model. This is when you use the oldest dated items first to ensure that food is not sitting in your pantry for an extended period.

**Nutrition Guidelines**

We encourage schools to offer a variety of foods in the pantry. The USDA’s My Plate is a good resource to use when promoting a healthy balanced diet. You can find more information about My Plate in the appendix and other nutritional resources on their website a[t http://www.choosemyplate.gov/.](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/)

**Other food resources**

Schools are encouraged to also utilize other food resources in addition to resources received from the Regional Food Bank. To help with this, schools can continue their own food drives to collect items to supplement what they receive from our inventory. Some schools also partner with local community groups to provide additional supplemental food items and support. If you need assistance obtaining additional community support, please contact the Help Desk and the Regional Food Bank may be able to help you.

# Section 7: Distribution

**Methods**

Schools may choose a distribution method that works best for their pantry set-up. We encourage the client-choice model of the pantry, which allows students to select their food items, much like the set-up of a grocery store. This method helps cut down on food waste as students tend to select food items they will use. Foods can be sorted according to category (i.e. fruits, vegetables, grains, etc.). If your school does not have the capacity for client-choice, you may choose to pre-package sacks of food for students to pick up. If choosing the pre- packaged sack method, you may inquire with students about which foods they would like before packing and distributing the sacks.

**Quantity and Variety**

As a rule of thumb, we recommend that coordinators allow students to take enough food to fill their backpacks. If this amount is not enough to meet an individual student’s needs, the student should be able to visit the pantry more than once a week. The coordinator should be aware of the students’ situation and use his/her discretion when selecting the appropriate amount of food to send home with the student.

**TIP:** Discuss your plans for how food will be distributed with staff. Get input from staff members so that everyone will be accommodating to your plan of distribution.

# Section 8: Volunteer Recruitment

**Finding individuals to help with your pantry**

While having volunteers is not mandatory to participate in this program, coordinators are encouraged to utilize volunteers to help stock shelves, pre-pack food boxes or assist with distributions. 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

**NOTE:** Students are not allowed to distribute food.

**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 receive a background check. 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 9: Community Engagement

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](https://secure3.convio.net/rfbo/site/Donation2;jsessionid=00000000.app30014b?df_id=8060&mfc_pref=T&8060.donation=form1&_ga=2.31772670.1304087247.1687877856-1970964694.1668739718&NONCE_TOKEN=471784D3518D120DEEE1886E2CCE81F3).”

If you would like to host a Food and Fun Drive, please visit our [Students Against Hunger](https://www.regionalfoodbank.org/students-against-hunger/) page.

# Section 10: Appendix

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://www.regionalfoodbank.org/foodforkidshelp/)[**foodsafety.gov**](https://www.foodsafety.gov/)**,** [**fightbac.org**](https://www.fightbac.org/) **or contact Jhonhenri at** **jlee@rfbo.org** **or 405-600-3127.**