



# California Community Colleges Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT ) Guidebook: 2026 Edition

College student hunger is a pressing concern and one of the most significant barriers to student success. Within the California Community College System, two-thirds of students experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness. (Community College League of California, 2025). Nearly half of our students (46%) reported food insecurity within the past month, and nearly one in five students (19%) lost weight because there wasn't enough money for food.<sup>1</sup>

Federal and state benefits programs such as CalWORKs and CalFresh are powerful tools for addressing hunger and promoting academic stability. More California Community College students than ever before are accessing these supports according to the respondents of the 2025 Real College Survey: 65% of students experiencing food insecurity received CalFresh benefits in 2025, compared to only 22% in 2019.<sup>2</sup> This dramatic increase reflects ongoing statewide outreach, policy simplifications, and partnerships between colleges, counties, and state agencies to connect eligible students with food assistance.

When a college becomes an authorized CalFresh/SNAP Retailer (commonly referred to in California as an "EBT Retailer"), students can use their benefits to purchase food items on campus. Colleges may also accept EBT Cash benefits if their credit card or payment processing vendor enables that payment option. Accepting EBT on campus increases food access for students and can generate additional revenue for campus stores and food service operations. It may also encourage more students to apply for CalFresh and supports their ability to remain on campus for meals, which, as discussed in a 2025 Basic Needs Office Hours presentation on Assembly Bill 2033, is especially important for colleges located in rural areas or where public transportation is limited.<sup>3</sup>

In 2019, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (Chancellor's Office) released the California Community Colleges Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Guidebook (updated 2020) to assist colleges in understanding how to accept CalFresh and EBT transactions on campus. Since that time, all colleges have established a Basic Needs Center in alignment with state legislation, and many more colleges have implemented systems to accept CalFresh/EBT cards through campus food facilities, bookstores, or contracted vendors. These developments mark a significant step toward integrating food assistance access within the broader basic needs infrastructure across the California Community College system.


## KEY TERMS

This section provides a brief overview of closely related but distinct terms related to food and cash benefits that are used throughout this *EBT Guidebook*.

- **Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT)** is the electronic system through which states issue benefits. In California, the EBT system is used to issue benefits for multiple programs, including CalFresh; CalWORKs (California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids); State General Assistance; and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Special

Supplemental Nutrition Program, among others.

- **CalFresh (SNAP)** is California’s implementation of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the federal program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS).<sup>4</sup> CalFresh uses federal SNAP funds to provide monthly benefits for households with low income to purchase food, food products, and food-producing plants or seeds. Eligibility is based on household size, income, and monthly expenses, with additional criteria that apply specifically to students. California state and counties administer the program locally.
- **EBT Card** People who receive cash or food benefits use an EBT card to pay for items at participating businesses. EBT cards are designed to be discreet and function like debit cards. The updated card format now includes the cardholder’s name and account number, chip and tap functionality, a magnetic stripe, and a Personal Identification Number (PIN) for secure transactions. The same EBT card is used for all benefit programs described in this *EBT Guidebook*.
- **EBT Cash** benefits provide financial assistance for essential household needs such as rent, utilities, transportation, and other necessary expenses. Individuals receiving EBT Cash benefits can use their EBT card to pay for any item that can be legally purchased with currency or to withdraw cash from ATMs.<sup>5</sup> EBT Cash programs include State General Assistance; Refugee Assistance; and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which is known in California as CalWORKs.
- **The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP)** allows certain CalFresh recipients who are experiencing homelessness, have a disability, or are 60 years of age or older to use their CalFresh benefits to buy hot, prepared meals from participating restaurants. The program’s purpose is to provide reduced-cost meals for individuals who may not have access to cooking facilities or the ability to prepare meals at home. To qualify for the CalFresh RMP, all members of a CalFresh household must meet the eligibility criteria (an adult aged 60 or older, a person with a disability, a person experiencing homelessness, or the spouse of an eligible individual); households that include at least one member who does not meet these criteria are not eligible for RMP benefits. RMP vendors, including campus food service providers, are not responsible for verifying customer eligibility. Eligibility for RMP purchases is pre-determined and encoded on each participant’s EBT card, and if a card is not authorized for RMP use, the transaction will be declined automatically at the point of sale.



