



Food for People

The Food Bank for Humboldt County

CalFresh Application Assistor Best Practices

Food for People’s trained CalFresh application assistors have been helping people apply for CalFresh (formerly the Food Stamp Program) for many years. Over that time we have developed methods for reframing CalFresh for hard to reach individuals who have fears and questions about the program. Our goal is to provide as much information as possible so clients feel knowledgeable and comfortable with the program. If a client’s immediate reaction to CalFresh is negative, take the time to ask a few questions or explain the program in a different way. We have had great success using the reframing tools in the table below, which have helped us to put extra food money into the pockets of folks who had a tough time admitting that they could use the help.

The local angle has been particularly successful, especially with seniors. Potential applicants respond well to the idea of helping their community and economy in the process of improving their nutrition. It is not uncommon to find that just talking about using CalFresh benefits at local farmers’ markets can help someone who is uncertain or nervous about the program to get excited about applying for CalFresh. In addition, the local angle helps people feel empowered about supporting their local farmers and stores. There is dignity in offering people the power to choose their healthy foods and the power to stimulate their local economy in the process.

The table below includes some of the most commonly used reframing tools the food bank’s application assistors and intake interviewers use to talk to people about applying for CalFresh. We developed these tools after much practice and success. We know it works, and encourage you to utilize and share these tools.

Situation	How to Reframe CalFresh
“Save the money for someone else who needs it more than me.”	The right to access CalFresh is similar to the way programs like Medicare and Social Security are set up. These are all programs that, according to legal definition, are <u>guaranteed</u> as a right to anyone who meets the eligibility requirements. There is no cap to enrollment, thus the money will not run out. There is enough money set aside for everyone who meets the eligibility requirements. In fact, only two thirds of those who are eligible have actually applied, and that results in lost dollars that could be improving nutrition locally.
“I don’t have time or transportation to go to the county CalFresh office.”	It is possible to apply for CalFresh and go through the interview process without having to go to the Humboldt County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)- Social Services Branch office. Applications can be filled out at Food for People, over the phone with DHHS at 1-877-410-8809, 3 DHHS offices and numerous other sites around the county, or can be completed online at www.GetCalFresh.org . The eligibility interview that follows can now be done over the phone, and finger-imaging is no longer required for a CalFresh application.
“I don’t want welfare.”	The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – CalFresh’s name at the federal level) is a U.S. Department of Agriculture <u>nutrition</u> program— <i>not</i> a welfare program. It is intended to help households buy nutritious food for good health. The program has a long history, since the 1930s, of supporting nutrition and the nation’s farmers.
“It’s embarrassing. I don’t want everyone at the store to know I have food stamps.”	CalFresh has made great improvements in recent years. The program no longer issues paper coupons that many may remember from the past. All CalFresh money is loaded onto a debit card called the “EBT” card (Electronic Benefit Transfer.) It looks and works just like a bank card or debit card that is swiped in the credit card machine at a store. When paying for groceries, no one knows whether a shopper is using a bank debit card or an EBT card. It is fast, easy and private. Monthly CalFresh benefits are automatically refilled onto EBT cards electronically every month.
“I have WIC, but I don’t want food stamps.”	WIC and CalFresh make great partners. They are both U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrition programs. WIC provides nutrition education and vouchers for specific foods mothers and children need for good health. These are meant to supplement your diet, not

	<p>meet all of your food needs for the month. CalFresh offers food money on a debit card so you can choose the additional foods your family needs to supplement your WIC foods. Each of these programs is a supplement to your monthly food budget, and putting the two programs together stretches a food budget farther.</p>
<p>“I just don’t think this program is for me.”</p>	<p>Do you like going to local farmers’ markets? You can use the EBT card at many local farmers’ markets to buy produce directly from local farmers. Simply find the market manager’s table, where there is a mobile version of a credit card machine. You can swipe your EBT card in exchange for farmers’ market tokens accepted by all farmers for fruits, vegetables and seeds or plants that produce food.</p> <p>CalFresh participants can also receive free bonus tokens when spending up to \$10 in CalFresh at farmers’ markets, thanks to the Humboldt Market Match program. If you like to grow fruits and vegetables at home, start your garden with CalFresh! Seeds and plant starts are available at farmers’ markets and many grocery stores. Farmers’ markets are also a great social community event, often featuring live music. They are great places to walk around and get exercise, bring children for a new adventure, talk to your local farmers, and taste new and delicious fruits and vegetables at the peak of ripeness.</p> <p><u>Humboldt County Farmers’ Markets that accept CalFresh:</u> Tuesdays: Old Town Eureka, 3rd and F Streets, 10am - 1pm (June-October) Downtown Fortuna , 10th and Main Streets, 3:00-6:00pm (May-October) Thursdays: Eureka Henderson Center, Henderson & F Streets, 10am-1pm (June-October) McKinleyville ENF parking lot, 2165 Central Ave., 3:30-6:30 pm (June-October) Willow Creek Community Commons, Hwy 299, 5:00-8:00 pm (June-October) Fridays: Garberville Market, Town Square, 11am-3pm (May –October) Eureka Friday Night Market, E St. & Opera Alley, 5:00-8:00 pm. (June-October) Saturdays: Arcata Plaza 9am-2pm (Year Round)</p>
<p>“We own vehicles (and/or our home,) so we won’t be eligible.”</p>	<p>It does not matter how many vehicles you own, and their value does not matter either. Many years ago the program looked at the value of vehicles, but it <u>no longer does so</u>. All vehicles are exempt, including cars, boats, RV’s, etc. In addition, if you own your home or property, its value is not counted.</p>
<p>“I have some money in a retirement account, so I am way over the resource limit and won’t be eligible.”</p>	<p>As of October 1, 2008, most retirement accounts are not counted. This means that a retirement account such as an IRA, 401K, pension, or education account like a 529 may not count against you in determining your resources. This allows households to keep their safety net money for retirement or education. If you were ineligible in the past because of these accounts, reapply now!</p>
<p>“I have too much money in the bank.”</p>	<p>As of February 2011, for the majority of applications, there is no limit to the amount of money you can have in the bank. This is helpful for households that need to hang onto their safety net to make it through the coming months or years.</p>
<p>“I thought immigrants could not get CalFresh.”</p>	<p>Naturalized Citizens, Legal Permanent Residents, and the U.S. citizen children of undocumented parents can apply for CalFresh. Basically, if you have a <u>valid</u> Social Security Number, you can apply for CalFresh. Undocumented parents can apply safely for their U.S. citizen children. No information is shared with ICE/FBI/Law Enforcement. Undocumented parents or household members must leave their Social Security Numbers blank. These numbers will be checked, and a false number can result in negative consequences. A blank is fine. Only fill in a Social Security Number for children or household members who have valid numbers.</p>

For further information about CalFresh, how to pre-screen a client, or for application assistance at your organization or agency, feel free to contact: Heidi McHugh, Community Education & Outreach Coordinator (707) 445-3166 x308 hmchugh@foodforpeople.org or go to www.foodforpeople.org/programs/calfresh-outreach