Backpack Program Toolkit 2025-2026

Everything you need to start a Weekend Backpack Program in your Arizona Community

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Welcome

St. Mary's Food Bank

Backpack Program!

St. Mary's **Backpack Program** partners with schools and community organizations to identify children facing hunger. Each week, these children receive a **bag of nutritious** food to help support their families over the weekend – when school meals aren't available.

This program helps **bridge the gap** for families who may not have access to other food assistance, ensuring that no child goes hungry when school is out.

What's a Weekend Backpack?

Backpacks are filled with nutritious, non-perishable foods, purchased by St. Mary's Food Bank. Each durable, white plastic bag contains enough food to help supplement a family's meals over the weekend.

Our backpacks menu provides families with the opportunity to cook and enjoy meals together.

"*Weekly Backpack Menu 2025-2026*"

9 lbs

10 retail food items

2 Menus

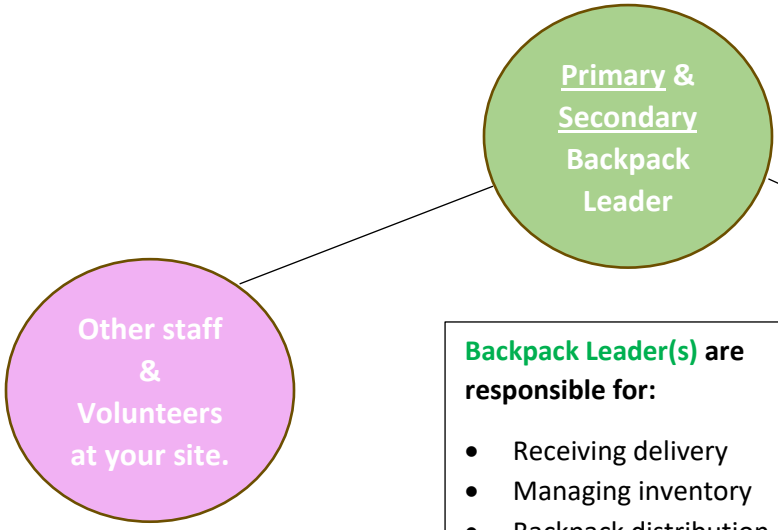
Purchased food, NOT donated.

Feeds a family of 4

Value over $8 each

Identify a Backpack Leader

Partners must designate one or two individuals to serve as Backpack Leaders. The Backpack Team includes the following roles, with key responsibilities outlined below:



Backpack Leader(s) are responsible for:

- Receiving delivery
- Managing inventory
- Backpack distribution
- Breaking down BP Boxes
- Food safety
- Link2Feed reporting

Remaining in close contact with their **St. Mary's Specialist**

Main backpack leader should be able to dedicate an average of **two hours per week** to receive, store and distribute backpacks.

Additional staff and volunteers (Parents, community members, or student groups) may:

- Help identify families in need.
- Help sort and store product.
- Assist with distributing backpacks.

Staff and volunteers who regularly assist with the program must have passes a **National Background Check**.

Your St. Mary's Specialist will:

- Offer initial trainings.
- Conduct customer care service visits
- Plan for your orders and deliveries
- Offer support and technical assistance when needed!

****Task 1: Identify Additional Staff/Volunteers**

Identify additional staff or volunteers who will help you maintain the program. For anyone heavily involved, please share their contact information with your St. Mary's Specialist.

Referral Process & Eligibility

Backpacks are intended for the same recurring children who are missing meals on the weekends. These children should be identified by a staff member who has close, regular communication with them.

Referrals can come from various staff, including (but not limited to):

- **Social workers** – Best resource for referrals
- **Teachers** – Best resource for referrals
- Parent coordinators
- Cafeteria staff
- Office staff
- School nurses

You can customize the "***Staff Letter Template***" (optional) to explain the program to others and start collecting referrals.

All approved sites must establish a **qualification process** to determine eligibility. This is important because the program is **100% donor funded,** and each bag currently costs approximately $8.00 (food only).

Families **cannot self-declare** food insecurity. For more information, refer to the "***Criteria for Identifying Backpack Participants***".

***Task 2:** **(Optional) Customize and send "*Staff Letter Template*"**

How many backpacks can I give out PER child/family?

- **1 Backpack** serves a **family of four**.
- **2 Backpacks** (max per family) may be provided if the family exceeds four members and more than one child from the household qualifies.