This document focuses on colleges implementing systems to accept purchases made with Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. If you are interested in learning about comprehensive approaches to student hunger and homelessness, access the [Basic Needs Center Toolkit \(Updated 2025\)](#) from the Chancellor’s Office.

# Apply to Accept EBT Cash

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The simplest way for colleges to begin accepting benefits is by becoming an EBT cash retailer. This allows students to buy items (not just food) on campus with their EBT card using their cash benefits, such as CalWORKs.

Colleges do not need separate government approval to accept EBT Cash benefits. To begin, campus business units (e.g., bookstores, cafes, business offices) should confirm that their existing credit or debit card payment processor supports California EBT transactions. In most cases, the vendor simply activates EBT Cash as an additional payment type on the card terminal with a functioning PIN pad.

Accepting EBT Cash is distinct from becoming an authorized CalFresh Retailer or participating in the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), both of which require separate USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) and/or state approvals. Implementing EBT Cash acceptance can serve as a practical step toward broader EBT readiness, including these other programs.

For additional guidance, visit the [California EBT Project Office](#) website and review the resources for business and service providers.

# Apply to Become a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer

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At colleges that are CalFresh (SNAP) Retailers, students can use their CalFresh benefits to purchase eligible food items on campus.

Under Assembly Bill (AB) 2033 (Chapter 419, Statutes of 2024), on or before September 1, 2025, each California community college must identify and apply for one on-campus business, such as a general store, bookstore, or food venue, to become an authorized CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer, if eligible. Once approved, the college must also ensure the location can process purchases made with EBT cards.

Colleges are strongly encouraged to apply if there is a reasonable possibility of approval. However, campuses are not required to modify their existing inventory or operations solely to meet federal SNAP eligibility requirements. If a college does not operate a qualifying on-campus business, it should encourage its contracted or third-party vendors that sell food to apply for CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer authorization.

## Legislative Note:

Assembly Bill (AB) 2033 was signed into law in September 2024 and applies to all 115 brick-and-mortar California community college campuses. The bill requires each college to explore opportunities to expand CalFresh access on campus through participation as an authorized SNAP retailer or through eligible campus vendors.

Colleges and their on-campus businesses can qualify as CalFresh (SNAP) Retailers if they meet federal eligibility standards established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). To qualify, a location must either:

**Criterion A: Maintain a minimum inventory of staple foods, or**

**Criterion B: Have more than 50% of total gross retail sales from staple foods** (this typically applies to specialty stores, such as butcher shops or fruit stands).

There are four staple categories defined by the USDA:

1. Fruits or Vegetables
2. Bread or Cereals
3. Meat, Poultry, Fish
4. Dairy

## Criterion C: Staple Food Inventory Requirement

This inventory must include:

1. Three (3) varieties in each of the four (4) staple food categories,
2. Three (3) stocking units of each variety, and
3. At least one (1) perishable variety in two (2) of the staple food categories

(See Image 1 for a visual example of the 36-unit requirement).

