

PARTNERING TO END HUNGER



# Good Shepherd

FOOD BANK OF MAINE

**SCHOOL  
PANTRY  
PROGRAM**



**FEEDING  
AMERICA**



# welcome

## to the School Pantry Program!

Here you'll find everything you need to launch a successful food pantry in your school. Running a pantry is a significant undertaking that requires careful planning and a dedicated team of leaders and volunteers. It may not seem easy—but it is worth it. A strong school pantry program is a vital resource for families in need and can result in a happier, healthier school full of children who are ready to learn, grow, and thrive.

The School Pantry Program is one of Good Shepherd Food Bank's Youth & Family Initiatives. Nearly one in five Maine children live in food-insecure households, where families lack consistent access to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy lifestyle.

### HUNGRY CHILDREN

- have lower academic achievement in school
- have more trouble concentrating
- are more likely to suffer developmental delays
- have a harder time getting along with peers and teachers

# 47,020

children are food insecure  
in Maine

# 46%

of Maine students rely on  
free and reduced-price  
school meals

# What is a School Pantry?

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A school pantry is a food pantry located in a school. Schools are vital resource hubs for their surrounding communities, and school-based food pantries allow us to connect children with the healthy food they need to grow and thrive in places they already frequent with adults they already trust.

The School Pantry Program provides food insecure students with easy, consistent access to nutritious food during or after school hours. The program model is designed to be flexible to meet the unique needs of each school community.



## Requirements for School Pantries:

1. Food must be stored on school grounds for easy access to students and families.
2. Food must be distributed at least once per month between September and June.
3. Food must be given to participants completely free of charge.
4. Program participants cannot be discriminated against based on age, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, or any other protected class.

School Pantries operate in two ways: **Community-Sponsored Sites** are managed and funded as programs of a church, or a community-based 501(c)3 non-profit incorporated to serve the ill, needy, or children. **GFSB-Sponsored Sites** are managed and funded as direct programs of the Food Bank.

# First Steps

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Before you get started, you'll need to answer a few key questions:

- What is the need at our school, and is a school pantry the best fit?
- Is our school administration in full support of the program?
- Do we have a space that will respect students' privacy and store food safely?
- Is there a team of people invested both at the school and in the community to make the pantry successful and sustainable?

## Site Eligibility

Due to the high demand for programming across the state, we only accept applications from schools with **40% or higher Free or Reduced Lunch rates**.

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Schools with **40% - 69% free and reduced lunch rates** are eligible to apply for partnership with a qualifying community-based non-profit sponsor.

Schools with **70% or higher free and reduced lunch rates** are eligible to apply as a GSFBS-Sponsored School Pantry. Please note that acceptance for direct programming is extremely limited.

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Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis.

## School Support

Every school community throughout the state is different, and who you'll need buy-in from will vary, but you'll need to get complete support from the school administration as early as possible. Some schools will require approval from the school board, while others require only the principal's. Be prepared to present the pantry's operating procedures, staffing and facilities needs, and if your site is approved, you should plan the program structure, location, distribution method and schedule in coordination with your principal.

## Community Support

Connecting with community partners helps establish vital pathways to future funding and volunteer resources. Regardless of who you've secured as your sponsor, we recommend reaching out to your local food pantry while developing your program. They can provide valuable advice as you get started, and this helps in building partnerships, rather than competitions.

# Onboarding with GSFB

**Step One:** Find a program sponsor  
**Step Two:** Complete the paperwork  
**Step Three:** Complete program training

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## Finding a Program Sponsor

If your school has a 40 – 69% free and reduced lunch rate, the first step is to secure sponsorship from a non-profit charitable organization (501c3) that is publically incorporated to serve the ill, needy, or children, or a church. This distinction is essential. Municipalities, school foundations, and parent-teacher organizations are not eligible.

