

Frequently Asked Questions

Child and Adult Care Food Program

CHILD CARE INSTITUTIONS

What is the Child and Adult Care Food Program?

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) is a federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that provides reimbursement for nutritious meals and snacks served to eligible children who are enrolled in participating child care centers (e.g., at-risk after-school centers, emergency shelters, and outside-school-hours care centers). Participating centers must maintain supporting documentation.

What type of organizations can participate in the CACFP?

Organizations that can participate in the CACFP include:

- Public entities, such as municipal, county, state, or federal government agencies.
- Nonprofit institutions that have documentation from the U.S. Department of the Treasury that they meet Section 501(c)3 criteria of the Internal Revenue Code.
- For-profit institutions that have at least 25 percent of their license capacity or enrolled children receiving either:
 1. Subsidized childcare benefits, **or**
 2. Free and reduced-price meals.

What type of programs can participate in the CACFP?

- Licensed Childcare institutions for children 12 years and younger
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs for children aged birth through 5 years
- Preschool programs for children aged 3 to 5 years
- Before and after school hour programs that provide education and enrichment activities for children 12 years and younger
- At-Risk After-School Snack/Supper Programs offered in areas where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free and reduced-price meals based upon school data. The program must offer education and enrichment activities for at-risk school-aged students up to 18 years of age after the regular school day ends.

Do all programs have to be licensed?

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the licensing agency. Please check with DCFS to find out if your program must be licensed.

What meal services can be claimed in the CACFP?

Up to three meal services (two meals plus one snack OR one meal plus two snacks) per child per day for:

- Licensed child and infant care institutions
- Head Start and Early Head Start programs
- Preschool programs
- Before- and after-school hour programs

Snack and/or supper only for:

- At-risk after-school snack/supper programs

Up to three meal services (three meals OR two meals plus one snack OR one meal plus two snacks) per child or disabled adult per day for:

- Emergency shelters

What are the food requirements for each meal?

Meal pattern requirements and portion sizes differ by age. For detailed information on the meal requirements, click on the links below.

- [Meal pattern for children ages 1-18 years](#)
- [Meal pattern for infants ages birth-11 months](#)

Do meals have to be prepared at a CACFP facility?

No, meals do not have to be prepared onsite. They can be prepared at a central kitchen operated by the organization or by a vendor.

Organizations purchasing \$350,000 or more annually in vended meals must use a formal Invitation for Bid and Contract process to obtain a food vendor contract. This process includes advertising the bid and obtaining several sealed bids, which are publicly opened on a specified date at a specified time and location. See the [CACFP Formal Invitation for Bid and Contract template](#).

If your organization spends less than \$350,000 per year, you will want to contact several potential vendors to obtain the lowest price possible. A [List of Potential Contractors](#) as well as the [ISBE contract prototype](#) are available on the [ISBE SFSP/CACFP Vended Meals Contracts webpage](#).

How are institutions reimbursed for meals?

Meal records are documented at every meal service and totaled at the end of the month. The monthly totals are then submitted online in the Web-Based Illinois Nutrition System (WINS). In addition to the meal reimbursement, you will receive cash in lieu of commodities for each lunch and supper served. The meal reimbursement rates and rate of cash in lieu of commodities change every July 1; therefore, check the [ISBE Eligibility, Income and Reimbursement Information webpage](#) for the most recent funding.

Can parents be charged for their child's meals?

Organizations cannot charge a separate fee for meals. Child care institutions charging tuition must include the cost of meals in the tuition.

How can you apply to participate in CACFP?

To participate in the CACFP, applicants must complete all steps of the application process, including completing mandatory training, submitting complete application documents, implementing CACFP procedures, and successfully completing a Pre-Operational Review. See the [ISBE Child and Adult Care Food Program webpage](#) for more information.

All approved institutions will enter into an agreement with ISBE to assume administrative and financial responsibility for CACFP operations. They must agree to follow USDA regulation 7CFR Part 226 and FNS Instruction 113-1: Civil Rights Compliance and Enforcement.

Contact the ISBE Nutrition Department at CNP@isbe.net or 217-782-2491 if you have questions.