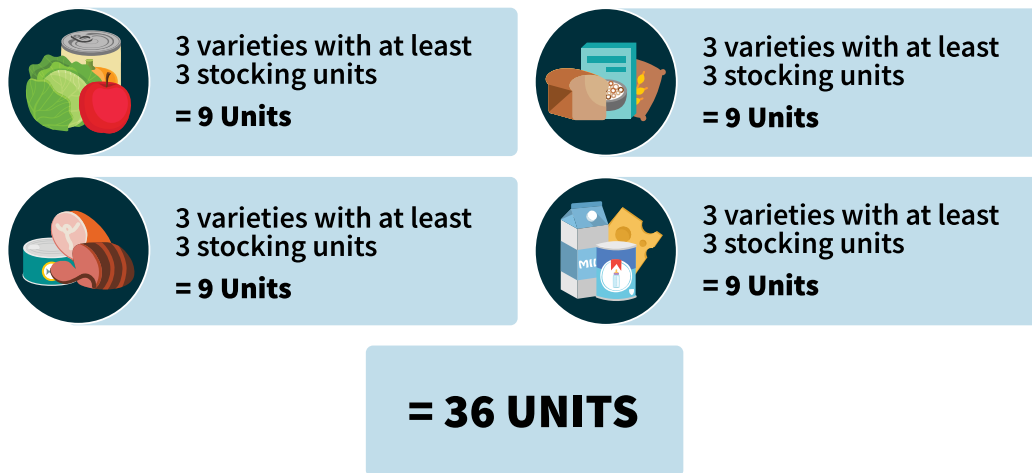


Image 1: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Although this requirement can seem intimidating, many campus businesses, such as bookstores, cafes, or food service locations, already sell items that qualify as staple foods (see Exhibit 1 for examples).

### Exhibit 1: Examples of Staple Food Items <sup>6</sup>

#### Vegetables or Fruits Examples

- Oranges (e.g., 100% juice or fresh oranges)
- Bananas (e.g., fresh, frozen, dried)
- Baby carrots (e.g., small individual packets)
- Apples (e.g., dried apples or pre-cut apple go-packs)

#### Dairy Examples

- Cheese (e.g., sliced, sticks)
- Cow milk (e.g., skim, whole)
- Yogurt (e.g., yogurt cups)
- Plant-based milk alternatives (note: different plants—e.g., almond milk, soy milk, oat milk—each plant-based type counts as a separate variety in the Dairy category)
- Multiple-ingredient food items with dairy as first ingredient (e.g., pack of cheeses and nuts)

#### Breads or Cereals Examples

- Bread (e.g., loaf of multigrain bread)
- Pasta (e.g., wheat rotini, gluten-free spaghetti)
- Tortillas (e.g., corn or flour)
- Bagels (e.g., plain, poppy seed)
- Pitas (e.g., low-carb, whole wheat)
- Breakfast cereal (e.g., rice- or oat-based cereal)

#### Meat, Poultry, or Fish

- Turkey (e.g., sliced deli meat)
- Beef (e.g., jerky)
- Tuna (e.g., tuna pouch or canned tuna)
- Pork (e.g., sliced ham)
- Eggs (e.g., hard-boiled eggs)

## Important Notes for Colleges

- Only **staple** foods count toward eligibility to become a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer (Image 2). Students may still use their CalFresh benefits to purchase non-staple food items at the store, such as accessory foods or prepared items (e.g., snack foods, beverages, condiments, cold prepared foods). However, these items generally do not count toward the store's staple inventory when the store is submitting their application. *See below for an important exception related to multi-ingredient and cold prepared foods.*
- If more than 50% of a facility's sales come from prepared or heated foods, the location is considered a restaurant and cannot be approved as a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer.
- Colleges should focus on qualifying packaged or unheated staple foods to meet the 36-unit standard for their application.

