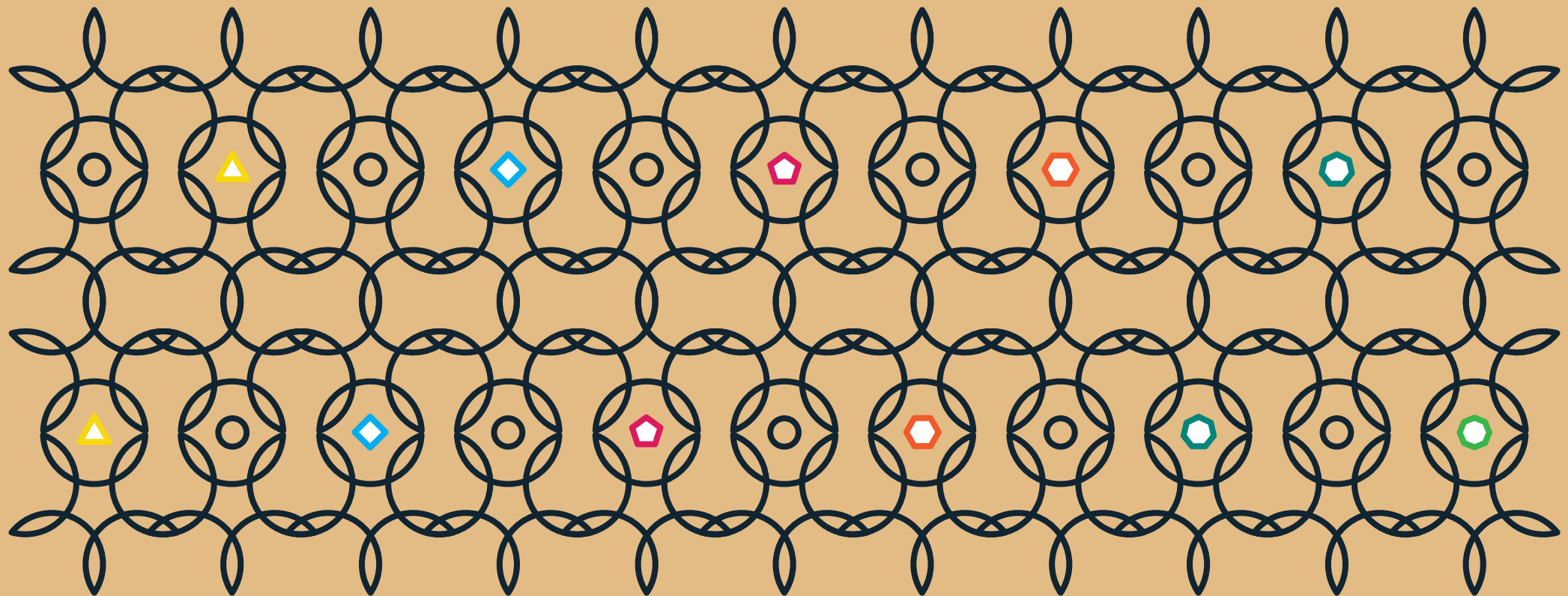
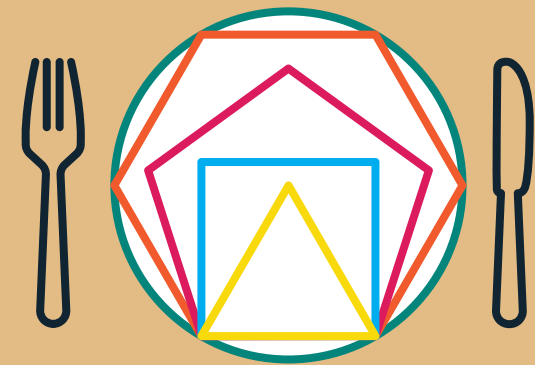


Building a Community Rooted School Food Program

An Open-Source Guide

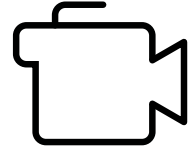


Start Here

How to Navigate this Open-Source Box

Big Picture Map of Contents • Acknowledgements • Glossary

This Open-Source Guide is a comprehensive resource for schools, communities, and organizations aiming to launch or improve their school food programs. It combines strategic planning tools with hands-on operational guidance, offering actionable steps for every stage of program development.



Video Summary



Its purpose is to provide clear, actionable guidance while emphasizing the flexibility needed to adapt to diverse contexts. This manual captures Flourish's commitment to equitable, nourishing, and sustainable food access for all students, combining proven strategies with a forward-looking, community-driven approach.

At its heart, the guide reflects Flourish's belief in flexibility, recognizing that every community has unique needs, resources, and capacities. The practices outlined here are proven strategies, but the manual also encourages users to innovate and tailor these approaches to their specific contexts.

Flourish's approach is rooted in continuous improvement and a commitment to learning. As the organization evolves, it incorporates feedback, adjusts its processes, and refines its methods to better serve students and communities. This focus on adaptability ensures the manual remains a living document, responsive to the realities of implementing school food programs in diverse settings. Additionally, Flourish emphasizes the importance of collaboration, with the program's success depending on strong partnerships with schools, families, and local stakeholders.

Goals

1. Provide **step-by-step guidance** for creating and sustaining school food programs that align with Flourish's values and operational standards.
2. Offer **customizable templates and resources**, such as food safety plans, kitchen setup checklists, and financial management tools, to streamline implementation.
3. Share **evidence-based practices** and real-world insights from Flourish's experience delivering thousands of meals and coordinating school gardens.
4. Highlight **compliance and safety protocols** to ensure food safety at every stage of preparation, delivery, and service.
5. Equip schools to foster inclusive, stigma-free environments where food fortifies both the body + mind.

Box Contents

This is the interactive digital version of the *How to Build a Community Rooted School Food Program - Open-Source Guide*. Explore the big picture overview of the open-source guide, hover over a book, and then click to navigate to where you feel is the most relevant to your needs. If you'd like to get your hands on the physical version of our box then please contact Matthew: info@flourishschoolfood.ca

x1 How to Grow Food Book - Resource

This short garden companion provides simple instructions on how to grow 3 vegetables in every season.



x4 Food Literacy Cards - Resource

Household Food Insecurity

Stats and figures • Not just a problem of Economics
Where to go for help • Family Stress



Cultural Inclusion through School Food

Why is it important? • What is our Role?



Supporting Healthy Habits

Eating Competence • What is our Role? • Eating Together



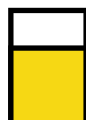
Benefits of School Food Program

Benefits to Learning • Benefits of a school food program

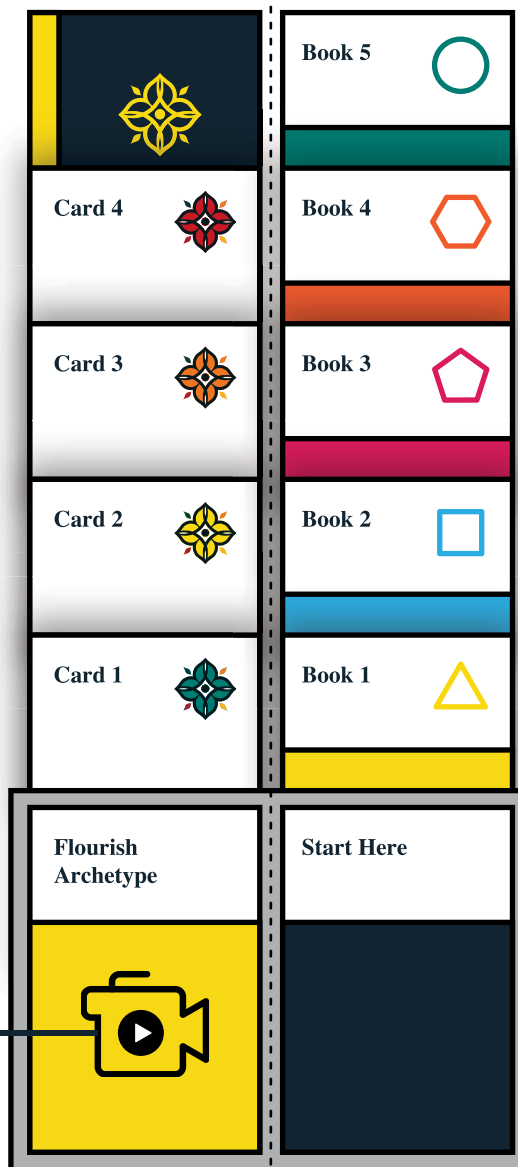


x1 Flourish School Food Program

Provides an overview of Flourish, including its mission, history, and the purpose of this manual and explores the principles, objectives, and rationale behind Flourish's approach, including insights into daily operations and their impact.



This Open-Source Guide, with all of its logical steps, can only take you so far. In reality, the musical tones of human energy, and the individual stories that bring people together, communicate so much more to the success story of this program. Open this book to get a **feel** for the **Day in the Life of Flourish School Food Society**.



How to Build a Community Rooted School Food Program

Each book is designed to stand alone, enabling you to focus on the topics most relevant to your needs. Follow our experience by dipping into the left side of the box to help you along if you get stuck.



Sustaining the Program

Includes strategies for crisis management, program evaluation, and scaling efforts.

x1



Meal Prep + Delivery

Provides operational details for meal preparation, ordering systems, and delivery logistics.

x1



Get Ready to Launch

Focuses on implementing services, communicating with school partners, and ensuring stigma-free access.

x1



Setup

Addresses kitchen requirements, regulatory compliance, food sourcing, and team building.

x1



Planning

Covers developing your mission, vision, and goals; assessing community needs; and establishing partnerships.

x1



A Gift from Flourish

Created by a human Artist, and a visual reminder why this Open-Source Guide Exists.

Anne-Sophie Cournoyer
@aetherreal_moods
www.aetherrealmoods.com



Seeds to get you started in the Garden

Left Side

Box

Right Side

Flourish Resources

Open-Source Guide

Glossary 1/2

Allergen management:	Procedures to identify, label, and avoid common allergens in food preparation and service to accommodate dietary restrictions and ensure student safety.
Batch preparation:	The process of preparing ingredients or meals in large quantities to improve efficiency, reduce waste, and maintain consistency across servings.
Culturally inclusive food:	Meals that reflect the cultural preferences, traditions, and dietary needs of diverse communities.
Emergency provisions:	Backup food items maintained to ensure uninterrupted service during unforeseen disruptions such as weather events, equipment failures, or supply chain delays.
Food literacy:	Knowledge, attitudes, and skills about food. This includes understanding the connections between food, health, and wellbeing; knowing how to select nutritious foods; and understanding how our food choices impact the individual, community, and environment.
Hotel pan:	A durable, standardized metal container used in food service for preparing, storing, and transporting food. It is designed to fit seamlessly into warming trays, carriers, and commercial kitchen equipment.
Locally sourced food:	Food grown or produced within a defined geographical area to reduce environmental impact and support local economies. For Flourish, truly local is within about 50 kilometers, though it can also be considered that all food produced in BC is local.
Metro mighty light carrier:	An insulated food carrier used to keep meals at safe hot or cold temperatures during transport, ideal for maintaining quality over longer delivery routes.
Online ordering system:	A digital platform that allows schools to place, track, and manage their food or grocery orders while providing administrators with tools for inventory, logistics, and invoicing.

Glossary 2/2

Reheating protocol:	Specific steps followed to safely reheat prepared meals, ensuring they reach a food-safe temperature of 74°C before serving.
School food environment:	The school food environment refers to all the spaces, infrastructure, and conditions inside and around the school premises where food is available, obtained, purchased, and/or consumed. It also considers the nutritional content of these foods. The environment also includes all the information available, promotion, discussion, and pricing of foods and food products. Food environments shape how accessible, affordable, desirable, and convenient specific foods are. A healthy school food environment allows and encourages the school community (children, families, school staff, etc.) to make food choices that are consistent with better diets and improved well-being while supporting connection and care.
Scratch cooking:	Preparing meals using fresh, whole ingredients rather than processed or pre-packaged foods.
Standardized portions:	Pre-measured servings that ensure consistency in meal size and nutritional content while reducing waste.
Universal food access:	Providing meals to all students, regardless of income or background, to eliminate stigma and ensure equitable access.
Waste reduction strategies:	Methods employed to minimize food waste, including composting, efficient inventory management, and re-purposing leftovers.

Link to all resources shared within each book

*School Food Program
Resources*



Acknowledgements

The creation and success of the Flourish School Food Program Manual would not have been possible without the collective efforts, insights, and dedication of numerous individuals and organizations. **Flourish! School Food Society** extends its deepest gratitude to everyone who has contributed to the development of this manual and the transformative work of school food programming in our region.

This guide would not exist without the encouragement and support of *Food Banks BC*. Food Banks BC's support has been vital to the flourishing of school food programming here and elsewhere. Their continued support, advocacy and guidance are cornerstones in the work to build a better food future for us all.

We would not exist without our founding partners: the *Victoria Community Food Hub Society*, the *Capital Region Food Share Network*, *Farm to School BC*, the *Mustard Seed Street Church*, and *Sooke School District #62*. Special mention should also go to *Lifecycles Project Society* and *Island Health's Healthy Schools* team for their involvement in the *School Food Shift* collaborative that gave rise to our founding collaborations. All of these organizations supported the vision and helped lay the groundwork that has become the foundation for Flourish's approach to providing nourishing, locally sourced meals to students while integrating food literacy and sustainability in schools.

We also recognize the commitment and support of everyone collaborating in the *Mustard Seed Food Security Distribution Center*. This space and its people have enabled the seamless preparation, storage, and distribution of meals to schools across our region. Your logistical expertise and unwavering support have been vital.

Special thanks go to the many school teachers, CUPE and administrative staff who have shown tireless dedication to fostering nourishing school environments. Your feedback and collaboration have helped refine our practices, ensuring that every meal served meets high standards of quality and care.

To the parents, students, and volunteers who have shared their stories, lent their hands and supported our programs, we are immensely grateful.

Your engagement and enthusiasm have inspired us to continuously innovate and improve.

This manual also reflects the contributions of **Flourish** staff, from delivery drivers and kitchen teams to food literacy educators. Your day-to-day efforts ensure that every meal, garden lesson, and interaction embodies our values of equity, sustainability, and compassion.

Finally, we extend our gratitude to the broader community of food systems advocates and funders. Your belief in the importance of school food programs as a vehicle for change has driven this work forward.

Together, we are setting the table for a future where all students can access nourishing food, thrive in their education, and flourish in their lives.

Open-Source Guide

We offer this guide and all of the tools linked herein as an open source document; we hope that our work can be improved, and shared forward in the future. If you do take from what we have developed here (through a not insignificant amount of hard work), please let us know and where appropriate, acknowledge our support.

Authors - This guide was developed by:

Matthew Kemshaw

Alison Ryan

Scale Collaborative

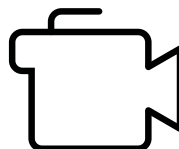
Ross A. Whelan

Flourish! School Food Programs

The organization's three main streams of programming are designed to ensure equitable food access while promoting sustainability, local food systems, and cultural inclusivity.



Flourish!
— School Food Society —



Short Film Inside






Setting the Table for Learning



Flourish!

— School Food Society —

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1.



A Little About Us

Flourish! School Food Society is a non-profit charity dedicated to bringing sustaining change to schools by reimagining how students eat and learn about food.



To ensure every student has access to healthy, local, and sustainably sourced meals, **Flourish** integrates food services with food and garden-based learning in schools, fostering environments that promote both individual and community well-being.



Flourish was built to address the growing challenge of food insecurity in schools, recognizing that hunger and poor nutrition impact not only student health but also academic outcomes and emotional well-being. By combining meal programs with hands-on educational experiences in gardens and kitchens, Flourish fosters deeper connections between students, their food, and their environment. This multifaceted approach aligns with Flourish's core belief: truly good food feeds equity, sustainability, and inclusive communities.



*Flourish Executive Director
Matthew Kemshaw guiding kids
in their custom made garden at
Pexsisen Elementary.*



History

Flourish's origins lie in a long history of seeking to support connections between school gardens, kitchens and food services. Through many years of iterative collaboration, Flourish's founding partners worked to support a regional appreciation for how we could build truly nourishing school food environments.

Setting the Table



These years of collaboration led to the *Setting the Table pilot project* (2022–23), which demonstrated the transformative potential of school food programs. Collaborating with the Mustard Seed, Capital Region Food Share Network, Victoria Community Food Hub Society, Farm to School BC, and the Sooke School District #62, this project provided 200 scratch-cooked meals daily to students in eight schools while building the systems and infrastructure for long-term success.

Regional Leader

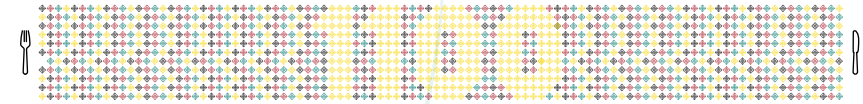


Since then, Flourish has established itself as a non-profit society, registered charity and regional leader in school food systems. As of December 2024, the organization serves over 1100 daily home-cooked meals across 22 schools in the Capital Regional District (CRD), ensuring students receive the fuel they need to thrive. Flourish also supports a grocery program, which reaches an additional 1800 students each day with breakfast and snack foods. Flourish also collaborates with schools on garden design, maintenance, student-led food service and food literacy programming.

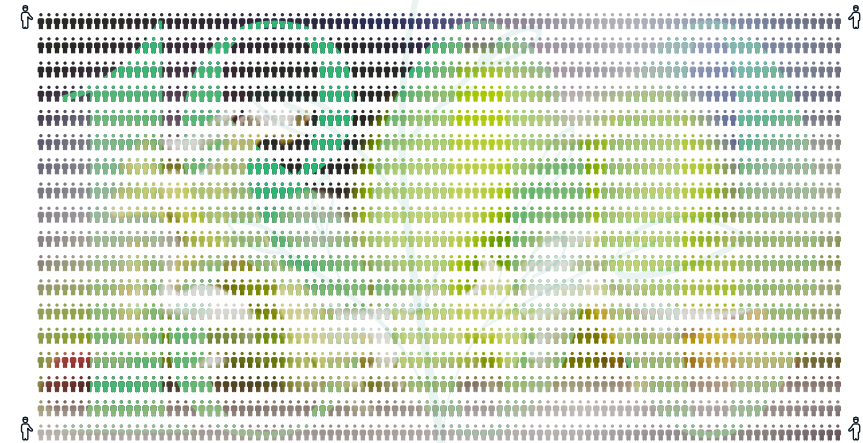
Universal



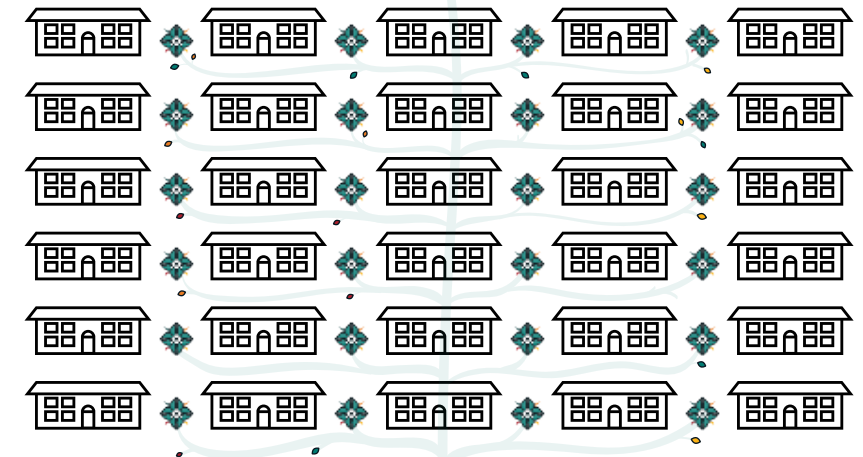
Driven by the belief that food is for everyone, Flourish's work is rooted in inclusion. Programs aim to be accessible and eliminate the stigma associated with targeted food assistance. This philosophy underpins all Flourish initiatives, from meal delivery to teaching students the value of sustainable, locally grown food.



Meals



Students



Schools



From 1

2. The Big Picture

The Flourish! School Food Society aims to provide comprehensive support for school food initiatives in the Capital Regional District (CRD) in British Columbia (BC). The organization's three main streams of programming are designed to ensure equitable food access while promoting sustainability, local food systems, and cultural inclusivity.

The following programs operate within 30 schools within two school districts: Greater Victoria (SD 61) and Sooke (SD 62)



Kitchen Program

Fun, Nourishing Meals

Following Mother Nature's guidance, we create diverse, seasonal and youth-friendly menus, and prepare and distribute home-cooked meals daily.



Grocery Program

*Food Aggregation
& Distribution*

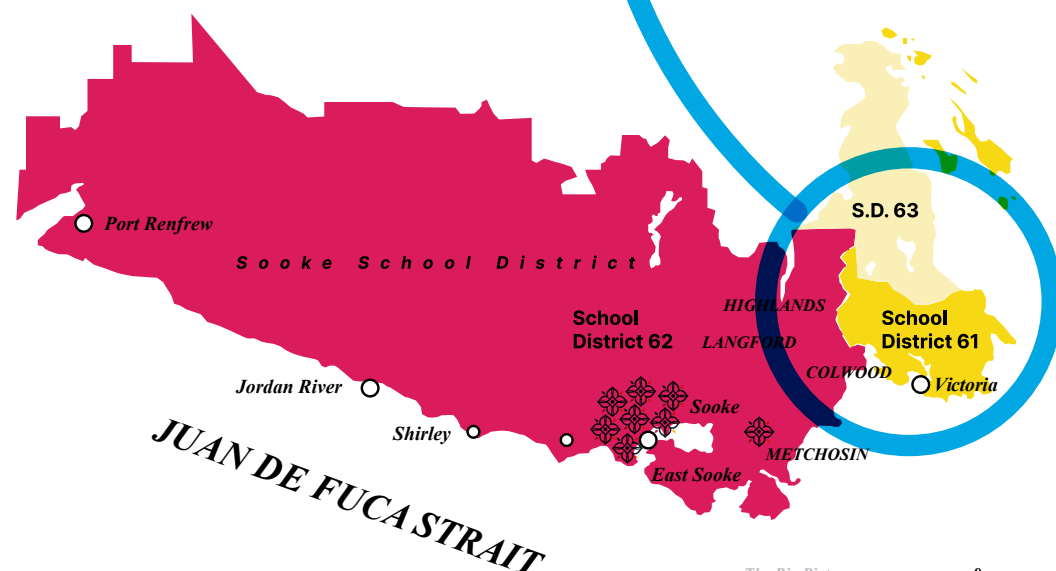
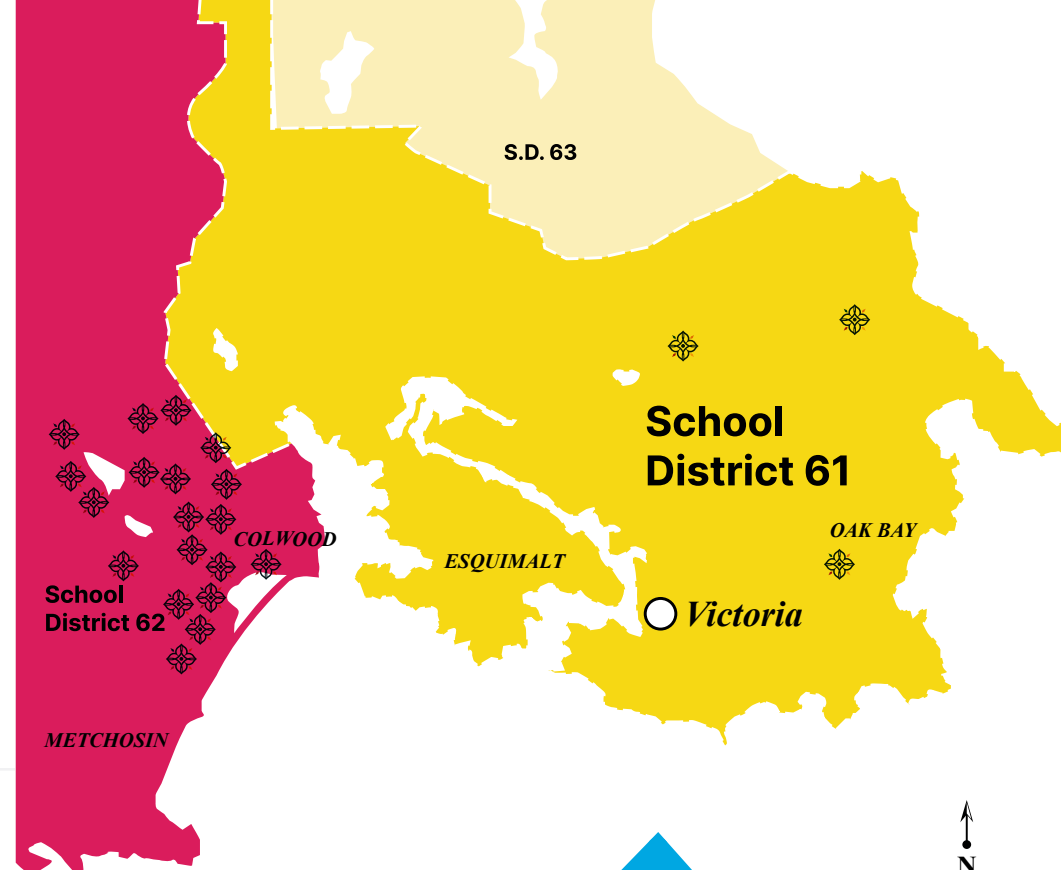
Through partnership, we help connect school communities with the foods they need to ensure students are fueled and ready to learn. We provide breakfast staples, snacks and other thoughtfully sourced grocery items.



