



# Backpack Program

---

STARTER TOOLKIT

## Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>What is a backpack program?</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Guide to creating a backpack program</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Conclusion and steps for success</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Support other nutrition programs</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Toolbox</b> .....	<b>16</b>
Targeting Participants .....	<b>17</b>
Sample Program Notification Letters.....	<b>18</b>
Sample Food Safety Orientation Handout .....	<b>19</b>
Sample Monthly Report .....	<b>21</b>
Sample Year End Survey for School Staff.....	<b>22</b>
Sample Resource Flyer .....	<b>23</b>
Food Allergy Handout .....	<b>24</b>
Culturally Appropriate Foods .....	<b>25</b>



## Introduction:

Currently, Northwest Harvest operates the Three Squares program in nine school districts throughout Washington. We provide food to serve students in 50 high-need schools. Since 2004, the program has provided food to selected public schools with high percentages of students participating in the free or reduced-price school meals program. In the schools we serve, the average free or reduced price meal population is currently between 52% and 98%.

Many children who are eligible to receive free or reduced price school meals may be left without an adequate supply of nutritious food on the weekends or when school is not in session. The goal of the Three Squares Program is to provide supplemental food to children most in need of additional nutrition in a manner that protects their dignity.

A backpack program requires the cooperation of the school staff, your program staff or volunteers, and the support of the community. This guide will help with the process of attaining this cooperation.

This Backpack Toolkit includes:

1. A step-by-step guide for creating your own program,
2. Templates and sample documents to easily implement your program.

## What is a backpack program?

Every backpack program is unique. Each community and school has its own culture, personality and idiosyncrasies. Generally backpack programs provide a bag of child friendly food to students in need that they can take home and eat when school meal programs are unavailable. Backpack programs do not have any state or federal legislation around the contents of the bags being sent home. This also means that federal reimbursement is not available for the food provided by backpack food programs. At Northwest Harvest, we take child nutrition seriously and try to provide low-sodium meals that provide protein, grains, dairy, fruit and vegetable servings. We also ensure that each bag contains enough food for at least one day. This includes breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack item. We get assistance with our meal planning from student dieticians from nearby colleges. Any program could reach out to a registered dietician school program and ask for interns to help consult their menus. It's a great project for everyone.

One day's worth of food equals one bag. We distribute two bags per child every Friday. The site coordinators at the schools distribute the plastic bags of food by placing them in secondary backpacks, or in plastic/reusable bags, or they may even place the plastic food bags directly into the child's primary backpack if space allows. Distributing the food on Friday helps to ensure that the food is eaten over the weekend and not through the week.

This Friday distribution is also handled in many different ways. Some site coordinators drop the bags off at the last class of day and the teachers help in final distribution. Others call students down anonymously to the counselor's office or are quietly dismissed early to pick up food from a specific location.

Backpack programs are commonly run by volunteers and sustained by donations of community members and private foundations. Often, backpack programs are run through food banks or food pantries that are already providing emergency and supplemental food assistance for families in need.

## Guide to Creating a Backpack Program

### 1. Identify the school you want to work with.

There are two main reasons a group wants to start a backpack program with a school. One, is that the school is nearby and you are very connected with the school and want to be even more involved. The second reason is that you know that many of the students have a need at the school and you want to help them. Obviously these two reasons are not mutually exclusive.

#### Determining need:

A helpful way to learn more about the need in your community is to explore the percentage of children in a school who qualify to receive free or reduced-priced school meals. You can find this easily by visiting the Office of Superintendent and Public Instruction. Their website provides a listing of free and reduced-price meal eligibility at every school in Washington. (Visit link here: <http://www.k12.wa.us/ChildNutrition/Reports/FreeReducedMeals.aspx>) Once here you can download an excel file to view by school district or school in order by county.

Children who receive free or reduced-priced school meals are commonly considered high need and likely participants for your backpack food program. Other likely participants are McKinney-

Vento students. This is a federal law that ensures immediate enrollment and educational stability for homeless children and youth. Find more tips in the toolbox section.

**CONSIDER THIS:**

When choosing the school to launch a program with, consider how the program will affect the children of the school:

If it is a high need school (40% or more of students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals), you may be serving a large number of students.

If it is a non-high need school (less than 40% of students qualify for free or reduced-priced meals), you may be serving a small group of children.

No matter the type of school you work with, think about the possibility of unintentionally creating a stigma for the children that receive the food bag. Additionally, children who may not receive a bag may feel bad themselves and envious of the other children. Consider how you can hand out the bags so no child feels bad about participating or sad for not participating in the program.

**2. Schedule a meeting with the school to talk about the program.**

It's time to meet with the school. For this meeting, you will want the principal, school food service professional and counselor present. All of these individuals play a role in a backpack program and it is important to have buy-in from everyone as early as possible. Keep in mind, that unless, you already have funding, the program may not start until the following school year.

If you decide to expand to multiple schools in one district, it may be appropriate to schedule a meeting with the superintendent and district food nutrition director to secure additional support for a program.

