



Tribal Food Security Resources:

A Guide for Tribal Leaders during the COVID-19 Pandemic & Recovery Period



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Regional Operations



Many tribal communities experience high rates of food insecurity, or a lack of reliable access to enough affordable, nutritious food. The COVID-19 pandemic has only amplified this issue. Studies¹ have shown that approximately 25% of American Indian/Alaska Natives face food insecurity, and this rate is even higher in rural communities. Tribal food sovereignty offers a path toward increased food security, greater financial stability, and economic opportunity.

This resource guide provides information on federal resources from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Community Living (ACL) and Administration for Children and Families (ACF), that can address food insecurity and advance food sovereignty in tribal communities. The guide highlights grant opportunities and current COVID-19 program waivers and flexibilities that tribal human service's leaders may utilize to assist child care and early learning providers, elder care providers, and other community leaders working to improve food security and sovereignty in their communities.

Resources to Promote Food Security for Child Care and Early Learning Providers

Tribal leaders can ensure that child care and early learning providers have access to resources to support the nutritional needs of children in their care through the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program and the Farm to School Program. In addition, tribal child care and early learning providers can support the families that they serve by providing information on Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) and other resources and flexibilities that may be available to families during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tribal child care and early learning providers can participate in the [Child and Adult Care Family Program \(CACFP\)](#), which provides cash reimbursement for nutritious meals and snacks served to infants and children ages 12 and younger in licensed family or group child care homes. CACFP funds can also be used to purchase and grow [local foods](#). Among others, a few key child nutrition [Food and Nutrition Service \(FNS\) waivers and flexibilities](#) relevant to child care and early learning providers include:

- **At-risk Afterschool Area Eligibility Waiver:** FNS is allowing schools and afterschool care centers to serve at-risk afterschool meals and snacks to students [regardless of their location](#), through June 30, 2021.
- **Parent/Guardian Meal Pickup Waiver:** FNS is allowing parents/guardians to [pick-up meals](#) and bring them home to their children.
- **Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) Parent Pick Up Waiver:** FNS is allowing parents/guardians to [pick-up FFVP foods](#) and bring them home to their children through June 30, 2021.

Tribal child care and early learning providers may be able to participate in the [USDA Farm to School Grant Program](#), which offers annual grants to preschools, K-12 schools, school districts, nonprofits, state agencies, and Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) that support planning, developing, and implementing farm to school programs. "Farm to school" refers to efforts that bring locally or regionally produced foods into schools, including: sourcing local foods for school meal programs; providing hands-on learning activities such as school gardening, farm visits, and culinary classes; and integrating food-related education into the regular, standards-based classroom curriculum. Please visit [here](#) for resources on the Farm to Preschool Program.

¹ Jernigan, V., Huyser, K. R., Valdes, J., & Simonds, V. W. (2017). Food Insecurity among American Indians and Alaska Natives: A National Profile using the Current Population Survey-Food Security Supplement. *Journal of hunger & environmental nutrition*, 12(1), 1–10.

Resources to Promote Food Security for Elder Care Providers

The increased isolation brought on by the pandemic, along with the economic hardship, has placed elders at a greater risk for food insecurity. Tribal leaders can ensure that elder care and/or caregiver providers are utilizing food security supports provided by the [Administration for Community Living \(ACL\)](#), such as through the Title VI of the Older Americans Act. American Indian Tribes, Alaskan Native Villages, and local entities serving native people should work with states to secure assistance for native elders in urban areas and reservations.

ACL funds supportive and nutrition services to older Native Americans (American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians) through [Title VI of the Older Americans Act](#). The program covers services such as transportation, home delivered and congregate nutrition services, information and referral, and a wide range of home care services. Title VI funds are awarded directly by ACL to Indian tribal organizations, Native Alaskan organizations and nonprofit groups representing Native Hawaiians.

Title VI is comprised of three sections which identifies the eligibility criteria for each section and the specific services that are authorized by that section:

- Part A is the Indian Program
- Part B is the Native Hawaiian Program;
- Part C is the Native American Caregiver Support Program.

Parts A and B include nutrition services and supportive services under these criterium. Part C includes, among others, supplemental services which provides nutrition services in compliance with Part C of Title III.