Food Literacy

Garden Learning

We support school gardens and promote good practices in school food services. We believe there is magic in experientially connecting with seeds, gardens, kitchens, and composts. While the purpose of this manual is to focus on the Kitchen and Grocery Programs, more information about food literacy can be found on Flourish's website.



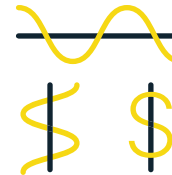
3. Rationale & Guiding Principles

Flourish! School Food Society (Flourish) is driven by a core belief that food is a powerful tool for building equity, fostering connection, and supporting sustainable communities. Its guiding principles reflect a commitment to providing nourishing, locally sourced meals while nurturing a sense of belonging within schools.

The following pages contain a detailed articulation of Flourish's rationale, philosophy, and principles. Below we describe our foundational understanding of what school food programs should be about.



Financial sustainability:



The Flourish! School Food Society was built as a social enterprise with charitable purposes and has been successful at not relying on charity to support its programs.

The engine of our financial sustainability is partnerships with schools and school districts to provide high-value food services at competitive prices. Schools and school districts pay for our services with the money they are allocated by the *Ministry of Education's Feeding Futures program*.



1 Details about our financial model and pricing structure are provided here.

We receive additional funding for infrastructure and new projects through a combination of grants, donations, and sponsorships. The program also benefits from in-kind support, such as rescued and donated foods from local partners, and collaborations with farmers and food producers to source fresh, seasonal ingredients at lower costs.



“

We all appreciate the food that we are now able to provide for the kids. To see them eating a big salad and a hot meal is wonderful, especially because we know that they might not have access to those healthy foods at home. These things make such a difference in their day!

Teacher - Westshore Secondary

Equity and Inclusion:



1. Inadequate nutrition affects students across socioeconomic backgrounds. We are working towards universal access to food to ensure that all students, regardless of circumstances, receive the nutrition they need to thrive.
2. Providing food for all eliminates stigma, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where no student feels singled out or judged for accessing school food programs.
3. Constantly seeking feedback about our foods and working to understand and incorporate cultural diversity in our offerings is crucial to ensuring students feel included in their school's food program.

Learning Support & Development:



1. Hunger and poor nutrition impede cognitive function, concentration, and academic performance. By offering nourishing meals, students show up ready to learn and succeed.
2. School food programs reduce anxiety, bullying, and behavioural challenges, fostering safer and more productive school environments.



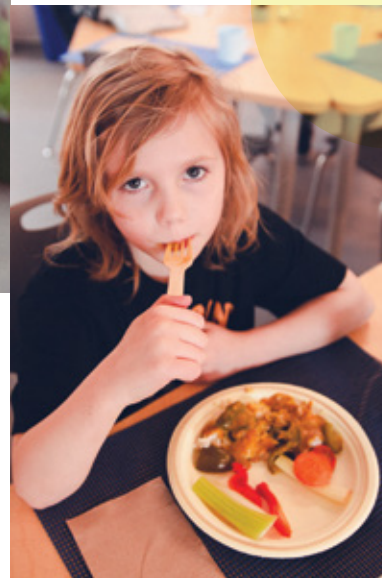
Environmental & Social Responsibility:



1. Supporting local farmers and reducing the ecological footprint of food can be achieved by using seasonal, locally sourced ingredients.
2. Encouraging sustainable practices in food preparation, waste reduction, and composting helps students build lifelong habits that benefit the planet.

Cultural Responsiveness:

1. Menus celebrate the diversity of the school community by including culturally appropriate foods that reflect students' backgrounds and introduce others to new cuisines.
2. Programs foster cultural humility and inclusion, respecting the preparation and sharing of food as a deeply personal and communal experience.




“

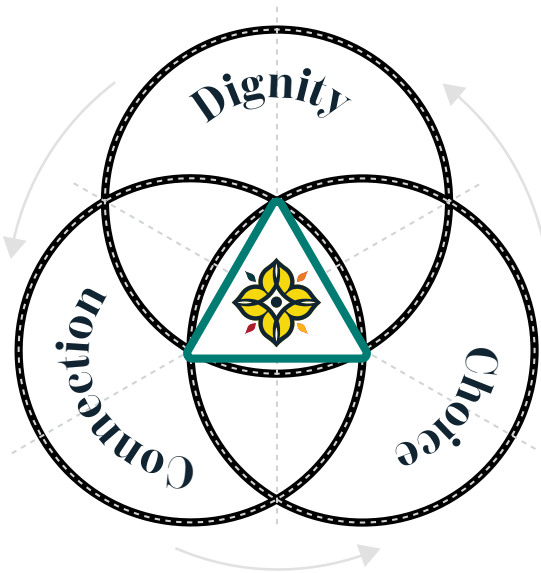
You've done great work here... For a big school like this, being asked to build a food program was daunting. *You've made it seamless.*

Teacher - Oak Bay Secondary



Guiding principles

These principles  guide Flourish's work, ensuring programs are impactful, sustainable, and deeply embedded in the communities they serve. By integrating food into the fabric of school culture, Flourish creates environments where students, staff, and communities can truly flourish.

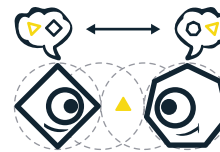


Dignity:

1. Everyone participates. School food programs are open and inclusive and enjoyed by everyone in the school, staff included. Everyone eats together, promoting connection, belonging, and a shared culture of care.
2. The food is **GOOD**. Quality ingredients are made with care. This ensures accessing the food is something you can feel good about.
3. The food is served without judgment. Meals are presented in a way that encourages exploration without judgment, allowing students to develop a lifelong positive relationship with food. Foods are not labeled as "good" or "bad," focusing instead on balance and the enjoyment of diverse, nourishing meals.



Connection:



1. Served by adults who care. Food is offered and shared by caring adults.
2. There is time to eat AND tell stories. Mealtime is not rushed. Students have time to get their food, sit down, eat and talk in an unhurried manner, and clean up.
3. Connection to the people and places that made the food. Eaters are supported in knowing where their food came from and who was involved in preparing it.
4. Students are invited to participate and provide feedback and input regularly

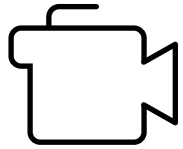
Choice:



1. Students decide what they eat from several options. Several options are available each day, and the food choices vary day-to-day to ensure diverse cultures and food preferences are supported.
2. You come to the food by your own choice. Students decide to participate and are supported in making decisions about when they access school food.

4. A Day in the Life of Flourish!

The Flourish Kitchen is the heartbeat of our organization, where dedication, teamwork, and passion come together daily to provide nourishing meals for students. This section captures a high-level overview of operations and key moments, showcasing the flow of activity and the people behind the scenes who make our kitchen program possible.



Click to play film.

Runtime: 15 minutes



Setting the Table for Learning

The best way to communicate the heartbeat of *Flourish!*, and how we do things, is to show you.

This small film will cover a day in the **Flourish** Kitchen so you can get an eye for the teamwork involved, the care and attention to detail they apply to their work, and the equipment they use; ending with the most important heart beat of them all, the why and the who: the people we serve; children and youth at school.

The following pages will guide you through the logistical side of our operation while acknowledging the flexible reality of the day-to-day experience shown in the film.



Flourish!

— School Food Society —



Film Chapters

This isn't a top-down organization, we plant at the root with care, then aim to grow so our service can flourish and blossom where it matters most. So start at the bottom and work your way up.



Delivery, Setup, and Service at School **p32**

All the hard work, care, teamwork, and attention to detail blossoms everyday at school lunches.

5

Cooking: Where the magic happens **p30**

With the day's meals out for delivery, the kitchen team resets and begins preparing for the next few days.

4

Off for Delivery: A Mission in Motion **p28**

With all meals loaded, the delivery team ensures each vehicle is organized for efficient routes to schools.

3

Preparing for Delivery: Food Safety in Action **p26**

Food is plated the day before service and refrigerated, reheated the next day then delivered to schools.

2

Packaging: Meals for Schools **p24**

Once the ingredients are prepared, the team assembles buffet-style meals.

1

Morning Prep: Starting with Precision **p22**

The day begins early as the team gathers to review the schedule and organize supplies.



1

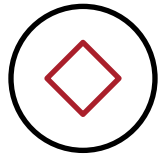
Morning Prep: Starting with Precision

The day begins early as the team gathers to review the schedule and organize supplies. Prepared ingredients from the previous afternoon are retrieved, and workstations are set up with a strong focus on food safety. This stage involves careful collaboration as tasks are assigned and everyone prepares for the busy day ahead. The team works like a well-coordinated orchestra, ensuring every detail is accounted for before moving to packaging.

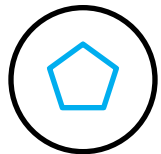
Key Highlights



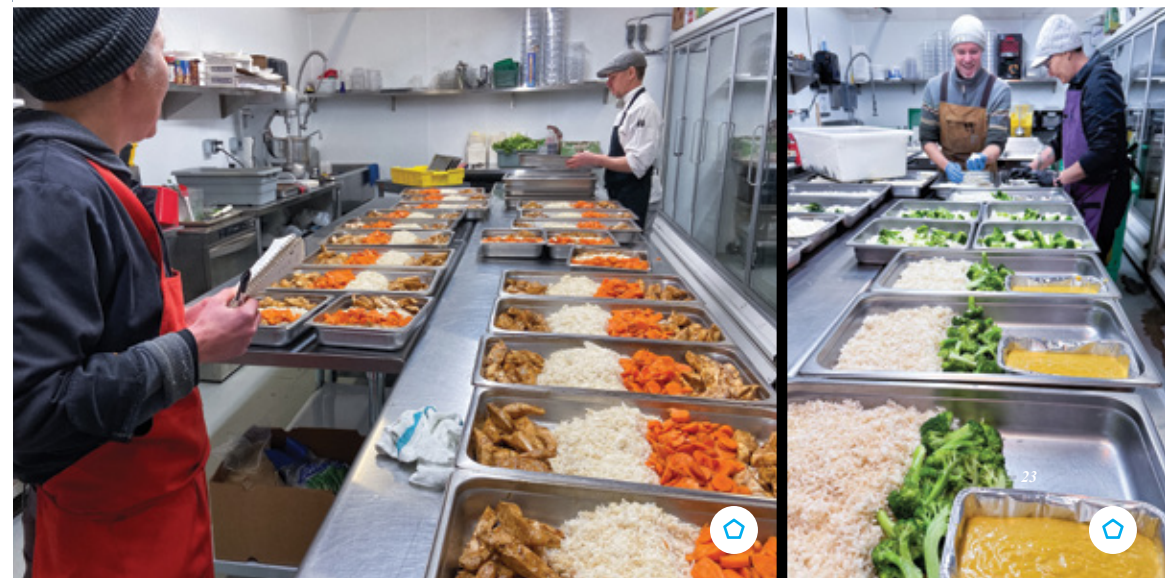
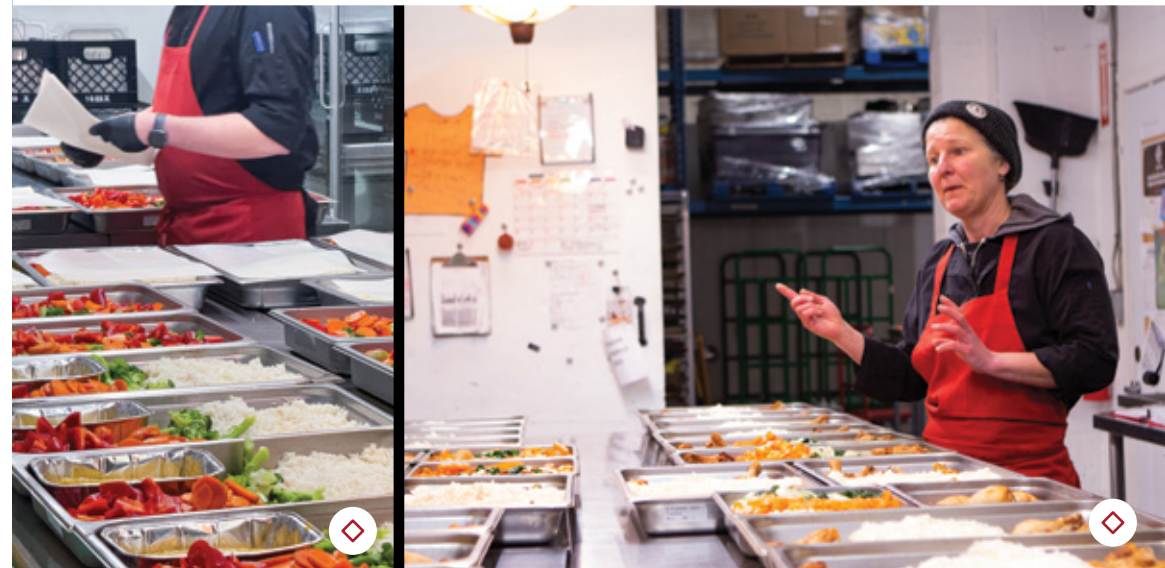
Supplies are organized, and workstations are sanitized to ensure compliance with food safety standards.



Prepared ingredients from the day before are reviewed and staged for packaging.



Team members collaborate to divide responsibilities and create a smooth workflow.



Packaging: Meals for Schools

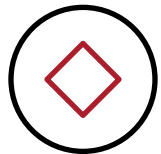
Once the ingredients are prepared, the team assembles buffet-style meals. The dishes are plated into large metal pans and insert trays specifically designed for school buffet service. Each pan is carefully filled with balanced and appealing meal components, reflecting Flourish's commitment to quality and inclusivity.

Hot entrees and salads go out to each school, every day. This process requires precision to ensure consistency across all schools. Elementary school meals are designed to allow students to choose which components of the meal they want to eat. For example, pasta is served separately from the sauce, and green salads are presented as individual piles of ingredients rather than being pre-mixed.

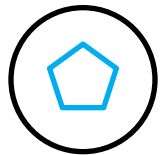
Key Highlights



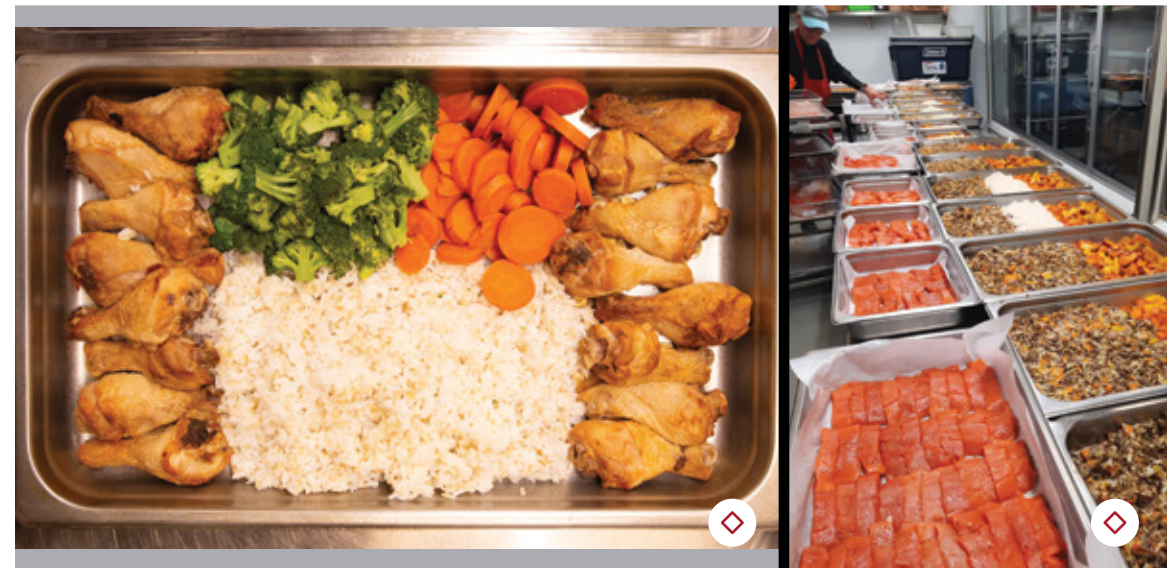
Meals are packaged in durable “pans” for buffet-style service.



Pans are portioned and balanced to meet the nutritional needs of students.



The team ensures all pans are labeled for accurate distribution.



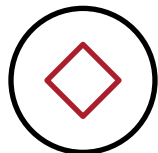
Preparing for Delivery: Food Safety in Action

Food is plated the day before service and refrigerated adhering to strict food safety protocols. Hot entrees are heated in our kitchen's ovens and shipped hot to schools. Ensuring proper food temperature is critical to maintaining quality and safety during transport. The reheated pans are then placed into insulated food carriers, which are loaded into delivery vehicles.

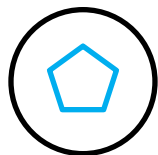
Key Highlights



Pans are reheated to the correct temperature, ensuring food safety and readiness for service. Minimum 74°



Insulated food carriers maintain temperature, ensuring meals stay hot until they reach the schools.



Team members follow detailed checks to confirm food safety standards are met, including using thermometers to verify temperatures before transport.



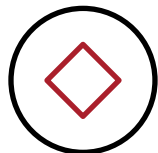
Off for Delivery: A Mission in Motion

With all meals loaded, the delivery team ensures each vehicle is organized for efficient routes to schools. Meals are delivered on time into school fridges and ovens (where hot entrees are held hot at **175F** until the time of service), ensuring students receive hot, ready-to-serve food. This step marks the culmination of the morning's efforts and the impact of the team's work.

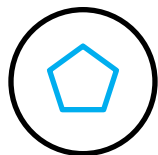
Key Highlights



Hot and cold insulated food carriers are carefully secured in vehicles to maintain food safety and quality during transit.



Deliveries are planned to align with school schedules, ensuring punctual delivery at least 30 minutes before lunch.



Each delivery represents the team's commitment to support students and fostering community.



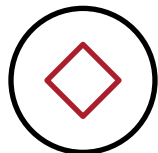
Cooking: Where the Magic Happens (Preparing for Tomorrow)

With the day's meals out for delivery, the kitchen team resets and begins preparing for the next day (in some cases, days). This is where creativity and skill come together as fresh ingredients are transformed into the next day's meals. Scratch cooking ensures that every dish meets Flourish's high standards of nutrition and taste.

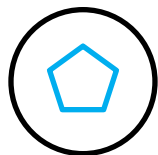
Key Highlights



Chefs work with fresh, seasonal ingredients, focusing on scratch cooking for optimal flavour and quality.



Team members collaborate to prepare meal components, following carefully developed recipes designed with input from public health dietitians.



Cultural inclusion is prioritized, with diverse menus that reflect the school community's backgrounds and preferences.





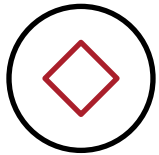
Delivery, Service, and Setup at School

With the day's meals out for delivery, the kitchen team resets and begins preparing for the next day (in some cases, days). This is where creativity and skill come together as fresh ingredients are transformed into the next day's meals. Scratch cooking ensures that every dish meets Flourish's high standards of nutrition and taste.

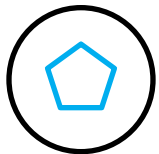
Key Highlights



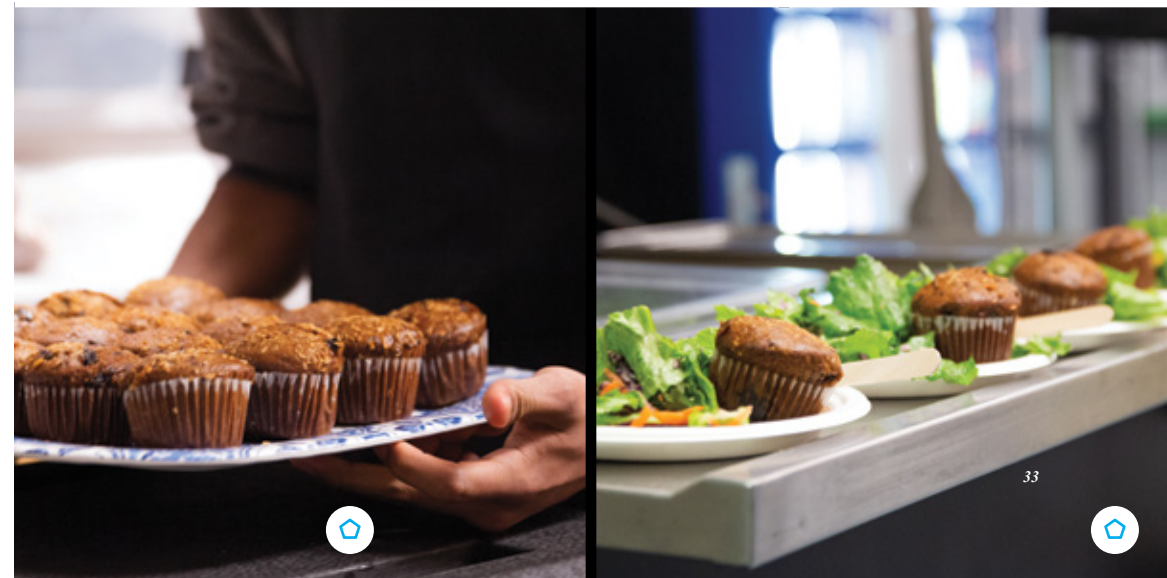
Flourish Delivers Hot Pans and Groceries to Reynolds School with time to setup for Lunch.



Lunches are served hot to students with a variety of options for those with dietary restrictions.



Students from the culinary class support the end of the journey by serving their peers at lunch.

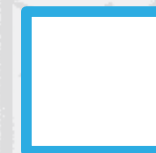


5.

Why Start a School Food Program?

Starting a school food program is about more than providing meals—it's about creating environments where every child feels cared for, included, and supported. These programs address food insecurity, improve educational outcomes, and foster stronger connections within communities.

To truly understand the impact of a school food program, let's step into the shoes of one student.



6.