Age Eligibility: School age children, 5-18

Backpack Roster Requirements

Each organization must maintain a roster including:

1. Child's name or initials
2. # of individuals household
3. Reoccurring or one-time families

Suggested formats:

- Google Gocs (shared)
- Print template in a binder
- Excel spreadsheet
- "*Backpack Roster (Monthly)"* – Recommended for new sites.

3 Key Steps:

1. **Step 1: Identify Children**
   As staff to help refere children (using the "Staff Letter Template," if needed).
2. **Step 2: Maintain Roster**
   Keep the roster available for St. Mary's in-person visits. Backpacks are provided weekly for each child listed.
3. **Step 3: Adjust Roster**
   You may add, remove, or substitue children throughout the year.

Note: Rosters are only reviewed in-person during site visits. For child privacy, do not email rosters unless required due to non-compliance.

****Task 3: Begin Creating Your Roster**

Parent Notification

Notify selected families they will receive a weekly backpack. You may use your preferred communication method or customize one of the following template:

- "*Parent Letter Template Option 1*" (English/Spanish)
- "*Parent Letter Template Option 2*" (English/Spanish) ****Recommended*: Uses a lottery explanation to destigmatize the program.

****Task 4: (Optional) Customize and Send Parent Letters.**

Delivery Schedule:

Once your roster is finalized, your St. Mary's Specialist will begin scheduling your delivery based on your location:

Metro Phoenix:

Weekly (Minimum 30 bags)

Outside Metro Phoenix:

Bi-weekly (Minimum 60 bags)

Monthly (Minimum 120 bags)

Deliveries will take place **August 2025 – May 2026**

Before Delivery:

- ✓ Share delivery schedule and backpack storage location with your front office.
- ✓ Deliveries of over 120 bags will arrive on pallets. If the doors are narrower than 4 feet, have volunteers ready to assist.

Receiving Delivery:

- ✓ Check delivery receipt for correct order/quantity.
- ✓ Inspect all boxes for proper food safety (Damages, rust, major dents, etc.)
- ✓ Notify you Specialist of any quantity/food safety issues.

Note: All items on the menu except the **cereal and pasta are NOT pre-packaged**. They must be **individually placed in white bags before distribution** to reduce damage.

****Task 5**: Finalize Roster and Order Quantity**

Storage Space

Quantity:

- Backpacks arrive in boxes.
  - 1 box = 3 backpacks
  - 10 boxes = 30 backpacks (EXAMPLE)
- 120 bags = 1 pallet (4 x 4 ft pallets)

Minimum Storage Requirements:

- Room temperature
- Secure, clean, and dry area
- 6 inches off the floor and 4 inches from the wall.
- Enough space to organize and navigate safely.

Suggested Storage Areas:

- Shelving units in closets/classrooms.
- Cafeteria
- Pallets in a warehouse or multipurpose space.

Box Pickup Process

- **1st Delivery** – Driver delivers product.
- **Subsequent Delivery** – Driver collects flattened boxes/pallet.
- **Final Pick-up** – St. Mary's Specialist will schedule your last pick up 1-2 weeks after your last delivery.

Watch how to breakdown boxes:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_OQO1SoBPUM

Reminder:

- ✓ Flatten boxes
- ✓ Neatly stack off the floor or on a pallet and away from moisture.
- ✓ You may put a note by them, so they aren't taken/thrown away by staff at your location.

****Task 6: Email a Picture of Your Storage Area to Your Specialist.**

Food Safety Guidelines

Primary/secondary leaders and staff involved in food handling must either:

- Hold a current **Food Handlers Card** or
- Complete our **FREE internal Food Safety Training**

Food Safety Best Practices:

- ☐ Inspect storage monthly
- ☐ Use "**First In, First Out**" method
- ☐ Report food safety concerns immediately to your St. Mary's Specialist.
- ☐ **When in doubt, don't hand out.**

If reporting a Food Safety Issue:

- ✓ Take and send a photo of the issue to your St. Mary's Specialist.
- ✓ Do NOT throw away food in question – St. Mary's may pick it up to investigate the source of the issue.

****Task 7: Submit Food Handlers Info or Complete Training.**

Ordering & Inventory Management

We provide enough backpacks to last you until your next delivery.

Before requesting changes:

- Allow **1-2 weeks** for quantity updates (orders are pre-packaged 1-week in advance)
- Orders must be in **multiples of 3** (3 bags per box)

School Breaks: If a delivery falls on a break, your Specialist will either **cancel** or **double** your order beforehand.

Summer: You may opt to continue or pause services.

If inventory is building up:

- Contact your Specialist immediately.
- **Extra bags cannot be returned** but can be used to pause upcoming deliveries.