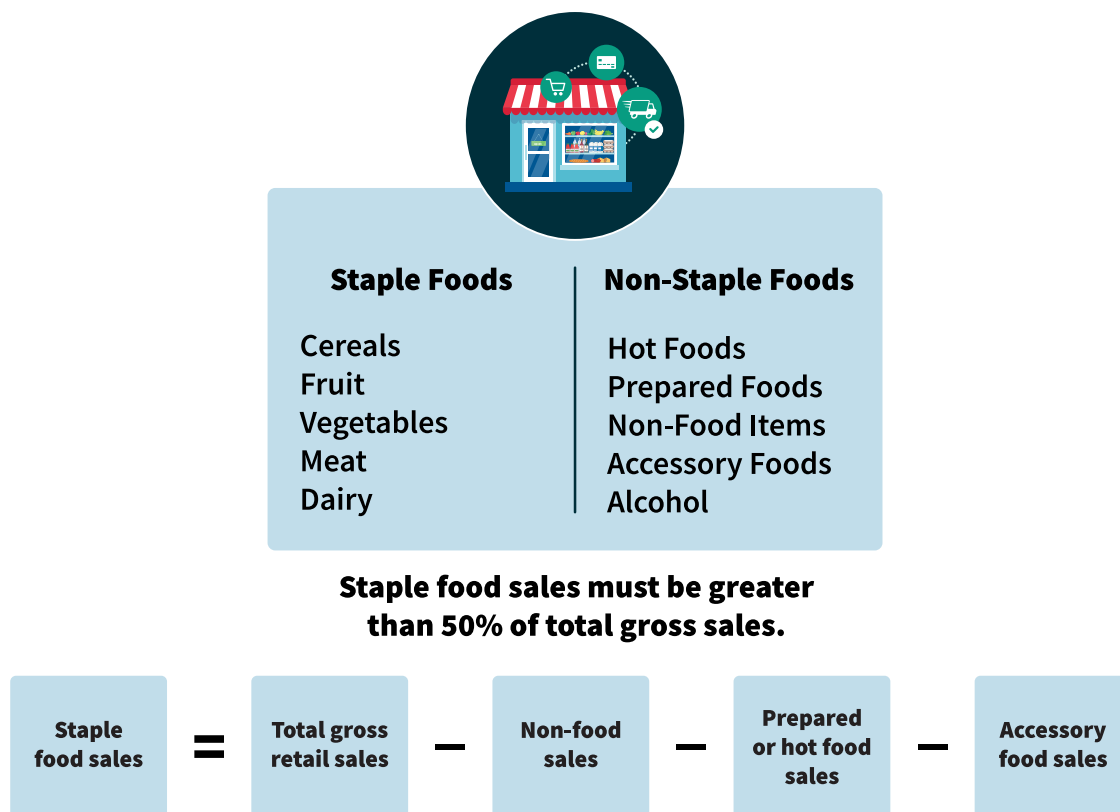


Image 2: U.S. Department of Agriculture

## Prepared Foods and Multi-ingredient Items

Generally, prepared and accessory foods cannot count as staple foods for the purposes of a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer application. However, as an important exception, some multi-ingredient or cold prepared foods can qualify as staple foods when the first ingredient falls within a staple food category.

### Examples Include:

- A granola bar with oats listed first (Bread/Cereal).
- A microwavable beef stew with beef listed first (Meat/Poultry/Fish).
- A yogurt parfait with yogurt listed first (Dairy).

- A sushi tray with tuna or salmon listed first (Meat/Poultry/Fish).
- An instant oatmeal cup with whole grain oats listed first (Bread/Cereal).

Prepared foods that are hot at the point of sale and intended for immediate consumption (e.g. pizza slices, burritos, or sandwiches heated by staff before sale, soup or chili sold from a hot bar) are not eligible for purchase from a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer with CalFresh benefits. However, if the location participates in the Restaurant Meals Program (RMP), then individuals who are eligible for RMP can use their benefits to purchase hot prepared foods.

# Steps to Become a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer

## (College-Owned / Operated Stores)

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Visit the USDA FNS [SNAP Retailer](#) hub for detailed information and resources.

### Step 1: Identify an Eligible Campus Location

- Determine whether your campus operates a location that sells staple foods, such as a bookstore or campus convenience market.
  - Eligible locations typically offer packaged foods and beverages that align with USDA staple food categories (fruits and vegetables, dairy, breads/cereals, and meat/fish/poultry).
- If no existing location qualifies, consider whether a small inventory adjustment, such as additional milk, fruit, or shelf-stable proteins, could help the store meet eligibility criteria. Remember: colleges are encouraged to apply if eligibility is feasible, but they are not required to modify their operations solely to qualify.

### Step 2: Obtain Institutional Approval

- Because this is an official federal application, participation must be authorized by college or district leadership.
- Typical participants in the approval process include:
  - Basic Needs Coordinator or Program Lead, who coordinates the effort and ensures alignment with student support services.
  - Store or Business Office Manager, who provides inventory information and operational details.
  - College President, Vice President of Administrative Services, or Foundation Director, who provides fiscal authorization.
  - District or College Fiscal Office, which confirms institutional tax and financial information.
- Maintain a signed internal memo or approval form designating the authorized institutional representative.

