

Equity in USDA, Food and Nutrition Service Disaster Nutrition Assistance Programs

Plan for the Most Vulnerable

WHAT IS EQUITY?

Equity is the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

WHAT IS FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY?

Food security means all members of a household, at all times, can access enough food for an active, healthy life. Nutrition security is consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods essential to optimal health and well-being. USDA's approach to tackling food and nutrition insecurity emphasizes equity to ensure our efforts serve all populations.



PLAN FOR EQUITY

In the aftermath of a disaster, some people need additional assistance accessing nutritious food. Disruptions to basic services like power and water will be more challenging for people who are already food insecure or who live in under-developed and/or rural areas.

- 1 CONNECT WITH COMMUNITY**
Reach out to and learn from community organizations and community members and leaders about the unique needs of underserved populations before disaster strikes.
- 2 DESIGN EQUITABLE ASSISTANCE**
Gather insights from previous disaster survivors as well as people who operate or participate in USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) nutrition assistance programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).
- 3 TARGET VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES**
Consider local infrastructure, natural hazards, and the underserved communities that reside in a specific area in order to include these factors in your disaster response plans and improve resource allocation for a more equitable response.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/da/disaster-assistance>

1 Design Equitable Assistance

State agencies and program operators should gather insights from previous disaster survivors as well as people who operate or participate in USDA, Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) nutrition assistance programs.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What are the specific vulnerabilities?
Local knowledge is essential.
2. What are the barriers that prevent you from reaching those most in need?
3. Who decides where to put resources?
4. What assumptions does your agency or agency staff make about disaster survivors?
5. What safeguards are in place to address unconscious bias in determining eligibility?
6. Are disaster-related policies reviewed for equity?
7. How do you target communications for those with limited English and limited internet or phone access?
8. Are staff trained on resources to help those who are experiencing disaster-survivor trauma?
9. How do you inform survivors about other programs they may be eligible for (such as Medicaid)?
10. Have you leveraged community and faith-based organizations to help you reach underserved populations?
11. Have you created a system for feedback from survivors and volunteers?

USDA FOODS, DHD, TEFAP

- Verify congregate meals sites.
- Verify Disaster Household Distribution (DHD) is serving culturally appropriate foods and accessible to all.
- Verify recipients of The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) are informed of other relief programs.
- Locate TEFAP sites in areas accessible by those without a vehicle.
- After recovery, ask recipients for feedback on meal type/ quality.

SNAP AND D-SNAP

- Confirm Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/ Disaster-SNAP (D-SNAP) announcements are accessible to those without internet or phones.
- Address the needs of homeless.
- Ask SNAP offices and advocacy organizations in the disaster area how to help address unmet needs.
- Develop a D-SNAP interview script to reduce bias.
- After recovery, ask recipients about improvements in State's D-SNAP plan.

CHILD NUTRITION AND WIC

- Confirm State agencies that administer the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) can verify participants eligibility status.
- Homeless children are eligible for free meals in the Child Nutrition Programs.
- A McKinney-Vento homeless liaison or a shelter manager should assist families with homeless determinations.
- Create a space for breastfeeding.
- Create a menu for infants and children with food allergies or intolerances.

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Connect with Community

Design equitable disaster nutrition assistance for underserved populations. Individuals may identify with more than one of the items:

RACIAL EQUITY*

Longstanding systemic inequities in urban planning limit access to healthy food and increase vulnerability to hazards during emergencies. Include community leaders from all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds in disaster planning to reduce barriers and improve access to nutritious foods for all.

TRIBAL NATIONS*

Build culturally appropriate relationships with Tribal leaders to better understand a Tribe's needs and expectations regarding emergencies. Support [Indigenous food sovereignty](#) and understand that Tribal sovereignty means federally recognized Tribal Nations can directly ask the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for help.

RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Faith-based organizations may operate shelters and feeding sites at houses of worship. Ensure people of all backgrounds feel welcome, regardless of their religious affiliation or lack thereof. Institutions should not require prayer or participation in their services as a condition for receiving assistance. Dietary needs of all faiths should be included when planning disaster feeding efforts.

LGBTQIA+

LGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely to be food insecure before a disaster and may need more nutrition assistance after a disaster. Shelters and meal sites should use gender inclusive language on intake forms, signage, and other communication materials. Include LGBTQIA+ community members in disaster planning.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ensure communications, facilities, and feeding areas at sites are accessible. Sites should be prepared to serve people with mental, physical, or sensory disabilities, children and the elderly, those who have special diets, and people with service animals. Work with leaders in the disability community to understand specific needs.

RURAL COMMUNITIES

Rural communities are vulnerable to disasters because of their distance from infrastructure, reliable communication, and community services. Additional resources may be needed for communities along evacuation routes from urban centers. Food or water may need to be delivered after industrial accidents or when utilities are interrupted. Involve locals who are familiar with the health, nutrition, and economic needs of underserved populations in their communities.

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY (LEP)

Assess the language needs of your community and provide information about disaster feeding and distribution sites in multiple languages. Translate materials and messaging into languages most spoken in your community. Call centers should offer interpretation services. Involve immigrant, farmworker, and refugee community leaders in disaster planning. Work with LEP organizations and tailor your approach to your community.

PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

People experiencing poverty may already struggle to meet their daily food needs. In a disaster, they may not have 3 days of food on hand per the Ready.gov recommendation. Position shelters, feeding sites, and food distribution locations in or near areas of persistent poverty. Support food and nutrition security in these areas to mitigate impacts.

LACK OF TRANSPORTATION AND INTERNET*

Lack of transportation can severely inhibit a household's ability to evacuate and access feeding sites. Consider mobile feeding units and bringing services directly to neighborhoods. Plan communication strategies in collaboration with local leaders to reach those without phone or internet access.

*Available on the [FNS Resilience and Recovery Tool](#)

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Locate Vulnerable Communities

State agencies, Tribal Nations, and program operators can use [FNS Resilience and Recovery Tool](https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/disaster-assistance) (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/disaster/disaster-assistance>) to identify areas of most need, tailor disaster responses, and allocate resources.

SEARCH
Search by city, county, landmark, or zip code. The map will zoom in and display SNAP-authorized retailers and Meals for Kids Summer Sites.

MORE INFORMATION
A guide for using the tool and links to the underlying data.

LEGEND
Understand what the colors and points on the map signify.

SNAP Retailers 258,431	Meals for Kids Sites 45,770
Total Occupied Housing Units 140,056,552	Children Eligible for Free/Reduced Price Meals 26,391,338

HURRICANES AND WILDFIRES
Updated every few minutes.

DATA
As users add more data, the more shaded an area, the more vulnerable.