A Day in the Life of Alex



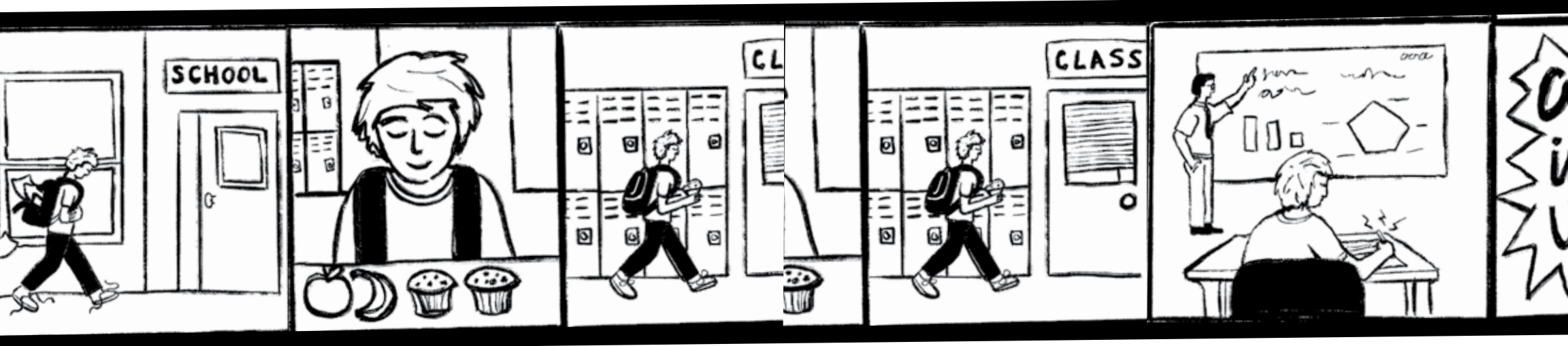
45%

THIS IS NOT JUST ALEX'S STORY: NEARLY 45% OF STUDENTS IN ALEX'S REGION SKIP BREAKFAST REGULARLY*

**Data from the latest Adolescent health survey, McCreary Centre Society)*

Morning Struggles

ALEX, A GRADE 6 STUDENT, OFTEN SKIPS BREAKFAST AT HOME BECAUSE MORNINGS ARE RUSHED, AND THERE ISN'T ALWAYS ENOUGH FOOD AVAILABLE. BY THE TIME ALEX REACHES SCHOOL, HUNGER TAKES OVER—MAKING IT HARD TO FOCUS, LEARN, OR FULLY ENGAGE IN CLASS.

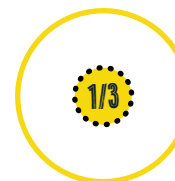


a Warm Welcome

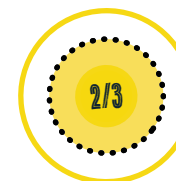
AT ALEX'S SCHOOL, THERE IS A UNIVERSAL SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM. AS ALEX WALKS INTO THE SCHOOL, A BREAKFAST SNACK TABLE AWAITS, FILLED WITH FRESH FRUIT, MUFFINS, AND OTHER SIMPLE OPTIONS. A FRIENDLY TEAM GREET'S ALL STUDENTS, NO QUESTIONS ASKED. ALEX PICKS UP AN APPLE AND A MUFFIN, FEELING AT EASE IN THE INCLUSIVE, STIGMA-FREE ENVIRONMENT. THIS SMALL BUT MEANINGFUL INTERACTION SETS A POSITIVE TONE FOR ALEX'S DAY, ENSURING A SENSE OF BELONGING AND READINESS TO LEARN.

energy for learning

ALEX HEADS TO CLASS FEELING ENERGIZED AND READY TO LEARN. ALEX PARTICIPATES MORE ACTIVELY, STAYS FOCUSED DURING LESSONS, AND EVEN CONTRIBUTES NEW IDEAS IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS. RESEARCH SHOWS THAT WELL-NOURISHED STUDENTS LIKE ALEX EXPERIENCE IMPROVED CONCENTRATION AND FEWER BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES.



Elementary Schools



Secondary Schools

One-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of students in secondary schools do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school (McCreary Centre Society. Adolescent Health Survey.)

When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.



Building connection

AT LUNCHTIME, ALEX EATS ALONGSIDE PEERS IN A WELCOMING, BUFFET-STYLE SETTING. DIVERSE DISHES ARE SERVED, REFLECTING THE CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS OF THE STUDENTS. OVER SHARED MEALS, ALEX MAKES NEW FRIENDS AND FEELS MORE CONNECTED TO THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY. EATING TOGETHER FOSTERS A SENSE OF BELONGING AND CREATES OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONVERSATIONS WITH CLASSMATES AND TEACHERS.



BY THE END OF THE DAY, ALEX HAS HAD TWO NUTRITIOUS MEALS AND FELT SUPPORTED IN A CARING, INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT. THANKS TO THE SCHOOL'S UNIVERSAL FOOD PROGRAM, ALEX HAS THE ENERGY TO PARTICIPATE FULLY IN LEARNING AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES. PROGRAMS LIKE THIS ENSURE THAT NO STUDENT IS LEFT BEHIND, PROVIDING THE NEEDED SUSTENANCE THAT HELPS STUDENTS THRIVE ACADEMICALLY, SOCIALLY, AND EMOTIONALLY.

Ending the day strong

Countries need to prioritize *learning*, not just schooling. Children must be *healthy*, not hungry, if they are to match learning opportunities with the *ability to learn.*

7. Feeding Futures, One Meal at a Time

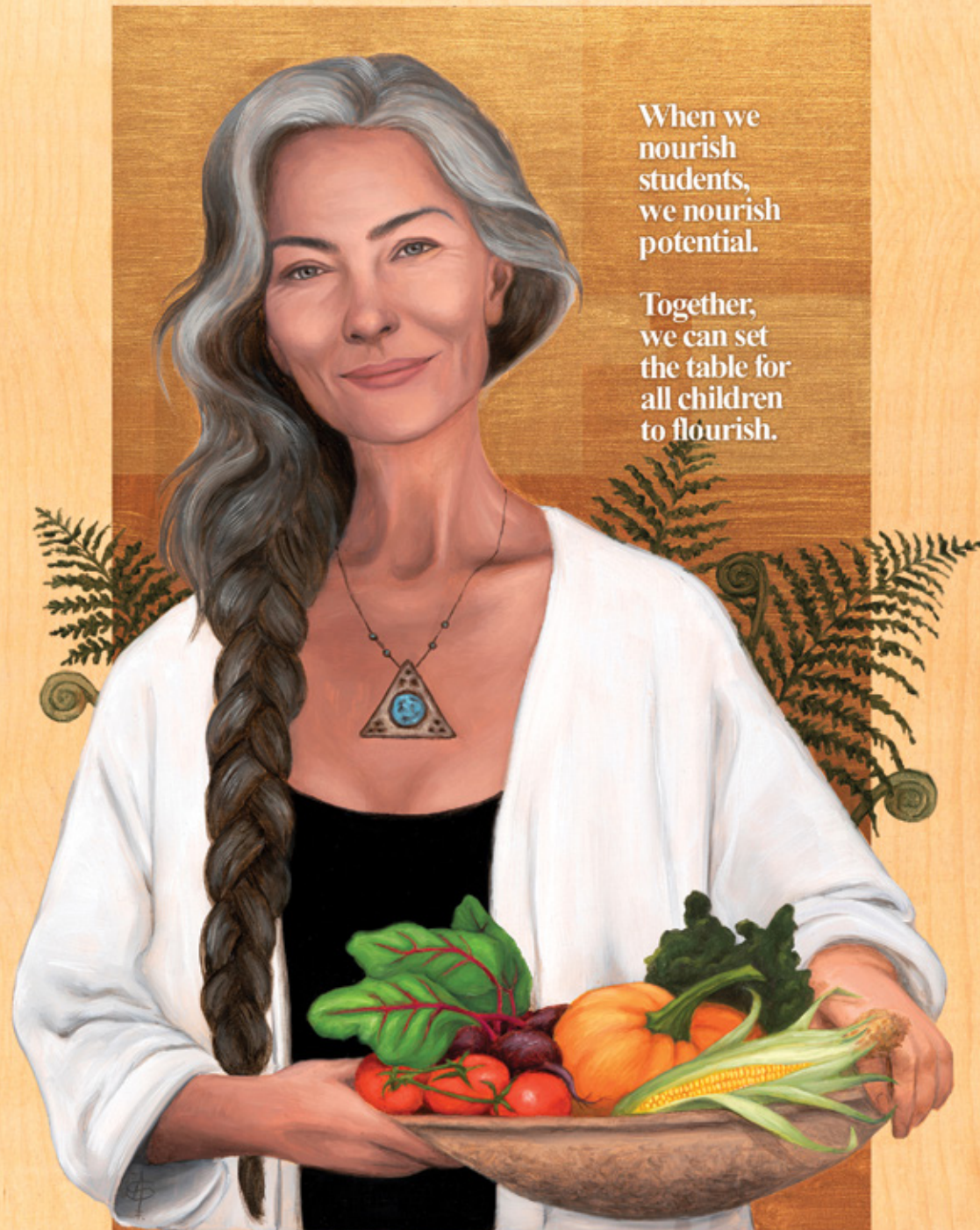
With growing recognition of the role school food programs play in addressing systemic challenges, there has never been a better time to invest in their development. Government initiatives, like *British Columbia's Feeding Futures program*, are paving the way for increased funding and support for school food systems.

Starting a program today means contributing to a healthier, more equitable future for all students.



It is more than just feeding students. At its core, a school food program is about creating a space where every student feels cared for, included, and ready to thrive. By providing universally accessible, nourishing meals, schools become places where no child feels the weight of hunger or exclusion.

These programs foster connection and belonging, building stronger relationships between students, staff, and the community. They reflect the simple but profound belief that when we share meals, we share care—and that care ripples outward into learning growth and brighter futures.





Flourish!

— School Food Society —

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FlourishSchoolFood.ca

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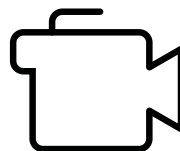


Setting the Table for Learning

Planning

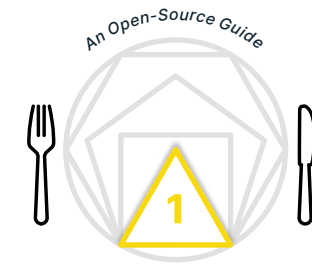


Understand your community's needs, define your vision, and set clear goals. This phase lays the groundwork for everything that follows.




Video Summary





**Building a Community Rooted
School Food Program**

Planning

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Planning



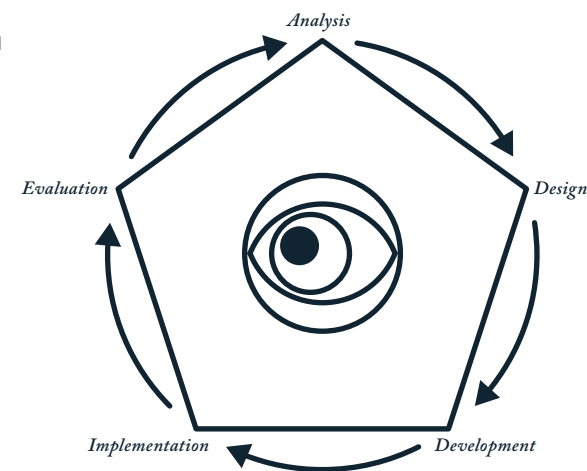
Video Summary

Begin by understanding your community's needs, defining your vision, and setting clear goals. This phase lays the groundwork for everything that follows.



Careful and thoughtful planning is the foundation of a successful school food program. This phase helps ensure that your program is rooted in community needs, supported by clear goals, and positioned for long-term sustainability. Flourish believes in starting with purpose and building with care.

One possible approach to guide your planning process is the **ADDIE educational design framework**—Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. This structured method, used by Flourish in designing its program, provides a clear and iterative process for program development. While **ADDIE** is not the only way to plan, it offers a valuable starting point for organizations, groups, or schools. For more information about how Flourish used **ADDIE** principals to design its school food program, view the webinar from our early days: **Farm to School Approach to School Food Program Development.** ¹



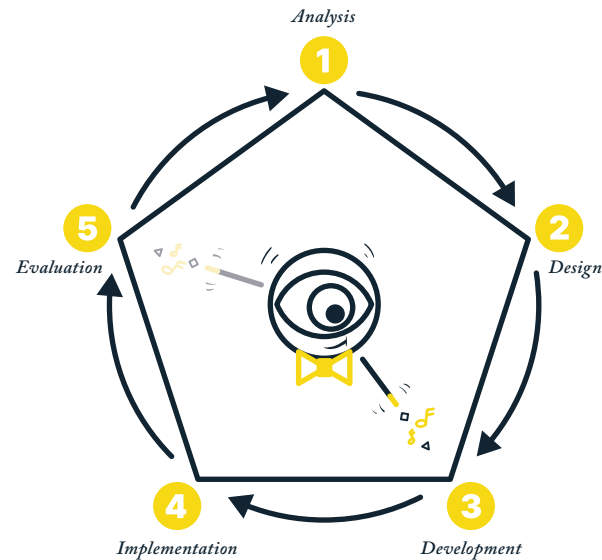
Resource Links

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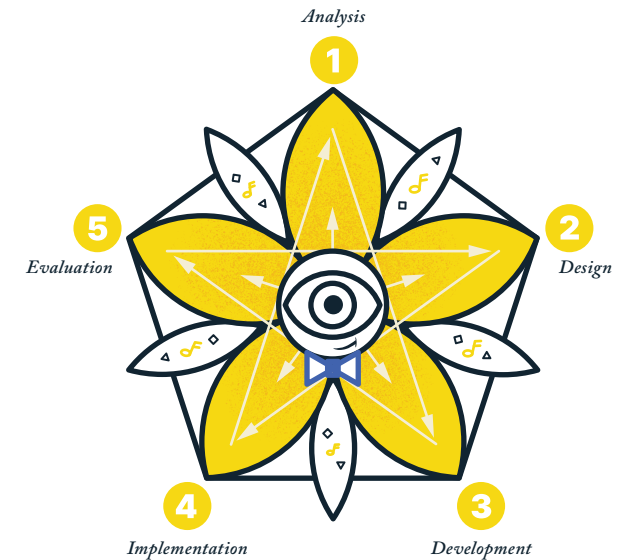
Farm to School Approach to School Food Programs

The A.D.D.I.E Educational Design Framework



You can think of it like this **logical and cyclical process**; starting with **1 Analysis**, then moving clockwise. However, more accurately, it's a ★ dynamic experience, where you're constantly dancing around in a non-linear fashion while conducting everything from the center. And so your focus can be at multiple places at once with a project that's in motion, but, if you follow it, you'll eventually flourish.

A Constantly Evolving Process



In practice, it's a lot like jazz, an orchestra, or Nature. You kind of end up feeling like a conductor in the center of it and improvising upon the educated experiences gathered from each phase. For example, focusing energy towards **3 Development** and **5 Evaluation**, to bring out trustworthy information needed to navigate towards the fertile ground needed for growth, and then cueing in the **2 Design** phase to test out your theories. Then shift to **5 Evaluation**, back to **1 Analysis**, return to **2 Design** and then onto **3 Development** and **4 Implementation** again. There's a feel to it and it'll be entirely unique to your project.

2. Developing a Mission, Vision, Goals & Objectives

A clear mission and vision inspire action and provide the foundation for a successful school food program. Your mission defines the purpose of your program, while your vision sets the overarching long-term aspirations. Together, they provide clarity and direction to guide the work ahead.



At **Flourish!** School Food Society our mission is to support efficient, nourishing school food services, hands-on food literacy programming, and the development of nourishing food environments in schools. Flourish's vision is that all students can access nourishing food and learn through immersion in all aspects of food—growing, harvesting, preparing, sharing, and composting. These guiding statements reflect the core purpose of Flourish's work and drive every decision made.

By developing a robust mission and vision, and translating them into clear goals and objectives, you create a framework that guides your efforts and ensures alignment with your program's purpose. This clarity helps inspire partners, secure resources, and sustain momentum as your program grows. For us, it was foundationally important to develop our vision and mission through dialogue and discussion with key community partners.



Kids plant lettuce in the Flourish Garden at Pexsien Elementary, Victoria B.C.

3. Assessing Community Needs

Every school and community is unique. To create a program that meets local needs, you must assess the context and demand carefully.



Is there demand?

Understanding demand requires distinguishing between real and perceived needs. Once the demand has been assessed, the next step is to gather credible data to inform your program and ensure it meets the real needs of your community.



Perceived Demand:

Driven by anecdotal evidence or assumptions, which may not always align with actual needs.



Real Demand:

Based on data and observable patterns, such as high rates of food insecurity or school absenteeism tied to hunger. To identify real demand:

3. Consult existing data, such as school lunch participation rates or regional food bank statistics.
4. Conduct surveys, meetings, and/or focus groups with students, families, and educators to gain insights into their challenges and needs.

Collecting Credible Data

Collecting credible data is the foundation of designing a school food program that responds effectively to the unique needs of your community. Robust data ensures your program targets real gaps, builds stakeholder confidence, and supports sustainable impact. This section offers practical tools and draws on insights from our precursor study, *Opportunities for Building Healthier School Food Environments in the Capital Region 1*, which helped inform the development of our work.

Practical Steps for Collecting Data

Leverage Diverse Tools:



1. Use surveys, interviews, and focus groups to engage students, parents, educators, and community members.
2. Host community consultations to create a dialogue around challenges, priorities, and opportunities.
3. Collect both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure a comprehensive understanding of local needs and barriers.

Collaborate with Partners:

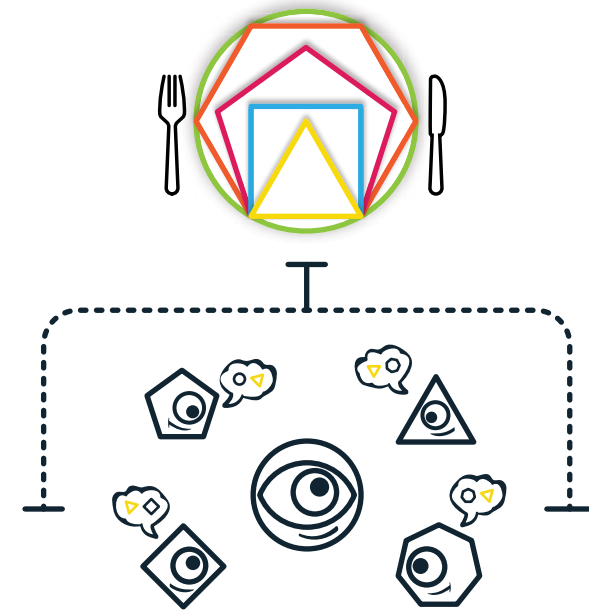


1. Partner with local organizations, nonprofits, and health authorities to access existing datasets and research.
2. Work with community partners to co-design data collection tools that are culturally relevant and inclusive.

Ensure Inclusivity and Representation:



1. Prioritize the voices of underrepresented groups, such as marginalized families, Indigenous communities, & new immigrants.
2. Use multilingual surveys & culturally sensitive methods to ensure all community members can participate.



It is understandable that collecting many data points can feel like an overwhelming experience. **However, going out and discussing with as many people as you can about their needs is critical for properly supporting a school food program.** Once these connections are made, it will facilitate many of the steps required to be successful.

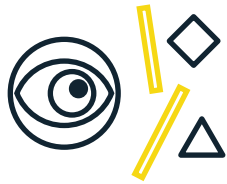
Resource Links

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Insights from the Capital Region Study

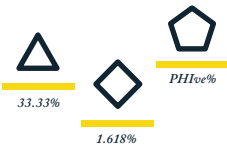
The **Opportunities for Building Healthier School Food Environments in the Capital Region 1** report offers actionable insights for collecting and applying credible data. The following is a summary of key insights:

Identify Barriers:



1. Use data collection and **observable experience** to explore systemic barriers, such as affordability, stigma, and logistical challenges to accessing and distributing healthy food.
2. Highlight infrastructure gaps, such as the need for better kitchen facilities, HR support or delivery systems within schools.

Map Resources:



1. Conduct an inventory of available resources, including looking closely at both the commercial and charitable food sectors and local school food landscape.
2. Use this information to identify opportunities for partnerships and efficient use of existing assets.

Engage partners:



1. Actively involve educators, parents, and students in identifying needs and shaping solutions.
2. Programs that engage partners early often gain stronger buy-in and long-term support.

Resource Links

1

Focus on Sustainability:



1. Collect data on potential partnerships with local food systems, such as farmers or food rescue organizations, to integrate sustainable practices into the program.
2. Assess the environmental and social impact of proposed initiatives to ensure long-term feasibility.
3. Closely track financial information and understand costs with as much detail as possible.

Applying your findings

Once data has been collected, it's essential to turn insights into action. Share your findings with key partners to build transparency and trust. Use the data to:



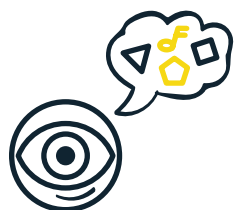
1. Identify priority areas for intervention, such as meal accessibility or sourcing improvements.
2. Tailor program goals and objectives to address the specific needs identified in your community.
3. Develop a plan for ongoing data collection to continuously adapt and improve the program.

By grounding your program in credible data and leveraging local insights, you can create a school food program that is responsive, sustainable, and impactful.

4. Communicating the Vision

With a clear understanding of community needs and actionable insights, the next step is to communicate your vision in a way that inspires and engages partners. Effective communication builds trust, attracts support, and ensures alignment among partners.

Good Practices:



1. Use clear and inclusive language that resonates with your audience.
2. Share your vision through multiple channels, including presentations, community events, and online.
3. **Highlight stories and data that demonstrate the program's potential impact.**
4. Invest in professional visual communications / graphic design to support effective translation of your vision and key communications goals. Effective communication will help grow support and buy-in for your work and is worth the investment.



There were a few key communications that particularly supported Flourish's quick growth:



1. Large group meeting with key partners in Sooke School district to communicate growing vision and seek input into school food program design, including District leadership, administrators, teachers, parents and related community organizations (this helped formalize commitment and support for our vision within the school district);



2. Webinar presentation supported by the BC Chapter of the Coalition for Healthy School Food about our goals and findings from our region (this helped generate some interest in financial support for our work).



3. Face-to-face tours of our operations with key partners (this helped bring additional support to our work).



4. Thoughtfully designed, brand-aligned logo, website and resources (this helped grow buy-in from key partners in schools and community and continued to draw support to our work).

5. Community & School Partnerships

Strong partnerships are the backbone of a successful school food program. Partnerships bring resources, expertise, and credibility to your initiative while building a shared sense of ownership.

willingness to listen to feedback enhance collaboration and strengthen these relationships over time.

“How can we help?”

One of the most important lessons Flourish has learned is the value of supporting schools in ways that align with their priorities and challenges. Schools are often inundated with external requests for change or the integration of special causes, which can feel overwhelming. **Instead of demanding transformation, Flourish’s approach is to recognize and celebrate the incredible work that schools already do. By expressing appreciation for their efforts and asking, “How can we help?” Flourish fosters partnerships that are collaborative rather than confrontational.** This approach of “coming alongside” rather than “breaking down the gates” may seem subtle but has proven transformative in building trust and achieving meaningful, lasting impact.

Partnership Strategy



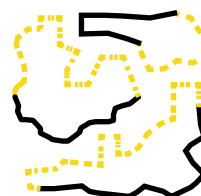
Partnerships are foundational to the success of Flourish’s school food programs, built on the principle of mutual benefit. By definition, partnerships thrive when all participants gain value from their involvement. Flourish’s strategy prioritizes co-creation, actively seeking partners who are willing to collaborate from the outset. This approach fosters a culture of shared ownership, where stakeholders contribute ideas and efforts to shape the program’s design and operations. The emphasis on co-creation ensures that partnerships are dynamic, inclusive, and adaptable to evolving needs.