Title III of the Older Americans Act provides nutrition and related supportive services to designated state units on aging who work through local and community networks for service delivery. Title III funds are awarded based on state populations of persons 60 years and older. The Older Americans Act requires targeting of services to persons most in need, which includes rural, American Indian, non-English speaking, minority, low-education levels, frail and low income.

Resources to Promote Food Security for Communities, Individuals, and Families

Tribal leaders can ensure that community leaders and organizations working to improve food security are aware of and sharing information with individuals and families about the range of food services and programs for which they may be eligible. One family may need support from and be eligible for multiple programs, including SNAP, WIC, TEFAP, and Pandemic EBT. Taken together, these resources can provide the level of comprehensive food support that families need during this unprecedented public health emergency. Tribes, Pacific Indigenous communities, and Native non-profits are also able to seek project funding that can be used to develop food sovereignty or food security initiatives.

Families can access nutrition benefits to purchase healthy food through the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) program. USDA increased benefits during the COVID- 19 pandemic to meet the rising need and provided flexibilities to allow easier access. Among others, a few of the key [SNAP waivers and flexibilities](#) allowed during COVID-19 include:

- **Emergency Allotments:** FNS is approving states to issue emergency supplements to SNAP households that normally receive less than the maximum benefit. State-by-state waivers granted thus far are viewable [here](#).

- **Increase in benefits:** All SNAP households will receive a 15 percent increase in SNAP's maximum benefit through September 30, 2021.
- **Pandemic EBT:** FNS is allowing states to provide benefits (similar to SNAP) to children who normally receive free or reduced-price school meals. USDA provides [Guidance for States](#) on Pandemic EBT.
- **On-line Purchasing:** FNS rapidly expanded SNAP online purchasing to support social distancing, bringing access to nearly [three-quarters of the states](#). Online purchasing is limited to state-approved retailers.

The [Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children \(WIC\)](#) serves to safeguard the health of pregnant women, and women with infants, and children younger than 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care. Among others, FNS has implemented the following [waivers](#) during COVID-19:

- **Physical Presence Waivers:** FNS is allowing participants to enroll or re-enroll in WIC [without visiting a clinic](#) in person and postpone certain medical tests.
- **Remote Benefit Issuance Waivers:** FNS is allowing WIC agencies to [issue benefits remotely](#) so participants don't have to pick up their WIC benefits in person.
- **Food Package Substitution Waivers:** FNS is allowing WIC state agencies to [substitute certain food package items](#) when availability is limited. WIC state agencies can also change their approved-foods lists as needed.

Tribes can mitigate food insecurity by accessing the [Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations \(FDPIR\)](#), which provides USDA foods to income-eligible households living on Indian reservations and to Native American households residing in designated areas near reservations or in Oklahoma. USDA distributes both food and administrative funds to participating Indian Tribal Organizations and state agencies to operate FDPIR. A few of the key [FDPIR waivers and flexibilities](#) allowed during COVID-19 include:

- **Income Verification:** Mandatory verifications, such as income, the child support deduction, the medical expense deduction, and the shelter and utility expense deduction can be performed via email, mail, fax, text and/or through a collateral phone contact.
- **Application Processing:** New FDPIR applicants may use an authorized representative to file an application. FDPIR employees may act as authorized representatives if written approval is received from the Food Distribution Director or supervisor and if it is determined that no one else is available.
- **Certification Periods:** For households with a certification period less than 12 months (or less than 24 months if all adult members are elderly or disabled), an ITO/SA can verbally confirm with the household that circumstances remain the same and extend their certification period additional months, provided that it does not exceed 12 months (or 24 months if applicable) from the start date of their certification.

Tribal organizations can develop nutrition education programs through FDPIR's grant opportunities:

- **FDPIR and SNAP-ED Grants:** The [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education \(SNAP-Ed\)](#) is a federally funded grant program that supports evidence-based nutrition education and obesity prevention interventions and projects for persons eligible for SNAP through complementary direct education, multi-level interventions, and community and public health approaches to improve nutrition. FDPIR participants are eligible to receive services through SNAP-Ed if the State and agency administering FDPIR work together.