During the meeting with the school staff it will be important to cover:

- I. Why you want to create a backpack program
- II. Why you want to work with their school
- III. What it would require of the school staff

- IV. What are the school's requirements (if any). This could include food delivery specifications and locations, background checks for volunteers entering school, food restrictions, etc. *(See the Food Allergy Handout in the Toolbox on page 25.)*
  - i. Items here would include Friday distribution, being available at the time of food delivery to school, working with other staff to add children to the program, end of year evaluations, etc.
- V. Discussion about how many students could be served at the school. If this is a large number, talk about a tiered start. Just because the need is 200 students, does not mean you have to start off being able to feed that many students. You can grow into it. Coming up with some tiered potential benchmarks will help you later when figuring out costs, budgeting and what you can afford.
- VI. Cover details like food safety and proper food storage. This should include whether the school has space available to store food, First In First Out, product dating and expiration dates. *(See the Food Safety Handout in the Toolbox on page 20.)*
- VII. Discuss what the backpack program would look like at that school after going over all the above details. Layout a plan for the school year that includes when and how the food will be dropped off to the school, how many students, how much food, when you will start the program, when it will end, and how you will coordinate school breaks.
- VIII. Who will be your Site Coordinator?
  - i. The Site Coordinator serves five main functions in the school:
    1. Serves as a liaison for staff, students, parents, and backpack program
    2. Maintains documentation (student and distribution records)
    3. Completes monthly reports and communicates order information
      - a. Will you have the school submit monthly reports? Some programs require a monthly report and others do not. *(See the Monthly Report Form in the Toolbox on page 22.)*
    4. Confidentially distributes backpacks of food to hungry children
    5. Implements the backpack program and ensure compliance with all food safety standards
- IX. If you can't serve all the students who might need weekend food, then the school will need to select the highest needs children. This can be difficult, but there are ways to make this easier. At Northwest Harvest, our Three Square program serves 24 students at

each school. The counselors use a few different approaches to identify the highest need students.

- i. Any child on the McKinney-Vento program is a participant
- ii. Counselors can work with the teachers. A great example: at one of our schools, the teachers ask the students to put their heads down and close their eyes. The teacher proceeds to ask questions such as, did you eat this morning, did you eat last night, do you have socks, do you have shoes, etc. With each question, the children raise their hand if the answer is a yes. The teacher records who raises their hand for which question and turns this into the counselor so they can reach out to those students with resources.
- iii. Please see the toolbox at the end for more information on identifying children.

*(Page 17)*

### **3. Design the program details**

Now that you have met with the school and have a better understanding of the program, begin to answer these questions.

- I. How many children will most likely be involved in your backpack food program?
- II. How many grades will participate with the program?
- III. How do you want children to join the program? Can families opt-in to the program? Will you require approval from the parents?
- IV. What languages does your community require? English? Spanish? Somali? Russian?
  - a. *Make sure you provide flyers and handouts in all languages needed.*
- V. How and where will you package the food?
  - a. *Many programs use a central location outside of the school to store and package the bags and then deliver to be distributed. Think about the model that will work best for you.*
  - b. *Is the cafeteria or another common area available for you and your volunteers to pack the food if you choose to pack at the school?*
- VI. What day of the week will you pack the food bags?
  - a. *Packaging is commonly completed by Wednesday or Thursday if delivered on a weekly basis.*

- VII. Does the school have a room or space available for you to store the food for the program?
  - a. *This space needs to meet some food safety guidelines.*
- VIII. How will you distribute the food bags?
  - a. *Many programs work with teachers to distribute the bags to the students in the classroom. Other programs distribute the food in a central location, like the front office. Some place the food in the students' lockers and yet others have the parents pick up the food. Think about which model will work best for your program and school, and will make the children feel the best about receiving the bags.*
- IX. What day of the week will you distribute the food bags?
  - a. *Bags are usually distributed by staff on Fridays.*
- X. Are you going to distribute additional food or resources for extended breaks like spring and winter breaks?
- XI. Develop a draft of menus that you would like to serve the school. This will help you get a beginning cost associated with the program so that you know what kind of budget you require. *(See section 7. Build Menus and Purchase Food for more details on how to do this.)*

#### **4. Finalize budget**

There are many resources you will need to secure before you begin your program. They include: food, large containers/boxes, bags, labels, access to a computer and printer, a dolly or cart, and storage space.

- A. Food: Food will likely be your largest cost for your program. Due to the possible inconsistent availability of food, try to maintain three to five week storage of food.
  - a. Purchase from low-cost retailers: Pioneer Buying Service, Costco, Fred Meyer (sale items), and Grocery Outlet. Watch for special deals at these stores.
  - b. Buy food in bulk when you can and utilize Northwest Harvest SmartBuys program.
  - c. Ask grocery stores or other community businesses to host a food drive for your school and request specific items. You can easily create a drive for items that you want by making flyers and posting them with the donation box.