### **All Fiscal-Legal Sponsors must:**

- Receive and take responsibility for invoices for School Pantry products purchased through GSFB
- Deposit and withdraw funds for the School Pantry to and from a bank account belonging to the nonprofit organization
- Sign an Agency Contract with the Food Bank
- Sign a Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement with the school documenting that the School Pantry operates legally as a program of the nonprofit

### **Some Fiscal-Legal Sponsors also:**

- Serve as the lead liaison between GSFB and the school
- Order product on behalf of the school and assist with delivery or pick-up
- Support fundraising efforts for the School Pantry Program
- Support volunteer recruitment efforts for the School Pantry Program

Your local food pantry is often best suited to support your School Pantry efforts. Local churches and rotary clubs have also been successful partners. You'll need a reliable lead contact at the sponsor agency who is available to work and coordinate with you, or other school staff. Clear communication outlining who will be responsible for which program activities and regular updates on finances and spending are key to successful relationships.

A note about 'legal responsibility': There is a law referred to as The Good Samaritan Act that protects organizations and individuals distributing emergency food to those in need from lawsuits if they can prove that food was kept safe while in their possession. We work closely with our schools and their sponsors to provide the training and monitoring necessary to meet the standards for protection.

When choosing a sponsor, it's important to involve the School Initiatives team—we'll help make sure that everyone fully understands their roles and responsibilities, and provide paperwork to clearly document the parameters of your relationship. Organize a planning meeting with potential partners to discuss logistics, operations, funding, and administration. This conversation will help you determine if you have the resources necessary for a successful program. Be sure to include your school principal, the school site coordinator, the sponsor program liaison, and a board member of the sponsor if necessary.

*Why do I need this?*

Due to IRS regulations concerning donated food, GSFb can only partner with 501c3 non-profit organizations incorporated to serve the ill, needy, or children, or churches. Fiscal-Legal Sponsorship from a qualifying organization allows us to build partnerships with and serve schools that would not otherwise be eligible for partnership.

## Completing the Paperwork

### **Step One:** Complete the Partner Application

Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis, and we will notify you of your application status. If you have any questions about the application process, please contact Jessica Gildea at [jgildea@gsfb.org](mailto:jgildea@gsfb.org).

### **Step Two:** Complete Program Paperwork (if accepted)

After the School Initiatives team notifies you of your acceptance, the following paperwork is required before your site can begin ordering and receiving food from GSFb.

#### Agency Contract

- The sponsoring church or 501c3 needs to complete an Agency Contract, which will allow your group to shop at GSFb and gain access to additional resources. If your sponsor is already a GSFb partner, this step may not be necessary.
- For questions regarding this contract, contact Kathy Helming, Vice President of Community Partnerships: [khelming@gsfb.org](mailto:khelming@gsfb.org).

#### Fiscal Sponsorship Agreement

- This is the contract between the sponsor and your school. A template is provided [here](#) so you can adapt it to your needs.

#### Program Agreement

- The [program agreement](#) needs to be signed by the sponsor and your school principal. Submit the signed agreement and [site information sheet](#) to the GSFb School Initiatives Team.

# Staffing Your Pantry

The site coordinator is the heart of the school pantry. From food distribution to volunteer recruitment, the coordinator's efforts largely determine the success of the pantry. The coordinator is expected to dedicate enough time to keep the pantry organized, accessible, and publicized to the school community. The school pantry coordinator is often an individual who has ongoing contact with students and parents, such as a school counselor, parent liaison, or school social worker. What's needed is a passion for getting children and families what they need to be healthy and ready to learn.

## Site Coordinator

Site coordinators are the lead contact for both the program sponsor and GSFB. This person is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the pantry. Responsibilities include:

- Ordering food (or coordinating online shoppers/volunteers)
- Tracking the number of families served each month
- Ensuring food is stored and distributed safely
- Participate in site visits and food safety training
- Coordinating with school administration and staff
- Participate in program evaluations
- Reporting successes and challenges to the Youth & Family Initiatives team

## Online Shoppers

Your authorized shoppers are responsible for selecting food that is both safe and nutritious to distribute to students at the pantry. Shoppers are responsible for reviewing current stock before placing new orders to avoid food waste, and should be trained by either GSFB staff or the site coordinator on how to shop most efficiently for your community. Every shopper should be aware of the Pantry's budget and the allowance for each online order.

