

DISASTER OUTREACH:

THE HEAT IS ON

– REACHING OUT AFTER A DISASTER



DISASTER OUTREACH

OUTREACH FOR THE DISASTER FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

What is the Disaster Food Stamp Program (DFSP) and how does it operate?

After a natural or man-made disaster occurs and a Presidential declaration of disaster with a provision for individual assistance has been made, State agencies can request approval from the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to operate a DFSP to provide temporary food assistance to households. FNS approves operation of the DFSP once grocery stores are operational and telecommunications and electricity have been restored, as DFSP benefits are delivered on Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards, which require telephone and electricity for redemption. Generally, States request and FNS approves operation of the DFSP a week or more after a disaster has occurred.

The DFSP helps people buy food when they are experiencing economic hardships as a result of the disaster (loss of jobs, loss of food because of power outages, damages to home and personal possessions, etc.). Although every State agency maintains a general DFSP Plan for use in time of disaster, State agencies do tailor DFSP policies and procedures to fit the community's specific needs following each disaster, so every DFSP is unique.

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How does the DFSP differ from the Food Stamp Program (FSP)?

The DFSP is different from the FSP in some important ways:

- Families who are not normally eligible for the

FSP may be eligible for the DFSP. During the eligibility process for the DFSP, a household's short-term, disaster-related expenses are considered.

- Students, strikers, noncitizens, and persons subject to work requirements are not barred from the DFSP as they are from the FSP.
- Rules surrounding verification, income, and resources are relaxed.
- Recipients receive the maximum food stamp benefit for their household size.
- The period to apply for the DFSP is short, generally 1 week.
- State agencies may operate mass application

sites at fairgrounds, stadiums, or other easily accessible locations that can serve large populations. For very small disasters, State agencies may operate the DFSP out of social services offices. All applications for the DFSP are distributed to prospective clients and collected at these sites. Applications generally are not distributed throughout the community, as they are for the regular FSP.

How are ongoing FSP participants aided in a DFSP?

Aid to FSP participants will depend upon the disaster. Ongoing participants may be eligible to receive replacement benefits for lost or damaged food. Additionally, a supplement or additional benefits may be provided to ensure participants receive the maximum level of benefits for their household size. Sometimes these benefits



are paid automatically – in other cases, participants may be asked by the State worker to complete an affidavit attesting to disaster losses in order to qualify.

Why should my organization conduct outreach during disasters?

During times of disaster, the agency that administers the DFSP in your state will conduct informational activities, often through the media, to inform the public of the DFSP, the eligibility requirements, and the application process. Because the days following a disaster are often chaotic, news about the DFSP might be overshadowed by other disaster-related issues, misinformation might be circulated, and local disaster victims will urgently

turn to trusted organizations, such as yours, for information and guidance.

Because the eligibility rules for the DFSP are different than those of the regular FSP and applications are accepted for a short time (about 1 week), many potential applicants will not realize they may qualify for benefits. Also, participants in the FSP might not know they may be entitled to replacement or supplemental benefits. As a trusted messenger in your community, you have a unique opportunity to connect your clients with benefits from the DFSP.

Why should my organization partner with State/local food stamp offices?

Partnering with State/local food stamp offices helps your organization provide your clients with accurate, timely information.

Some of your clients might be food stamp participants. They will need information about replacement or supplemental benefits and what actions to take, if necessary, to prove individual loss to claim these benefits.

By collaborating with your State agency on DFSP outreach, you will be able to provide your clients with answers to these and other questions.

How can my organization involve the State/local FSP office in our disaster preparedness discussions?