- B. Food bags: Purchase plastic bags to hold one menu, one days' worth of food. You can purchase these types of bags from Northwest Harvest or Redi-Bag at 425-251-9841.
- C. Large containers/cardboard boxes: Once the food bags are packed, they can be stored in 30 gallon plastic storage tubs or sturdy cardboard boxes and stored off the floors until distributed on Friday.
  - a. If you distribute from the classroom you can purchase one container, like a plastic tub or cardboard box for each participating classroom. Each container should be labeled with the teacher's name and should stay in the teacher's room except when you are filling them with food bags.
  - b. If distributing from a central location, you can store all the bags in one location.
  - c. If you have different menus, make sure to keep them separate marking the individual bags and/or storage containers with the menu number and expiration date.
- D. Distribution bags: Choose a type of bag that you want to distribute the food in.
  - a. One bag is needed for each child.
  - b. Plastic bags work well because they can easily be collected and do not require a child to return the bag the following week. Additionally, you can host a plastic bag drive, which can be a great outreach tool to raise awareness about hunger in your community among other schools, churches, or community organizations.  
*Note: Keep donated bags outside. Sometimes these bags can be contaminated with bugs. By keeping them outside, you keep the bugs outside.*
  - c. Reusable bags can be environmentally-friendly, but you risk children or families losing the bags and require you to purchase more.
  - d. At Northwest Harvest, we do not supply distribution bags to the schools. The schools procure their own bags.
- E. Labels: Labels on both the food bags and containers help volunteers and school staff distribute the food.
  - a. Labels should have the menu number, if doing varying menus, to ensure that staff are handing out multiple menus and to help delineate them. Labels should also have the earliest expiring product date to ensure that food gets distributed before it expires. *(See the Food Safety Handout in the Toolbox on page 20.)*
  - b. The large container for each classroom should be labeled with the name of teacher and grade. If using a central location the containers should have the

menus labeled on the outside, keeping each menu separate for easy distribution.

- F. Access to a computer: Common computer programs like Microsoft Word and Excel (or similar drafting and computing programs) are highly recommended.
  - a. For example, Microsoft Excel can help you keep an up-to-date list of your participants and food costs.
  - b. Access to a printer is also recommended to print the labels, letters, flyers, and other resources you will need for your program.
- G. Cart or dolly: To easily collect and deliver the large containers of the bags each week, it is helpful to have a cart or dolly.
  - a. Ask your school if they have one you can use each week for your program.
- H. Storage space: Having storage space at the school makes setting up food packaging and organizing delivery much easier for volunteers and program leaders.
  - a. Ask your school if they have a closet or small room available where your program will be able to store food or materials.
  - b. If you store food, make sure:
    - To be in accordance with food safety rules and that food is four inches off the ground and six inches from the wall.
    - Your storage space is ventilated, rodent-proof, heated, on the ground level and easily accessible to you and your volunteers. *(See the Food Safety Handout in the Toolbox on page 20.)*
  - c. If a space is unavailable, consider what you will need to do to deliver food weekly to your school.
    - Do you need a large vehicle like a truck, SUV or van?
    - Would a volunteer be able to donate their time and vehicle to help with delivery?
- I. What else will you need?
  - a. Depending on what your community needs and what your school or other organizations can provide, your program may need additional or different resources.
  - b. Consider your transportation needs and the additional cultural and nutrition needs your community may have.

## 5. Recruit Donors

How do you get all this? Some of the food can be acquired through food drives at local grocery stores or local businesses. Regardless, you will need monetary contributions to sustain the program if you do not have it in your programs normal budget.

Here are some ideas for where to find donors:

1. Churches
2. Rotary
3. Kiwanis
4. Local businesses
5. Grants through institutions like Safeway Foundation and Walmart Foundation
6. Other local civic groups

The first three can also be volunteers and for many of these groups they do like to be more involved than simply giving money.

## 6. Recruit volunteers

Have you already gathered a group of community members excited to help start and volunteer for this backpack food program? Or, how will you recruit volunteers?

Local community clubs (i.e. Lions, Rotary, or Kiwanis Club) and faith-based organizations can help you find volunteers or host fundraisers. The best time to package food bags is during the day so retired or available community members may have the time to help. Additionally, explore your local high school or middle school groups (i.e. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, service clubs) who may also be available to volunteer and help with the program.

Have at least one lead for the program to be your school liaison with the school site coordinator. This person will act as your main contact for the backpack program.

- Their responsibilities include:

- Collecting the forms from parents opting in or out of the program.
- Coordinating the packing and delivery of food. You will need additional volunteers here.
- Assisting with purchasing of food.
- Distributing and collecting program evaluations to children, teachers, and parents.

- Communicating with school administration, staff, and teachers about the program.

**7. Build menus and purchase food**

If you want to provide a full weekend of food, you must provide:

1. 2 Breakfast Options
2. 2 Lunch Options
3. 2 Dinner Options
4. Snacks

Make sure to include fruits and vegetables. Call your local college if they have a nutrition program and see if a student would want to help you make your menus. You could also call you county public health office and ask for their assistance on this as well.