Understanding the benefits that partners receive is essential to establishing sustainable, long-term relationships. Flourish invests in creating an environment of free and open dialogue, encouraging transparency and trust among all parties. Regular communication and the

Identifying Potential Partners:

The success of a school food program hinges on forging strong partnerships with key stakeholders who provide the resources, expertise, and infrastructure required to sustain operations. Certain partners are indispensable, each bringing unique contributions to the program’s success:

School Districts



Building relationships with school district staff and elected officials is critical. These leaders offer valuable insights and support. Their endorsement ensures alignment with district-wide goals and smooth program implementation. Relationships beyond individual schools foster consistency and scalability.

School staff



Collaborating with all school unions — e.g., administrators (principals and vice principals), teachers, and CUPE (educational assistants, clerical staff, facilities staff) — is vital. Each group plays a distinct and important role in supporting the program. Their collective buy-in ensures smooth integration into daily school routines and stronger program adoption.

Food Makers



Chefs and culinary professionals are crucial for designing menus, ordering ingredients, and preparing large volumes of food efficiently. Collaboration with culinary arts instructors, chefs in non-profits, and local businesses adds valuable insights into school operations and food production. These partnerships allow the program to maintain high standards for quality and scalability.

Facilities



A well-equipped, large-scale kitchen is essential for food production. Partnering with organizations that can lease commercial kitchen space ensures that operations are functionally aligned with program needs. When sharing facilities, building trust and maintaining positive relationships with other users of the space are critical for success.

Food Growers



Farmers and local food producers supply fresh, high-quality ingredients, forming the foundation of the program's meals. They contribute to the program's commitment to healthy, flavorful dishes. Strong partnerships with growers ensure consistent access to fresh produce and foster connections to the local food system.

Food distributors



Reliable distributors streamline the process of acquiring food efficiently and cost-effectively. While some ingredients come directly from growers, distributors provide the infrastructure and logistics that are the backbone of large-scale food service. Input from chefs and food makers often helps in identifying the best distributors.

Critical Food Folks



Their knowledge of the commercial and charitable food sector is invaluable.

These are individuals with expertise and a passion for improving local food systems. They help build organizational capacity and connect stakeholders, ensuring the program's vision is realized. Their advocacy for sustainable, community-based food initiatives strengthens the program's impact.

Environmental health officers



Partnering with local environmental health officers is highly recommended. Their guidance ensures compliance with health and safety standards, offering essential support for successful program operations. ***Don't fear these people; embrace their knowledge and seek their guidance.***

Other partners that may be of benefit:

Beyond essential partners, additional collaborations can bring significant value and strengthen the impact of your school food program. For **Flourish!**, the following types of partners have proven extremely valuable:

Local Business Sponsors.

Businesses that provide in-kind contributions, such as equipment or supplies, or financial support to help sustain the program's operations.

Provincial & national organizations.

Partnerships with groups like the Coalition for Healthy School Food, Food Banks BC, Public Health Association of BC, and BC Agriculture in the Classroom have provided insights, advocacy, and logistical support. Connections with staff from the Ministries of Agriculture, Education, and Health have also contributed to aligning the program with broader policy goals.

Tip

When seeking additional partners, prioritize local organizations, businesses, and community leaders whose missions and values align with your program. Engaging these partners early in the process and involving them in crafting the program's mission and values fosters shared ownership and long-term commitment.

Other Organizations doing similar work.

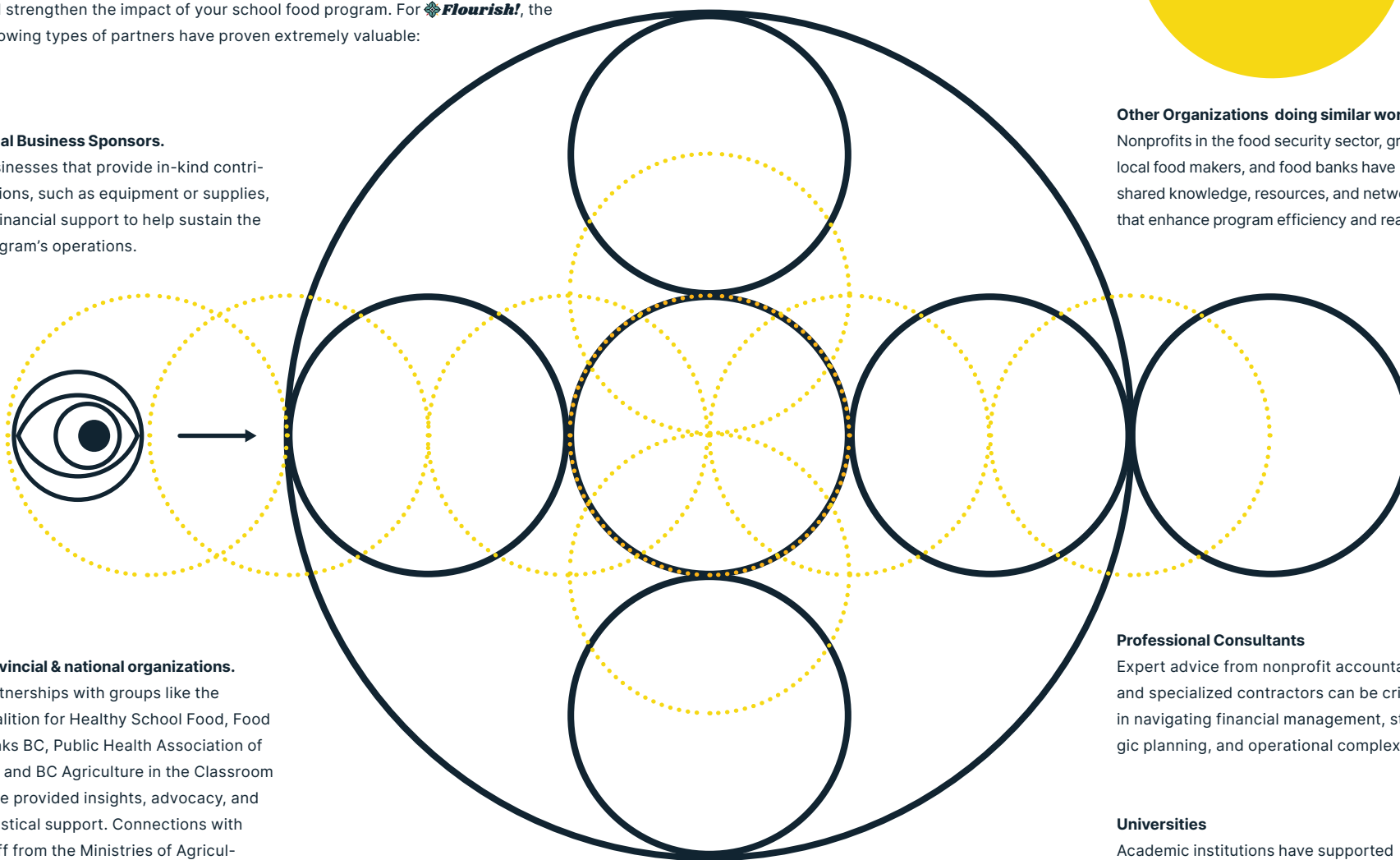
Nonprofits in the food security sector, grocers, local food makers, and food banks have shared knowledge, resources, and networks that enhance program efficiency and reach.

Professional Consultants

Expert advice from nonprofit accountants and specialized contractors can be critical in navigating financial management, strategic planning, and operational complexities.

Universities

Academic institutions have supported program evaluation and development, with professors & students contributing research, data analysis, & innovative solutions.



Contracts with School Boards:

Establishing clear agreements with school boards is essential to define responsibilities, expectations, and operational details, ensuring a smooth collaboration between all parties. These contracts provide a framework for accountability and transparency, helping to align the goals of the school board and the food program.

Flexibility

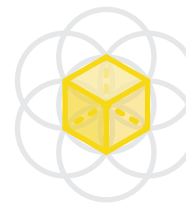


This formal agreement ensures clarity on the scope of services, funding arrangements, and mutual responsibilities. While contracts are preferred, note that it is also possible to work with individual schools without formal contracts, and relying instead on agreements to provide food at a predetermined rate. This flexible approach allowed **Flourish!** to tailor solutions to the specific needs and capacities of each school while maintaining operational efficiency.

School Selection Process

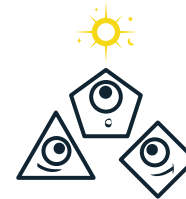
Collaborating with schools to assess their readiness for a food program is a critical first step in ensuring its success. This involves open dialogue to understand each school's unique needs and providing tailored support for essential systems like meal distribution, space allocation, and staff involvement. A thorough assessment of the following areas is key:

Infrastructure & space



Evaluate the school's existing kitchen facilities, including appliances and storage space. Determine where food will be served and eaten and understand how these spaces are currently utilized outside of the potential food program. Identifying potential conflicts or limitations in space usage is vital for seamless integration.

Human capacity



Identify who will be involved in serving food, their available time, and contingency plans for staff absences. Dedicated paid staff to manage food service has proven to be a critical factor for program success. **Celebrate and support champions** within the school; those who are willing to go above and beyond to make the program work effectively.

School systems



Review the timing and flow of mealtimes within the school day. Consider factors such as the amount of time students have to eat, who supervises them during meals, and how the current school schedule might create challenges for rolling out a new food program. Understanding these dynamics helps to anticipate and address logistical complexities.

Students at Reynolds Secondary, Victoria B.C., strengthen their life-skills by pitching in to help with the Flourish School Food Program.





The **Flourish!** Model

Schools are responsible for serving the food provided to students. To ensure smooth operations, we collaborate closely with schools to understand their logistical plans and provide advice and input to support these systems. We recognize that the most complex challenge is often moving food “from the door to the belly.”

The structure of the modern school day, which places limited emphasis on mealtimes, can make this last step particularly difficult. Aligning the operations with the school’s needs and supporting their food service logistics ensures that food reaches students without creating undue strain on school staff. Creating a truly nourishing school food environment requires systemic changes to the way schools prioritize and structure mealtimes. This shift is essential to maximize the impact of school food programs and ensure students have the time and support to fully benefit from them. This is a work in progress.



Supporting Schools to Be Successful:

Ensuring that schools feel equipped and supported is central to Flourish’s approach to school food programs. We provide schools with the tools, resources, and ongoing communication necessary to foster success and address challenges effectively.

Resource binders



Each school receives a binder containing concise, practical information to support safe food handling, along with materials that emphasize the importance of school meal programs. The binder also includes guidelines on good practices for sharing food with students, promoting cultural inclusion through food, and addressing food insecurity within the community.

Ongoing advice and communication



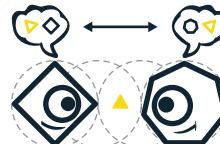
We provide regular updates and practical tips through printed posters delivered with food orders and electronic communications sent to school staff involved in food service. These resources are designed to offer timely, actionable advice that supports day-to-day operations.

Professional development



Hosting professional development sessions aimed at encouraging transformational leadership in school food systems can also be offered. These sessions provide a space for staff to share ideas, learn best practices, and cultivate innovative approaches to improving meal programs.

Feedback and relationship-building:



A critical part of our support strategy is maintaining open lines of communication with schools. We regularly check in with key staff, including principals and food service personnel, to understand how the program is working and identify areas for improvement. We place a high value on receiving feedback about what isn’t working well, as these insights help us refine and adapt our operations. Building trust and fostering positive relationships with school staff is fundamental to ensuring the long-term success of our programs.

Building & Maintaining Strong Partnerships:

Strong partnerships are the foundation of a successful school food program, and maintaining these relationships requires intentional effort, transparency, and humility. Flourish emphasizes the following strategies to build and sustain meaningful collaborations:

Regular communication and shared goals: Open and frequent communication ensures that partners remain aligned with the program's mission and objectives. Clearly defined, shared goals create a sense of ownership and mutual investment in success.

Celebrate Successes: Acknowledging milestones and achievements is key to strengthening relationships. Involving partners in program celebrations reinforces their value and contributions, fostering a sense of pride and collaboration.

Seek feedback and take action: Continuous improvement relies on soliciting honest feedback and asking critical questions. When something isn't working, act quickly to address the issue and clearly communicate the actions taken and their outcomes. This approach demonstrates accountability and responsiveness.

Be accountable No organization is perfect, and owning up to errors is essential for building trust. Transparently communicating about mistakes and the steps taken to resolve them fosters credibility and deepens partner relationships.

Challenge assumptions & question approaches: Encourage a culture of humility within your organization by questioning assumptions and evaluating approaches regularly. Sharing these reflections with partners and colleagues, with compassion and respect, creates space for growth and innovation.



“

If we could provide food for all students, this would be the best way of incorporating nutritional education in our curriculum. Seeing the growth in food and choices students are making about what to eat and try has been excellent since we started the lunch program with Flourish. It would mean healthier adults making healthier choices. It would remove so much financial and organizational pressure on our families.

Principal – Elementary School



6. Funding & Financial Management

A strong financial strategy ensures the sustainability of your program. Flourish takes an enterprising approach to funding and has built a detailed financial model to help determine a price to charge schools for our food services. With a clear price, we could negotiate contracts from a position of clarity.

❖ **Flourish!** were fortunate to have a School District partner who supported their pilot program and helped them develop this financial model and cost certainty. They didn't start with it; they built it after 100 days of trialling their kitchen program and providing daily food service to eight schools. Without trialling it and doing the work, it would have been very hard to develop the model with certainty. **A template of a financial model can be accessed in the link below. 1**

With contract funding supporting the core of our food service operations, we have begun strategically developing other revenue streams from community sponsorship, donations and grants. These streams are not leaned on to support the core of our operations, but rather help us further develop the following areas:

Resource Links

1

Financial Model

2

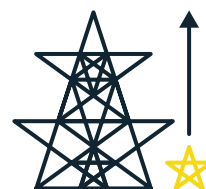
Budget and Financial Reporting Sheet

Capacity	To do "research and development" and create new programs or services.
Capital Assets	Like vehicles, kitchen equipment, and potentially one day a new kitchen.
Food Literacy	Support new resources and programming that can help deepen and strengthen the core food service work we do.
Universal Food for all	To achieve this mission, a cost shared approach will be necessary.

Securing Funding

Establishing a robust and diversified funding strategy is critical for maintaining and expanding school food programs. This requires a combination of careful planning, clear financial objectives, and strategic partnerships.

Developing a Fundraising Plan



- 1. Diversify funding streams around a sustainable revenue source that can maintain your operations:**
Explore grants, donations, sponsorships, and in-kind contributions to create a balanced and reliable revenue model.
- 2. Set financial goals:**
Develop realistic financial goals and timelines that align with program objectives.
- 3. Create a budget:**
Support your fundraising efforts with a detailed and transparent budget that accounts for operational costs, infrastructure investments, and growth.
Scan the QR code to see our budget and financial reporting spreadsheet. 2

The Importance of Partnership



1. Leverage partnerships for financial sustainability:

Strategic partnerships can be instrumental in connecting with funding opportunities, receiving discounts, and fostering cost-saving efficiencies. Collaborations with like-minded organizations, local businesses, and community leaders create win-win scenarios that enhance financial resilience.

2. Sponsorship strategy:

Flourish has developed a Sponsorship Strategy that outlines approaches and tools for building mutually beneficial partnerships. This strategy provides practical guidance on fostering relationships that deliver value for all parties involved. [Use the link below to see our Sponsorship Strategy.](#) ¹

3. Optimize spending:

Regularly review expenses related to food procurement, logistics, and labor. Programs like Flourish's food aggregation initiative enable cost-effective bulk purchasing of staple ingredients while maintaining quality. These strategies help maximize the program's impact without compromising on core values.

Resource Links

¹

[Sponsorship Strategy](#)

Financial Sustainability & Long-term Funding Management

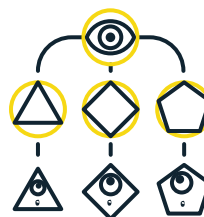
Achieving financial sustainability and managing long-term funding effectively are essential for the stability and growth of any school food program. This requires strategic planning, financial transparency, and a proactive approach to securing diverse and reliable funding sources.

Detailed Financial Reporting



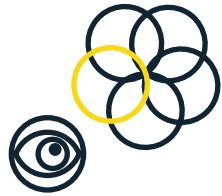
One key aspect of financial sustainability is the use of detailed financial reporting to build trust with funders and demonstrate responsible stewardship of resources. Transparent practices ensure stakeholders feel confident in their investment and strengthen long-term partnerships. To safeguard against unforeseen financial challenges, allocating a percentage of annual funding to an emergency reserve is critical. This reserve provides a safety net to manage funding delays, unexpected cost increases, or other financial shocks without disrupting operations.

Diversifying Funding Streams



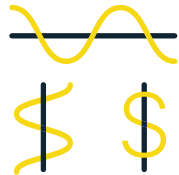
Diversifying funding streams is another pillar of financial sustainability. A balanced revenue base that combines government grants, private donations, and corporate sponsorships ensures stability while reducing reliance on any single source. Public funding, while invaluable, can fluctuate over time, making it essential to work collaboratively with policymakers to advocate for sustained government support, such as our goal to build universal school meal programs. Programs can also benefit from applying for targeted grants related to education, health, and food security from foundations and charitable organizations.

Partnering with local businesses



Partnering with local businesses further enhances financial resilience. These partnerships can fund specific aspects of the program, such as purchasing equipment or subsidizing meals for students. Maintaining regular communication with donors and business partners is essential; sharing program achievements and impact ensures continued support and fosters a sense of shared purpose. Additionally, offering optional paid services, such as catering for staff events or community programs, provides a supplemental income stream that supports financial stability while remaining aligned with the program's mission.

Financial forecasting



This is a critical tool for long-term planning. **The financial model forecast 1**, offers guidance on anticipating future funding needs and adapting strategies to changing circumstances. Regular updates to financial plans ensure that the program remains aligned with both its goals and external economic factors. By adopting these strategies, a school food program can achieve the financial resilience needed to provide nourishing meals and lasting impact for its community.

All resources shared within this book

1

Financial Model

2

Budget + Financial Reporting Template

3

Sponsorship Strategy

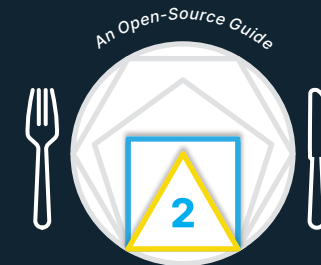
4

Capital Region Study

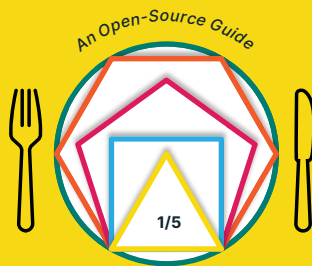
5



Farm to School Approach to School Food Programs



You're now ready for
Phase 2: Setup



Building a Community Rooted School Food Program

Written content

FlourishSchoolFood.ca

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Creative Director | Graphic Design

RossAlexanderWhelan.com

Illustrations

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Mother Nature Painting

[AnneSophieCournoyer - AetherealMoods.com](http://AnneSophieCournoyer-AetherealMoods.com)

Film | Sound | Drone

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Box Production

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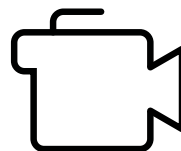


Setting the Table for Learning

Setup

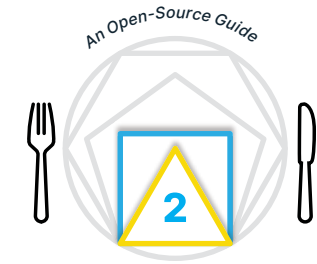


Build the foundation for your program by preparing infrastructure, securing resources, and assembling a team.



Video Summary





Building a Community Rooted
School Food Program

Setup

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◆ Purchase or Lease Kitchen/Storage Space	6
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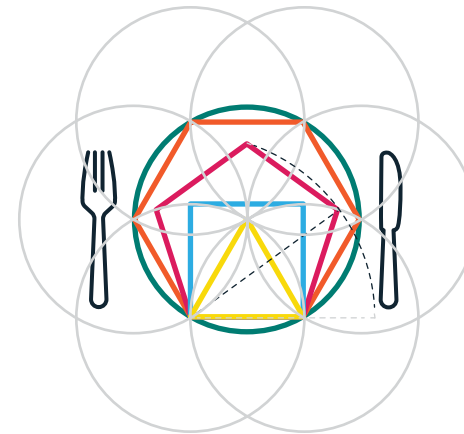
Setup



Build the foundation for your program by preparing infrastructure, securing resources, and assembling a team.



Once your vision is in place and a clear plan has been developed, the next step is setting up the infrastructure and systems to bring your school food program to life. This phase focuses on preparing the kitchen, securing resources, ensuring compliance, and building a capable team. Following Good Practice, this step creates a solid operational foundation that reflects your program's goals and values.



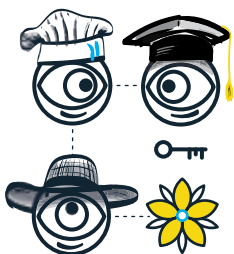
2. Commercial Kitchen

Choosing the right kitchen and storage space is a critical step in establishing an efficient and sustainable school food program. A functional commercial kitchen ensures that meals can be prepared at scale while aligning with the program's service model and operational requirements.



Purchase or Lease Kitchen / Storage Space

Accessibility



Firstly, accessibility is a key consideration when selecting a location. A kitchen that is conveniently located near schools and suppliers minimizes transport time and costs, allowing for faster delivery and fresher meals.

The capacity of the space is equally important; it must be able to handle large-scale meal preparation, including adequate room for staff, equipment, and be able to accommodate an efficient workflow for each process.

Community centers, food banks, or shared commercial kitchens often provide affordable and well-equipped options.

Reliable Utilities



Secondly, the facilities themselves should meet essential standards, with reliable utilities such as power, water, and proper ventilation. Additionally, the space must be equipped with the necessary tools and appliances to support high-volume meal production. If purchasing a space outright is not feasible, leasing or partnering with existing facilities offers a cost-effective alternative. Community centers, food banks, or shared commercial kitchens often provide affordable and well-equipped options. These partnerships can reduce startup costs while fostering collaboration with values-aligned organizations.

Licenses & Permits

Operating a commercial kitchen requires strict adherence to local health and safety regulations, ensuring that food preparation meets established standards and protects public health. Compliance begins with obtaining the necessary permits and licenses, which vary by region but are essential for legal operation.

Food Establishment Permit



A Food Establishment Permit is a critical requirement issued by local health authorities. This permit ensures that the kitchen complies with food safety regulations, including proper sanitation, equipment standards, and handling procedures.

Business License 1

This important piece of documentation is often required to register the program with municipal authorities, formalizing its operations within the community.

Staff Certifications



Staff certifications are another vital component of regulatory compliance. Food handlers must complete approved food safety training, such as **2 FOODSAFE Level 1**, to demonstrate competency in safe food handling practices. Supervisory staff may require advanced certifications, such as **FOODSAFE Level 2**, to oversee compliance and manage kitchen operations effectively. By securing the appropriate licenses and ensuring staff are fully certified, programs can operate with confidence, knowing they meet the necessary legal and safety requirements. This foundation not only ensures compliance but also builds trust with partners, funders, and the broader community.

Resource Links

1

[Business License BC](#)

2

[FoodSafe BC](#)

Procuring Equipment

Equipping your kitchen with the right tools is essential for ensuring smooth and efficient operations. A well-equipped kitchen supports high-volume meal production and maintains food quality and safety standards. Below is an overview of the equipment categorized as essential and nice-to-have, based on our operations and experience.

Essential Equipment List 3



Dish pit

A dish pit with a commercial-grade high-volume sanitizer to handle the cleaning demands of large-scale food preparation.



