

USU STATEWIDE PANTRY TOOLKIT

A GUIDE TO START YOUR OWN CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY



College of Agriculture & Applied Sciences
UtahStateUniversity

Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences Department

SNAC
Student Nutrition
Access Center

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Acknowledgements

This is a Project of the
Student Nutrition Access Center

Our mission is to provide Aggies with a hunger-free education by being a supportive and inclusive environment that offers nutritious and diverse food options while also fostering educational opportunities to empower students in their academic pursuits. SNAC is not supported by student fees, so anyone in the USU Community can access the services and resources.

When you are in need, use the USU food pantry – no questions asked.

For more information, visit
<https://caas.usu.edu/ndfs/snac/>

Written By
Shayla Adams, SNAC Student Director

Additional thanks to,
Jonathon Walters, SNAC Program Coordinator
Casey Coombs, SNAC Faculty Director

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Introduction

Hunger and food insecurity are prevalent issues, affecting communities everywhere—even college campuses. Research shows that 1 in 3 college students nationwide experiences food insecurity, highlighting the need for support systems (Ellison et al., 2021). We have developed the USU Statewide Pantry Toolkit to offer step-by-step guidance for those looking to make a difference. This comprehensive guide will walk you through the essentials of starting, managing, and sustaining a successful food pantry. From navigating logistics to engaging volunteers, our toolkit is here to help you create a positive impact on your campus community.

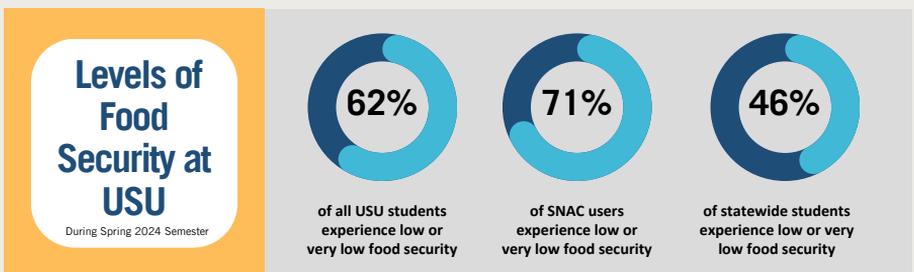
As the costs of food, tuition, and housing continue to rise, more students are being forced to make difficult choices between basic needs like food and other essentials. In response, campus food pantries have been established nationwide to help bridge these gaps—but where should you begin? Whether you're a student, an enthusiastic professor, or a dedicated student support specialist, we appreciate your interest in supporting students and combating college hunger. For questions or to connect with our team, feel free to email us at snac@usu.edu!



The Problem: Hunger and Food Insecurity on Campus

Research shows that food insecurity greatly affects students in higher education, with estimates showing that between 30% to 50% of students experience some form of food insecurity during their college careers (Freudenberg et al., 2019). At Utah State University (USU) and for other similar institutions, statewide campuses where students may not have immediate access to larger urban resources, can increase this number. For example, a study found that rural students are more likely to struggle with food insecurity compared to those on more urban campuses (Watson et al., 2020).

Food insecurity has been directly linked to negative academic outcomes, such as lower GPAs, reduced class attendance, and a higher likelihood of dropping out. Research by Martinez et al. (2020) highlights the mental health strain caused by food insecurity, noting its connection to higher levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. In addition, many students lack awareness of available resources or assume they do not meet the criteria for assistance (Raskind et al., 2019). This emphasizes the need for targeted outreach and education to ensure students can effectively access and benefit from these services.



[Figure 1: Assessment of Food Security Challenges & Impact of the Student Nutrition Access Center At Utah State University](#)

The Solution: The Student Nutrition Access Center (SNAC)



The Utah State University Student Nutrition Access Center was started in 2010 and was located in a trailer owned by USU. After an overwhelming need and interest for this service, the USU Student Association welcomed SNAC into a space in the Taggart Student Center (TSC) where it was run by Student Affairs until 2023. SNAC is currently run by the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences within the Department of Nutrition, Dietetics and Food Sciences. During the 2023–2024 school year we served nearly 4,000 individuals with over 25,000 pantry visits, distributing 178,000 pounds of food.

[Learn more about our work here!](#)



Demonstrating Need

Running a campus food pantry is a long-term endeavor that no one should have to do alone! This chapter will go over your first steps, including creating a committee and creating a pantry proposal.

