

# MONTANA FOOD BANK NETWORK

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## ■ *Program Overview*

The mission of the Backpack Program is to meet the needs of hungry children by providing them with nutritious and easy-to-prepare food to take home on weekends and school vacations when other resources are not available.

Program Objectives are to:

- Provide nutritious, healthy food to children at-risk of hunger for preparation and consumption at their residence.
- Distribute food discreetly in easily accessible and safe environments
- Involve additional resources and partners in order to assure sustainability of the program.

A Backpack Program must meet the following *Feeding America* standards:

1. Approved agency in good standing with the Montana Food Bank Network that comply with all applicable Federal and local statutes, ordinances and regulations.
2. Healthy, nutritious food must be distributed to children free of charge.
3. Backpacks must be provided a minimum of once a month during the school year.



## ■ *How to Start Your Backpack Program*

### **1. Identify qualifying sites for the program.**

*The Montana Food Bank Network can tell you what local schools qualify for the program. To be eligible, a school must have at least 50% of students registered in the free & reduced lunch program.*

### **2. Determine if your pantry has the support staff to administer the program.**

*The Montana Food Bank Network will help provide resources to begin your program but only you can provide the local supervision.*

### **3. Approach qualifying sites and verify their interest, ability to identify and serve the qualifying children.**

*The Montana Food Bank Network will participate in the initial contacts with qualifying locations. We have a DVD, brochures and all support materials to help in the “pitch” process.*



### **4. Make a plan to promote, educate & fund raise for the program in your community.**

*The Montana Food Bank Network will provide you with a DVD presentation and promotional materials, including press releases and brochures. MFBN provides school contracts, program reporting forms, referral forms and informational letters for parents of identified students.*

### **5. Be Flexible**

*Each of your sites will be slightly different in implementation. Keep in mind that the people who work at the site will have the best perspective for what works for their students.*



## ■ *MFBN's Commitment*

**MFBN commits to providing the following items and support to the local backpack program site:**

1. *Assist in identifying the food needs for your area.*
2. *Distribution to the local pantry once a month to cover identified children at each location.*
3. *Support in launching program at identified sites.*  
*Includes attendance with local agency for presentations at the identified schools with school administrators, counselors, teachers and kitchen staff.*  
*Includes all forms for identifying students, reporting forms, and educational materials for identified students and parents.*
4. *Support in promotion and education of community.*  
*Includes initial program press releases, MFBN Program brochures, and DVD for presentations.*



## ■ *Agency's Commitment*

**The Agency must commit to providing the following items to run a backpack program site:**

1. *Designate a coordinator from the local agency to be the contact with MFBN.*
2. *Ensure the coordinator supervises each local location.*
3. *Ensure the coordinator provides reports on a monthly basis.*  
*This includes the number of bags delivered to each site, the number of students and siblings served each week and the pounds of food delivered each week to each site.*
4. *Ensure the coordinator keeps in contact with MFBN concerning any changes in the local program.*







## ■ *How the Program Started*

In late 2007 the Montana Food Bank Network approached DeSmet School in Missoula to solicit their interest in the Backpack program. The MFBN staff presented the program to the student council at DeSmet in December of 2007. Their enthusiasm was contagious. The Student Council in turn presented the program to the student body.

DeSmet approved the program and it started in January of 2008. At DeSmet the entire student body participated in the program. The Student Council assembled the bags and distributed the Backpack bags to the students.

We continue this program with the goal of expanding throughout the whole state. Each program is run according to the individual school's needs and is determined by MFBN staff and the school Principal.





## ■ *Testimonials*

“This program has helped us with the knowledge they (students) have food on the weekends where we are a bit short of money. It is getting harder to provide these days. Thank you for everything.”

*Parent at DeSmet*

“Principals continue to tell me what a blessing it is and how they never realized there was such a need until your group filled it. The coordination and distribution has been simple and seamless.”

*Valerie Addis - Missoula County Food Distribution Manager*

“My family is really hungry. Can we be on the food program?”

*Student at Missoula County Public School to Coordinator*

“My kids eat breakfast and lunch at school. This helps for it’s so hard to have enough food for 3 healthy meals everyday. This program helps so much. Thank you so much.”

*Parent at DeSmet*



## ■ *Frequently Asked Questions*

*How does MFBN determine a school's eligibility?*

The Montana Food Bank Network uses Feeding America's standard of eligibility for this program. This standard is a minimum of 50% of participating Free and Reduced Meal students.

*How does the Coordinator deliver the bags to students?*

Each Backpack program is run a little differently. There are many examples throughout Montana, and the Nation, that offer your school ideas in the best distribution model. MFBN supports your finding the best way for your local site.

*How often is the food distributed to our pantry?*

MFBN will deliver the requested number of bags for an entire month with each regularly MFBN scheduled delivery.

*What if students are added to the program during the month?*

MFBN will provide the requested number of bags + 5-7% more in the first two months of operation as the program stabilizes. After the first two months the children and siblings identified should be fairly



## ■ *Frequently Asked Questions*

consistent. As the program gains exposure in the community more children may be referred into the program.

### *What if we run out of food for the month?*

MFBN can only deliver once a month. You will need to make sure if there are students added during the month that you determine if you have enough bags for them or if they will have to be included in the program during the next month.

### *What kind of Resources from MFBN are available?*

MFBN has customized support material for you to use in creating your program. This list includes forms for parental consent, referring students, how to identify potential students, school checklist, school coordinators responsibilities and the application for sites. This list also includes the programs brochure, DVD and the initial press release.