Stand Mixer

A stand mixer for baking or mixing large quantities of ingredients.

Resource Links

3

[Equipment Vendors](#)

Essential Equipment List

High Capacity Cooking Tools

High-capacity cooking tools such as a steam kettle, tilt skillet, combi oven, and steamer, are critical for preparing bulk meals efficiently.



Steam Kettle



Combi Oven



Steamer



Tilt Skillet

Tables & Counters

Adequate table and counter space for meal prep and portioning to streamline workflows.

Refrigerators & Freezers

To store perishable ingredients safely.

Refrigerated Vans

"Sprinter style" for transporting meals while maintaining temperature safety standards.

Supporting Equipment

Rack and rolls, baking sheets, miscellaneous kitchen utensils, and an immersion blender to meet everyday kitchen needs.

Trolleys and carts

To facilitate the movement of food and equipment within the kitchen.



Metro Mighty Light Carriers & Hotel Pans

Metro Mighty Light carriers and hotel pans with well-fitting lids for securely storing and transporting food.

Nice-to-have Items



Dehydrator



Robot Coup Veggie Slicer

Kitchen Setup

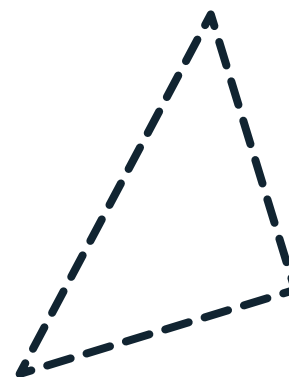
The setup of your kitchen should align closely with your service model and operational philosophy, ensuring efficiency, sustainability, and an enhanced meal experience for students.

Service model:

✦ **Flourish!** utilizes a buffet-style service, which significantly influences our kitchen setup and logistics. This approach requires pans for transporting meals but eliminates the need for individually packaging each serving significantly reducing both waste and cost.

By allowing students to choose their portion sizes, the buffet model reduces food waste while offering flexibility in menu design.

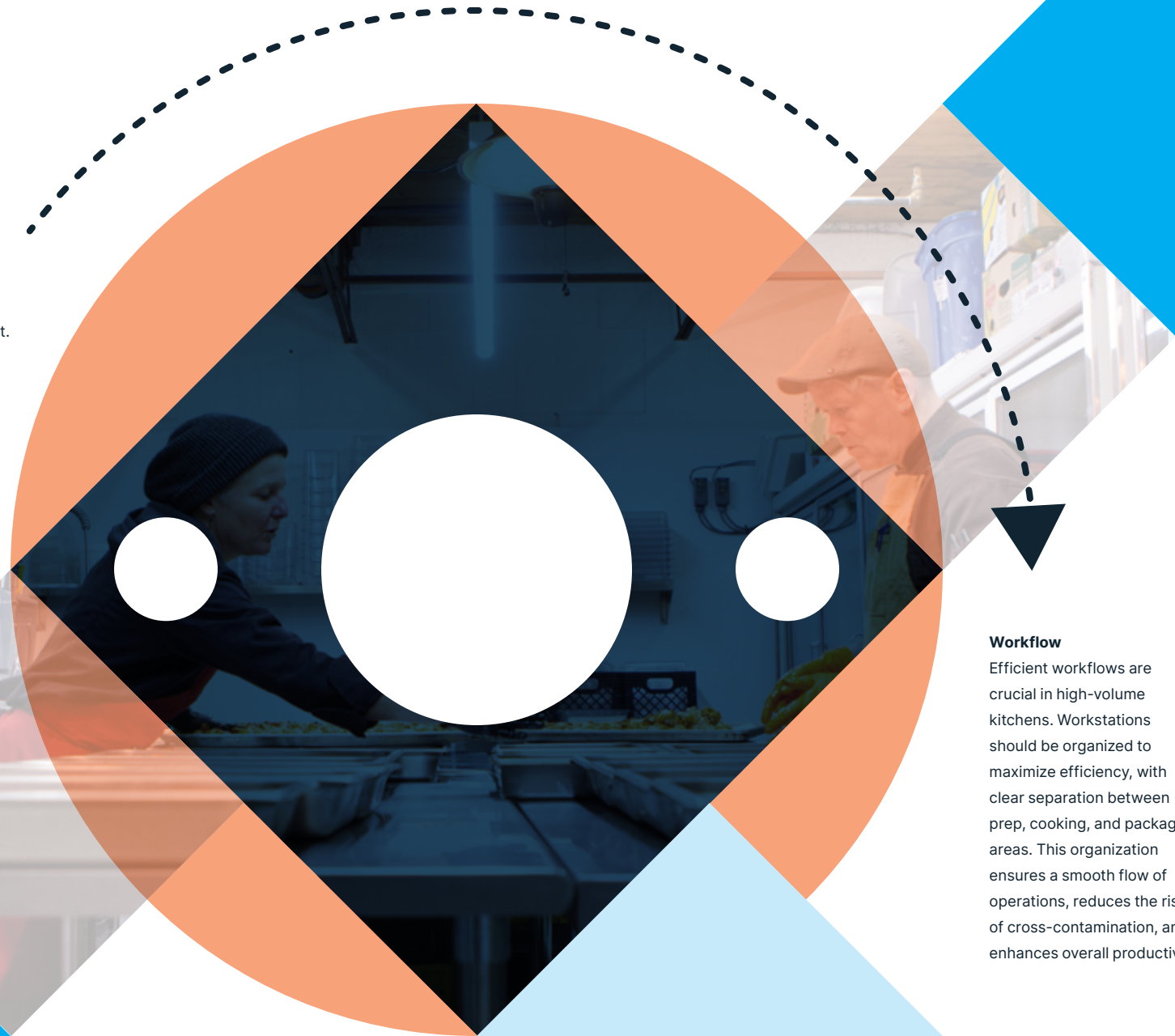
This method also significantly reduces labor costs associated with individual packaging. Schools further benefit by paying their own staff to serve food, as this creates opportunities for caring, well-supported adults to interact with students during mealtimes. The result is a more personalized and enriching dining experience for students, as well as cost savings overall, since the food can be provided at a lower price without the additional packaging labor and environment toll. These cost savings may make paying staff to serve food in schools possible.





Sustainability

Kitchen setups should incorporate sustainable practices to reduce the program's environmental impact. This includes sourcing ingredients locally, implementing composting systems, utilizing energy-efficient appliances, and minimizing the use of disposable packaging. These practices align with the broader goals of fostering environmental responsibility and community support.



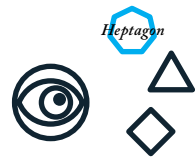
Workflow

Efficient workflows are crucial in high-volume kitchens. Workstations should be organized to maximize efficiency, with clear separation between prep, cooking, and packaging areas. This organization ensures a smooth flow of operations, reduces the risk of cross-contamination, and enhances overall productivity.

Food Storage Solutions

Effective food storage is essential to prevent spoilage, maintain food safety, and streamline kitchen operations. A well-organized storage system ensures efficiency, minimizes waste, and supports scalability as your program grows.

Labeled Storage Bins

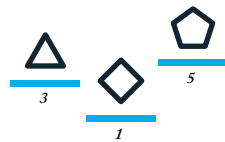


These are a key component for organizing dry goods, helping to prevent confusion and reducing waste by ensuring that ingredients are used before expiration.

Clear labeling allows staff to quickly locate items, saving time during meal preparation and maintaining consistency in operations. For perishable items, cold storage solutions such as walk-in coolers and freezers are indispensable.

These systems not only ensure the freshness of ingredients but also provide the capacity needed to handle bulk purchases and support large-scale meal production. Investing in reliable cold storage equipment helps maintain temperature control, reducing the risk of spoilage and ensuring food safety.

Inventory Management System



An effective inventory management system is also critical for tracking supplies and avoiding over-ordering. Regular inventory checks allow for better forecasting, ensuring that ingredients are replenished in a timely manner without creating excess. This practice improves cost efficiency and reduces food waste, aligning with both operational goals and sustainability efforts.



Executive Chef Ali ensuring that the orders for the day have all been met.

3. Regulatory Compliance

Food safety is a fundamental priority in school food programs, ensuring that every meal served meets the highest standards of quality and safety. Adhering to health regulations and implementing systems that go beyond compliance not only protects students' well-being but also reinforces trust in the program.

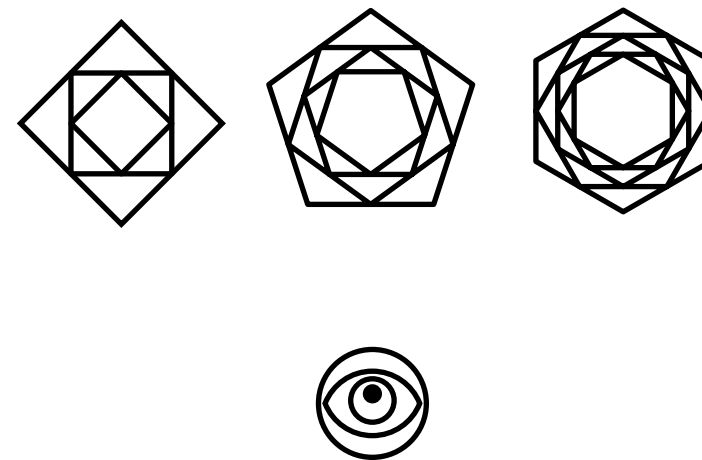
Critical practices



A detailed **1 Food Safety Plan** and **2 Sanitation Plan** are essential to maintaining high standards. These documents outline key processes and procedures, which all staff must read, understand, and follow.

Additionally, the program incorporates a **HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points)** plan to identify and mitigate potential risks at every stage of food preparation.

Rigorous monitoring and documentation of food storage, cooking, and cooking times and temperatures are essential to prevent contamination and ensure compliance with health standards. Proper training is also a foundation of food safety, with all staff educated in hygiene practices, correct handwashing techniques, and cross-contamination prevention.



Visual aids



Signage in the kitchen serves as a constant reminder for staff to follow best practices for hygiene and food handling. These visual aids reinforce training and help maintain consistent adherence to safety protocols.

Supporting Schools



Ensure food safety extends beyond the kitchen. School food service staff and volunteers receive clear guidance on best practices for handling and serving food, including detailed information about critical control points. Each participating school is licensed with their **Environmental Health Office** as a food service facility, and at least one staff member overseeing the program at each school holds a Food Safe Level 1 certification to oversee compliance and safety.

Resource Links

1

2

Food Safety Plan

Sanitation Plan

4. Food Sourcing

Without quality food you can go nowhere. Securing consistent, easy access to quality food is essential to any food program's long-term success.

Supplier Relationships



Building strong and reliable supplier relationships is essential for maintaining consistent access to high-quality ingredients. Partnering with local farmers and producers ensures a steady supply of fresh, seasonal foods, enhancing the nutritional value and taste of meals.

Collaborating with farm aggregators and cooperatives simplifies the procurement process, making it easier to access larger volumes with minimal effort. Diversifying suppliers is equally important to mitigate risks such as shortages or supply chain disruptions, ensuring the program can adapt to changing circumstances without compromising on quality.

Bulk/Wholesale Purchasing



Purchasing ingredients in bulk is a cost-effective strategy that supports efficient inventory management and aligns with the program's operational goals. Partnering with other organizations to collaborate on bulk orders can lead to better pricing and shared logistical benefits. Maintaining flexibility in procurement is also critical; incorporating rescued or surplus foods when available reduces costs and minimizes food waste while providing opportunities to introduce creative menu options. This approach supports both financial sustainability and environmental responsibility.

Food Quality Standards



Prioritizing food quality is key to delivering nourishing and sustainable meals. Ingredients should be minimally processed, locally grown, and in-season to ensure freshness and align with ecological goals. Ethical sourcing practices, such as supporting fair trade suppliers and promoting environmentally friendly farming methods, further reinforce the program's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. By emphasizing high food quality standards, the program fosters trust among stakeholders and delivers meals that reflect its values of health, equity, and environmental stewardship.

5. Building Your Team

A strong staffing structure begins with identifying key roles and the expertise required for each. The necessity of experienced and qualified team members cannot be overstated—particularly in leadership and culinary roles.

These are the key roles at Flourish. Depending on the size, scope, and needs of your program, roles may differ. Adjustments can be made to fit your organization's unique structure and requirements. **1** **2**

Executive Director

4. Provides overall leadership and strategic direction for the program.
5. Oversees partnerships, funding, school relationships & program sustainability.

Executive Chef

1. Directs kitchen operations, meal preparation, & food safety compliance.
2. Ensures menu quality & alignment with organizational values, including sustainability & cultural inclusivity.
3. Requires Red Seal certification & a minimum of 10 years of culinary leadership experience.

Project Chefs

1. Lead day-to-day meal production for specific program areas or projects.
2. Bring creativity and adaptability to menu development and meal execution.
3. Preferred qualifications include Red Seal certification and at least 5 years of professional culinary experience.

Kitchen Assistant

1. Supports food prep, cleaning, and packaging.
2. Ideal for entry-level culinary staff with an eagerness to grow in the field.

Operations Manager

Food Aggregation & Distribution Program

1. Oversees logistics, procurement, and coordination of local food sourcing for the FAD program.
2. Requires experience in supply chain and warehouse management, logistics, and/or food systems.

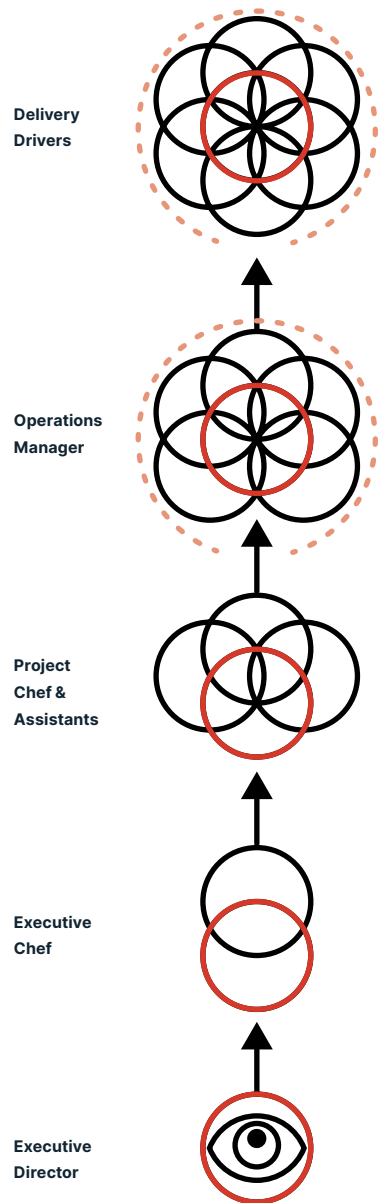
Delivery Drivers

1. Ensure timely and safe transport of meals to schools.
2. Must understand food safety protocols, maintain punctuality, and be able to lift up to 40 lbs. They are the face of the organization in schools.

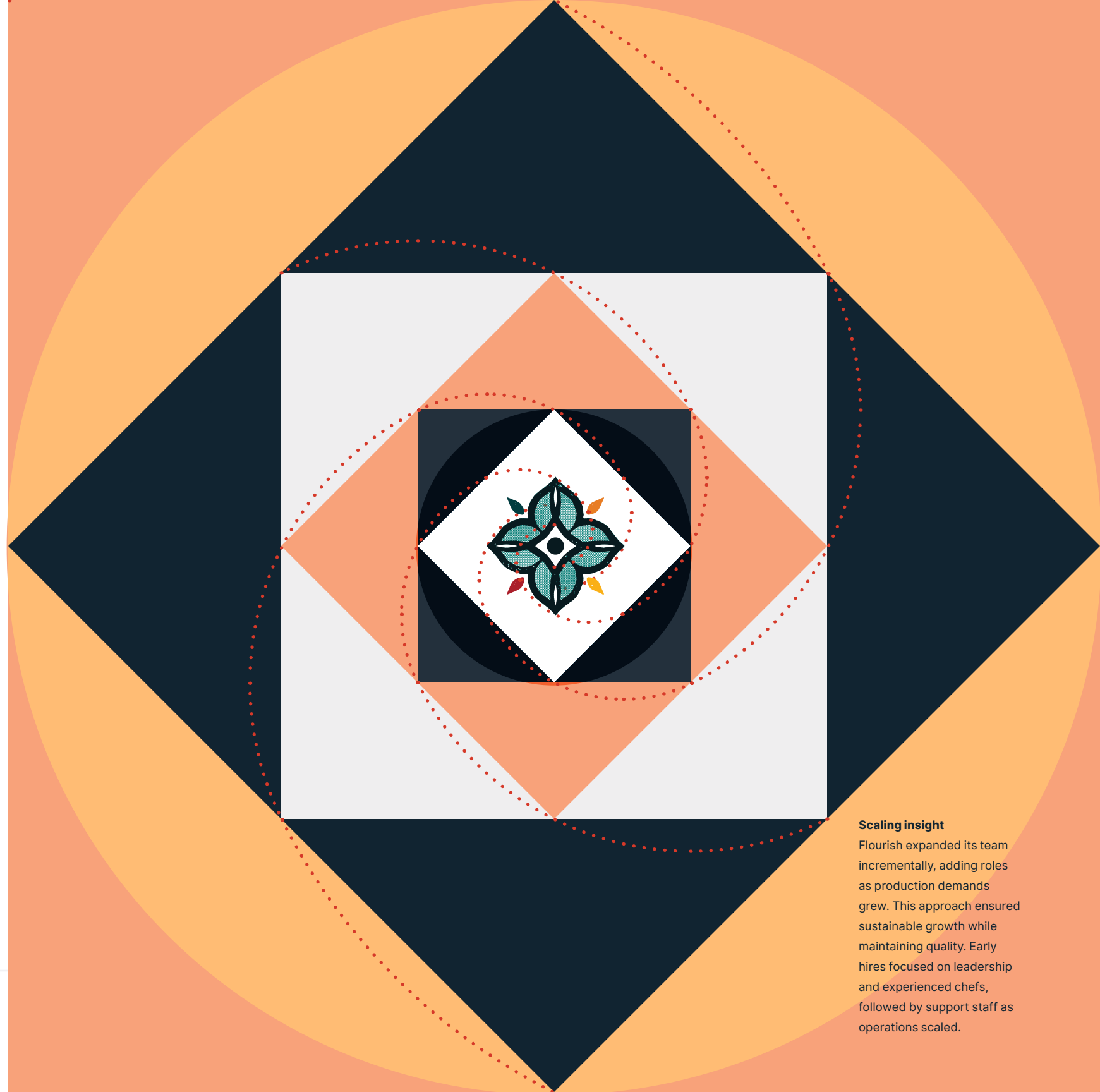
Resource Links

1

Staff Job Descriptions



Lead from the center with a philosophy that all members align with and grow your organization like the grand old oaks of the Earth.



Scaling insight

Flourish expanded its team incrementally, adding roles as production demands grew. This approach ensured sustainable growth while maintaining quality. Early hires focused on leadership and experienced chefs, followed by support staff as operations scaled.

Hire Key Staff

Recruiting the right team is a cornerstone of a successful school food program. Experienced and skilled staff ensure that high standards are maintained in every aspect of operations, from meal preparation to program management. Hiring highly qualified individuals, particularly in leadership and culinary roles, is essential to delivering high-quality meals, maintaining safety standards, and fostering innovation within the program.

Key Culinary Positions



Prioritize candidates with professional certifications, such as Red Seal chefs, and extensive experience in high-volume meal preparation. The leadership provided by individuals with decades of experience is invaluable for setting the tone and maintaining operational excellence.

Culinary staff, such as Project Chefs, bring creativity and adaptability to menu planning and execution when they have strong professional backgrounds.

Shared Mission & Values



Equally important is ensuring alignment with the organization's mission and values. Staff should share a commitment to nourishing students, fostering community, and supporting sustainability practices. Whether in the kitchen or overseeing logistics, each team member should bring expertise and a passion for the program's goals.



Roles & Responsibilities

Clearly defining roles and responsibilities is essential to avoid overlap, streamline workflows, and ensure accountability. Each team member should have a well-documented set of expectations aligned with their position. Job descriptions, provided as an attached document outline these responsibilities in detail.

Onboarding & Training

Invest in comprehensive onboarding to equip staff with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed. By prioritizing experience and investing in training, the team can operate at the highest standards, delivering programs that are impactful, sustainable, and scalable.

Food Safety & Kitchen Workflows

Include training on food safety, kitchen workflows, and sustainability practices.

Professional Development

Provide ongoing professional development opportunities for advanced culinary training, leadership development, and cross-training in logistics or operations.

Supportive Systems

Have clear and supportive systems to support day-to-day operations and ensure everyone knows where to look for key information.

6. Volunteers

While volunteers can be valuable, we feel that school food programs **should not rely on unpaid labour to function**. Paying staff ensures consistency, accountability, efficiency and long-term sustainability. It also allows your organization to scale and meet the demands of your communities.

Some reasons not to depend on volunteers



1. Volunteers may lack the time or commitment needed for daily operations.
2. You run the risk of relying on somebody who ends up being unreliable. And so a paid workforce ensures professionalism and accountability.
3. Volunteers require onboarding and training, which can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, especially if they do not stay long-term.

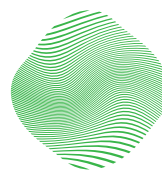
Volunteer Recruitment and Retention

Short-term



Volunteers are most effective in regular short-shifts or event-based roles, such as assisting during community events or coming to help in the kitchen at a set time each week. These opportunities allow individuals to contribute without committing to the full time job required for daily operations, making it easier to attract a diverse group of participants.

Medium-term



For regular involvement, creating weekly volunteer shifts can be a valuable approach. Volunteers who commit to consistent shifts can be trained to support specific tasks, ensuring they are equipped to perform their roles effectively. Work assigned to volunteers should be engaging but simple enough to manage independently, reducing the need for constant supervision. Prioritizing volunteers who demonstrate a commitment to regular participation will foster reliability and allows the program to better integrate their efforts into daily operations.

Acknowledge & Celebrate Successes



Recognizing and celebrating volunteer contributions is also essential for fostering engagement and retention. Whether through small gestures like thank-you notes, public acknowledgments, or organized appreciation events, showing gratitude helps volunteers feel valued and encourages ongoing involvement. These practices not only strengthen the program's relationship with its volunteers but also enhance community support for its mission.

Onboard & Training

The On-ramp



A structured onboarding and training process is essential for ensuring that volunteers contribute effectively to school food programs. Clear expectations and thorough training help volunteers feel confident in their roles and align their efforts with the program's goals.

Food Safety Training



Volunteers should receive training in food safety and operational protocols to ensure they understand and adhere to the standards required for handling, preparing, and serving food safely. This training minimizes risks and ensures compliance with health regulations. Providing an overview of the program's mission and operational practices during onboarding also helps volunteers connect with the purpose of their work.

Assign Roles



It is important to assign roles that match each volunteer's skills and availability, making the experience both meaningful and manageable. By aligning responsibilities with individual strengths, the program can maximize efficiency while fostering a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction among volunteers.

All resources shared within this book

1

2

3

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5

*Equipment
Vendors*

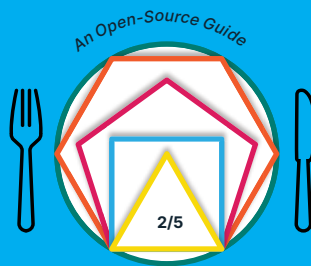
*Food Safety
Plan*

*Sanitation
Plan*

*Staff Job
Descriptions*

*Food Safety
B.C.*





Building a Community Rooted School Food Program

Written content

FlourishSchoolFood.ca

ScaleCollaborative.ca

Supported By



Creative Director | Graphic Design

RossAlexanderWhelan.com

Illustrations

SimonDanielHayes.com

Mother Nature Painting

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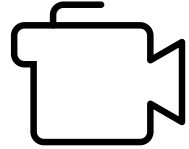
Packlane.com



Setting the Table for Learning

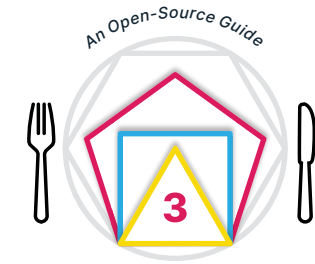
Get Ready to Launch

Finalize logistics, train staff, and ensure all systems are in place to deliver a smooth and successful launch.




