

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 telephones 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.

How does the DFSP differ from the 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, 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.

How are ongoing FSP participants aided in a DFSP?

Aid to FSP participants will depend upon the disaster. Your State agency may decide to issue 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 need to complete an affidavit attesting to disaster losses to qualify.

Why should my agency conduct outreach during disasters?

Since each DFSP operation is unique and many participants are first-time applicants, your agency must be prepared to clearly communicate what benefits are available, who is eligible, how to apply, and how to use food stamp benefits. Because the DFSP generally operates for a 1-week period, providing timely and detailed information is essential.

In addition, FSP participants may need to know how to verify food loss for replacement benefits, how to obtain supplemental benefits, or whether or not benefits will be automatically replaced.



Because the days following a disaster are often chaotic, news about the DFSP might be overshadowed by other disaster-related issues, or misinformation might be circulated. Ongoing outreach is essential to correcting misperceptions and providing factual information to disaster victims about the nutrition benefits to which they may be entitled.

Why should my agency partner with community and faith-based organizations during disasters?

Some disaster victims will turn to trusted organizations in the community for information and help. Affected people may already be interacting with these organizations for other needs, such as clothing, shelter, or medical care. These organizations are in a position to help your agency provide accurate information about the DFSP to potentially eligible individuals.

Additionally, community and faith-based organizations might have personnel in parts of the affected areas where your staff are not present. They may also have other resources that are useful during disasters, such as media contacts, Web sites, toll-free numbers, and translators.

How can my agency involve these community organizations in our disaster preparedness discussions?

Convene a “get-ready” meeting before a disaster occurs. Invite grocers, community organizations, and faith-based groups. At this meeting, consider conducting a needs assessment. A needs assessment will identify existing outreach services and resources in your community. It will also provide your agency 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 in the aftermath of a disaster, such as language assistance. Information identified in the needs assessment will not only 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.

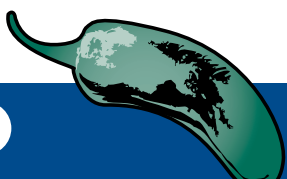
During a DFSP, what outreach activities can be reimbursed by FNS?

To be eligible for reimbursement, partners must secure approval from the State agency in advance of implementing any DFSP outreach activities. Allowable outreach activities during a disaster may include:

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

How can I learn more about the DFSP?

For complete information on operating a 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

STEP 1 | **DEVELOP
A PLAN**

Convene or participate in a “get-ready” meeting with community and faith-based partners.

- Explain how the DFSP can provide food assistance to those adversely affected by disasters, whether man-made or due to natural causes.
- Explain how disaster victims already enrolled in the regular FSP may be assisted with replacement benefits.
- Discuss strengths and needs of each partner in terms of disaster response.
- Discuss what community partner 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. Identify who will be responsible for periodically updating this information and on what schedule.
- 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. Consider if volunteers or staff will 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.

**10 STEPS
TO PLAN FOR
DFSP OUTREACH**

- 1 | Develop a plan
- 2 | Develop or update a needs assessment
- 3 | Add language to State Outreach plan
- 4 | Describe outreach activities in the State DSFP plan
- 5 | Plan for media activities
- 6 | Maintain good relationships with 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

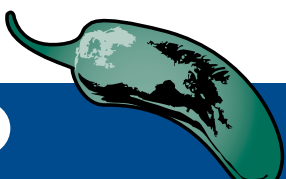
- Develop a State outreach plan and add a contingency plan for outreach activities to respond to a disaster.
- If you already have a State Outreach Plan, add a contingency section for outreach for the DFSP.
- Include a list of allowable activities and identify which agency will handle each activity. Advanced planning improves your disaster response. Knowing you have the tools and resources in place will reduce stress and improve your ability to respond to a disaster, when or if it occurs.
- Include drafts or template materials that your State might use as part of your media response.
- 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.

STEP 4 | DESCRIBE OUTREACH ACTIVITIES IN THE STATE DFSP PLAN

- Describe your disaster outreach activities in your State DFSP Plan. If your State does not have an outreach plan, provide sufficient details on outreach activities and contacts. If your State agency has an outreach plan, make references to that plan.
- Develop templates of outreach materials, such as flyers, posters, and a Web page, so that they can be finalized quickly when needed. Consider the alternatives for printing and distributing in an emergency situation.
- 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.
- Identify a community liaison whose sole responsibility during a disaster is to coordinate and share information between the State agency and community partners.

STEP 5 | PLAN FOR MEDIA ACTIVITIES DURING A DISASTER

- Develop and articulate State policy on who initiates or handles media inquiries in your State DFSP Plan and State Outreach Plan.
- Identify State spokesperson(s) in the plans. There may be more than one contact.
- Develop a list of media outlets (television, radio, or print) for the DFSP. These outlets can inform your audience of details about the DFSP when it is implemented. Include phone numbers, fax numbers, and addresses so that you have multiple ways to reach the media.



STEP 6 | MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH 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.
- If your State contracts outreach activities to organizations, contractual oversight will require more frequent contacts.
- 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 outreach partners and implement your contingency plan.
- Provide accurate and consistent messages to your partners via the community liaison, especially as you make changes to the application process, application sites, or other aspects of the program that affect applicant eligibility and access.
- Remind State employees in disaster areas of media procedures. This is important because you may have employees from other States with different media policies.

STEP 8 | DEVELOP NEW PARTNERSHIPS OR CONDUCT ADDITIONAL OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- Initiate partnerships with new organizations to meet unanticipated needs.
- Expand outreach activities, if needed. Don't feel limited. You may conduct necessary activities even though they are not referenced in your State Outreach Plan.



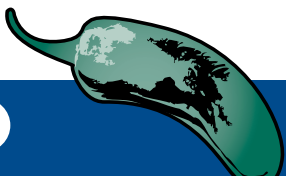
WHEN THE DISASTER IS OVER

STEP 9**CONNECT DFSP VICTIMS TO
THE REGULAR FSP**

- DFSP recipients who wish to apply for the regular FSP will need to follow the normal food stamp application process. Some households may have questions about FSP requirements or may need assistance in filling out application forms or securing verification documents. Others may need other types of assistance such as clothing or household goods. Your partners can play an important role to help you provide the services your client might need during this stressful time.
- 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 practices for disaster outreach:
<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 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.]*

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