Here is a sample of what we offer:

<b>Menu 1</b>	<b>Menu 2</b>	<b>Menu 3</b>	<b>Menu 4</b>
Oatmeal	Wholegrain Cereal	Oatmeal	Wholegrain Cereal
Milk	Milk	Milk	Milk
Applesauce	Fruit Cup	Applesauce	Fruit Cup
Mac & Cheese	Mixed Vegetables	Mac & Cheese	Cup of Noodles
Raisins	Fruit Juice	Fruit Juice	Raisins
Beef Ravioli	Cheese Crackers	Cheese Crackers	Brown Rice
Corn	Rice	Chicken Noodle Soup	Vegetable Chili
Fruit strips	Canned Chicken	Mixed Vegetables	Corn

Things to Consider:

- The weight of the bag. It is recommended to not exceed 3 pounds because younger kids cannot carry the weight.
- Consider what utensils the child will or will not have available.
- If you decide to include perishable food, choose items that have longer shelf lives and harder skins, like apples and carrots. *(See the Food Safety Handout in the Toolbox on page 20.)*

- Try to keep the food consistent so that every child is receiving the same food. This is why if you choose to do a food drive, you should be specific about what you need. Providing every child the same option reduces envy among children and maintains nutritional consistency among your menus.
- Think about food allergies. Talk to the school about any restrictions they might have like peanuts or milk. *(See the Food Allergy Handout in the Toolbox on page 25.)*
- Consider cultural appropriateness of foods. Keep in mind diverse religions and cultural backgrounds. The school staff will be able to help you with this. *(See the Cultural Appropriate handout on page 27.)*

#### **8. Attend a staff meeting with teachers and staff.**

To inform school staff members of the program, you may offer a presentation at a staff meeting, create an email for the Site Coordinator to send out to all staff, or put together a bulletin board in the teacher's lounge. By presenting at a staff meeting, you can describe the program, answer any questions or concerns staff may have about the program, and describe everyone's role with the program.

Here are some items to include to school staff.

##### Family Involvement

1. Let the student know they have been invited to join the backpack program:
  - a. Explain that the program will make sure he or she will have enough food to eat on the weekends
  - b. Let the student know that if he or she has enough food at home on the weekends, he or she will be removed from the program so another child may take his or her place
  - c. Inform the student of when and where to pick up the food.
2. Your program or the school may choose to inform parents:
  - a. Letters informing parents about the program. Samples are located in the toolbox.
  - b. Some schools prefer to talk to parents one-on-one rather than send a letter home. You should decide how the program will operate best for your school and families.

- c. When communicating with parents, be sure to discuss any food allergies. Use school records to identify children with food allergies (peanuts, dairy, etc.).
  - i. Talk to the parent to see how they would prefer to handle the issue – sometimes removing an item from the sack is sufficient
  - ii. Make a note in your records of any children with allergies, and what the preferred method of the parent or guardian in addressing the issue.

### Publicizing the Program

At Northwest Harvest, the intent of the backpack program is to provide food to children in need of additional nutrition in the most inconspicuous manner. Participants in the program are to be identified by school staff. The school should not advertise the program to parents in newsletters or outside publications.

## **9. Confirm a start date and launch your program**

Check off the below list to see if you are ready!

- Meet with your school.
- Gather support with the school staff.
- Find the volunteers and funds you need for the program.
- Create a budget and purchase the food and materials you need.
- Have start date!

## **10. Measure success of program**

The success of any program depends on the feedback of the participants. End-of-Year surveys provide coordinators, principals, teachers, and school staff the opportunity to provide feedback, observations, and stories about ways in which a backpack program benefitted students. The opinions can assist you in measuring the impact of the program and help you craft a better program for future years.

Classroom teachers, and/or principals and/or other administrative staff may provide feedback about the program through the end-of-year evaluation. Personal testimony and observations,

such as changes in a child's behavior over the course of the school year, may be used when seeking additional funding. Principals, teachers, lunch aides, and/or other personnel should complete the evaluation form.

Measuring the success of your program not only helps you evaluate your impact on the school and children in your community, but it also prepares you for writing grants or finding additional financial resources for sustaining or expanding your program.

Lastly, make sure to keep records of how many children you are serving. This can be done simply based on how many bags you deliver to the school, or you could have the school submit a monthly report. This monthly report can collect stats on the number of children you are serving as well as collecting stories and other qualitative information that can help you gauge the effectiveness of the program.

## Conclusion

Here is a summary of the steps for success:

1. Identify the school that you want to work with.
2. Draft an initial program structure.
3. Meet with the school staff.
4. Finalize the backpack program structure and budget.
5. Recruit volunteers and donors.
6. Finalize menus and purchase food.
7. Confirm start date.
8. Evaluate your program.

## Support Other Nutrition Programs

Backpack programs are not designed to be the major source of food for a family. It was intended to supplement other sources of food, such as food stamps, WIC, and food banks. The percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced-price meals could, most likely, also use additional food resources at home. Your program may not be able to supplement every child's household. Ask every Site Coordinator to identify those who are coming to school hungry and

most need the extra support. Work with teachers, instructional aides, cafeteria and office staff who might refer a child needing extra help. For families with infants & preschoolers, connect them with WIC. For all other families, direct them to community sources such as meal programs and food banks.

Many families in our state simply do not have enough food resources; we also know schools cannot become food banks. Let schools know to link families to their neighborhood food banks. Families can call **2-1-1** or the **Family Food Hotline at 1-888-436-6392** to find their local food bank and other resources. Please encourage your families to apply for Food Stamps/Basic Food; see [www.foodhelp.wa.gov](http://www.foodhelp.wa.gov) or [www.parenthelp123.org/professionals](http://www.parenthelp123.org/professionals) for forms & information.

Want More Help?