Video Summary





Building a Community Rooted
School Food Program

Get Ready to Launch

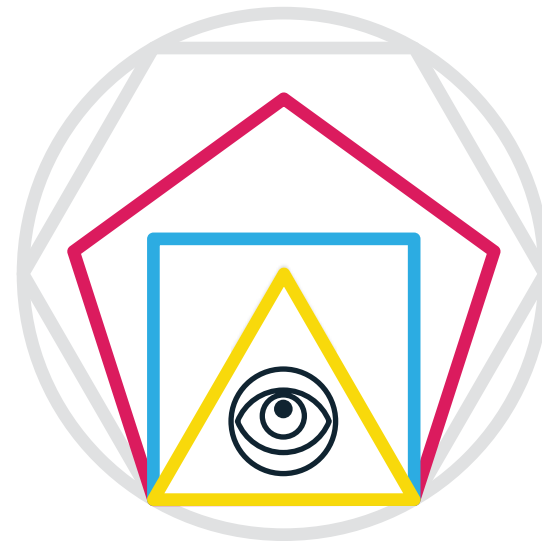
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Get Ready to Launch



Prepare your processes and communications to ensure you can make a good first impression with your program.

The third phase of implementing a school food program focuses on preparing for a smooth launch, ensuring all key partners are ready to deliver meals effectively and sustainably. This phase includes onboarding schools, training personnel, setting up processes, and fostering open communication to create a stigma-free, inclusive, and impactful program.

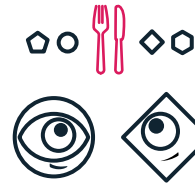


2. Service Implementation in Schools

Supporting schools to receive and serve food to students is critical to program success. Work to understand possible pain points for each individual school and work collaboratively with their team to overcome these.

Onboarding New Schools

Initial Meetings

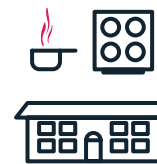


The onboarding process begins with engagement and initial meetings with school administrators. These meetings are an opportunity to outline the program's goals, operational details, and expectations.

Bringing examples from other successful programs and leveraging real-world use cases can help effectively communicate the program's benefits and feasibility.

It is equally important to actively listen and ask questions during these discussions to identify the specific barriers each school faces in implementing a food program. By understanding these challenges, the organization can tailor its support to minimize potential pain points and address concerns proactively.

Site Assessment



A site assessment is the next step, focusing on evaluating the school's infrastructure. This includes reviewing kitchen facilities, food storage areas, and equipment to ensure they meet the program's requirements. Practical considerations such as pan sizes, oven capacity, and fridge space are essential to confirm that schools can maintain the appropriate temperatures for food storage and service. These assessments ensure compatibility with the program's logistical and operational needs.

Formalize agreements



The final step involves formalizing agreements that clearly define the roles, responsibilities, and commitments of both the school and the organization.

These agreements provide clarity and set expectations, establishing a framework for accountability and collaboration.



FLOURISH! MENU - FEBRUARY 2025

February 3-7	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	3	4	5	6	7
Lunch Mid & High	Beef Bolognese + Penne + Caesar Salad	Vegetable Turkey (GF) + Green Salad	Turkey Sausage Pasta + Vegetable Mash (GF) + Raw Veg & Dip	Homemade Pasta + Caesar Salad	Chicken Pasta + Caesar (GF) + Black Bean Salad
February 10-14	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	10	11	12	13	14
Lunch Mid & High	Potato + Cheese Pierogies + Caesar Salad	Roasted Chicken Drum, Steamed Vegetables (GF) + Sushi Salad	Vegetarian Chili + Cheddar Biscuits + Raw Veg & Dip	Beef Taco + Cheese + Raw Veg + Salsa + Beans	
February 17-21	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	17	18	19	20	21
Lunch Mid & High		Vegetarian Chow Meen + Raw Veg & Dip	Cabbage Roll Casserole (GF) + Greek Salad	Pork Casserole + Cauliflower Mash + Green Beans + Dinner Roll + Dinner Salad	Vegetarian Chili + Bean Salad
February 24-28	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
	24	25	26	27	28

Training Manuals for School Personnel/Volunteers

Role-specific



Providing clear, role-specific training manuals is essential for equipping school personnel, and volunteers with the knowledge they need to fulfill their responsibilities effectively. These manuals cover critical topics such as food preparation, portioning, allergen management, and program policies, ensuring that all personnel adhere to consistent standards.

Best of Both Worlds



Both printed and digital versions of the manuals should be distributed to enhance accessibility, making it easy for staff to reference the materials as needed. Ensuring the formats are user-friendly and accessible supports efficient onboarding and continuous improvement.

Food Handling Guidelines



Strict compliance with provincial and federal food safety standards is non-negotiable in school food programs.

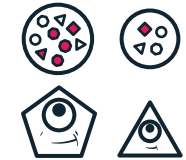
Guidelines must cover essential practices, including maintaining safe cooking temperatures, preventing cross-contamination, and adhering to proper storage protocols. Monitoring and logging food temperatures during preparation, delivery, and service is critical to ensure meals remain within safe ranges. Detailed food safety plans are instrumental in articulating these responsibilities, making compliance clear and actionable. Workshops and certifications on food handling best practices should be conducted as needed to keep all personnel up-to-date and confident in their roles.

School Food Service Guidelines

Good Practices for Sharing Food with Children & Youth

Implementing good practices for sharing food with children and youth fosters positive meal experiences and encourages healthy eating habits. Serving appropriately sized portions minimizes waste while meeting students' nutritional needs, especially for younger children. Using colorful and visually appealing ingredients can make meals more engaging, encouraging children to try a variety of foods.

Flexible Portions



Whenever possible, allow children to choose from a variety of options, promoting autonomy and reducing food waste. A pressure-free environment helps students explore new foods over time, appreciating that preferences may evolve. Supporting the division of responsibility in food service, where children decide what and how much to eat, aligns with recommended best practices.

Choose your own adventure

Cultural inclusivity is another critical component. Incorporating dishes that reflect the diversity of the student body not only fosters a sense of belonging but also broadens students' palates and food literacy.



Waste Reduction Strategies

Reducing waste is a core goal of any sustainable school food program. Allowing students to choose what they want to eat helps ensure food is consumed rather than discarded.

Evolve with feedback



Listening carefully to feedback about foods that students dislike and avoiding sending large quantities of those items can significantly minimize waste.

Remain flexible



Flexibility in adjusting the volume of food sent to each school, based on ongoing feedback, supports a better match between supply and demand. Clear communication of waste reduction goals helps build buy-in among school communities and reinforces the program's commitment to sustainability.

Cyclical Economy



Schools are also encouraged to establish composting and recycling programs, turning food waste into an educational opportunity about soil health and sustainable food systems. For leftovers, clear food safety guidance should be provided.

Food Service Equipment

Ensuring that schools have appropriate equipment is vital to maintaining food quality and safety. Essential tools include ovens, refrigerators, thermometers, insulated containers, and utensils. Ensuring schools have standardized equipment not only supports operational consistency across locations but also presents opportunities to partner with suppliers for discounted rates.



Protocols



Protocols for the regular collection, cleaning, and upkeep of equipment are necessary to extend its lifespan and ensure hygiene. Staff should be clearly informed of their responsibilities and supported in fulfilling them without added stress. Establishing routine procedures helps maintain consistency and reduces the risk of errors.

Visual Communication



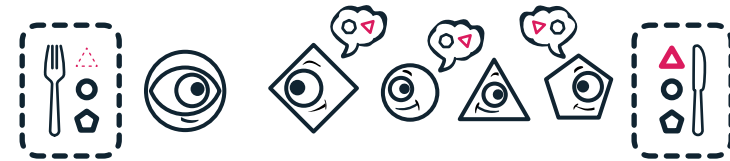
Finally, it is important to designate and label specific spaces within schools for food program storage and equipment use. Clear labeling reduces confusion and ensures that food service operations remain efficient and organized, aligning with the broader goals of quality and safety.

3. Communicating to your School Partners

Clear communication is vital to the program's success, fostering understanding and collaboration among all partners.

Interactive Guidance

Create opportunities for students and parents to provide feedback, sharing their preferences and experiences to ensure the program evolves in alignment with their needs. Incorporating interactive lessons or fun facts about the origins, preparation, and nutritional value of meals can further engage students. Using storytelling and making these interactions dynamic can also leave a lasting impression, fostering excitement about the food being served.



Students

Universal to all



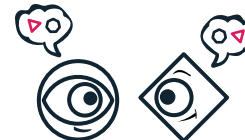
Supporting schools in effectively communicating the goals and benefits of the food program to students is essential to fostering positive perceptions and engagement. Schools should frame the program as openly accessible, not as a service solely for those in need, as this can inadvertently stigmatize participants.

Offer to assist schools in staff and parent meetings, helping them highlight the program as an inclusive initiative. Trust schools to act in the best interest of their students, but also encourage thoughtful, compassionate approaches to managing limited food resources. This is a real and evolving challenge as funding levels do not support food for all, forcing some schools to create lists of students most in need of food.

Food Service Staff, Teachers, & Administrators

Clear communication with food service staff, teachers, and administrators is vital to the program's success. Provide concise details about program goals, operational workflows, and safety protocols, ensuring that the school's responsibilities are well-defined and achievable. This includes:

Collaboration



Rather than dictating what needs to be done, engage school staff in conversations about how you can support them, understanding their barriers and pain points. Recognize and appreciate the complexity of their work, ensuring they feel valued and heard.

Celebrate True Champions

Acknowledge the efforts of school staff to boost morale and strengthen partnerships. Celebrate champions who go above and beyond, ensuring they feel seen and appreciated.

Overall, it is critical to collaborate with administrators to integrate the program into school culture, policies, and procedures, while aligning it with broader goals, such as improving student performance, fostering equity, and promoting wellness.

Food Literacy

Educate teachers on incorporating mealtimes into classroom routines and integrating food literacy topics into the curriculum, creating a holistic approach to student engagement with food.

Compassion

Highlight the importance of students being served by caring, well-supported adults, and celebrate the role of food service staff in fostering a nurturing environment.

Transparency & Knowledge Sharing

Encourage all staff to share observations about student engagement and well-being to refine the program continually. Involve them in program-related decisions to ensure their insights are recognized.

Family Communication Strategies

Building strong connections with families is essential for creating a successful and sustainable school food program.

Digital Comms



Effective communication through newsletters, emails, and social media allows families to stay informed about the program's benefits, menu options, and food safety measures. These channels provide an opportunity to showcase the efforts behind the scenes, such as collaborations with local producers and the steps taken to ensure children receive the healthiest meals possible.

Direct engagement with families



Collaboration with school district leadership and communications teams is equally important in amplifying the program's visibility and value. A coordinated approach helps raise awareness among parents across the district, fostering a positive perception of the program. Direct engagement with families through tasting sessions or workshops offers a tangible experience of the meals provided, creating a deeper understanding and building stronger support for the program.

Open-source



To further enhance trust and advocacy, it is essential to share data on program outcomes, such as increased student participation or reductions in food waste. Presenting these results to trustees and senior school board leadership not only demonstrates the program's impact but also reinforces its importance as a valuable district initiative. Providing annual updates ensures that stakeholders remain informed and engaged, fostering a sense of shared ownership and collective responsibility for the program's ongoing success.

4. Stigma Free Access

Creating an inclusive and stigma-free environment is critical to ensuring equitable access to meals for all students. Offering meals to all students, regardless of socioeconomic status, eliminates the need to identify specific recipients and reduces stigma.



While limited budgets often prioritize vulnerable students and families, designing programs that avoid creating visible distinctions among students is essential. Communicate to schools the importance of framing the program as food available for anyone who needs it, rather than as an initiative exclusively for the needy.

Compassionate communication is also key. Schools should clearly and regularly remind staff of the importance of speaking about the program in a way that emphasizes its inclusivity. Frame the program as a benefit for the entire school community, fostering pride and participation among students.

For example, it is recommended to:

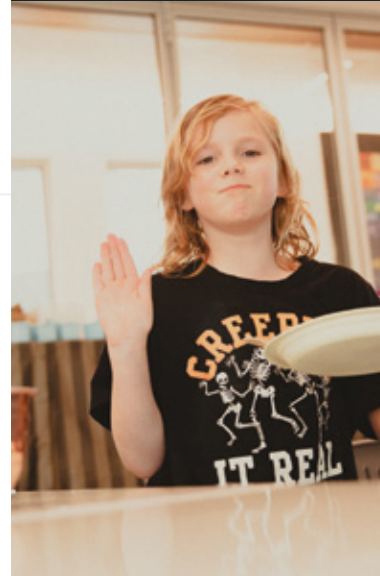
1

Engage students as champions of the program, encouraging them to view mealtimes as a communal and positive experience.



2

Make sure no student is visibly identified as a recipient of free or subsidized meals, as this could inadvertently highlight socioeconomic disparities and create barriers to access.



3

Encourage schools to develop food service models that work best for their unique needs, without imposing rigid structures.



All resources shared within this book



2 Check out our Food Literacy cards, which we share with all participating schools.

1

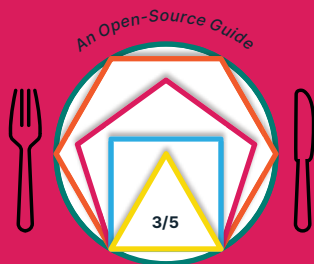
*School Food Service
Guidelines*

2

*Food Literacy
Cards*



You're now ready for
Phase 4: Meal Prep & Delivery



Building a Community Rooted School Food Program

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FlourishSchoolFood.ca

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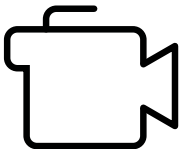


Setting the Table for Learning

Meal Prep & Delivery

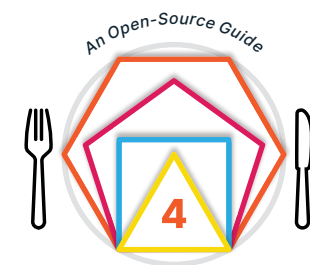


Put your plan into action by preparing and delivering nourishing meals to students in a way that is efficient, safe, and reliable.




Video Summary



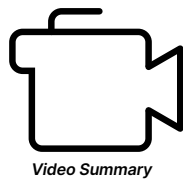


Building a Community Rooted
School Food Program

Meal Prep & Delivery

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Meal Prep & Delivery



It's time to get ready to make and deliver fantastic food for schools.



Flourish's popular "sushi salad"

2. Nourishing Lunches

Providing students with nourishing lunches is at the heart of many effective school food programs. These meals can be more than just sustenance—they are an opportunity to foster health, energy, and well-being while instilling lifelong habits around food



We encourage organizations to be committed to creating menus that are not only nutritionally balanced but also culturally inclusive, delicious, and accessible to all students. Central to this approach is the belief that food can be a powerful equalizer, ensuring every child has an equitable opportunity to thrive.



A student at Pexxisen Elementary picks up his Flourish prepared Lunch

Why Buffet Style?

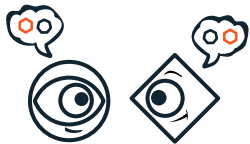
Buffet-style service offers numerous benefits for school food programs, fostering autonomy, inclusivity, and efficiency while minimizing waste. One of its primary advantages is that it **promotes autonomy and choice** by allowing students to select their own portions and food combinations. This independence encourages them to try new foods over time and reduces food waste, as students only take what they intend to eat.

Food Exploration



Buffet setups also encourage food exploration by exposing students to a variety of options, which they might not experience with pre-plated meals. This is particularly valuable for introducing diverse and culturally inclusive foods, helping students broaden their palates in a pressure-free environment.

Social Interaction



Additionally, buffet-style service supports social interaction, creating a communal dining experience where students learn social skills while sharing meals in a relaxed setting. This model also fosters meaningful engagement between students and the caring adults serving the food, promoting positive interactions and a nurturing environment.

Streamlining Processes

From an operational perspective, buffet service maximizes efficiency, streamlining processes to serve large groups of students quickly while maintaining meal quality. It is also easier to prepare and deliver at scale, reducing the logistical complexities associated with individually packaged meals.

Environmentally Friendly

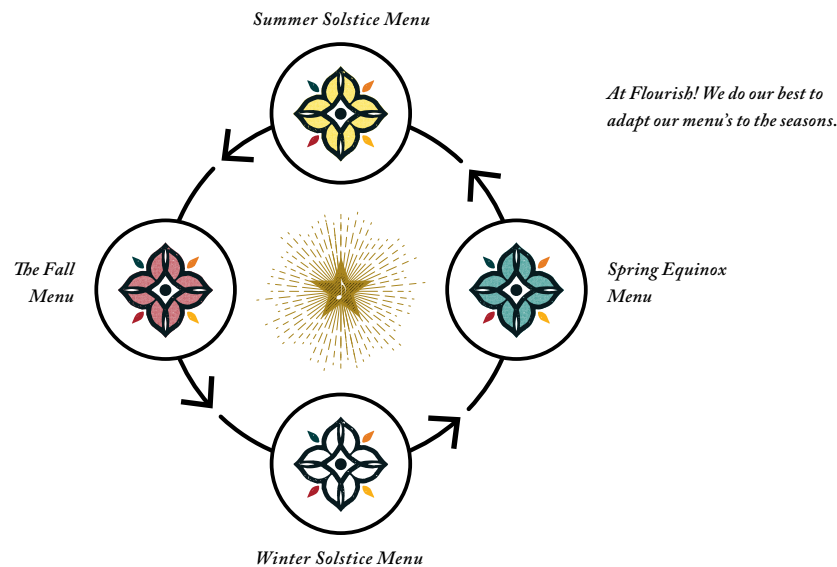
Finally, buffet-style service reduces packaging, as food is prepared and transported in reusable containers and served on reusable or compostable plates.

This approach not only lowers costs but also significantly reduces the program's environmental footprint, aligning with sustainability goals.



Menu Development

Designing menus for school food programs requires a thoughtful approach to ensure nutritional balance, cultural relevance, and operational efficiency. Menus are crafted to **meet or exceed national and provincial dietary guidelines**, providing students with adequate portions of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Chefs design the menus, which are then reviewed and vetted by Public Health Dietitians to incorporate expert feedback.



Seasonal & Local Availability

Ingredients are sourced with an emphasis on seasonal and local availability, ensuring freshness and supporting local farmers. This approach also reduces costs and enhances the quality of meals. Menus are planned on a month-to-month basis to take full advantage of seasonal produce and adapt to changing availability.

Regular Student Feedback



Regular student feedback is collected to inform menu adjustments, ensuring meals remain enjoyable and relevant to students' tastes. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of ownership and satisfaction among participants.

Allergens & Food Preferences



Allergens and food preferences are carefully managed, with menus clearly labeling items that may contain common allergens. To create a safe and inclusive environment, the kitchen operates as nut-free and pork-free, ensuring participation from students with nut allergies and accommodating the dietary requirements of Muslim students.

Re-Cycle!



Finally, menus are designed with waste reduction in mind. Recipes are planned to use ingredients efficiently, and strategies like repurposing leftovers into soups or baked goods are implemented to minimize food waste. This thoughtful planning contributes to the program's sustainability and cost-effectiveness while maintaining high-quality meals for students.

The Flourish home-made snack: Made from free rescued produce



Recipe Examples

Detailed recipes used in **Flourish** programs, such as vegetable stir-fry with white and brown rice, shepherds pie, and seasonal fruit scones, can be accessed via the **1 QR code below**. These recipes are designed to be adaptable and scalable to support growth and evolution.



Resource Links

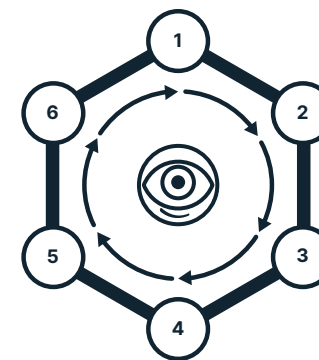
1

Recipes

Meal Preparation

Efficient and safe meal preparation is crucial to delivering high-quality, nourishing lunches that meet both nutritional and food safety standards. The following six sub-sections provide a step-by-step guide to ensuring meals are planned, prepared, and delivered effectively while maintaining strict adherence to food safety protocols.

- 1** *Planning Meals and Deliveries* *p14*
- 2** *The Importance of Labeling* *p15*
- 3** *Preparing Ingredients* *p16*
- 4** *Setting up the Hotel Pans* *p18*
- 5** *Assemble Hotel Pans* *p20*
- 6** *Re-Heating Meals Before Packing* *p21*



Once the main cycle has been designed, it'll become much easier to recycle through the steps in order to sustain and scale your operation.

Menu Schedules

Effective planning is critical to ensuring meals are prepared efficiently and delivered on time, maintaining the program's high standards for quality and reliability. Menu schedules play a central role, allowing the kitchen to coordinate ingredient procurement and streamline preparation processes. This ensures that meals are ready for delivery without unnecessary delays.

*Our Menu Presentation***Delivery Coordination**

This is equally important, with routes and schedules carefully organized to minimize travel time and maintain meal quality. Efficient delivery planning ensures food remains fresh, hot, or cold as required, upon arrival. Note that batch preparation further enhances efficiency by allowing ingredients to be prepped in larger quantities. This approach reduces waste and ensures consistency across servings while simplifying workflow for kitchen staff.

Production & Packaging Procedures

To maintain clarity and organization, detailed production and packing procedures are implemented. Every hotel pan and food carrier is clearly labeled, identifying contents and destinations. For this, **envelope sticker labels 1** are used to create clear, professional labels for pans, helping the kitchen and delivery teams execute their tasks efficiently and accurately.

Labeling is a vital part of meal preparation and delivery, ensuring safety, accuracy, and clarity at every stage of the process. Ingredient transparency is key; menus should prominently list key ingredients, particularly allergens, and include links to complete ingredient lists. This ensures dietary restrictions are accommodated and that all food served is safe for consumption.

Ingredient Transparency

Each school is assigned a customized label detailing the number of servings it will receive. These labels include space for the kitchen team to write a best-before date, ensuring clear communication regarding food freshness. Additionally, every hotel pan and carrier is labeled with the school's name. This organization simplifies delivery routes, helping drivers efficiently identify and transport meals while maintaining appropriate temperatures during transit.

Customized Label

1

Label template

Preparing Ingredients

Stick to the Recipe



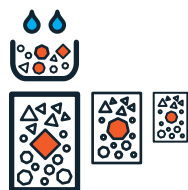
Proper preparation of ingredients is crucial to maintaining both the quality and safety of meals. Strict adherence to developed recipes ensures consistent product quality, accurate allergen declarations, and the production of the correct food quantities. This consistency supports efficient operations and ensures all meals meet dietary and safety requirements.

Temperature Checks



These are conducted rigorously during preparation and storage. Perishable items must remain within safe temperature ranges: below 4°C for cold foods and above 60°C for hot foods, which must reach a minimum internal temperature of 74°C (165°F) during cooking. Any ingredient that remains outside these temperature ranges for more than two hours is immediately discarded to prevent food-borne illnesses.

Washing Produce & Standardizing Portions



Safe handling practices, such as thoroughly washing produce and separating raw proteins from other ingredients, are also strictly enforced to prevent cross-contamination. Finally, standardized portioning using measuring tools ensures consistent servings, reduces food waste, and aligns with menu planning and nutritional guidelines.