Convene a “get-ready” meeting before a disaster occurs. Invite State/local food stamp offices, grocers, EBT industry representatives, and other community and faith-based organizations to the meeting. At this meeting, consider conducting a needs

QUESTIONS YOUR CLIENTS MIGHT HAVE

- ? AM I ELIGIBLE FOR THE DFSP?**
- ? WHERE DO I GO TO APPLY?**
- ? WHEN CAN I APPLY?**
- ? WHAT SHOULD I BRING WITH ME?**
- ? WHEN AND HOW WILL I RECEIVE THE BENEFITS?**
- ? HOW LONG WILL I BE ABLE TO RECEIVE THE BENEFITS?**
- ? WHERE CAN I USE THE BENEFITS?**



assessment. A needs assessment will identify existing outreach services and resources in your community. It will also provide your organization with a better understanding of the number and nature of diverse groups in your community. In addition, it will help you identify geographic areas most prone to disasters, or communities, locations, and neighborhoods that may need unique assistance, such as language assistance, in the aftermath of a disaster. Information identified in the needs assessment not only will help you effectively prepare to coordinate outreach efforts during a disaster, but will also reinforce cooperation for ongoing outreach.

Can my State agency include a DFSP contingency plan in its State outreach plan?

Yes. A State outreach plan may include contingency plans for food stamp outreach during a disaster. Preparation is critical to adequate disaster response. It enables a State to quickly implement activities that have been carefully planned. Talk to your State agency to find out if it has a State outreach plan and if it includes a contingency outreach plan for the DFSP. Discuss how you can participate in such activities if they are available or how you can assist in the development of such documents if they are not.

During a DFSP, what outreach activities can be reimbursed by FNS?

All DFSP outreach activities must be approved in advance by the State agency in order to be eligible for reimbursement. Allowable outreach activities during a disaster may include:

- Distributing information about the provisions of the DFSP to disaster victims,
- Funding a toll-free number,
- Distributing information to media outlets,
- Greeting applicants at DFSP application entrances and directing them to appropriate areas,
- Translating DFSP outreach materials into other languages,
- Distributing and helping applicants fill out DFSP application forms at disaster sites, and/or
- Prescreening activities that do not involve accessing the State eligibility system or existing client case files.

How can I learn more about the DFSP?

For more information on how a State might operate the DFSP, please see the Disaster Food Stamp Program Guidance on the FNS Web site: http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/response/DFSP_Handbook/handbook.htm.



BEFORE A DISASTER STRIKES

10 STEPS
TO PLAN FOR
DFSP OUTREACHSTEP 1 | DEVELOP
A PLAN

Convene or participate in a “get-ready” meeting with State / local food stamp offices.

- Explain how community and faith-based partners can help the DFSP provide food assistance to those adversely affected by disasters, whether man-made or due to natural causes.
- Explain how community and faith-based partners can assist disaster victims already enrolled in the regular FSP with replacement benefits.
- Discuss strengths and needs of each partner in terms of disaster response.
- Discuss what your organization’s staff can and cannot do during a disaster.
- Plan and document how you will work together to prepare for potential future disasters. Be very specific about the best ways to get the word out, how that can be done in an emergency, and who will do it.
- Develop a contact list of participating members, with multiple ways of reaching each party in the event of a disaster.
- Discuss what resources, such as toll-free numbers or Web sites, can be shared in the event of a disaster.

STEP 2 | DEVELOP OR UPDATE
A NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- If your community has not conducted a needs assessment, take steps to complete one. Discuss who will take the lead to complete the needs assessment.
- If your community has previously conducted a needs assessment, reevaluate the findings and update corresponding next steps.
- Identify existing outreach services and resources in your community.
- Identify partners with special expertise, such as ethnic media contacts or translators.
- Identify vulnerable populations in your community, such as those in certain geographic areas or those with particular language needs, who may be most affected by potential disasters or who will need extra support accessing help following the disaster.
- Each community organization may also want to take this opportunity to examine its own disaster plans. Each organization must be sure that it can adequately account for its employees and mobilize them quickly with the right tools and materials to implement the response plan as agreed with other partners.