Contact Northwest Harvest at [threesquares@northwestharvest.org](mailto:threesquares@northwestharvest.org)





# Toolbox

---

## TOOLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

A. Targeting Participants.....	17
B. Sample Program Notification Letters.....	18
C. Sample Food Safety Orientation Handout.....	20
D. Sample Monthly Report.....	22
E. Sample Year End Survey for School Staff.....	23
F. Sample Resource Flyer.....	24
G. Food Allergy Handout.....	25
H. Culturally Appropriate Foods.....	27

### *A. Targeting Participants: Identifying and Addressing Chronic Hunger*

The program is targeted at children who show signs that they do not have access to adequate food resources at home and are at nutritional risk. Signs that a child might be chronically hungry may include: continually asking for food, low energy levels, falling asleep in class, frequent illnesses and absences, inability to pay attention, and hyperactive, aggressive, and/or irritable behavior. Note that a child's weight is not a good indicator of chronic hunger. Child obesity can be caused by extreme poor nutrition.

Chronically hungry children may be identified by asking questions:

- *Did you eat breakfast?*
  - a. If the child skipped breakfast, why? If he or she ate breakfast, ask what was eaten and if it was enough to make him or her full.
- *Did you eat dinner last night?*
  - a. Ask what the child ate, and if it was enough to make him or her full.
- *What did you eat over the weekend? What do you normally eat over the weekend?*
  - a. Again, ask if weekend meals were enough to make the child full.

Other ways to identify chronic hunger issues:

- Assess the home environment of the child by observing the following:
  - a. Does the family move frequently?
  - b. Has one or more family members lost a job? Is there a loss of income?
  - c. Has the child mentioned a family crisis or disaster in the household?
- It is important that the entire staff understands the program and how to identify chronic hunger. Insight into a child's home situation may come from a teacher, counselor, coach, cafeteria worker, teacher's assistant, or custodian. Each person interacts with children in a different way. For example, cafeteria staff members often have great feedback on a child's relationship with food and their eating habits.

*B. Sample Notification Letters to Parents*

Sample One

This food is provided for the elementary-school-aged children in your family through a partnership between Hazel Valley Elementary and Northwest Harvest. Your child has been selected to receive this food to help them be the best student they can be. We will keep your child's participation in this program confidential, and we ask that you do too.

- Northwest Harvest, a statewide food distribution agency, has a program that serves schools called Three Squares. They purchase the food and transport it to your school. The goal of the Three Squares Program is to help children thrive in school by offering additional nutrition after school and on weekends.
- Hazel Valley Elementary provides the bags to your elementary-aged children. The staff members at your school are available to help support your students and direct you to other resources.

If you have unmet food needs for your family, including older children, babies and preschoolers, please **dial 2-1-1** for referrals to food banks and social services in your area, or call the **Family Food Hotline at 1-888-436-6392**. You can also find help on [www.parenthelp123.org](http://www.parenthelp123.org).

If you have questions about this Three Squares food, please call:

**Hazel Valley Elementary**— Name, Phone Number

**Northwest Harvest**—[threesquares@northwestharvest.org](mailto:threesquares@northwestharvest.org) .

Sample Two

**Martin Luther King Jr., Elementary School**

2000 S 18\* St Yakima WA 98903 / 509-573-1102

Dear parents/guardians.

MLK is fortunate to be participating in the Northwest Harvest Three Squares Program. The weekend food bag in your child's backpack is being provided by Northwest Harvest. Each Friday a few kids from class will receive a weekend snack bag. We hope your children will enjoy it!! If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at the number above.

Estimados padres o tutores.

Martin Luther King está participando con un programa de Northwest Harvest que es conocida por Three Squares. La bolsa de merienda de fin de semana en la mochila de su hijo fue proporcionada por Northwest Harvest. Todos los viernes, unos cuantos niños de la clase recibirá una bolsa de merienda para el fin de semana. Esperamos que sus hijos lo disfruten! Si tiene alguna pregunta, favor de llamarnos al número indicado arriba.

### C. Food Safety Orientation

## Food Safety Orientation

Please make sure you are knowledgeable in all of the food safety areas below. If you are not sure about something---PLEASE ASK QUESTIONS!

- Deliveries should arrive to the school ready for distribution, however, be sure to carefully inspect all packages when they are received. Any problems must be reported to the Program Manager as soon as possible.
- Please retain all receiving records.
- Employee Hygiene
  - Hand washing must take at least 20 seconds (10-15 second scrubbing, a through rinsing and complete drying with paper towels). Make sure you know where the hand washing sink is. Wash hands before you start work, when changing tasks, and after the restroom.
- Storage
  - Food from Three Squares is shelf-stable and does not need refrigeration. The food should be stored in a place that is secure, clean, pest-free, and allows for regular rotation of inventory. This area will be inspected annually. Chemicals and cleaning products must be stored away from foods.
  - If your program has perishable food (fruits and vegetables) as part of the menu, these items must be kept cool and will not be able to be kept with other menu items. Most programs utilize coolers for these items, using one to two coolers per school. These are dropped off each Friday and picked up the following week. Tape a log sheet to the top of the cooler where you can input the date the food was dropped off to the school, by whom, and the date of when the food needs to be distributed by. Make sure you have ice packs in the cooler as well!
  - Potentially hazardous foods (such as meats, dairy-based products and cooked foods) should never be held between 40F and 140F. These temperatures are ideal for bacterial growth. Even foods that will be cooked before consumption may be dangerous when held for long periods of time at unsafe temperatures. Bacteria may produce toxins that are not destroyed by high temperatures.
  - **Secure:** Food should be stored in a secure location. This means it should be placed in an area where it cannot be taken by children, faculty, staff, or others who have access to the building.