- **FDPIR Nutrition Education Grants:** FNS annually awards funding for nutrition education projects through [Food Distribution Program Nutrition Education \(FDPNE\)](#) grants. Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) and state agencies that are current FDPIR allowance holders are eligible to apply for funds to conduct projects that provide nutrition information and services to FDPIR participants. The goal of the grants are to enhance nutrition knowledge through the development of nutrition education resources and facilities, such as food demonstration spaces and educational gardens.

The [Emergency Food Assistance Program \(TEFAP\)](#) is a federal USDA program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including elderly people, by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. While Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) can't enter into direct agreements with USDA to distribute TEFAP foods, they may be eligible to participate in TEFAP as recipient agencies. Among others, some key [TEFAP flexibilities](#) allowed during COVID-19 include:

- **Income eligibility:** TEFAP state agencies may adjust TEFAP income eligibility guidelines to expand participant eligibility at any time. State agencies can also consider categorical income eligibility procedures (e.g., establishing a policy that makes all SNAP or WIC participants eligible for TEFAP) to expedite household eligibility processes.
- **Distribution models that accommodate social distancing:** ERAs can utilize a drive-through model in which recipients receive a box of TEFAP foods that is placed directly in their vehicle by staff or volunteers. ERAs may also consider delivering TEFAP foods to central pick-up locations or to participants' homes.

During the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic, FNS approved state requests for **Disaster Household Distributions (DHD)** for targeted areas to meet specific needs when traditional channels of food are unavailable and not being replenished on a regular basis. DHD provides boxed foods to households using existing inventories of USDA purchased foods. USDA has approved targeted DHD programs for the following states and [Indian Tribal Organizations \(ITOs\)](#).

Additional Federal Food Security Grant Opportunities

Federally and State recognized Tribes, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and Native non-profits are able to apply for ACF's [Administration for Native Americans \(ANA's\) Social and Economic Development Strategies \(SEDS\)](#) grant funding. This funding supports community-driven projects designed to grow local economies, increase the capacity of tribal governments, strengthen families, preserve Native cultures, and increase self-sufficiency and community well-being. SEDS funding can be used to develop food sovereignty and food security projects specific to community needs. ANA also offers a focused funding stream to Alaska Natives through the SEDS-AK grant opportunity.

Federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations can also take advantage of ACF's [Community Services Block Grants](#). The grants provide funds to alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty in communities and can be used to provide services and activities that address nutrition and related services that may be necessary to counteract conditions of malnutrition. A Community Services Block Grant application and plan is submitted directly to the [Office of Community Services \(OCS\)](#) before September 1. Any federally-or state-recognized tribe or tribal organization that is interested in receiving CSBG funds directly must first contact OCS at csbgtribes@acf.hhs.gov to receive specific instructions.

The [USDA Community Food Projects \(CFP\)](#) awards grants to eligible nonprofits, tribal organizations, and food program service providers to promote self-sufficiency and increase food security in low-income communities by developing comprehensive, community-based solutions. The goal of the program is to increase access to fresher, more nutritious food supplies, increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs, and promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues.

The American Rescue Plan (ARP)

The American Rescue Plan of 2021 continues to provide [increased benefits and emergency resources](#) toward the goal of ending food insecurity through the following:

- **Access to the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program available for the duration of the health emergency**, including through the summer, to allow families with children receiving school meals to purchase healthy food more easily during the pandemic.
- An **extension to the 15 percent increase in SNAP benefits** for all participants through September 30, 2021, with \$1.15 billion allocated for the cost of state administrative expenses.
- **Investments in technological improvements** to expand access for families to use their SNAP benefits to purchase groceries safely online.
- \$880 million to deliver **expanded access to more fruits and vegetables** for moms and babies and investments in innovation to WIC.
- **\$37 million for senior nutrition** through the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.
- State and Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Programs will soon have access to the [Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund](#). These resources are part of the American Rescue Plan and can be used for **non-recurrent short-term assistance, including emergency food aid**.

Where can tribal organizations go for assistance?

ANA has four regional [training and technical assistance \(TA\) centers](#) offering, at no cost, project and planning development training, pre-application training, and post award training to eligible tribes and native organizations that are prospective applicants or current grantees. The centers can also review applications that are 75 percent complete and offer guidance to help improve the proposal. Trainings are provided in-person and virtually throughout our service area. To help increase the chance for success, technical assistance remains available throughout the life of the grant.