- 1 Develop a plan
- 2 Develop or update a needs assessment
- 3 Add language to State Outreach plan
- 4 Encourage your State to include your organization in its State DSFP plan
- 5 Plan for media activities
- 6 Maintain good relationships with all partners
- 7 Implement activities in your outreach plan
- 8 Develop new partnerships
- 9 Connect DSFP victims to FSP
- 10 Thank staff and partners and share lessons learned



STEP 3 | ADD LANGUAGE TO THE STATE OUTREACH PLAN

- Encourage your State to develop an outreach plan with a contingency plan for the DFSP.
- If your State has an outreach plan, encourage the development of a contingency section for the DFSP.
- In the plan, include a list of allowable activities and identify which agency will handle each activity. Advanced planning improves your disaster response. Knowing you have the tools and resources in place will reduce stress and improve your ability to react and respond to a disaster, when or if it occurs.
- Maintain a hard copy of the contingency plan in a secure offsite location. If there is a disaster, you might not have access to a computer or your office.
- Include draft or template materials that your organization might use as part of your media response.

STEP 4 | ENCOURAGE YOUR STATE TO INCLUDE YOUR ORGANIZATION IN ITS STATE DFSP PLAN

- Describe what outreach activities you can perform and encourage your State to include them in the State DFSP Plan.
- Maintain a hard copy of the plan in a secure offsite location. If there is a disaster, you might not have access to a computer or your office.

STEP 5 | PLAN FOR MEDIA ACTIVITIES DURING A DISASTER

- Develop a list of media outlets (television, radio, or print) for the DFSP and share your list with your State partners. Include phone numbers, fax numbers, and addresses so that you or your partners have multiple ways to reach the media.

STEP 6 | MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH ALL PARTNERS

- Keep in touch with your community and faith-based partners. Check with them periodically to confirm their roles and responsibilities and to update your contact lists.
- Know your State agency liaison and how to initiate contact.
- Consider holding a practice drill, role-playing game, or table-top exercise to practice what you will do in the event of a real disaster.



WHEN A DISASTER STRIKES

STEP 7 | IMPLEMENT ACTIVITIES IN YOUR OUTREACH PLAN

- Make contact with State/local food stamp offices and other partners to implement your outreach plan.
- Provide accurate and consistent messages to your clients using your toll-free number or Web site.
- Stay informed. As the DFSP application process changes, provide updates to your clients and other partners.

STEP 8 | DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS OR CONDUCT ADDITIONAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- Initiate partnerships with new organizations to meet unanticipated needs.
- If your State has an outreach plan, expand outreach activities, if needed. Don't feel limited. Your organization may conduct allowable and reasonable outreach activities to get the word out about the DFSP.

WHEN THE DISASTER IS OVER

STEP 9 | CONNECT DFSP VICTIMS TO THE REGULAR FSP

- Conduct outreach to connect those DFSP victims eligible for the regular FSP to those benefits. DFSP recipients who wish to apply for the regular FSP will need to follow the normal food stamp application process. These households may need assistance in understanding FSP requirements.
- Let the media and other opinion leaders know how the DFSP and regular FSP responded to the needs of families and the broader community.

STEP 10 | THANK STAFF AND PARTNERS FOR THEIR EFFORTS AND SHARE LESSONS LEARNED

- Recognize employees and partners for a job well done.
- Make changes to your outreach and disaster plans based on what worked and what didn't work.
- Visit the FNS Web site and prepare promising disaster outreach practices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/promising/Default.htm>



10 IDEAS FOR DFSP OUTREACH

- 1 **Inform the media.** Use the media to spread messages about the availability of the DFSP. Be sure the identified spokesperson has the timely and correct information and an updated media list. Be sure to follow your State's procedures.
- 2 **Coordinate with other responders.** Identify the liaison to other first (disaster) responders in the community. Be sure that they have the correct information about your DFSP and can share it with disaster victims they serve.
- 3 **Engage grocery store partners.** Provide information to grocers to post, distribute in grocery bags, or announce in stores.
- 4 **Enlist faith- and community-based partners.** Enlist the help of your partners to distribute information (who can apply, when, where) about the DFSP or to perform other duties as described in your State Disaster or State Outreach Plan(s).
- 5 **Use community volunteers.** Engage volunteers to perform activities such as answering the State/local toll-free number, distributing informational materials at grocery stores, and monitoring food stamp lines to make sure potential applicants are in the correct line at disaster sites.
- 6 **Enlist community translators.** Work with community translators to translate news releases for ethnic media and informational materials and to serve as interpreters during food stamp interviews.
- 7 **Provide a toll-free number.** Set up cellular phones to use as DFSP informational numbers if land lines are not working.
- 8 **Use the remote telephone feature.** Use the remote message feature of your telephone system, if available, to announce DFSP information. If this is not available, contact FNS to ask about using the national toll-free number remote messaging feature and/or contact your State FSP EBT provider to ask if a message can be added to the customer service phone line.
- 9 **Post information on your Web site.** Post DFSP information on your Web site. Provide basic information, such as who may qualify, where and when to apply, and types of verification documents, if needed.
- 10 **Develop new outreach partnerships.** Develop new outreach partnerships to provide DFSP information to disaster victims, based on what is occurring in your community.