In order to get the institutional support that your pantry will need, you will need to demonstrate that your students need and will access a food pantry. Students and faculty at USU have completed many studies to prove that food insecurity is a real problem on USU's campuses. This study in particular has information about the need for Statewide campus pantries. [Access the study here!](#)

We encourage pantries to be involved with students and student leaders on their campus. This is one of the best ways to spread word about the pantry, and to normalize receiving help.

Things to consider:

- Is anti-hunger work happening on your campus already?
- Is there a network of faculty members who are passionate about this subject?
- Is a student organization or club doing food recovery or sustainability efforts already?
- Does your campus have a Meal Swipe Donation Program?
- Are there a clubs (Service, Nutrition, Religious, Nursing, etc..) that would be interested in helping with this process?

Creating a Committee and Pantry Proposal

Creating a small team of campus collaborators builds support, solves problems specific to your campus and state, and creates sustainable processes for the longevity of your pantry. Who on your campus is interested in hunger relief? Who is already doing research or volunteering in the community?

Suggestions of groups to reach out to:

- Student Government leaders or advisors
 - Check your Student Activities, Student Ambassadors or Senators, Student Support, or Community Engagement offices.
- Service-oriented student groups or offices
 - Community Engagement, Volunteer Services, Sustainability or Environmental Clubs, Civic Engagement
- Student Psychological Services or Student Health Centers
- Dining Services Professionals
- Faculty who educate on and research, food or social services
 - Food Science, Dietetics, Nutrition, Social Work, Natural Resources, or Agriculture departments

Initial goals for your steering committee should include:

- Learn about campus hunger on a national scale
- Set a mission for the food pantry
- Set goals including an ideal timeline
- Decide on a “Host Office” for the pantry. Where will it live and who will be responsible for its operations?
- Brainstorm about space for your pantry. Who can you contact with on campus to secure space? Student Centers or Facilities offices would be a good place to start.

As you work with your committee, creating and filling out a pantry proposal will help visualize your plans, as well as have answers ready for your administrators, directors, stakeholders, etc. We have created a [Pantry Proposal Template](#) to help you get started.

Operating Style

You have many options to choose from when deciding on what is going to work best for your situation. While this is not an extensive list, here are some examples of what has worked for other pantries!

[Utah State University SNAC Pantry 2024:](#)

This pantry functions on an hourly basis with one large location in the student center. They have set hours each semester and always have someone working while students are visiting. Students can visit once per week and “shop” for foods that they need.



[Utah State University SNAC Pantry 2020:](#)

During Covid, SNAC employees took online orders where the student could choose what types of food they wanted. Employees and volunteers then assembled and the students picked up their bags.



[Utah University Feed U Pantry:](#)

This pantry has 2 options for food assistance. They have a designated space for a food pantry similar to SNAC. They also have the option for students to pick up bags for when the pantry is closed at the building front desk.



[Pepperdine University Wave Cabinets:](#)

This organization has 6 different shelves across campus. Each site is within eyesight of a Pepperdine staff member. Inventory is taken and they restock every week by a staff member of the Student Care Team.



Data Collection

Utah State University uses a secure data collection system called Transact. Students will swipe or tap their student ID's, and the system will be able to track all of their information such as gender, school year, ethnicity, etc.. This information can be used in identifying which populations are at a higher risk for food insecurity. It can also help visualise the growth of the pantry and how many students it serves.

The Utah Food Bank and local pantries requires its partnering food pantries to track the data on its users. Submitting this information to Utah Food Bank is required. More information can be found in the [Community Partners](#) section.

Speaking with your campus [card office](#) will be the most helpful in obtaining a Transact machine.



Food Storage and Safety

In order to serve food to students, your pantry needs to have a safe system in place to transport, store, and distribute food. Once you have determined where your pantry will be located, this should be the next step. The Utah Department of Agriculture and Food has created an application which will need to be filled out. There are 2 documents listed below which outline the requirements and application process. **These forms are required for your establishment!** SNAC is listed as a Food Establishment, and the size is small. Your designation will depend on what you want available for your campus and students. **Also, Food Pantries are exempt from both the Food Facility Registration Fee and the Plan Review Application Fee.**

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food Application

Here are the 2 forms that are essential to complete in order to be compliant with the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food. These plans must be submitted at least 30 days prior to operation. This form and the provisions therein must be submitted to the Support Services Staff at udaf-planreview@utah.gov.

[Plan Review Application](#)

[Plan Review Guide](#)

The plan review guide will help you while you fill out the application. Submitting this food establishment plan review application does not constitute an authorization from the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food to operate a food establishment.