### Step 3: Complete the USDA FNS

- Submit the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) SNAP form [FNS-252](#) or FNS 252-E (paper or online, respectively) through the online Retailer Service Portal.
- When prompted, select “Educational Institution” (e.g., school, college, or university) as the organization type. This designation ensures the correct documentation fields appear for a public or nonprofit college.
- For college or district owned locations, follow these guidelines:
  - List the college or district as the store owner.
  - Identify the authorized institutional representative (typically the College President, District Chancellor, Vice President of Administrative Services, or Chief Financial Officer) as the signer and primary contact.
  - Use the institution’s Federal Employer Identification Number or Tax ID number (not a personal Social Security Number).



- Enter the hours of operation and a brief description of the food items sold, as required by the online form.
- **Note:** The online form adjusts automatically for educational institutions, and individual identification documents are not required.

## Step 4: Complete SNAP Training Requirements:

- All approved retailers must ensure that owners and employees understand and comply with SNAP regulations.
- The required training materials, including guides and videos, are available at [SNAP Retailer Notice – Training Expectations](#).
- Colleges should maintain documentation verifying that relevant staff have completed training.

## Step 5: Set Up EBT Payment Processing

- Once approved, the USDA issues a SNAP Retailer Permit listing the college's name, location, and assigned FNS number.
- To activate EBT transactions:
  - Contact the campus payment process or POS vendor
  - Provide the FNS number and request to add California EBT food benefits processing
  - Confirm that payment terminals can process chip, tap, and magnetic stripe transactions.
- **Tip:** Colleges using third-party payment services for their bookstores or campus stores may need to coordinate with both the vendor and district fiscal office to ensure the EBT function is activated.

## Step 6: Prepare for the USDA Site Visit

- Within approximately 30 days of application approval, the USDA will schedule an on-site inspection (sometimes they use a third-party contracted vendor for the inspection). During this visit the inspector:
  - Will verify that inventory meets the required staple food variety and quantity standards.
  - Will confirm that the location matches the details in the application.
  - May photograph displays and verify hours of operation.
- After successful inspection, the campus location will receive final authorization to accept CalFresh benefits.

### Note:

If an inspector visits when certain staple food items are temporarily sold out, the college can demonstrate ongoing compliance by providing evidence that those items are regularly stocked. Examples of this evidence may include recent purchase orders, vendor invoices, or point of sale records showing recent sales and pending restock. Inspectors generally accept documentation that confirms the items were part of normal inventory and will be replenished.

# Encouraging Vendors to Participate in CalFresh

## (Vendor-owned / Operated Stores)

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Visit the USDA FNS [SNAP Retailer](#) hub for detailed information and resources.

Some California community colleges have vendor-operated food venues, such as contracted bookstores, cafes, or convenience markets. In these cases, the vendor, not the college, is responsible for applying to become an authorized CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer.

Colleges are encouraged to share information with these vendors to help expand on-campus access to affordable food for students.

### Suggested Language to Share with Vendors

Colleges may include this information in vendor bid packets, contract renewals, or onboarding materials. This fulfills AB 2033 expectations by informing vendors of the opportunity. The college is not expected to oversee or participate in the application process.

**Subject:** Opportunity to Accept CalFresh (SNAP) Benefits on Campus

**[College Name]** is committed to reducing food insecurity among students. Under state law AB 2033, community colleges are encouraged to ensure that at least one on-campus food venue accepts CalFresh (SNAP) benefits.

As a contracted food vendor, you may be eligible to apply to become an authorized CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer through the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Becoming a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer allows students who receive CalFresh benefits to use their EBT cards to purchase food items at your location.

To apply, visit the USDA SNAP Retailer Application Portal and follow the steps for retail stores in California.

For questions, you can contact the California EBT Retailer Help Line at (877) 328-9677 or email [SNAPRetailerService@usda.gov](mailto:SNAPRetailerService@usda.gov)

# Basic Needs Office Hour: Tips & Strategies

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The following strategies are adapted from suggestions shared during the April 2025 California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office Basic Needs Office Hour, "CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) on Campus: Assembly Bill 2033."<sup>7</sup> See the **Case Example: Los Angeles Community College District** section, below, for more lessons learned and useful tips!