Setting up the Hotel Pans

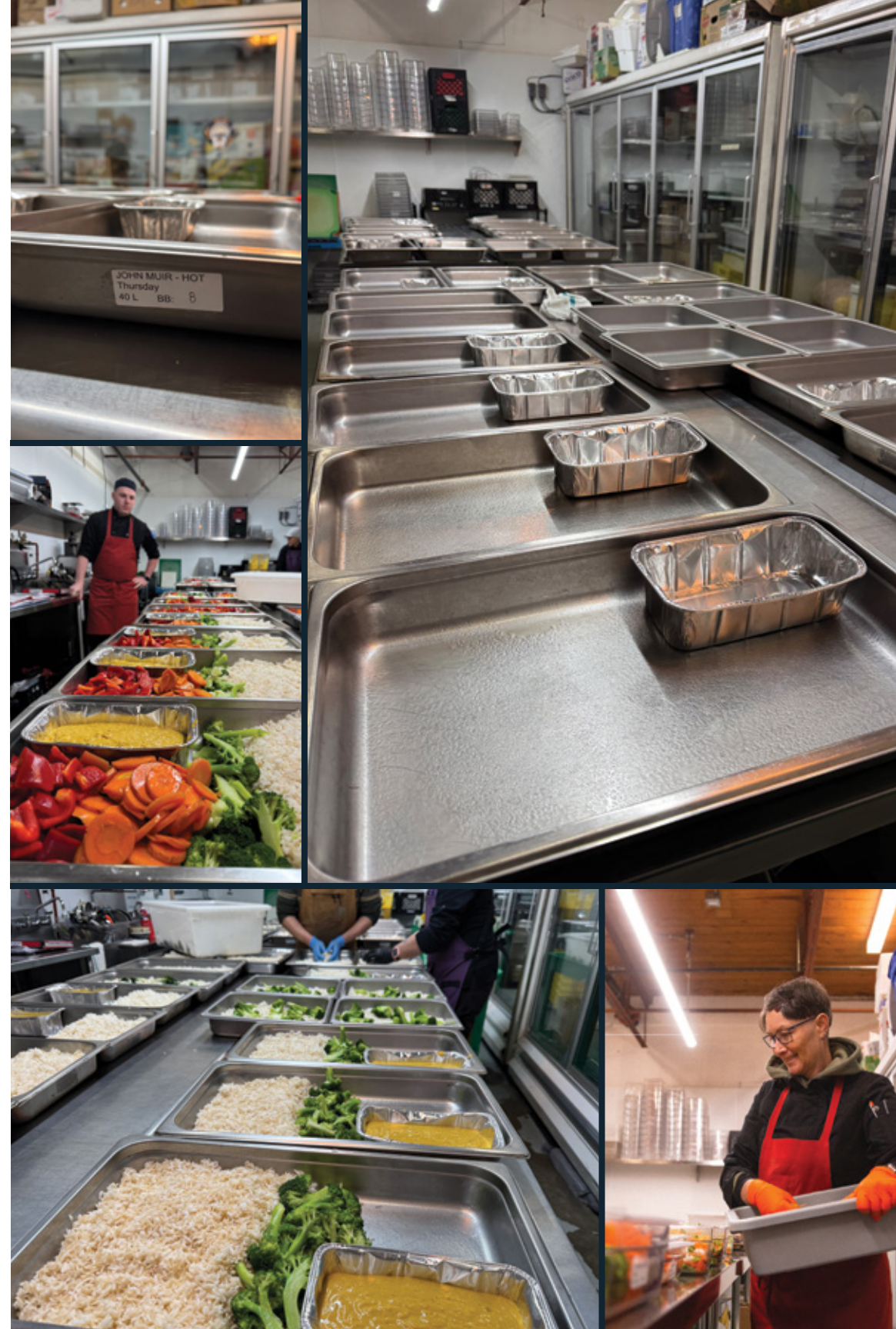
Streamlined Workflow



Properly setting up pans is essential for ensuring smooth and efficient meal assembly. Begin by preparing a clean workspace, sanitizing all surfaces and utensils before starting to maintain food safety standards.

Pan layout should be systematic, with pans arranged to match the planned menu, allocating designated spaces for main dishes, sides, and any additional components. This organized setup ensures consistency across servings and simplifies the assembly process.

Establishing a streamlined workflow by organizing assembly lines optimizes efficiency, minimizes handling, and reduces the time required to prepare multiple pans for distribution.



Assembling Pans

Layered Assembly

The assembly of pans requires precision and attention to detail to ensure consistency, quality, and portion control. Layered assembly involves placing the main dish first, followed by sides, with all components securely positioned to prevent spillage during transport.

To maintain temperature integrity, hot and cold items should be kept separate, utilizing warming pans or refrigeration as needed during the assembly process.

Finally, conduct a visual inspection of each pan to confirm accuracy, portion consistency, and overall quality before sealing and labeling.



“

The one thing for you to think about, because you're going to be doing the reheat, if the rice isn't in the center, we're going to watch overcooking of the rice. That's why we protect it in the center, so it doesn't overcook as much.

Ali – Executive Chef at Flourish

Re-Heating Meals Before Packing

Re-heating meals is a critical step in preparing food for safe consumption, ensuring that meals reach students at the appropriate temperature. Follow temperature guidelines by reheating all food to an internal temperature of at least 74°C, as mandated by food safety standards. This practice eliminates any potential bacteria and ensures safe consumption. Batch reheating in industrial ovens or other high-capacity equipment ensures uniform temperature distribution across all pans. Once reheated, meals should be immediately packed into insulated containers to retain heat and minimize exposure to potential contaminants during transport.

3. Breakfast & Snacks

In addition to scratch-cooked meals prepared in our kitchen, Flourish aggregates and distributes the grocery items schools need to support a well-rounded school food program.

Streamlining Systems



From experience, **Flourish** started with the kitchen program but realized quickly that schools were still sending Principals and other staff to their local grocery store to buy things to support school breakfast and snack programs.

The School Grocery Program

After understanding that **Flourish** could get better pricing and distribute groceries efficiently by leveraging its kitchen delivery, it started the Grocery program, which is internally called **FAD** (for Food Aggregation and Distribution).






FAD Program (School Grocery Program) ¹

The FAD Program is designed to provide schools with high-quality, versatile food products and supplies, tailored to their needs and capacities. Through ongoing collaboration with schools, we continually refine the offerings in our grocery program, which currently includes items such as muffins and banana loaves from local bakeries, bread and spreads, milk and cereal, fruits and vegetables, cheese and crackers, granola bars, yogurt, healthy snacks, quick-serve foods, and essential food service equipment like compostable cups and spoons.



Centralized Purchasing Model

-  *Local Producers*
-  *Larger Wholesalers*
-  *Regional Food Hubs*



Schools are overburdened with a responsibility that they shouldn't have to carry.



A centralized purchasing model supports the program, leveraging partnerships with local producers, larger wholesalers, and regional food hubs to procure fresh, high-quality ingredients in bulk. This approach reduces costs while supporting local economies

whenever possible. The program employs a flexible distribution model, sorting and distributing aggregated food to schools based on their specific needs and preferences, ensuring that schools receive items they are enthusiastic about serving to students.

¹

*The FAD Manual
Resource*

The FAD program is planted in the foundation to support schools and takes the food burden off their shoulders so they can focus their full attention and resources on their priorities.

Sustainability



To align with sustainability goals, the program emphasizes minimized food waste through advanced inventory management systems. These systems track food usage patterns, enabling precise planning and efficient purchasing that prevents overstocking and spoilage. In addition, the program incorporates culturally appropriate sourcing by working closely with suppliers and school district staff to include ingredients that reflect the cultural diversity of the student population. This helps ensure that all students feel seen and included in the food offerings.

Allergen-friendly Options

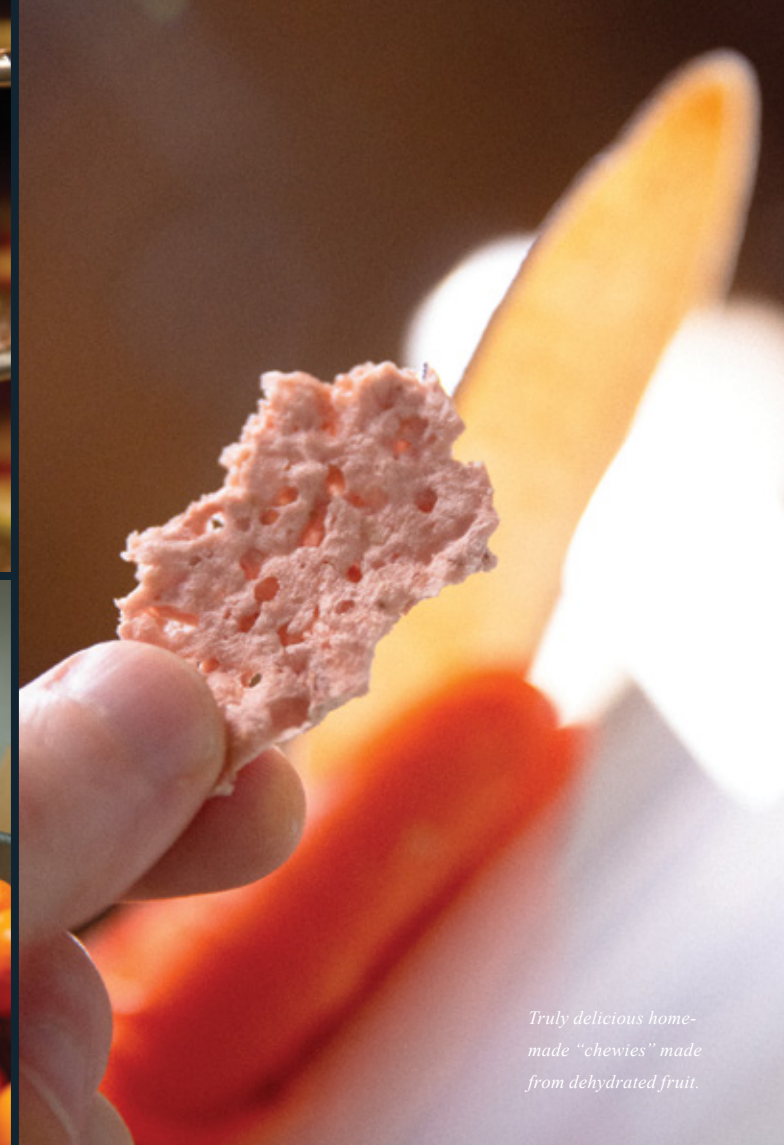


The **FAD Program** also prioritizes allergen-friendly options, providing schools with safe choices such as: nut free bars, seed free butters and gluten free crackers. These options enable schools to accommodate students with dietary restrictions while maintaining variety and inclusivity in their food offerings.

Emergency Provisions



To further enhance resilience, the program maintains emergency provisions as part of its aggregation strategy. Schools are supplied with back-stock food items to ensure availability during kitchen disruptions caused by adverse weather, vehicle breakdowns, or human error. This proactive approach ensures continuity of service and reinforces the program's commitment to meeting students' needs, no matter the circumstances.



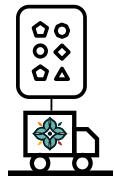
Truly delicious home-made "chewies" made from dehydrated fruit.



4. Online Ordering System

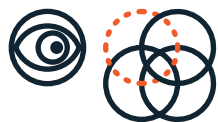
The online ordering system streamlines the process of managing and fulfilling grocery orders for schools, ensuring efficiency and reducing administrative workloads. Powered by **Local Food Marketplace**, the automated platform enables schools to place orders for grocery items directly, simplifying the ordering experience for both schools and the program team.

Selective Automation



By automating the ordering process, schools can efficiently select items from an updated inventory without delays or manual coordination. This system reduces the administrative burden for both schools and program staff, freeing up valuable time to focus on other priorities. For the program team, the platform provides quick and easy access to essential tools, including inventory management systems, pick lists, and detailed order records for invoicing. This ensures accurate tracking of supplies and smooth logistics for preparing and delivering items.

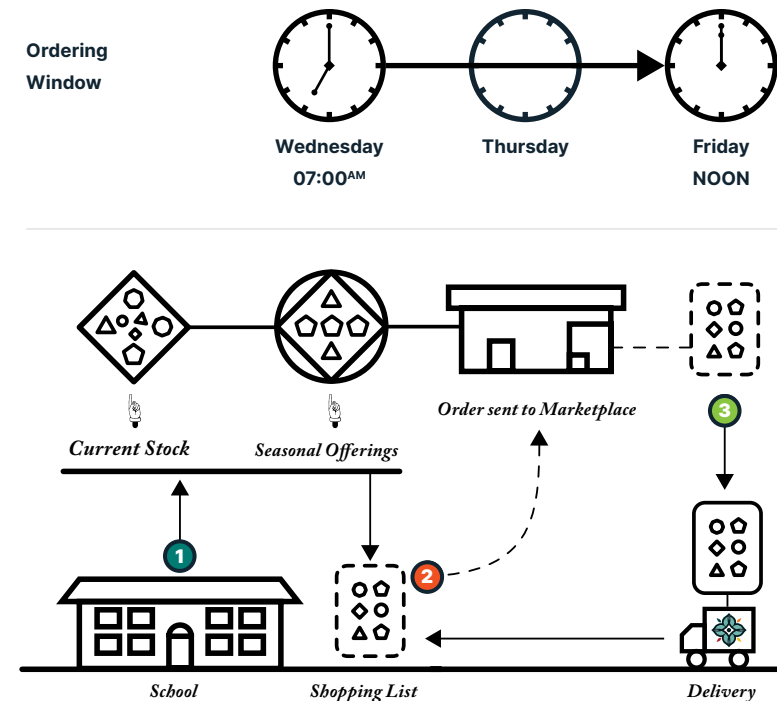
Seamless Integration



The online system also facilitates seamless integration with grocery suppliers and inventory management, allowing the team to easily procure groceries from external vendors and pack items from internal stock for distribution to schools. This cohesive process minimizes errors and enhances the overall efficiency of the food program, ensuring that schools receive exactly what they need in a timely manner.

How the Online Ordering System Works

The online ordering system provides schools with a user-friendly platform to efficiently manage their grocery orders. Each school is given a unique account linked to an email, allowing them to place and track orders, monitor spending, and access past transactions with ease.



- 1 School picks Items from Inventory
- 2 Online Shopping list purchased
- 3 Shopping list delivered to school

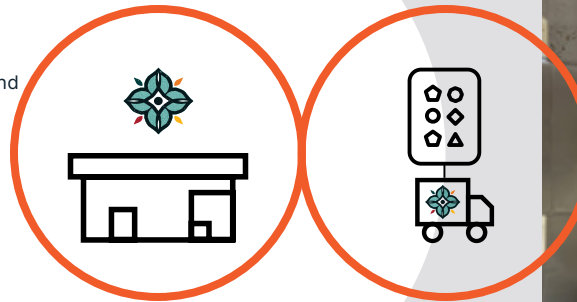
During designated ordering windows schools can browse the platform to view available grocery items. The system displays up-to-date inventory, ensuring orders align with current stock and seasonal offerings.

Bi-Monthly Updates

Schools also receive bi-monthly updates detailing new products, seasonally available produce, and logistical information, such as changes to delivery days for professional development (Pro-D) days or holidays. This transparency helps schools make informed decisions and plan accordingly. Once logged in using their email and password, schools can place their orders and immediately receive a confirmation.

Streamlined Accounting

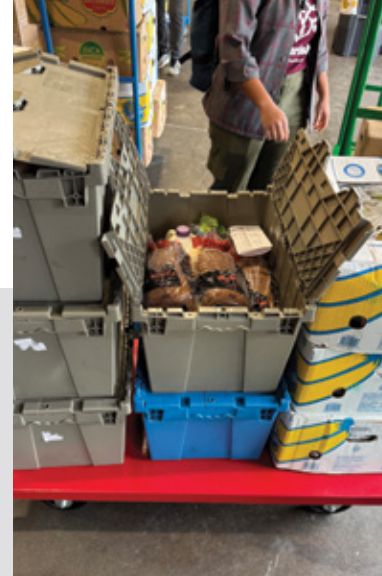
For schools with pre-set budgets supported by district funding, the system allows them to apply account credits to their purchases. The system then tracks all orders placed by schools, simplifying reporting and financial reconciliation. Program administrators can easily access data on what schools have ordered and prepare detailed invoices for district-wide costs on a monthly basis. This streamlined approach reduces administrative complexity, enhances transparency, and ensures the program operates efficiently to meet the needs of participating schools.



How Flourish Manages the Program

Managing the online ordering program requires a coordinated effort to ensure schools receive their groceries accurately and on time. The process begins with placing orders from a variety of suppliers throughout the week, prioritizing good pricing and local products whenever possible. These orders are either delivered to us or picked up by our drivers and stored in our facility. The storage includes pallets of cold storage in a walk-in fridge and pallets of dry storage space, providing ample room to hold inventory for weekly fulfillment.

When it's time to prepare school orders, Flourish uses the online system to print **pick slips** that detail what each school has ordered. Based on these slips, items are pulled from inventory and packed into **frog boxes**, which are clearly labeled with the school's information and the total number of boxes in the shipment (e.g.,



"School ABC - 1 of 4," "School ABC - 2 of 4", etc.). This labeling system ensures clarity and prevents mix-ups during delivery.

During packing, we record the number of boxes and any additional containers (e.g., cases of apples, bananas, or pears that do not fit in frog boxes) designated for each school. This information is added to a simple sheet provided to the drivers, streamlining the delivery process.



Packed orders are then organized on large carts or pallets, grouped by delivery route. These are stored in the walk-in fridge with taped instructions for drivers, ensuring everything is ready for transport. In the morning, drivers load the orders into vans, often alongside meals prepared in the kitchen, to optimize delivery routes. Additional deliveries are arranged as needed to accommodate special requests or unexpected requirements.



Metro Mighty-Lite Carriers

5. Delivery System

The Flourish delivery system has been designed to ensure timely and safe transportation of meals to schools while maintaining food quality and safety standards. Organizations looking at implementing a similar food program will need to adapt it based on their resources and geography. The following sections outline the key components of the delivery system.

Purchasing Containers and Vehicles

Metro Mighty-Lite Carriers



Delivering perishable grocery items and prepared meals requires careful consideration when selecting delivery vehicles. Maintaining food-safe temperatures during transit is critical to avoid food-borne illnesses. While refrigerated vehicles are ideal for transporting grocery items, our kitchen program relies on Metro Mighty Light carriers to maintain the correct temperatures for hot and cold food.

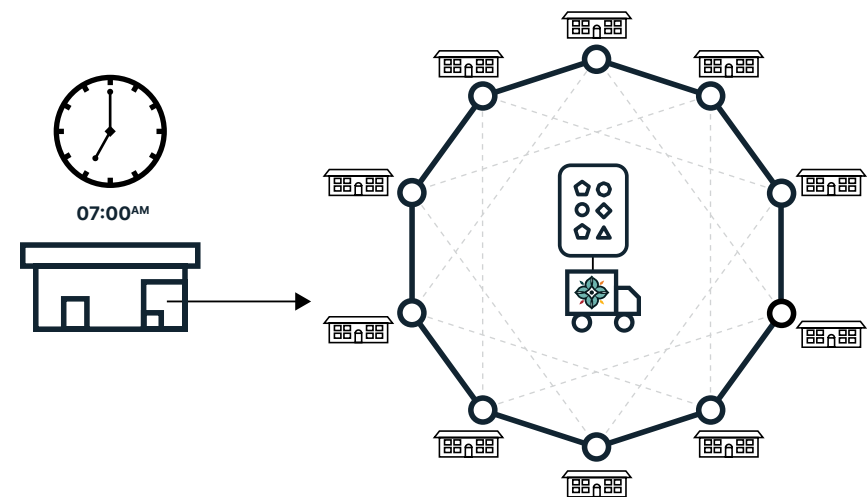
Unrefrigerated Vehicles

This approach allows food to be safely delivered in unrefrigerated vehicles. Extensive testing and monitoring have informed how Flourish uses these insulated carriers under various conditions and with different menu items. For example, denser foods like shepherd's pie and lasagna retain their temperature better than

lighter items like quesadillas. Carrier performance also depends on factors such as the volume of food inside (more volume holds heat or cold longer) and how frequently the carrier is opened and closed during delivery. These insights shape packing strategies, balancing temperature maintenance, efficiency, and driver safety, including considerations for weight distribution.

10 Schools Per Van

The number of delivery vehicles in operation must be scaled to meet the volume of deliveries while adhering to strict time constraints. For example, lunches must be delivered before lunchtime, which means vans often leave the warehouse as early as 7 am to ensure timely service. This scheduling gives each van a practical capacity of around 10 schools per morning delivery. Grocery deliveries typically occur on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, adding to the operational planning.



Leasing Vehicles



For organizations with seasonal or fluctuating delivery needs, leasing vehicles offers flexibility and reduces upfront costs compared to outright purchasing. Leasing a refrigerated van generally costs between **\$1,800** and **\$2,600 per month**, while owning a vehicle incurs an annual maintenance expense of approximately **\$3,000** per vehicle.

Electric Vehicles



Sustainability considerations, such as integrating electric vehicles into the fleet, can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and align with environmental goals. However, transitioning to electric vehicles requires access to charging infrastructure with appropriate plugs at parking facilities.

Type of Van



When selecting delivery vehicles, choosing a slightly larger vehicle than currently needed is advisable to accommodate future expansion, whether increased meal volumes or additional schools. Commonly used vehicles, such as the Ford Transit, Mercedes Sprinter, or Dodge ProMaster, provide the capacity and reliability required for efficient operations.

Safety is also paramount. Backup cameras are strongly recommended for navigating school grounds, reducing the risk of accidents in areas with children who may not always be mindful of moving vehicles. Such features enhance driver visibility and helps ensure safe operations around schools.

Delivery Procedures

Food Temperatures



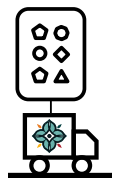
Adhering to proper delivery procedures is critical for maintaining food safety and ensuring meals arrive at schools in optimal condition. One of the most important aspects of delivery is the recording of food temperatures at every critical stage of the process: preparation, cooling, reheating, packing, delivery, and service. These records are essential for demonstrating compliance with food safety standards. Kitchen staff document the temperatures up to the point of packing, drivers record the temperatures upon delivery, and school-based staff are responsible for recording the temperatures at the time of service. These records must be retained for a minimum of three months, though it is recommended to consult with a local Environmental Health Officer to establish best practices for documentation and record-keeping.

Insulated Containers



To maintain safe temperatures during transit, meals are placed in insulated containers (Metro Mighty Light carriers), with hot and cold foods loaded separately. For additional temperature stability, especially when containers are not fully packed, **hot stones** or **salt bricks** can be placed at the bottom of the boxes to keep hot pans warmer for extended periods. In the rare event that food falls outside the safety temperature thresholds, it needs to be discarded **immediately** to prevent any risk of food-borne illness.

Delivery procedure



Upon delivery, drivers handle the food with precision and care. Hot meals are placed directly into school ovens, set at **74°C**, to keep them hot until service. Cold salads are stored in school refrigerators. For grocery items, drivers ensure timely communication with school office staff to notify them of any perishable groceries that need refrigeration.

Driver Qualifications



Drivers play a pivotal role in maintaining the program's efficiency and upholding its community-focused mission. **They must possess a valid driver's license (as required) and complete specialized training on logistics, food safety, and customer service.**

Drivers are held accountable by signing off on detailed logs that document delivery times, vehicle temperatures, and any incidents that occur during transit. Professionalism and respectful engagement with school staff are emphasized during training, fostering positive relationships and trust. Additionally, drivers are trained to prioritize the safety of children, especially when operating vehicles in and around school grounds.