Pantry as a Non-Profit

Campus program budgets, especially at public, state funded institutions can get complicated. Different funding streams will have different restrictions. More USU specific information can be found in the [Advancement](#) section of this guide.

Why do I Need a 501c(3) Status as a Campus Pantry Program?

Grants! Most funders will require a 501c(3) status for eligibility.

Donations! 501c(3) status means that donors have incentives to give: donations can be deducted from the donor's federal (and sometimes state) taxes.

Food Bank Membership! Food banks often require non-profit status to become members of their network, opening the way for discounted food, grants, and other helpful programs.

What is a 501c(3)?

This is a federal tax code that creates tax exemption for non-profit organizations. Additionally, most donations to 501c(3) organizations are tax deductible. [Learn more here!](#)

Obtaining your own can take a lot of time, energy, and money. However, there are many ways to use already established 501c(3). An organization that is willing to let you operate under their umbrella is called a **Fiscal Sponsor**. Utah State will be the fiscal sponsor for your statewide pantry. Meeting with [USU Advancement](#) will be the best place to start when obtaining this permission.

Federal Liability Protection for Food Donations

Organizations, whether for-profit or nonprofit, that donate or distribute donated food or products are covered by legal protections thanks to laws designed to shield them from liability related to food donations. The [Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Food Donation Act](#), enacted in 1996, offers extensive federal liability protection to promote food donation to those facing food insecurity. Organizations that you receive donations from must follow these conditions.

Conditions Required to Receive Liability Protections

1. Qualifying foods and grocery products

The donor must donate “apparently wholesome or fit foods” that meet food safety standards. Foods may still contain flaws that make the food unmarketable (including aesthetic factors).

2. Direct Donations or Donations Through Non-Profits

A “qualified direct donor” may receive protection if they donate through a nonprofit organization. Organizations qualified as direct donors include retail grocers, wholesalers, agricultural producers, restaurants, caterers, school food systems, and higher educational institutions.

3. Food Offered for Free

When donors donate food or products to nonprofit organizations, such as food banks, liability protections will apply when the food pantry offers the food to its recipients for free

4. Good Faith

Donations must be made in “good faith.” Organizations should not donate or facilitate the distribution of donated food that one knows is likely to be harmful or dangerous.

Tax Deduction for Food Donation

The federal government recognizes the critical role that food donations play in addressing hunger and reducing food waste. To incentivize businesses to contribute to this cause, the government offers enhanced tax deductions for food donations. These deductions are designed to encourage businesses to donate surplus food to eligible non-profit organizations rather than discarding it. However, businesses must meet specific requirements to qualify for these enhanced deductions, including ensuring the donated food meets safety standards and keeping proper documentation. Additionally, there are caps on the total annual charitable deductions a business can claim, typically set at different rates depending on whether the business is a C corporation or another type of entity. [More information can be found here!](#)

What does an eligible business need to receive from the organization to claim the tax deduction?

- A description of the contributed property, including the date of the receipt.
- A statement that the property will be used in compliance with the requirements.
- A statement that the recipient organization is recognized as exempt from federal income taxes.
- A statement that adequate books and records will be maintained and made available to the IRS upon request.

What food quality standards must a business meet to receive the tax deduction?

- Must satisfy all requirements of the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.
- Food may not be adulterated or misbranded.

Establishing a Relationship with Community Partners

Working with different organizations can greatly increase the amount of students that you can serve. When contacting on or off campus sponsors, be prepared with an understanding of how your pantry's mission relates to the organization's mission. Create a Memorandum of Understanding to set the terms and conditions of your working relationship. Contact USU's [Office of Legal Affairs](#) before signing any documents!

Local Community Food Pantries



Food banks are large non-profit organization that gather food in bulk to then redistribute to charitable feeding organizations within their network. To partner with a food bank, organizations often need to meet certain requirements, which may include providing basic data on who you serve and/or a 501c(3) status. Visit [this website](#) to find your local food bank and reach out to them!

Local Donations

Individuals:

Another great way to find food for your students is reaching out to the local community. Many times during the fall semester, people are looking for places to give their extra garden produce to. Try promoting yourself at local farmers markets, on social media, or at campus tableting events.

Organizations:

Some restaurants around your city might be interested in helping reduce food waste and food insecurity on campus. For example, Logan SNAC partners with Kneaders to pick up their day old bread twice a week. We have created [brochures to hand out to businesses](#) to give them more information. We have also created a [donation onboarding form](#) for businesses to fill out about when and where to pick up food.



