



Opportunities to Support the Child Nutrition Programs by Leveraging Federal Relief Funding During COVID-19

As states continue to respond to COVID-19 and its subsequent impacts on food security, education, and the economy, the need to strengthen and expand the reach of the child nutrition programs is more critical than ever. Available federal relief funding provides state and local leaders an important opportunity to draw down resources to support the nutritional needs of families hardest hit by the current public health crisis. Policymakers should work with anti-hunger advocates to identify barriers to participation during this unprecedented time and consider using the following funding streams to bolster the child nutrition programs.

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act)

The Coronavirus Relief Fund

\$150 billion total; [state allocations](#) (minimum \$1.25 billion per state)

Through the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Relief Fund provides payments to state, local, and tribal governments navigating the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. In each state, funding will be disbursed between the state government and municipalities with over 500,000 residents. Payments can be used only to cover expenses that are necessary expenditures due to COVID-19; were not accounted for in the budget most recently approved as of March 27, 2020; and were incurred between March 1, 2020–December 30, 2020.

Available [guidance](#) allows funding to cover expenses for food delivery to residents, including older adults and other vulnerable populations, to enable compliance with COVID-19 public health precautions. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) includes education expenses, such as programs to mitigate learning loss, school nutrition services, summer learning, and remote learning technology in its [analysis](#) of acceptable ways to spend these funds. Many state and local governments are currently developing plans for the dissemination of this funding. Advocates should connect with state and local leaders to identify opportunities to support schools and other organizations operating the child nutrition programs. Below are some examples.

- [North Carolina](#): Allocated \$70 million in funding to school nutrition departments to cover services provided in response to COVID-19. The governor's plan specifies that the funding will be used to provide incentive pay, expand programs to include all family members, and ensure continued compensation for child nutrition staff.
- [Montana](#): Grants of up to \$50,000 per applicant are available to increase food security for Montanans hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. Eligible applicants include community organizations providing food assistance to Montanans with limited resources.
- [Massachusetts](#): Distributing \$502 million to cities with populations under 500,000 and highlights food insecurity as a potential use of funding.

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund

\$13.5 billion total; [state allocations](#)

The CARES Act provides funding for states to distribute to local education agencies to use for coronavirus-response activities. This includes planning for and coordinating during long-term school closures, including how to provide meals to students.

Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund

\$3 billion total; [state allocations](#)

The CARES Act also provides each governor a share of \$3 billion to allocate at their discretion for emergency support grants to school districts impacted by COVID-19. These funds can be used to support the ability of school districts to continue to provide educational services to their students and to support the ongoing operations of the local education agency. This may provide an opportunity to support school nutrition operations.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)

\$5 Billion

CDBG is a flexible program that provides communities and states with funding to provide a wide range of resources to address COVID-19, such as the expansion of community health facilities, child care centers, food banks, and older adults services. The CARES Act allocated additional funding to existing grantees, and many are using these funds to support organizations operating the child nutrition programs.

- [Kansas](#): CDBG grant funds are being provided to organizations, such as Meals on Wheels and food banks, or to support organizations that provide meals to children impacted by the loss of school meal programs.

FEMA Public Assistance Program Grants

FEMA's Public Assistance Program provides grants to state and local governments, tribal nations, and certain nonprofit entities to assist with eligible costs, such as the purchase and distribution of food, that are associated with responding to and recovering from disasters. FEMA is prohibited from providing financial assistance that would duplicate existing funding, such as costs already covered through the federal nutrition programs. Public Assistance Program grants, however, may be used for costs not covered by the federal nutrition programs, including the following:

- purchasing, packaging, and/or preparing food, including food commodities, fresh foods, shelf-stable food products, and prepared meals;
- delivering food, including hot and cold meals if necessary, to distribution points and/or individuals when conditions constitute a level of severity that food is not easily accessible for purchase; and
- leasing distribution and storage space, vehicles, and necessary equipment.

Learn more [here](#).