- **Start Easy:** Start with EBT cash acceptance to prepare for CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer approval. This is the simplest and fastest way for colleges to start accepting EBT benefits on campus. No additional state or federal authorization is required, and setup can be completed through the college's existing debit or payment processor.
- **Educate Vendors:** Campus food vendors may not know if they should apply for RMP or to be a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer. Colleges should provide guidance and support in the process.
- **Get Buy-in:** It is critical to engage the Vice President of Administrative Services and the food services manager, if you are submitting an application for a campus-owned facility. Other essential partners include the college president, administrative or contracts services, student government, and the basic needs team. Senior leadership staff and the academic senate should also be aware.
- **Think Creatively About Staple Foods:** For example, if the first ingredient in a multiple-ingredient item fits a staple food category, then that item qualifies.
- **Check & Update Payment Systems Early:** Navigating changes to POS equipment can take more time than expected. Ensure payment processors and systems can mirror transactions between the pin pad and the register.
- **Document Sales:** Staple items may sell out mid-week, before a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer audit. Use receipts, purchase orders, vendor invoices, or point of sale records to document sales.
- **Promote Widely:** Use many different ways to promote this resource among students, staff, and faculty—store signage and stickers, social media campaigns, presentations in classes, promoting to categorical program staff, on-site outreach events at the CalFresh store location, in student support applications, in syllabi, press releases with community partners, etc.

# Encouraging Vendors to Participate in the Restaurant Meals Program

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Some campus food vendors that prepare and sell hot or ready-to-eat meals may also qualify to accept EBT benefits by participating in the CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program (RMP).

The Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) allows CalFresh recipients who are age 60 or older, have a disability, or are experiencing homelessness to use their EBT cards to purchase prepared meals at authorized restaurants and similar food establishments. To qualify for RMP, every member of the CalFresh household must meet the eligibility criteria (age 60 or older, disability, or experiencing homelessness); households with one or more members who do not meet these criteria are not eligible for RMP benefits. RMP vendors must offer low-cost, nutritious options and may not charge sales tax or gratuities on meals purchased with CalFresh benefits.

The RMP was originally limited to specific counties but following AB 1747 (2017) and subsequent program expansions, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) now allows statewide participation. Community colleges are encouraged to support student access to RMP by sharing information about the program with their contracted food vendors and encouraging eligible vendors to apply for authorization. For the most current information and a list of participating RMP food vendors by county and zip code, visit [CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program](#).

## Policy Update: Restaurant Meals Program Eligibility

In previous years, some college-operated cafeterias and cafes were eligible to apply as RMP vendors. However, under current USDA FNS and CDSS guidance (2023-2025), **only businesses that operate as private commercial entities (e.g., restaurants, cafes, or franchises organized as corporations, LLCs, or sole proprietorships) are eligible to participate.**

Although some campus-owned/operated food operations may generate revenue, California community colleges are public educational institutions and therefore do not meet the federal definition of a qualifying food establishment.

## How Colleges Can Support RMP Access

Colleges can still support RMP access by sharing program information with their contracted food vendors and encouraging those vendors to apply.

Under AB 2033 (2024), if no campus food vendors currently participate in RMP, colleges must annually share information about the program with all on-campus food vendors and encourage those that qualify to apply. This information sharing fulfills the college's role and helps expand access to affordable, prepared meals for students that qualify.

- **Identify vendors that may qualify:** Review on-campus food vendors, cafes, or franchise partners that prepare and sell hot or ready-to-eat meals.
- **Share information with vendors:** Provide vendors the [CalFresh Restaurant Meals Program Partner Resource](#), which includes eligibility details, forms, and application instructions.
- **Encourage participation:** Vendors must apply directly to CDSS to participate in RMP. Once approved, they are authorized to accept EBT payments for eligible meals.
- **Promote RMP vendors:** Colleges can display signage or include information about participating restaurants in Basic Needs Center materials and other student communications.

