

GRAB AND GO LESSON

CACFP FAQs for Child Care Center Directors

Administration | Introduction to CACFP

Purpose: This handout addresses some common questions for participating in the CACFP as a child care director.

Participating in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) as a child care director can offer many benefits. For example, the program offers support services for promoting the development of healthy eating habits, starting at an early age. It also provides valuable meal reimbursements for serving nutritious meals to the children in your care.

What is the CACFP?

The CACFP is a federally funded subsidy program designed to promote healthy growth and development in young children and maintain good health and wellness in adults. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA, FNS) regulates this program, while State agencies across the country administer the program within their state.

The purpose of the CACFP is to ensure that those attending child care, adult day stay, at-risk afterschool programs, and emergency shelters receive nutritious meals and snacks. The CACFP improves the nutritional quality of child care meals and snacks in three ways:

- Provides required guidelines, including, but not limited to, minimum serving sizes for meals and snacks for children ages six weeks to 12 years
- Provides monetary assistance (reimbursement) to eligible child care providers to help pay for meals that meet USDA requirements
- Requires training for those who work in these programs and monitoring by State agencies and sponsors

This program helps ensure that the growing number of infants, toddlers, and young children in child care receive nutritious meals and snacks.

How can the CACFP help my center and families?

The CACFP helps child care centers in many ways:

- Provides reimbursement for meals and snacks that meet the nutritional standards
- Trains staff on how to plan and serve meals that meet national nutritional standards for child care
- Ensures that the children have adequate, nutritious meals and snacks while at child care

When parents leave a child in your care, they want to feel confident that the child receives the best care. By participating in the CACFP, you can assure parents that their child receives nutritious meals based on age-appropriate USDA meal standards.

There are two ways to participate in the CACFP. The first option is applying to the program as an independent center by contracting directly with your State agency. The second option is to operate under a sponsoring organization, in which the sponsor will follow the same requirements as independent child care centers. The center will work directly with the sponsoring organization, as opposed to the State agency, to implement the program.

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Your center(s) must be licensed, nonprofit, or public. For-profit centers may also participate if they meet specific criteria for serving children from low-income families. Sponsoring organizations may sponsor centers and homes, following the same requirements as independent child care centers. Your State agency can tell you the requirements specifically for your center.

If you are approved to participate in the CACFP, you will sign an agreement with the State agency, declaring that you will follow the rules and regulations of the program. Each month the center, or center's sponsor, will submit a claim for reimbursement. The payment is based on the number of meals or snacks served, and the family size and income level of the children enrolled.

What are the requirements?

Basic USDA requirements for child care centers on the CACFP include:

- Prepare and serve meals that meet the CACFP Meal Pattern requirements appropriate to a child's age
- Follow safe food handling practices
- Participate in training offered by the State agency or sponsoring institution
- Promote the safety and well-being of the children in your care
- Follow established record keeping requirements

Have additional questions?

If you are interested in finding a sponsoring organization or have additional questions regarding CACFP, contact your State agency.

References

Institute of Child Nutrition. (2019). *CACFP meal pattern requirements training*. University, MS: Author.

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<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cr/fns-nondiscrimination-statement>

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