## Volunteers

Volunteers can be parents, school staff, or anyone else from the community who wants to get involved. The setting and amount of time a volunteer will spend with children determines whether or not background checks are required. Recruiting school staff as volunteers is a great way to make sure that students always have access to food in times of need, since school staff are on site during all operating hours. School Pantry Volunteers assist with:

- Maintaining first-in-first-out rotation
- Tracking distribution
- Distributing nutrition information
- Providing support during distributions

# Setting Up Your Pantry

Once you have your School Pantry foundation in place, it's time to determine the physical set-up and procedures for your pantry.

## Finding a Location

The size and type of location you need will vary depending on the available space, the level of need in your community, and your volunteer resources. Food safety is also one of the most important considerations when deciding where to set up your pantry. Keep in mind that the space will need to be securely locked when unattended.

## Setting Up & Maintaining the Space

**Temperature:** Maintaining a safe temperature in the school pantry is critical. You'll need to find a space within the school where the temperature can be controlled between 40–78 degrees. This requirement is mandatory. If you'll be using a refrigerator or freezer, the internal temperatures must be monitored and recorded weekly (a [temperature log](#) is provided). The GSFb team will monitor your site once every two years, at minimum. Please note that a thermometer and up-to-date temperature log must be available during monitoring visits.

**Storing Food:** Products available from GSFb include cleaning products, personal care items, and fresh and shelf-stable food. If your community has a need for non-food items, we encourage you to order anything available through the salvage program. If space is limited, food and personal care can be stored on the same shelving as long as food products are stored **above** personal care products. Important note: under no circumstances can chemical products be stored in the same area as food. Food (and shelves) must be a minimum of six inches off the ground at all times—this includes intermittent times when boxed food is waiting to be unpacked and shelved. Food must also be away from the wall at all times. Both of these measurements are in place to avoid pest problems. Documentation of regular pest control is required.

**Cleanliness:** Managing dirt and debris in the pantry is important for pest control and other risk factors like allergies. Your space should be regularly swept and dusted.

## Receiving Food Orders

You'll need to consider how you will get food from the GSFb warehouses in Auburn and Hampden, or from Catholic Charities in Caribou. Though delivery may be an option for some communities, **it cannot be guaranteed for every school**. For more information on the warehouse locations and hours of operation, visit [www.feedingmaine.org/contact](http://www.feedingmaine.org/contact). To inquire about delivery options, please call us at 207-782-3554.



# Managing Your Pantry

After determining the need in your community, finding a sponsor, meeting with the Youth & Family Initiatives team, and choosing your distribution model, you're ready to start serving your community. Here are a few important things to keep in mind as you get started:

## Identifying Hungry Students

First and foremost, you need to identify students in your school facing food insecurity. Some students will self-identify if you announce the new program over the intercom or send letters and flyers home. Other students will work to hide their needs.

Children who aren't getting enough food at home might complain often of headaches, stomachaches, and other ailments, and are at risk of falling behind in nearly every way. Make sure your school staff are trained to recognize the signs of hunger.

### A child facing food insecurity may:

- Suffer from poor health, feel sick or tired often
- Sleep in class
- Have difficulty with math and language skills
- Be more aggressive and fight with classmates and teachers
- Feel anxious and have difficulty concentrating
- Exhibit slower memory recall
- Underperform and have poor grades
- Frequently miss school or arrive late

## Making Students Comfortable

It is vital to take the time to thoroughly introduce the new program to your students. The level of need in your school will dictate how you make students and families comfortable asking for food. If the need at your school is relatively small, keeping the pantry discrete and private will likely be most successful. In schools with higher free/reduced lunch rates, we've found that the best way to eliminate stigma is to make the resource very well known. Fresh produce giveaways are a great and very successful way to make children and families feel comfortable, and can very easily be framed as part of other school events.