The food must be distinguishable from other items, as they are not to be used for other purposes.

- **Clean:** The storage area should be clean, dry, and free of clutter. Dry storage areas should be cool, dry and well ventilated (between 50°F - 70°F). Keep food out of the direct sunlight.
- **Pest-free:** Food must be at least 6" off of the floor and 6" away from an outside wall for pest control purposes. The food can be stored in a cabinet, on a table, or on a pallet. Food should never be on the floor. In addition, you should make sure the pest control service that monitors your kitchen area also monitors the backpack program 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. It is important for the menu bags to be labeled with the expiration dates so that it is easy to identify which foods to use first. Store the food with the earliest expiration dates in front of items with later dates. Once shelved use items stored in front first. Do not send out expired food items to schools. If you find expired items, notify the Program Manager directly.

➤ **Damaged Food**

- If you find any of the food is damaged, please dispose of the damaged food **immediately** and contact the Program Manager. You should also throw away food that was contaminated by the damaged containers. Record the number of bags with damaged food, as you will need to report the loss on your monthly report, if using.
- Northwest Harvest 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.**

D. Sample Monthly Report

Northwest Harvest  
Three Squares Monthly Report

One bag feeds one student for one day with breakfast, lunch, dinner and a snack. We have given you enough food to provide 2 bags to 24 students to cover a 2-day weekend. Distribution should follow this: 2 bags per student. If you are feeding several children in the family, please mark how many bags you are sending home. Please list the number of sacks given to each student every week, not just a check mark.

School Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Month: \_\_\_\_\_

	Student's Name or Family ID	# of Children in Family k-8 school age	List Distribution Dates Here							
			Dec 7	Dec 14*						
1	Ex. Student Name		2	2						
2	Ex. Student Name		1	2						
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										
16										
17										
18										
19										
20										
21										
22										
23										
24										
<i>Totals</i>			0	3	4					

Please list any contact changes since submitting the last report (e.g. 3 Squares school site coordinator/staff, mailing and e-mail addresses, phone numbers, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Number of volunteers that helped you this month: \_\_\_\_\_

Estimated number of hours spent on program: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional questions on page 2. Either scroll down or turn page over. Thank you.

\*\*The last row will automatically total your distribution each week if entered electronically.

Northwest Harvest  
Three Squares Monthly Report

What trends have you observed? Is there anything in your school or community that has affected your Three Squares students?

\_\_\_\_\_

What challenges and successes have you experienced (include input on food you receive from us here)?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please share a memorable student, family, teacher or volunteer story.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Completed by (please print): \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please fax/email reports for the month by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the following month. (Fax to 206.267.2179; email to partners@northwestharvest.org) If you have questions [about this program or the reporting process](#), e-mail Laura Titzer [laurat@northwestharvest.org](mailto:laurat@northwestharvest.org) or call 206-923-7423.

*E. Sample Year End Survey Questions*

1. Name
2. Job Title
3. School District
4. School Name
5. Would you like to participate in the program again next year?
6. Briefly describe any changes you observed in your school and students related to Northwest Harvest's Three Squares food program.
7. Please give us feedback on the food. Is there anything that is overwhelmingly not liked by the students? Do you need other types of food that are more culturally appropriate? If so, please provide examples of foods that would be useful.
8. What, if any, barriers do you experience in getting kids to accept food? Please describe ways in which you have overcome these barriers.
9. How many additional students at your school (after the current 24) could be added to the program?
10. What opportunities and dilemmas do you see with the Three Squares program?
11. What suggestions or recommendations do you have for us in serving your students better next year?
12. What needs our immediate attention going forward?
13. How can Northwest Harvest support you better?



F. *Sample Food Resource Flyer (Community Specific)*

These are food resource flyers that Northwest Harvest created for each community we have a participating school. This can be very useful for clients. Please contact Northwest Harvest if you would like assistance creating one for your community.



## Food Resources For Your Family

### Food Banks:

**All Saints Food Pantry**  
314 S. Spruce St.  
Spokane, WA 99201  
509-838-4409

**East Central Community Center**  
500 S. Stone St.  
Spokane, WA 99202  
509-625-6699

**New Hope Ranch Food Bank**  
2524 E. Queen St.  
Spokane, WA 98227  
509-954-5145

**Our Place Ministries**  
1509 W College  
Spokane, WA 99201  
509-326-7267

**Salvation Army**  
2020 N. Division, Suite B  
Spokane, WA 99207  
509-325-6821

**SNAP - NE Pantry**  
4001 N. Cook  
Spokane, WA 99207  
509-487-1114

**Southside Food Pantry**  
2934 E. 27th Ave.  
Spokane, WA 99223  
509-535-2301

**Spokane AIDS Network Food Bank**  
905 S. Monroe  
Spokane, WA 99204  
509-455-8993

**Spokane Valley Partners Food Bank**  
10814 E. Broadway  
Spokane, WA 99206  
509-927-1153

**For Additional Resources Call 211  
or the Family Food Hotline**

**1-888-436-6392**

*Turn Over for Meal Programs in Your Area*

## G. Food Allergy Handout

### Information on Common Food Allergies

The following eight foods account for 90% of all food-allergic reactions:

