

Why Host a Challenge?

The SNAP Challenge gives participants a view of the struggle to obtain adequate food that is faced by millions of low-income Americans. By living on the average food stamp benefit, Challenge participants find themselves forced to make food shopping choices on a limited budget, and learn how difficult it is to avoid hunger, afford nutritious foods, and stay healthy without adequate resources.

While living on a food stamp budget for just a week cannot come close to the struggles encountered by low-income families week after week and month after month, it does provide those who take the Challenge with a new perspective and greater understanding.

FRAC has supported and fostered SNAP Challenges to help educate the public and opinion leaders about what it means to live on a limited budget. FRAC, with help from The Hatcher Group, developed a guide for Members of Congress. Since then, hundreds – if not thousands – of people have taken the challenge, including Members of Congress, governors, state legislators, mayors, advocates for elderly persons and children, religious and community leaders, reporters, and average citizens. They have educated themselves and their communities about SNAP/Food Stamps, bolstered the public's understanding of the Program, and often created new anti-hunger advocates.

By hosting a Challenge, you can help raise awareness of hunger in your community and the need to keep SNAP strong. All sample materials are available as Word documents on FRAC's website, and can be customized with your logo and community data. If you need further assistance, contact Betsy Edwards (bedwards@frac.org).

Starting up a Challenge

Once your organization has determined that it wants to host a SNAP Challenge, the process to get one started is quite easy.

Decisions to Make Before the Challenge

- **How long will the Challenge last?** Most participants take the Challenge for one week, and some organizations have hosted ones that are as short as a day or two or last an entire month.
- **How much will participants spend on food?** Most Challenge takers use their state's average food stamp benefit for one person times the number of people in the household taking the Challenge. You can find your state's average SNAP benefits on USDA's website. (<http://1.usa.gov/H0uITj>)
- **Who will participate?** Many organizations who have hosted Challenges have invited public officials (mayors, Governors, agency heads, and Members of Congress) to join them.

Challenge Guidelines

1. Each person should spend a set amount for food and beverages during the Challenge week. That amount is \$X0 for all food and beverage.
2. All food purchased and eaten during the Challenge week, including fast food and dining out, must be included in the total spending.
3. During the Challenge, only eat food that you purchase for the project. Do not eat food that you already own (this does not include spices and condiments).
4. Avoid accepting free food from friends, family, or at work, including at receptions, briefings, or other events where food is served.
5. Keep track of receipts on food spending and take note of your experiences throughout the week.
6. Invite others to join you, including co-workers, reporters, chefs, or other elected officials.

Promoting the Challenge

Encourage people to participate in the Challenge through your website, social media, flyers, mailings and other outlets. Make it easy to participate by allowing people to sign up online. You'll want to create a page that explains the basics of the Challenge, provides guidelines, and allows people to register for the Challenge.

Promotion Examples

- Creating a web presence for your Challenge can be as simple – and informative – as the one created by the **Community Food Bank of New Jersey**. This easy-to-read page covers the basics of the Challenge and allows people to register for upcoming Challenges. <http://bit.ly/H1lepO>
- Another example is the registration page created by the **Texas Association of Food Banks**, which used Google Spreadsheets. <http://bit.ly/HyugsD>
- **Three Square Food Bank in Las Vegas** created a colorful website that integrated all of its tools. <http://bit.ly/HzxLxa>

Sample Website Text

The SNAP/Food Stamp Challenge gives participants a view of what life can be like for millions of low-income Americans. Most participants take the Challenge for one week, living on a little over \$4 per day worth of food – the average food stamp benefit. Challenge participants are forced to make food shopping choices on a limited budget, and often realize how difficult it is to avoid hunger, afford nutritious foods, and stay healthy with too few resources.

Members of Congress, governors, state officials, journalists and other community leaders have taken the Challenge and have learned firsthand what it is like to try to make ends meet on the average food stamp benefit.

While living on a food stamp budget for just a week cannot come close to the struggles encountered by low-income families week after week and month after month, it does provide those who take the Challenge with a new perspective and greater understanding.

Sample Registration

First Name:

Last Name:

Are family members participating? If so, how many?

Organizational affiliation (if applicable):

City/State/Zip Code:

Email Address:

Facebook or Twitter handle:

Working with the Media

Many organizations host events during their Challenges to raise awareness of hunger and solutions to end it. Kick-off events – such as a grocery shopping trip – can provide media opportunities to promote the Challenge. Other events, like a panel discussion with local experts, provide a space for participants to share their Challenge experiences. Some ideas for events include: a shopping trip; brown bag/pot luck discussion; and a letter writing/postcard signing party.