# Key Sources

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California Department of Social Services (CDSS) – CalFresh Retailer and Restaurant Meals Program Partner Resource. <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/rmp/partners>

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service – SNAP Retailer Guidance and Compliance Resources. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer/training>

California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office – Basic Needs Center Toolkit (Updated 2025). <https://www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/resource/basic-needs-center-toolkit/>

# Case Example:

## Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD)

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The Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) is one of the first districts in California to actively pursue and sustain authorization for college-operated locations to accept EBT benefits. All nine LACCD colleges have applied to become CalFresh (SNAP) Retailers. The following case examples from the LACCD campuses highlight the challenges they have overcome and the lessons they learned in the process.

### Los Angeles City College (LACC)

LACC had the first college-owned facility within the district to successfully achieve authorization as a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer. LACC's experience offers valuable insights for other community colleges pursuing EBT acceptance, illustrating both the opportunities and challenges involved in integrating CalFresh EBT access into a campus-operated store environment.

#### LACC Challenge 1: Application & Inspection Timing

LACC's first application was submitted late during the academic fall semester, when campus stores had limited food inventory, reduced for the campus closure during the upcoming winter break. The USDA inspector conducted the visit during this period, resulting in temporary setbacks.

**Lesson Learned:** Schedule CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer application submissions and inspections during active instructional periods when staple food inventory is fully stocked.

#### LACC Challenge 2: Payment Processor Compatibility

One of the most persistent challenges has been EBT transaction compatibility through credit card processors. Initially, LACC used two different payment gateways. Even after consolidating under a single processor, EBT compatibility across registers and pin pads remained inconsistent. The current workaround involves using external handheld pin pads for EBT transactions, a viable but less efficient solution.

**Lesson Learned:** Before applying, confirm that your payment processor's point-to-point encryption system is fully EBT compliant and certified with California EBT Project Office specifications.

#### LACC Challenge 3: Application and Communication Barriers

Although the online USDA SNAP Retailer portal has improved significantly, the system remains designed for individual proprietors. College business offices must still designate a single authorized representative. The portal provides email notifications for application receipt and inspection scheduling, but official warnings, such as risk of approval rescission for inactivity, may arrive only by postal mail. When these are addressed to a district office rather than the campus store, critical timelines may be missed.

**Lesson Learned:** Verify and maintain accurate mailing and contact information on file with both USDA FNS and the payment processor and assign one local staff member to monitor activity regularly.

LACC continues to refine its processes and remains an approved CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer. Their persistence serves as a model for other colleges navigating similar system and vendor challenges, demonstrating that with coordinated leadership, technical troubleshooting, and steady follow-up, community college stores can sustain EBT access for students.

## Los Angeles Mission College (LAMC)

LAMC has made multiple attempts to become an authorized CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer. While the application itself was manageable, LAMC encountered several communication and technical challenges that significantly affected their ability to move forward. Their experience provides valuable insights for colleges initiating or re-initiating the application process.

### LAMC Challenge 1: Timing, Communication, and Disqualification Notices

During LAMC's application cycle, a major setback occurred when the official disqualification letter, containing a strict response deadline, did not arrive in time for the college to respond. This resulted in a missed appeal window and triggered a mandatory six-month waiting period before LAMC could reapply.

**Lesson Learned:** Ensure that USDA SNAP has accurate mailing information for the specific campus store or administrative office responsible for the application. Critical notices may be sent only by postal mail, and delays can disrupt eligibility timelines.

### LAMC Challenge 2: Customer Service and Technical Barriers

LAMC staff attempted to contact the SNAP Retailer Service Center multiple times to resolve issues, but hold times regularly exceeded an hour. During a subsequent application attempt, technical problems within the USDA SNAP online portal prevented the campus from progressing to submission.

**Lesson Learned:** Expect potential delays with both the online application system and customer service lines. Build additional time into planning and follow-up, especially when nearing federal deadlines or waiting periods.

### LAMC Challenge 3: Authorized User Structure

LAMC recommends assigning a single Authorized User for the SNAP Retailer portal, preferably the College Store Manager or College Financial Administrator, with a Vice President designated as backup. This ensures clear accountability and prevents missed communications or delays.

**Lesson Learned:** Establish a clear internal structure for managing the application and ongoing compliance, including both a primary Authorized User and a designated secondary backup.