- Milk
- Eggs
- Fish
- Shellfish, including lobster, shrimp and crab
- Wheat
- Soy
- Peanuts
- Tree nuts. Such as almonds, walnuts and pecans

In adults, the most common foods to cause allergic reactions include: shellfish such as shrimp, crayfish, lobster, and crab; peanuts, a legume that is one of the chief foods to cause severe anaphylaxis, a sudden drop in blood pressure that can be fatal if not treated quickly; tree nuts such as walnuts; fish; and eggs.

In children, the pattern is somewhat different. The most common food allergens that cause problems in children are eggs, milk, peanuts, soy, and wheat. Adults usually do not lose their allergies, but children can sometimes outgrow them. Children are more likely to outgrow allergies to milk or soy than allergies to peanuts, fish, or shrimp.

The foods that adults or children react to are those foods they eat often. In Japan, for example, rice allergy is more frequent. In Scandinavia, codfish allergy is more common.

**Symptoms** of a food allergy can include wheezing and difficulty breathing, itchy skin rashes, including hives, vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, abdominal pain and swelling around his mouth and in his throat. These symptoms usually develop fairly quickly after your child ingests the food he is allergic to, often within minutes to hours. Nasal symptoms by themselves, such as congestion or a runny nose, are usually not caused by food allergies.

Symptoms may be mild or very severe, depending on how much of the food your child ingested and how allergic he is to the food. A severe reaction can include **anaphylaxis**, with difficulty breathing, swelling in the mouth and throat, decreased blood pressure, shock and even death.

More common than food allergies are **intolerances** to certain foods, which can cause vomiting, diarrhea, spitting up, and skin rashes. An example of such a reaction occurs in children with lactose intolerance,

which occurs because of a deficiency of the enzyme lactase, which normally breaks down the sugar lactose. Children without this enzyme or who have a decreased amount of the enzyme, develop symptoms after drinking lactose containing food products, such as cow's milk. However, because this reaction does not involve the immune system, it is not a real food allergy.

Once you determine what your child is allergic to, it is important to learn to read **food labels** because the food your child is allergic to may be an ingredient of many other foods. You should also avoid eating foods that may have been prepared using equipment that was also used to prepare the types of food that your child is allergic to.

When trying to determine what your child is allergic to, parents often incorrectly assume that if he has eaten a food before and not had problems, then he probably is not allergic to that food. They usually only suspect new foods as being able to cause a food allergy. However, it is important to keep in mind that it takes time for the immune system to build up a reaction against something that the body is allergic to. It may take days, weeks, months or even years to build up enough of a response to cause noticeable symptoms. So your child may be allergic to a food even if he has eaten it many times before without problems.

## *H. Culturally Appropriate Foods*

### What does “a culturally appropriate food” mean?

With elevated participation in backpack programs, there is an increased desire to incorporate more culturally appropriate foods for the participants. However, “culturally appropriate” food items, or those that are most commonly found within a particular culture, are difficult to integrate into programs, such as Three Squares, as many cultures use fresh, whole foods as a basis for their diet. This presents some difficulty when trying to add relevant food choices to the bags provided by Northwest Harvest. In response to this, there needs to be an awareness of individual culture when procuring and distributing food items to better compensate for the lack of fresh foods offered. Culture defines social structure, decision-making practices, and communication styles and offers a sense of identity, order, and security. As a powerful symbol of cultural identity, food is more than an object or product to be purchased for routine insertion into daily life. Ethnic groups maintain their cultural identities with their food practices, values, and beliefs and it is hard for people to change this when forced to eat foods outside their cultures as a result of difficult circumstances. The following information is meant as a guideline when purchasing or choosing foods to create meals and menus for backpack programs.

Culturally specific foods: *The following are culturally relevant foods for some of the most predominant cultures encountered at Northwest Harvest.*

1. **Muslim:** Many of the Muslim faith follow strict dietary practices that guide their daily lives. Islamic, similarly to Judaic, dietary practices are fundamentally about obeying God, not just following a diet. Many strict practicing Muslims believe they obey God by eating allowed foods, also called *halal*, and avoiding the forbidden foods, called *haram*. Because of this, it is better to think of foods that are NOT allowed rather than those that are. When possible, while preparing packages or backpacks for Muslim clientele, only foods that are labeled Kosher or Halal should be included. The following are symbols commonly used to denote Kosher and Halal:



Most commonly seen are the crescent moon M and the circle K or U. The following is a list of foods that are **not** acceptable according to Muslim tradition:

- Pork, lard or porcine foods
- Non-halal gelatin and other animal derived additives
- Non-halal meats, shellfish, blood or blood products.
- Carnivorous animals or birds of prey
- Alcohol
- Non-halal additives such as E numbers like E120, E441, E542 and genetically modified foods are questionable (mashbooh).