To maximize the impact of the site visit, you want to get as much media attention as possible.

- Television and newspaper reporters have early afternoon deadlines for the evening news so schedule events, like a shopping trip, early in the day.
- Alert the media at least three days in advance of an event. Contact community newspapers, local television network affiliates, cable access channels and radio stations—they are likely to cover the event.
- Assemble media kits for reporters. The kit should include your press release, fact sheets, and brochures. List the names of staff contacts and other organizations involved in the event, along with telephone and email information.
- Identify a Challenge participant who is comfortable with speaking to reporters about SNAP, and why he or she is participating in the Challenge.
- Invite local reporters to take the Challenge. Many radio, TV and print reporters have done so and featured their experiences in their news programs and blogs.
 - In 2006, a reporter with the **Philadelphia City Paper** took the Challenge sponsored by the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, garnering national attention for the Challenge. <http://bit.ly/H4usTg>
- Take photos of the trip and pictures of the register receipt.

Media and Event Examples

- **Fighting Poverty with Faith** featured an event at Safeway to kick-off its Challenge, held in fall 2011. Religious leaders, Members of Congress, administration officials, and current SNAP recipients gathered for the event, which featured a press conference and shopping trip. Participants shopped for their groceries for the Challenge week, and spoke with reporters about why they were taking the Challenge. The Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Catholic Charities USA, and National Council of Churches sent out a press release (1) about the event and the Challenge, and also shared the event (2) on YouTube.
 1. <http://bit.ly/HsZfHb>
 2. <http://bit.ly/Hqxwb4>
- **Maryland Hunger Solutions** (MDHS) hosted a shopping trip to kick off its Challenge, and videotaped the executive director's interview with a local news station to share on YouTube. <http://bit.ly/H46s2K> MDHS also hosted a brown bag lunch with Challenge participants, using that opportunity to discuss ways to improve SNAP participation and the need to strengthen the program.

Model press materials are available on FRAC's website.

FRAC 101: SNAP Challenge Toolkit

Using Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs provide an easy way for your organization to communicate about the Challenge. Use these platforms to build interest before the Challenge, to keep up excitement during the Challenge, to thank participants after the Challenge, and to inform your policy work in the weeks and months that follow. Encourage your Challenge participants to use social media tools to share their stories.

Social Media Examples

- Marissa Parisi, **Hunger Free Vermont**'s executive director, blogged every day about the Challenge, and featured a daily action. <http://bit.ly/H7XQlc>
- Representative Marcia Fudge (D-Ohio) used YouTube to share her interview about the Challenge with CNN, in which she advocated for SNAP and spoke about her challenge experience. <http://bit.ly/H0uWUZ>

Before the Challenge

Create messages that will inspire people to participate. Share information about who currently receives SNAP (USDA's Characteristics Report contains helpful information <http://1.usa.gov/HzyGOM>) and statistics that show the number of people struggling to afford enough food, like FRAC's Food Hardship reports (<http://bit.ly/H46HuE>). Be sure to include a link to the Challenge registration page in all your tweets.

The average SNAP benefit in our state is \$XX. Could you afford enough food? Find out more about our #SNAPChallenge: XXX

Did u know that X% of #SNAP recipients are children (have a job, are seniors)? Take the #SNAPChallenge and find out more.

During the Challenge

Ask participants to post photos or videos of their shopping trips and the meals that they are preparing. They also can share interesting takes on the Challenge, like a family trying to buy foods based on the "MyPlate" campaign by USDA or having some participants use a higher or lower benefit level to demonstrate the benefits of increasing SNAP allotments. Get permission to use their Twitter handles or link to their Facebook profiles if you mention them. And don't forget to share any media coverage you get during the event.

We are grateful to have XX participants join us in our #SNAPChallenge this year. It's not too late to join. Learn more here: XXX

After the Challenge

Thank everyone who participated. If you joined with other organizations to host the Challenge, thank them as well.

Thanks @xxxxxx for sharing your experiences during the #SNAPChallenge with everyone!

Use FRAC as a Resource

FRAC can be a resource for you as you plan your SNAP Challenge. FRAC staff can provide advice and planning assistance and can help you reach out to your Members of Congress to participate. Contact Betsy Edwards (bedwards@frac.org) if you would like assistance in planning a SNAP Challenge.