



University of Vermont  
Center for Community News

## Assignment Template: Reporting on food assistance

The Center for Community News' mission is to grow and support partnerships between college reporting programs and local news outlets. CCN has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students to contribute local news to their community. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes. For questions about this template, contact CCN Program Manager Sarah Gamard at [scbgamard@gmail.com](mailto:scbgamard@gmail.com).

### Notes for Faculty

**WHAT:** This is an assignment template for students covering food assistance programs in community-centered ways. They will track changes to federal funding and legislation on these programs, document their impacts on the residents who rely on food assistance, and effectively share news and resources with these communities

**WHY:** This an opportunity for students to build rapport within and identify the information needs of communities around food assistance programs, while gaining hard news experience on angles like national-to-local impacts. It will also challenge them to explore the ripple effects on issues like funding cuts – for example, if grocery stores will experience revenue loss and if food banks will struggle to meet increased demand.

**HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE:** This assignment is best for students who are experienced and/or comfortable with establishing new sources and building trust in communities, particularly around issues like food insecurity, which can be [traumatic](#). This will help them determine effective ways to approach community-based reporting. Students will work in groups to connect with their community, gather data, and determine the best ways to share their story. Encourage students to find ways to humanize this story by seeking out the experiences of community members impacted by changes in food security policy, rather than simply framing it

as a policy story. This may include working with a local nonprofit to reach affected residents, or seeking out sources through public social media callouts.

#### **EXAMPLE STORIES:**

[Where to find food assistance, or help neighbors in need, during the federal shutdown](#), by Kate Dario, New Hampshire Public Radio, Oct. 31, 2025

[Loss of SNAP-Ed program leaves gaps in Vermont's food assistance network](#), by Theo Wells-Spackman, [VTDigger.org](#), Sept. 12, 2025

[How campus food pantries meet the hidden needs of Vermont college students](#), by Kennedy Connors, Community News Service, May 20, 2024

[Proposed cut to universal free school meals prompts pushback from local food advocates](#), by Noah Diedrich, Community News Service, March 10, 2025

#### **About CCN**

The [Center for Community News](#) at UVM is a nonpartisan nonprofit that is working to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs around the country, to create a more sustainable future for local news outlets and the communities they serve.

# Assignment: Report on food assistance policy

## Instructions

**Step 1:** Break out into groups of 2-3 students. Determine who will be going out to community spaces and who will be gathering research and following the coverage issue. Discuss who your audience will be (such as people who are food insecure, or readers for a local news publication), as this will inform your approach and angle.

**Step 2:** Come up with a reporting plan and begin reporting. Identify nonprofits, gathering spaces and other sources that are connected to the affected populations. Ask about the impacts of the issue you're covering on those community members, how these sources distribute information (such as where to access food) to residents, and affected residents you may be able to interview. Consider using callouts on social media to ask people to get in touch with their experiences.

**Step 3:** Gather information on the latest developments impacting food security programs (for example, the impacts of the fall 2025 government shutdown on programs like SNAP). Dig into how they're affecting nonprofits like food banks, if food donations are meeting increased demand, and so forth. Stay up-to-date on the latest news (for example, federal judge orders on SNAP funding). Interview state officials, nonprofit directors, and other sources who can provide key data and context on the issue.

**Step 4:** Determine how you are going to write and distribute this story based on community needs. You may also find you'll produce a few stories/pieces. Should your coverage include a helpful FAQ-style listicle for community members, a reel on five places to find food, a hard news story? What will serve the information needs of community members? Begin writing and producing from there, weaving in narratives of affected sources, statistics, quotes from key officials, and other reporting you gathered. Distribute and share your story.

### People you can interview:

- **Nonprofits:** Food banks, your local Feeding America chapter
- **Food distribution centers:** Local food pantries, community fridges, community mutual aid groups
- **Community members:** People who are food insecure, volunteers at organizations involved with food distribution
- **Gathering spaces:** Community centers, churches, coffee shops, libraries, schools, parks, community gardens, farmers markets
- **Government:** Officials with local or state health, social services and agriculture departments, public benefits centers, lawmakers

- **Retailers:** Managers or employees at food co-ops, local groceries, corner stores, bodegas, big box grocers. You can ask them if they accept SNAP EBT cards and if they're seeing any change in patterns around consumers who use those cards. Also ask about any efforts they make in the community related to food insecurity, for example if they donate to food banks or have their own food donation process)
- **Hospitality:** Look up restaurants, bakeries, or cafes to see if they have any (they may donate to food banks)

### Questions you can ask:

For organizations:

- How will [insert issue, like SNAP cuts] impact your organization (or family or other affected sources)? How are you filling the gap?
- How are you adjusting your budget? What are you giving up and what are you prioritizing?
- What's the percentage breakdown of where you get your food from (federal, state, private donation...)?
- What are some ways you/your community members receive their news/information?
- What is your organization/business doing to meet the needs of food-insecure people (such as SNAP recipients who may lose access to their benefits)?

For individuals impacted by changes in food security programs:

- How does this food program [insert particular program, like SNAP, WIC, the food pantry] play a role in your weekly diet?
- What kinds of food items do you often get? What are your favorites?
- How has this change impacted you? [Or if it hasn't happened yet, frame it as a theoretical: How would this change impact you?]
- Do you anticipate making any changes in your budgeting because of this change? If so, would you tell me a bit more about that?
- How are you keeping up with news about this change/possible change?

### Definitions:

- **U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA):** the federal department under which several major food assistance programs are housed
- **Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards:** The system used to deliver benefits like SNAP to public assistance recipients via electronic access; these cards look like credit or debit cards and replaced the paper version of food stamps.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),** formally known as food stamps: The most widely used federal anti-hunger program, which, as of 2025, served more than 40 million low- and no-income Americans. The program is run through the USDA, and

administered by states. (See more from [Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health](#).)

- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** Provides specific foods and healthcare referrals for low-income women (pregnant, breastfeeding, postpartum) and to children up to age 5
- **Food bank:** a non-profit that safely stores millions of pounds of food that will soon be delivered to local food programs, like a food pantry (from [Feeding America](#))
- **Food pantry:** A distribution center where hungry families can receive food. Supplied with food from a food bank, pantries feed hundreds of people per week (from [Feeding America](#))

**Word Count:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Deadline:** \_\_\_\_\_