Foods that are halal are considered “healthy foods” are chicken, fish, milk, olive oil and honey are highly recommended in Islam. Fish must have scales and cannot be bottom dwellers, such as catfish. Muslims consider their health a religious matter and they believe that good nutrition is one of the essential steps toward maintaining good health.

**Hispanic/Mexican:** The traditional Mexican-American diet is rich in a variety of foods and dishes that represent a blend of pre-Columbian, indigenous Indian, Spanish, French, and more recently, American culture. Traditional diets also reflect the geographic regions of Mexico and the availability of local fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, and protein sources. The five staples of most Latin American diets are beans, corn (tortillas), peppers, tomatoes, rice and chilies. Typically, these diets are rich in complex carbohydrates, which are provided mainly by corn and corn products (usually tortillas, present at almost every meal), beans, rice, and breads. This diet also contains an adequate amount of protein in the form of beans, eggs, fish and shellfish, and a variety of meats mostly including pork and poultry. Popular fruits and vegetables are tomatoes, squash, sweet potato, avocado, mango, pineapple and papaya.

**Eastern European- Ukrainian:** Ukrainian cuisine is based on the plentiful grains and staple vegetables grown in the country. The traditional Ukrainian diet includes chicken, pork, beef, fish and mushrooms. Ukrainians also tend to eat a lot of potatoes, grains, fresh and pickled vegetables, Kasha (steamed buckwheat), barley or millet that is usually eaten as a warm cereal. Popular traditional dishes include varenyky (boiled dumplings with mushrooms, potatoes, sauerkraut, cottage cheese or cherries), borscht (soup made of beets, cabbage and mushrooms or meat) and holubtsy (stuffed cabbage rolls filled with rice, carrots and meat). Many of the staple foods include beets, potatoes, cabbage, mushrooms, millet, barley, buckwheat, wheat, lamb, pork and beef.

**Asian:**

**East/Central Asian:** Depending on the place of birth and religion, many East Asians are vegetarian but not all. Many foods consumed on a daily basis are rice (jasmine and basmati), rice products, noodles, millet, corn and other grains. Fresh fruits and vegetables such as cabbage, bok choy, dark leafy vegetables, bean sprouts, bananas, mangos, tangerines, watermelon and pineapple are common in main dishes as well as for dessert. The Asian diet consists of nuts and legumes as the main protein source, specifically mung beans and soybean in the form of tofu, soymilk and tempeh. Dairy items are not commonly used in most traditional Asian diets but Central Asia is considered the birthplace of yogurt and its use is widespread.

**South Asian/Indian:** The foods in this region include meats such as lamb, goat, fish and chicken. Many common spices are chili, black pepper, cloves, ginger, turmeric and cumin. There is less beef eaten here due to the primary religions of the region, Hinduism and Islam.

**African:**

The African continent is home to 47 countries and each of these countries has a different food associated with it. However, there are some common foods of African heritage that many share. Traditionally, the various cuisines of Africa use locally available fruits, cereal grains and vegetables as well as milk and meat products.

**Central Africa:** Some of these countries are DR Congo, Zambia, South Sudan, and Chad. Rice, millet, sorghum, sesame, yam, cassava plants and plantains, are a staple starches of this region. They are often served with grilled meats (chicken/beef) and other dishes made of spinach, tomato, peppers, chilies, rice, onions, okra, onion, garlic, banana and peanuts.

East Africa: The cuisine of East Africa varies from area to area and is distinctive in that meat products are generally absent. Common staples are maize, rice, beef, fish, chilies, tomatoes, coconut, pomegranate, curries, lentils, banana, pineapple, peppers, cabbage, kale and oranges. Common herbs used are saffron, cloves and cinnamon.

Horn of Africa: this is home to countries like Somalia, Eritrea, and Ethiopia. One of the main traditional dishes are stews called tsebhis (wot) made from chicken, beef, lamb, a variety of vegetables and clarified butter. These are traditionally served with injera or a flatbread made from teff, wheat or sorghum. Staple foods are legumes, lentils, barley and basmati rice. One important thing to be aware of is many people from this part of Africa are Jewish, Muslim or Ethiopian Orthodox and follow dietary restrictions accordingly. This means that most regional food is served halal.

Northern Africa: Countries that lie along the Mediterranean include Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Egypt. The diets here are varied and diverse and include foods such as been, wheat, semolina, couscous, olives, spices, pastries, potatoes, chickpeas tomatoes and zucchini. There is a large use of herbs and spices in this area including saffron, nutmeg, ginger, cloves and cinnamon.

Southern Africa: This part of Africa has a blend of foods that are blended from other cultures such as the many African tribes, European and Asian flavors. Many staples include maize and other whole grains, meat, soured milk products, vegetables and fruit such as apples, grapes, mangoes, bananas, avocados, oranges peaches and apricots. They also eat seafood such as crayfish, prawns, tuna, mussels, oysters and mackerel.

West Africa: This area includes countries such as Ghana, Togo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The diets are heavy with starchy items such as cassava, sweet potatoes, yams, cocoyams and other root vegetables. Traditional foods include rice, millet, sorghum, groundnuts, peanut butter, black-eyed beans, beef, chicken, mutton, guinea fowl, and eggs.