WEB-BASED RESOURCES

FNS Disaster Assistance Home Page	http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/disaster.htm
FSP Disaster Handbook	http://www.fns.usda.gov/disasters/response/DFSP_Handbook/handbook.htm
Outreach State Plan Guidance	http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/default.htm
Partnership Section in State Toolkit	http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/outreach/tool-kits_state.htm
FNS press releases	http://www.fns.usda.gov/cga/PressReleases/PressReleases.htm
FRAC Disaster Handbook	http://www.frac.org/pdf/dfsp05.pdf
Louisiana press releases	http://www.dss.state.la.us/departments/dss/Press_Releases.html



SAMPLE PRESS RELEASES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

[Date]

*[Name of Appropriate Contact]
[Area Code and Phone Number]
[Cell Phone]*

Disaster Victims Now Eligible for Food Stamp Assistance

[City, State] – Many victims of *[disaster]* are now eligible for benefits from the Disaster Food Stamp Program.

[Quote about significance of nutrition assistance following a disaster,] said [State official.]

The United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service has approved a Disaster Food Stamp Program (DFSP) to allow victims of *[disaster]* in *[eligible geographic area]* to receive nutrition assistance. Eligible households will receive an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card to use to purchase food at retail locations. Eligibility criteria for the DFSP are different than for the regular Food Stamp Program (FSP.) Residents who have experienced *[describe unique disaster elements that may make residents eligible for the DFSP]* may be eligible. Other eligibility factors include *[list eligibility criteria.]*

Applications for the DFSP will be accepted until *[date.]* Residents of *[eligible geographic locations]* can apply for disaster food stamp benefits at the following locations and times:

Location: *[address]*
Hours of Operation: *[hours]*

Those seeking to apply for benefits from the DFSP are encouraged to bring verification of identity and residency, if possible, with them when they apply. If the applicant’s documents have been lost in the disaster, DFSP staff can provide guidance on how applicants can prove their identity. *[List other documents that should be available at application or other information about needed verifications.]*

More information about the DFSP is available on *[Web site address and toll-free number.]*

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT:

[Date]

*[Name of Appropriate Contact]
[Area Code and Phone Number]
[Cell Phone]*

Deadline To Apply for Disaster Food Stamp Program Is *[add when]*

[City, State] – Victims of *[disaster]* are reminded that they have until *[deadline]* to apply for nutrition assistance from the Disaster Food Stamp Program (DFSP). The DFSP enables those who have experienced loss, such as *[list criteria]*, as a result of the *[disaster]* to receive food stamp benefits on an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card to purchase food at retail stores.

[Quote about the importance of applying before time runs out.] said *[State official]*. *[Quote about how many benefits have been issued to date.]*

Residents of *[geographic location]* may be eligible for nutrition assistance from the DFSP. Provisions of the DFSP are different from the regular FSP, so those affected by *[disaster]* in the designated locations are encouraged to apply to find out if they may be eligible for benefits under this program.

Applications will be accepted at the following locations until *[deadline.]*

Location: *[address]*
Hours of Operation: *[hours]*

Those seeking to apply for benefits from the DFSP are encouraged to bring verification of identity and residency, if possible, with them when they apply. If the applicant’s documents have been lost in the disaster, DFSP staff can provide guidance on how applicants can prove their identity. *[List other documents that should be available at application or other information about needed verifications.]*

More information about the DFSP is available on *[Web site address and toll-free number.]*

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