Campus Dining

If your campus has dining for students, reach out to them about picking up their leftovers. Many dining halls will have day old bread, or extra meals that's still safe but unservable. By setting up a regular pickup schedule, your pantry could repackage these items into convenient portions, offering students more variety and freshness.

Utah Food Bank

As mentioned before, Utah Food Bank can provide you with food that you can serve to your students. Utah Food Bank (UFB) has served Utahans for over 120 years to fulfill the mission of fighting hunger statewide. Many local food banks receive their food from UFB, including SNAC as a partner agency.

Below are links to forms that will need to be completed before receiving donations from UFB. They also require you to submit student demographic information. After completing and submitting these forms, you will be contacted with more information.

Utah Food Bank [Partner Agency Application Packet](#)

Utah Food Bank [Training and Orientation Manual](#)



Fundraising and Food Drives

Establishing a food pantry on your campus can be costly. However, startup funds or sustained financial support can be obtained by fundraising, grants, and food drives.

Advancement

Before learning about how to fundraise or accept monetary donations, you need to learn how USU Advancement works. This is the program on campus that manages all donations and giving for USU. Connecting with Business Services to set up a USU Index Number is the first step to be able to collect donations and use the money for operations. Advancement is also responsible for sending out receipts to people or organizations for food donations.

Fundraising and Grants

Fundraising and Grant Ideas:

- Identify grants through State, Regional, and Local Foundations
- Apply for Kroger [Grocery Community Awards](#) gift cards
- Dentist offices can donate toothbrushes or toothpaste
- [Farmers markets](#) may share unsold produce with you
- Local businesses may allow you to place a donation box in their store

Food Drives

Food drives are a fun opportunity to get creative and engage with your community! Here are a ideas for different food drives to spark some inspiration.

Grocery Store Drives

Set up a small table outside of a local grocery store and ask shoppers to buy and donate items for the pantry. Hand them papers that describe the pantry and a shopping list of food or hygiene items you need.

Online Food Drives

Engage with families, alumni and other supporters who are far away by creating online wish lists, and get donations shipped directly to your pantry. YouGiveGoods.com and Amazon wish lists are some examples.

Themed Drives

Create a specific list of what your program needs or what you would like to offer. Some examples: Hygiene Drive, Period Products Drive, PB & J Drive, Thanksgiving food drive. Connect with clubs or organizations on campus to help host these drives.

Athletic Events

Ask to collaborate with the Athletics Department to ask attendees to bring canned goods in exchange for discounted or free admission. If that is not an option, giveaway a signed jersey for the student that brought the most food or hygiene items.

Donation for a Discount

Partner with local cafes or campus dining to offer a small discount (like 10% off a coffee) when someone brings in a food item to donate.

Greek Life Competition

Partner with sororities and fraternities to see who can gather the most donations. Greek organizations often enjoy service projects and might be able to get their networks involved.

Running Your Pantry

As you start to think about how your pantry will operate within your campus, think about who will be responsible for your pantries operations. Some campus pantries are operated by staff and faculty members only, some are operated by students leaders, but most involve a mix of both. It is important to delegate day-to-day duties in order to stay organized and provide the best services to students.

Examples of Pantry Leadership Roles and Responsibilities

Staff/Faculty Model

- Staff or faculty members oversee the pantry and its operations
- Students may take on leadership roles through internships or volunteering, but oversight is in the hand of a campus staff person.
- Staff members may be apart of Student Activities, Community Engagement, Dining Services, or any other people that are willing!
- Smaller pantries may be operated by one person, but we encourage you to build a network of people who can step in if that person is unavailable for leaves the university.

Student Board Model

- A student leadership board runs the pantry with guidance from staff.
- This team could be under student government, volunteer organizations, or academic/administrative departments.
- Student groups may be able to tap into funding for student involvement.
- While volunteering is great, including [Federal Work Study positions](#) so that students may get paid is also an option.

Unstaffed Pantry Shelves

- Many pantries operate without direct staffing by using a “take what you need” model.
- [Friendly Fridges](#) and [Little Free Pantries](#) are examples of off campus organizations that you may take inspiration from.
- These unstaffed pantry shelves can also be cabinets, refrigerators, or closets that are stocked with nonperishables, supplies, and snacks that staff or students check on and refill regularly.
- This method can be effective, but note that you will still need to track student data. Ensuring that students are swiping their student ID cards may be more difficult with this method.

Engaging Volunteers

Creating opportunities for the campus community to serve in your pantry will increase the capacity for your pantry to serve. Creating specific roles for your volunteers can help bring in a wide variety of experiences for your volunteer team. USU uses a system called [GivePulse](#) for all volunteering experiences. We are also listed on [JustServe](#) for volunteer opportunities.