## Connecting Students to Other Resources

The School Pantry Program provides an opportunity to build stronger connections with families. Distributions are a great time to deliver information about other vital resources available to your community, like [SNAP](#), [WIC](#), and [Weatherization Assistance](#), [Free/Reduced Lunch applications](#), local health clinics, and nutrition incentives like [Maine Harvest Bucks](#).

## Successful Shopping

You'll need to determine who will place orders for your program, and what types of food should be purchased. School Pantries can place online orders as often as once per week. You will have one shared log-in for online orders, and will be trained on the online ordering system. The Youth & Family team will provide additional resources on how to shop successfully for school pantries. There are a few different types of products available:

### **Fresh Produce**

Fresh produce, whether purchased or donated, is available completely free of charge to our partners.

### **Salvage Product**

This is what we receive through food donations, food rescue, and grocery store donations. These dry goods are typically \$.16/pound or less.

### **Purchased Product**

We purchase these items wholesale, and provide them at cost to our partners—less than what you'd pay in a store, but higher than the price for salvage goods.

## Managing Your Budget

Keeping a low operating budget and providing nutritious food is easier than you'd expect. Making use of our fresh produce is key. The average cost to feed one child through the School Pantry Program is \$75/year. This can be significantly higher if you use primarily purchased product, or significantly lower if you primarily distribute produce.

## Record Keeping & Reporting

Each month, you'll receive a link to an online form where you will need to record how many families your pantry served. We never ask for any identifying information (name, age, grade, or family income). If your school administration requires you to collect additional information, we caution you and the school to be sensitive to participants' desire for privacy.

Each time you receive an order from the warehouse, you will be provided with an invoice detailing product type, weight, and total cost. Invoices need to be stored on-site or with your non-profit partner for two years.

# Choosing a Distribution Model

Schools across the country have designed many different distribution models for their school pantries. Below, you'll find a few of the models used most often by our partners. Get creative! And reach out if you have ideas or questions.

Here are some things to keep in mind as you think through distribution models:

- How will students access the pantry, by referral from a teacher, or by self-selection?
- When will food be distributed?
- Will food be pre-packed, or will students be able to choose what items they would like?
- Will food be distributed to students, to families, or both?

## Model #1: Drop In

In many schools, pantries serve children at any time while school is in session. This gives teachers the freedom to recognize and address a student's immediate need. Drop In pantries should be located where access and security is assured at all hours. This might be the nurse's, guidance, or front office. Drop In pantries serve students across the spectrum of need, from those who cannot afford afterschool snacks to those who need to take home full bags of food with meal supplies.

## Model #2: Monthly Produce Giveaway

All produce available through GSFb is completely free to all of our partners! These pantries receive one large monthly delivery of produce and dry goods, and host a large distribution event, which is a great community building and outreach opportunity. Some schools schedule the giveaway during sports games or parent-teacher conferences. This model reduces stigma in high-need schools by involving the entire school community, and is exceptionally helpful for schools without refrigeration. Dry goods can be distributed along with produce, or stored in the on-site pantry to meet other needs throughout the month.

## Model #3: Backpack/Pre-Packed Boxes

Many pantries distribute pre-assembled food boxes to families or children. This streamlines the distribution process, allowing the pantry to operate with fewer volunteers and serve students or families quickly. Some schools send students home with discreetly distributed, pre-packed bags weekly, while others distribute boxes to families before or after-school. This style is efficient, but doesn't allow for as much customization for individual children or families. Because this model provides a reliable and consistent source of food, it is most appropriate for families facing chronic food insecurity.

## Naming Your Program

You do not need to refer to your program as a School Pantry, and rebranding the program within the school can do a lot to reduce stigma among students. Think of a name that relates to whole and healthy foods, cooking, or nutrition, and share your ideas with us!

# Contact Us

## We're here to help!

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