Backpack Menu & Inventory Rotation

- Two rotating menus: **Menu 1** and **Menu 2** (labeled on boxes)
- If bags are excessive:
  - Assign to waitlisted children
  - Adjust future order quantity
  - Use "**First In, First Out**" to rotate inventory.

Use this template to monitor deliveries, distribution, and inventory, ***"August 2025 – May 2026 Deliveries & Distributions"***

Distribution

Each child on your roster should receive a backpack weekly. Find ways to **de-stigmatize distribution**.

Leaders Must Determine:

1. Distribution Day(s)
2. Time
3. Place(s)
4. Process
5. Optional: Make-up Plan

Ideas: (Be Creative!)

- PTO members or community volunteers.
- Older student volunteers
- Call the program the "Food Club" or "Nutrition Club" as a means of de-stigmatizing it.

Suggestions:

- Distribute towards the end of the week (Thursday or Friday).
- Distribute in classrooms, at the bus stop, or parent pick-up.
- Create a "make-up" plan for absent student.
    - Example: Label the bag with the students' name and have them pick up on the following Monday from the front office. You can wait till the next distribution to give them 2 bags, but we suggest another pick up day due to the excess weight. Missed bag(s) can be delivered via home deliveries, or parents can come to pick up as well.
- Older children (specifically High Schoolers) are more reluctant to receiving help even if their families are in need. **We do not encourage** making announcements, or having children deliver directly to their peers.

Important Note: All components of the Backpack bags must be distributed in full. Students and families are not permitted to select specific items from the menus, nor may Backpack items be used to create a 'pantry.' These practices are strictly prohibited, as they violate the Backpack Program guidelines

****Task 8: Confirm Distribution Process with Your Specialist**

Reporting via Link2Feed

We use Link2Feed (L2F) to manage inventory and reporting.

- Report distributions weekly (total by Friday if daily)
- Failure to report may result in "**pausing**" deliveries.

Login Information will be sent **after your 1st Delivery:**

Login Page: https://accounts.link2feed.com/users/sign_in
Link2Feed 7-min Training Video: https://vimeo.com/999618699
Link2Feed Username: _____
Link2Feed Temporary Password: _____

- **Issues with password**: You can reset it yourself on the main login page.
- **Other issues** please notify your St. Mary's Specialist and submit the "***Weekly Backpack Tracker***" to remain in compliance.

****Task 9**: **Submit Names for Link2Feed Access.**

- Names (max of 2)
- Email addresses
- Job titles

Equal Opportunity Statement

St. Mary's Food Bank is an equal opportunity provider. Backpacks must be accessible to eligible children regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability. Let us know if you need assistance making any accommodations.

Due to budget limits, not all referrals may be approved. Your Specialist will help manage a waitlist if needed.

You may be asked to support the program with:

- Feedback Surveys' (Site leader and Parent Surveys)
- Stories of Impact
- Photos (optional)

Reminder: Our program is donor funded.

Compliance & Support

Any deficiencies or compliance issues will be addressed by your St. Mary's Specialist. We will always work with you to help bring your organization into compliance.

Goal: We are here to help you be successful in our Backpack Program.

1. **Agreements**: We expect all organizations to abide by the policies, procedures, and record keeping requirement within this Toolkit and within our Agreement Forms. If you need any additional clarification, don't hesitate to ask questions.
2. **Communication**: Any issues needing to be addressed will be communicated in writing within seven business days.
3. **Adjustments**: Certain adjustments, such as placing your organization "**on pause,**" may be necessary to address issues with program compliance.
4. **Inactivation (Rare)**: Termination & Grievance Policy will be enacted if deficiencies are not corrected.

Major compliance includes but not limited too.

   a. Food Safety violations.
   b. Inadequate roster or reporting.
   c. Distributing to ineligible families
   d. Discrimination in access
   e. Disassembling backpacks

Customer Care Visit

Your St. Mary's Specialist will conduct at least one in-person visit, during the program year. We take a coaching approach during these visits.

- They may review:
  - Agreement Forms (5-pages)
  - Food Safety documentation
  - Roster and identification process
  - Current distribution numbers via Link2Feed
  - Storage Area
  - Inventory
- If there are any issues, we will provide you with technical assistance.
- We may ask for feedback on transportation, inventory management system, and/or building capacity.
- The purpose of these visits is to enhance the quality of the program!

****Task 10:** **Sign and submit "*Partner Agreement Packet 25-26* "(Total 5 pages)**

Thank you for partnering with St. Mary's Food Bank!