LAMC remains committed to becoming a CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer and intends to reapply once the six-month waiting period concludes. Their persistence demonstrates the importance of coordinated follow-up, system awareness, and careful tracking of federal requirements as colleges pursue expanded food access for students.



## West Los Angeles College (WLAC)

WLAC has experienced several unique challenges with both obtaining and maintaining CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer authorization. While WLAC has the technical capacity to accept EBT, ongoing operational and federal-system barriers have made compliance difficult. Their experience illustrates the need for continued policy and system improvements to support community college retailers.

### **WLAC Challenge 1: Low EBT Transaction Volume and Risk of Account Default**

Because WLAC does not have a large volume of students currently using EBT at the campus store, the college risks “defaulting” under USDA’s low-usage rules. WLAC must periodically call USDA to confirm that they remain actively engaged and are continuing to troubleshoot equipment issues.

At present, WLAC can accept EBT transactions through a PAX handheld device, but their integrated PIN pad system cannot yet separate tender types. The college must continue working with their credit card processing provider to enable full EBT functionality.

**Lesson Learned:** Colleges with limited EBT usage must regularly communicate with USDA to prevent account closure and should work closely with processors to troubleshoot low-volume risk and tender-separation issues.

### **WLAC Challenge 2: Authorized User Restrictions and Repeated Verification**

Because the original application was submitted using a former administrator’s information, WLAC has faced ongoing issues with USDA’s strict authorization structure. Only that individual is permitted to speak with USDA on behalf of the college. WLAC has had to conduct multiple three-way calls to temporarily authorize the College Store Manager to discuss the account. Formal authorization requires a wet-signature letter on college letterhead, which must then be mailed to USDA.

**Lesson Learned:** Colleges should ensure that the correct person, typically the College Store Manager or Fiscal Administrator, is listed as the Authorized User from the beginning, and should update USDA immediately when personnel change to avoid workflow disruptions.

### **WLAC Challenge 3: Inspection Readiness and Staffing Constraints**

WLAC raised concerns about their ability to always maintain the required quantities of staple foods on the shelves, especially if USDA conducts a follow-up inspection. Limited staffing makes it difficult to continuously restock staple items, which could jeopardize compliance.

**Lesson Learned:** Colleges may need additional staffing support or supplemental funding to maintain required stocking levels and prepare for unannounced inspections.

WLAC’s experience demonstrates that community college retailers with small footprints and limited staffing would benefit from flexibility around staple food stocking quantities, adjustments to low-usage rules for EBT authorization, and streamlined Authorized User processes within USDA systems. These recommendations highlight the need for continued advocacy to ensure that community college stores can realistically sustain CalFresh (SNAP) Retailer operations.



# Acknowledgments

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This updated edition of the Guidebook moves beyond basic information to uplift effective practices and explore colleges' challenges and solutions. We thank **Daren Lynne, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Los Angeles City College Foundation**, for her extensive input, expertise, and development support to both the original and updated EBT Guidebook.

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- **Zoila Rodriguez-Doucette, Store Manager, Los Angeles Mission College**
- **Olga Pech, College Store Manager, West Los Angeles College**

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1. The RP Group and the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) Affordability, Food & Housing Access Taskforce (2025). Real College California: Basic Needs Among California Community College Students in 2025. Community College League of California.
2. The RP Group and the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) Affordability, Food & Housing Access Taskforce (2025). Real College California: Basic Needs Among California Community College Students in 2025. Community College League of California.
3. Ganley, C., Vue, M., L., Lynne, D., & Hébert, G. (2025, April 3). CalFresh Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) on Campus: Assembly Bill 2033. Presentation. Basic Needs Office Hours.
4. SNAP was formerly known as “food stamps,” but this term should not be used, because it is outdated and stigmatizing. It is mentioned here only to provide a frame of reference for readers.
5. Some store types are not eligible to participate: adult entertainment locations, gambling locations, spa/massage parlors, cannabis retailers, smoke shops, tattoo/piercing establishments, bail bond merchants, and cruise ships.
6. Adapted in part from Ganley et al. (2025).
7. Adapted in part from Ganley et al. (2025).