To get started with using GivePulse, you will need to fill out this [interest form](#) that can be found on the USU Community Engagement Website. From there, they will notify you with the approval of your request and a link to your course page. You will then be able to create your page, add admin, connect with students and start tracking your impacts. [Visit their website](#) for more information.

Social Media

Another great way to spread awareness about your services or volunteer hours is through social media. The [USU Marketing and Communications](#) office has set clear guidelines on starting and running these accounts. Check out Logan SNAC’s social media below!

1. **Let us help.** Before launching a new social media presence, consult with the USU [social media team](#).
2. **Ask permission.** Make sure you have support from your department head or manager before you launch a USU-affiliated media account. There should always be at least 2 or 3 staff members with access to the account.
3. **Be committed.** Make sure you have the resources to sustain a social media account for the long run. Often staff or student workers move on, and social media accounts fall into disuse and can reflect poorly on the university.
4. **Be active.** Social media account must be regularly maintained and monitored.
5. **Name it correctly.** Identify your account as part of USU so users can search for you.
6. **Tie your social media to the brand.** The official “U-State” social media profile photo should be used on all USU-related accounts. Please refer to USU’s [visual identify guide](#) to ensure that you meet the requirements.
7. **Have a strategy.** What are your overall goals? Which platform can help you achieve those goals?
8. **Measure, evaluate, adjust.** Pick a few analytics that will help you measure how well you are accomplishing your goal.



Click Icons Above!

Materials

Depending on how your food pantry is organized, material needs may look different. However, there are a few things that stay consistent no matter what your pantry looks like.

Things that you may need:

- Shelving
 - Must be [NSF](#) (National Sanitation Foundation) or UL (Underwriters Laboratory) certified.
- Measuring Cups
- Scales
- Office supplies
- To-Go Boxes
- Basic kitchen tools (knives, serving spoons, scoopers, tongs)
- Donation boxes
- Ipad or Computer to track donations



Checklist

Decisions you'll need to think through for your pantry:

- Name Your Pantry
 - Ex. Blanding SNAC, Price SNAC, Kaysville SNAC
- Pantry Mission, Vision, Values
 - Mission is what you want to DO, vision is where you want to GO. Setting values can keep your team on the same page.
- Data Collection
 - Contact the USU Card Office to get a transact machine. Decide how and what data you will track.
- Procurement
 - Where will you get your food, hygiene, and other supplies from?
 - Complete the Utah Food Bank application.
 - Reach out to your local food bank to partner.
- Operating/Distribution Style
 - How will you distribute your services to students?
- Hours of Operation
 - “Whenever the building is open” is what many pantries without staffing do. Or perhaps will you have scheduled appointments instead of drop in hours.
 - Keep in mind the typical student schedule. Can you provide later hours for parenting students or student with night classes?
 - Consider your staff’s availability. Start small and add availability as needed.

- Food Storage and Safety
 - Complete the UDAF application.
 - “Sell by” and “best by” dates are not always food safety dates. [Check out this database](#) to make informed decision around what food you can offer to students.
 - The main pantry organizer will need to have a Food Manager Certification through [Serv.Safe.com](#)
 - If your pantry will be repackaging foods, all staff will need a [Utah Food Handler card](#). A fast and inexpensive option for this is through a program called [Tap Series](#).

- Delegation of Responsibilities + Partnerships
 - Decide how day to day operations will be delegated amongst your team. Who can you bring in to help manage different aspects of running a pantry?
 - Create your GivePulse website so that volunteers can start signing up to help.

- Accepting Donations
 - Decided what kinds of donations you can accept, how & when people can get donations to you, and who the main point of contact is for donations.
 - Some pantries have 24/7 drop-off bins around campus for easy drop-offs. Make sure you check these regularly!
 - Learn about USU Advancement and ask for your own link for online donations.

- Processing Donations
 - Set aside time to sort your donations and put them on your shelves. This could be a great opportunity for volunteers.
 - Learn about FIFO (first in, first out) and how to apply this to your pantry.
 - Check out the [guidelines from the USDA](#) for handling expired foods or extending the shelf-life of foods.



You've reached the end of USU SNAC's Pantry Basics Toolkit! Creating your own campus food pantry can be overwhelming and take a lot of time. Please know that you are not alone in this project and that you can contact snac@usu.edu with any questions! Click [here](#) to return to the table of contents.

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