1 Detailed driver policies and procedures are in the QR code below for further guidance.

Resource Links

1

Driver Policies

Logistics and Delivery

Efficient logistics and delivery systems are essential for ensuring the timely arrival of meals and groceries while minimizing operational costs. Organizations can benefit from logistics software that calculates optimized routes based on delivery sites, reducing both delivery times and fuel expenses. At Flourish, we use a combination of Google Maps and the staff's insights and knowledge of the region we serve to build delivery routes.

Standby Drivers



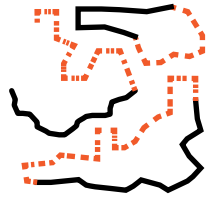
To ensure uninterrupted service, it is highly recommended to have standby drivers and vehicles available for emergencies, such as vehicle breakdowns or unforeseen absences. At Flourish, the Operations Manager serves as the first standby driver, followed by the Executive Director and kitchen staff as additional backups.

Modo Membership



For vehicle contingencies, we maintain an organizational Modo membership (car sharing organization in B.C. for rapidly accessing vehicles if needed). Additionally, we have established relationships with other organizations for potential vehicle sharing and have researched local rental companies that offer cargo vans, ensuring we are prepared for unexpected scenarios.

Zoning Schools



Schools are grouped into zones, with each driver assigned a cluster of schools to streamline coordination and reduce travel time. This zoning approach ensures efficient delivery while allowing drivers to focus on manageable geographic areas. When onboarding new schools, we communicate expected delivery windows rather than exact times, as precise scheduling may not always be feasible. Regular updates are provided regarding any delays or changes to the schedule, ensuring clear and transparent communication. This approach helps manage expectations and fosters trust between the organization and the schools it serves.



All resources shared within this book

1

2

3

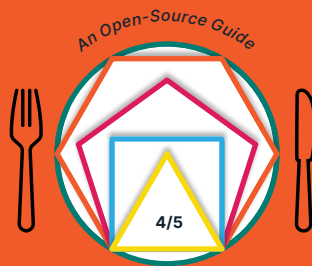
4

Recipes

*Our Menu
Presentation*

*Label
Template*

*FAD
Manual*



Building a Community Rooted School Food Program

Written content

FlourishSchoolFood.ca

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RossAlexanderWhelan.com

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Film | Sound | Drone

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Book production

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Box Production

Packlane.com

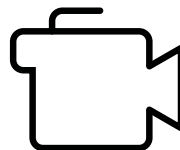


Setting the Table for Learning

Sustaining the Program

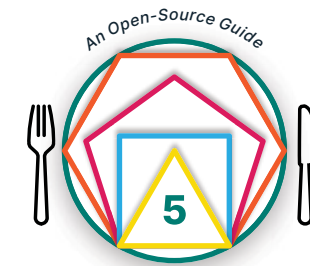


Grow creatively and from a position of strength,
and be ready to handle the unexpected.




Video Summary





Building a Community Rooted
School Food Program

Sustaining the Program

Chapters	Page
 1. Book Summary	4
2. Crisis Management	6
3. Monitoring & Evaluation Methodology	8
4. Expanding or Scaling the Program	10
5. Resources & Additional Readings	12
6. Summary of Key Takeaways	14

Sustaining the Program



Video Summary

Ensure the long-term success of your program by building sustainable funding models, assessing impact, and fostering community partnerships.

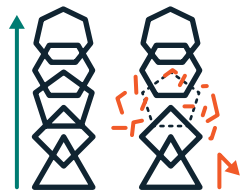


2. Crisis Management

Effective crisis management is essential for maintaining the resilience and continuity of a school food program, ensuring operations remain stable even in the face of unexpected challenges.



Potential Risks



The first step is to identify potential risks, such as supply chain disruptions, natural disasters, funding shortfalls, or operational issues like power outages, and develop comprehensive mitigation strategies to address these threats proactively.

While the list of mitigation strategies can be long and unique to each organization, the following examples are approaches that can be implemented to de-risk some of the operation:

Backup Suppliers

4. Establish backup suppliers and delivery partners. These partnerships ensure food availability during disruptions, reducing the risk of service interruptions. Open and transparent communication with key stakeholders—including schools, suppliers, and funders—is also vital.

Reserve Funds

5. To address financial risks, programs should allocate reserve funds to cover unforeseen challenges such as equipment failures or sudden increases in food costs. This financial safety net provides flexibility to handle emergencies without jeopardizing daily operations.

Staff Training & Communication

6. Continual staff training and communication are key to effective crisis response. Staff should be prepared to handle various scenarios, including food safety incidents, inclement weather, or delivery failures, with clear protocols and responsibilities.

School Principal Cell Phone Numbers

7. Specific measures, such as maintaining the cell phone numbers of school principals, are essential for direct communication during power outages when other systems may be unavailable.

3. Monitoring & Evaluation Methodology

Monitoring and evaluation are critical components of a successful school food program, providing a framework for assessing program performance, identifying areas for improvement, and demonstrating impact to stakeholders. These processes ensure the program remains aligned with its goals while fostering continuous growth and accountability.

Collaboration



For example, at Flourish, we have collaborated closely with partners in the **Sooke School District** to develop a **comprehensive School Food Program plan ①** for the district. This plan establishes clear strategies and goals to guide our organizational efforts. Its development was a highly collaborative process, engaging partners from schools and the broader community. This participatory approach has strengthened the program's foundation and ensured alignment with the needs and priorities of key stakeholders.

With the School Food Program plan now in place, Flourish focus has shifted over time to creating a **3-5-year evaluation strategy. ②** This long-term strategy is supporting Flourish work by providing consistent insights into the program's effectiveness, highlighting successes, and identifying opportunities for improvement.

①

*Sooke School District
Food Program Plan*

②

Evaluation Plan

It is highly recommended to involve students, parents, and school staff in evaluation processes to gain diverse perspectives:



Student surveys

Collect feedback from students on meal satisfaction, menu preferences, and suggestions for improvement.

School Staff Input

Use surveys and focus groups to gather insights from teachers, administrators, and cafeteria staff on program logistics and impact.

Parental feedback

Engage parents to understand how the program influences student behaviour and overall well-being.

In addition to long-term planning, Flourish conduct annual evaluations to perform comprehensive reviews of program performance. These evaluations inform strategic adjustments, enhance service quality, and provide valuable data for communication with key partners. By sharing these findings with stakeholders, the organization reinforces transparency and builds trust, ensuring continued support for the program.

4. Expanding or Scaling the Program

Expanding or scaling a school food program requires careful planning and consideration of the program's capacities, challenges, and the resources needed for sustainable growth. The first step is to identify current capacities and pinch points that could limit scalability.

Financial Model

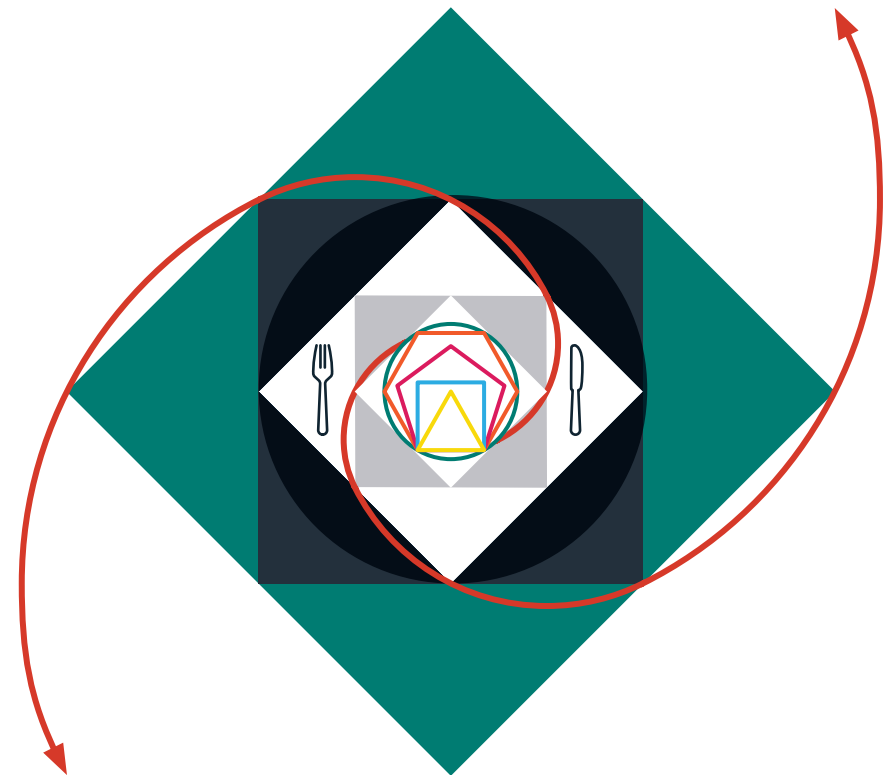


Understanding the costs associated with scaling is essential. Growth may require not only additional ingredients but also investments in infrastructure such as a new kitchen, more delivery vehicles, and increased staffing. Utilizing a financial model to project growth over time provides clarity on the financial and operational implications of expansion.

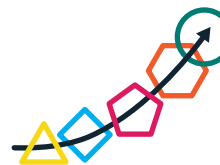
Shared Values & Pilot Programs



When identifying new partners, prioritize schools or districts that align with your values and have a demonstrated need for the program. Running pilot programs with smaller cohorts allows for testing and refining processes before committing to full-scale implementation. Pilots provide valuable insights into logistical, operational, and financial feasibility.



Long-term planning



Scaling also requires ensuring sufficient kitchen capacity, delivery vehicles, and staffing levels to meet increased demand. Developing scalable systems for menu planning, logistics, and reporting is critical to maintaining consistency and quality across locations, ensuring the program's standards are upheld as it grows.

Community Organizations



Collaboration is key to successful expansion. Partnering with local governments, non-profits, and community organizations can extend the program's reach and bring in additional resources. Engaging local stakeholders in planning and decision-making ensures that the program aligns with the unique needs of the community and fosters a sense of shared ownership.

5. Resources & Additional Readings



Organizations that use open-source documents provided by Flourish are encouraged to acknowledge Flourish as the originator of these resources.



This acknowledgment demonstrates respect for the effort and expertise that went into creating the materials while promoting a spirit of collaboration and knowledge-sharing. A simple statement or note of credit within the document or accompanying materials is sufficient, with no additional branding requirements. This practice ensures transparency and fosters a culture of mutual recognition and support within the community.

Please note that resources will be updated over time in our **1 online folder**.

Looking Forward

Flourish envisions this open-source guide as a tool to inspire action and collaboration, enabling others to join in the shared mission of nourishing students, strengthening communities, and fostering sustainable food systems. By adapting these practices and continuing to innovate, organizations can create impactful school food programs that deliver lasting benefits to their communities. Flourish looks forward to learning alongside its partners and contributing to a brighter future for every student.



*Project Chef
Shawna prepares
her truly delicious
“Green Smoothie
Muffins” for
schools.*

All resources shared within this book

1

*School Food Program
Resources*

2

*Sooke School District
Food Program Plan*

3

Evaluation Plan

6. Summary of Key Takeaways

This open-source guide is designed to be more than just a set of instructions. It is a practical and adaptable guide that empowers schools and organizations to create sustainable, inclusive, and impactful food programs. At its heart, the manual reflects Flourish's belief in flexibility, recognizing that every community has unique needs, resources, and capacities. The practices outlined here are proven strategies, but the manual also encourages users to innovate and tailor these approaches to their specific contexts.



Flourish's approach is rooted in continuous improvement and a commitment to learning. As the organization evolves, it incorporates feedback, adjusts its processes, and refines its methods to better serve students and communities. This focus on adaptability ensures the manual remains a living document, responsive to the realities of implementing school food programs in diverse settings. Additionally, Flourish emphasizes the importance of collaboration, with the program's success depending on strong partnerships with schools, families, and local stakeholders.

Overall, this manual reflects Flourish's experience in developing and managing school food programs. It provides practical strategies and principles that can guide organizations as they build their own initiatives. Some of its takeaways can be summarized as follow:

Planning and Infrastructure

Begin with clearly defined goals and assess the infrastructure and resources required to meet them. Collaborate closely with schools to design programs that are scalable, efficient, and aligned with the needs of the community.

Operational Efficiency

Utilize tools like online ordering systems, logistics software, and standardized workflows to streamline operations and reduce inefficiencies in food preparation and delivery.

Food safety and quality:

Adhere to strict food safety standards at all stages, from preparation to delivery. Focus on locally sourced and seasonal ingredients to enhance freshness, ensure nutritional balance, and support local economies.

Stigma-free access

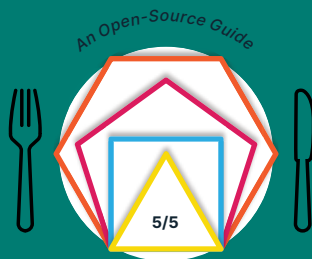
Foster inclusivity by offering meals to all students, eliminating visible distinctions between recipients. Incorporate culturally diverse menu options to reflect and celebrate the student population's diversity.

Feedback and monitoring

Regularly seek feedback from students, staff, and families to ensure the program is meeting their needs. Use evaluation tools to monitor impact and identify areas for improvement, enabling a dynamic and responsive program.

Sustainability

Prioritize waste reduction through strategies like efficient inventory management, composting, and using reusable packaging. Build partnerships with local producers and consider environmentally friendly initiatives.



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Box Production

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Setting the Table for Learning

1/4

Benefits of a School Food Program

Food Literacy Cards

We all intuitively know that we can better show up for our daily activities when our bellies are full. This is especially true for students at school.

◀ *Back to Big Picture Overview*



Flourish!
— School Food Society —



Setting the Table for Learning



Scan for more info



Benefits to Learning

When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.



There is strong evidence showing that school food programs support diverse positive impacts on student's mental health, including reductions in:

- ◆ Behavioral and emotional problems
- ◆ Bullying and aggression
- ◆ Anxiety and depression
- ◆ Visits to the school nurse

Students who eat breakfast are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, headaches, stomachaches and earaches, and do significantly better than their peers in terms of cooperation, discipline, and interpersonal relationships.



The mind withers away and sheds intellect and confidence like the falling leaves of an uncared for plant.

In addition to all of this, evidence shows that when school staff take the time to offer students the space to take a breath and eat a nourishing snack or meal, they feel like they belong. They feel loved. They feel cared for. This can be a powerful way to build positive relationships with peers and educators, which can support and foster learning.

Additional benefits of a school food program

We take great care to provide food sourced from local food producers, farmers and fishers. When school food programs focus on local procurement, they support the local economy.




Thoughtfully sourced school food has significant environmental and climate impacts, helping to reduce our ecological footprint and providing meaningful examples of solutions oriented work inside our schools. By considering where our food comes from, and learning about the social and ecological impacts of our food, students can be empowered to see positive solutions to some of our biggest societal challenges.

Continued on next page →

*School food is vitally important
to creating a culture of care and
compassion in our community.*

We want all students to thrive, and, in order to do that,
we need to make sure food is available to all students,
without stigma.



 **Flourish!** staff guiding a student at Pexsisen Elementary on
how to grow their own food with care.

2/4

Supporting Healthy Habits

Food Literacy Cards

Setting up a nurturing, positive space for kids to explore their own food choices is a great way to help children develop confidence and comfort around new foods.

◀ [Back to Big Picture Overview](#)



Flourish!
— School Food Society —



Setting the Table for Learning



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Supporting Healthy Habits

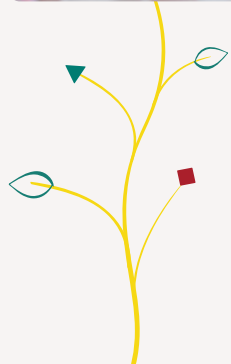
The way we talk about and present food can leave a lasting impact on young people. It's important that we facilitate nurturing environments where students can feel comfortable to choose what they want to eat without judgment.

Eating Competence

At the core of having a good relationship with food is the principle of Eating Competence. As defined by dietitian Ellyn Satter, Eating Competence is being positive, comfortable, and flexible with eating as well as matter-of-fact and reliable about getting enough to eat of personally enjoyable, nourishing food. Developing Eating Competence early sets us on a lifelong path of wellness.

What is our role?

It is our role as adults to provide options and set the times for eating. It is the kids' role to choose what and how much they want to eat. It's important that we give our kids this opportunity to be in control of what and



how much they eat. All children know how much to eat: the large child and the small child, the big eater and the small eater. Trusting and supporting students to make these choices for themselves sets them up for a healthy lifelong relationship with food.

Make an effort to eat together in the classroom.

Setting times where everyone can come together and enjoy a meal creates an atmosphere of enjoyment and togetherness. As adults, we can help students develop Eating Competence by role modeling healthy relationships to food. When students see others eating and enjoying a diversity of food, it gives them permission to do so too.



A young student clears his Flourish! home cooked meal at lunch.

Try not to use terms such as "healthy" or "unhealthy" when describing foods. Telling students that they must eat a certain way to "be healthy" can lead to stress and anxiety, particularly if they have not yet learned to accept those foods. Healthy and unhealthy implies good and bad, and food is not a moral imperative. In fact, it can be good to eat a cookie once in a while. Instead you can talk about eating in balance, or trying to eat a rainbow of different colors and foods.

Continued on next page →

Eating together

Getting hands on and familiar with a variety of foods is one of the best ways to develop nutrition education and support students to feel positive about eating. Consistently offering diverse, nourishing options and letting students choose what and how much they want to eat allows students to learn to enjoy nutritious foods, over time and at their own pace.

That being said, trying new foods can be intimidating for students! These feelings are valid, and we shouldn't shame students for not liking things or having negative reactions. Instead of focusing on a strong reaction, try to get students to ...

“Taste like a chef”

We want kids to consider and identify exactly **what** they might like or dislike about a particular food without labeling it as good or bad. This is what is called “tasting like a chef”, it encourages kids to step into the creative role of the chef so that they can explore their senses with a fun mindset without the fear of failure stopping them. **This can only be done with practice!** We encourage kids to try and describe the items that they taste using some of the following example identifiers, these are by no means set in stone, the point is to expand their **sense perception** vocabulary by exploring words that match what they experience emotionally. The following adjectives will help you get started:



“Fuzzy?!”

“Spicy!”

“Mmm, Earthly!”




Inspire wonder! Did you know that we taste with our noses? Try it and see. Ask children if they can still taste their food while holding their nose.




Texture 

- Smooth
- Rough
- Fuzzy
- Crunchy
- Pebbled
- Abrasive
- Slippery

Taste 

- Sour
- Sweet
- Bitter
- Spicy
- Acidic
- Acrid
- Nectarious
- Warm

Scent 

- Herbaceous
- Smoky
- Woody
- Fresh
- Floral
- Delicate
- Lemony
- Earthly

It's the same sense but experienced from a different perspective!

3/4

Cultural Inclusion through School Food

Food Literacy Cards

Food is a grand connector.

Serving culturally appropriate foods in schools is an important way to ensure all students feel connected with and a part of the school and broader community.

◀ [Back to Big Picture Overview](#)



Flourish!
— School Food Society —



Setting the Table for Learning



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Why is it important?

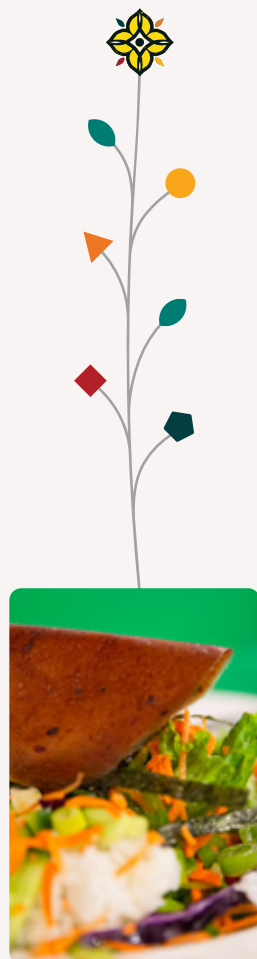
Offering meals from diverse cultures ensures all students can choose foods that they are familiar with and prefer eating.

Additionally, students from other cultural backgrounds have the opportunity to learn about cuisines that are different from their own in a welcoming and celebratory environment. This can lead to a more accepting and culturally aware school community. Something we can all agree is an integral part of the student learning experience.

Culturally responsive practices like cultural humility and competence can result in helping to build authentic relationships with students, engage with and address the needs and perspectives of students from diverse communities, and advance more inclusive, equitable health outcomes for our school community. As our schools grow in cultural diversity, offering cultural foods is an important way to help newcomer families feel welcomed and included in our community.

What is our role?

It's important that we compassionately offer diverse cuisines without judgment. Our schools are home to a wide diversity of students. By providing diverse options we ensure students feel a sense of connection and familiarity with our food and school. This increases student participation and positively impacts the health and wellbeing of our student community.



Trying new foods with different ingredients and flavours can be an overwhelming experience for young people who have heightened taste buds. While these feelings are valid, a lot of harm can be done to students from that cultural background if they hear others trying their cultural foods for the first time suggesting that it's "gross" or "weird". Encourage students to be open minded. Instead of using negative words, appeal to student's sense of creativity and exploration by inviting them to "taste like a chef" and describe the flavors and textures of their food. (more on that detailed in our Healthy Habits card).

"Eww, Weird!" → "Hmm, different, new?"

By principle alone, anything new and different from the norm will be instinctively sensed as weird and odd. It's a different rhythm. If we encourage our kids to understand this part of human nature by expanding their vocabulary then they will be better equipped to welcome our culturally diverse society.

If a student has a negative reaction or doesn't want to try something, don't force it or focus too much on it. If students are hungry, they'll eat what they are comfortable with on the plate and get filled up for lunch. The more that we provide foods from different cuisines in a caring environment, the more comfortable students will be with trying new things over time. Patience and a warm, non-judgmental attitude is important for encouraging students to try new things over time.

Continued on next page →



Scent

Did you know that we taste with our noses? It's the same sense but experienced from a different perspective.



Taste

What is “Culturally Appropriate Food”?

Food is a central part of culture. Culturally appropriate foods meet the diverse tastes and needs of communities based on their cultural identities. Culturally appropriate food does not only refer to the food itself, but also recognizes the cultural practices around the preparation and sharing of the food, considering where, how, when, and with whom it is eaten.



Flourish chefs preparing a special meal for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We try to share stories about the cultural foods we prepare, with the hope that you will share these stories with students.

4/4

Household Food Insecurity

Food Literacy Cards

More people than ever are turning to food banks and other community food resources to get by. Families are increasingly forced to make impossible decisions about whether to pay their bills or feed their family.

◀ [Back to Big Picture Overview](#)



Flourish!
— School Food Society —



Setting the Table for Learning



Scan for more info



These stressors, and more, exist in every school community.

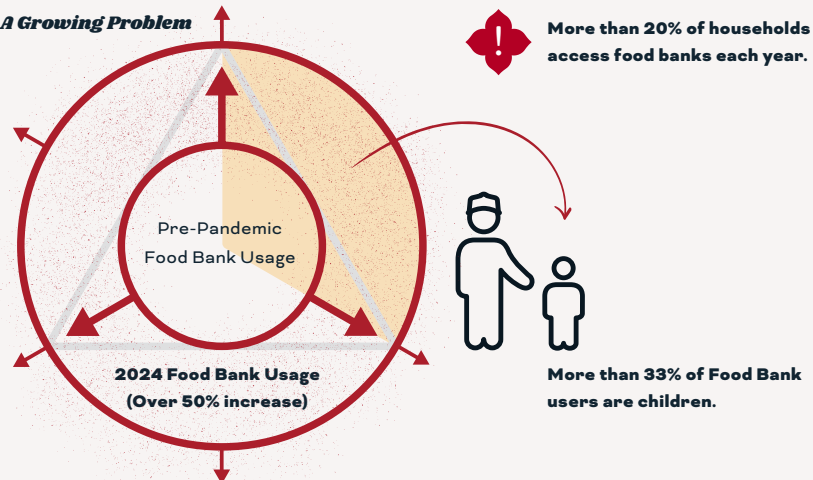
In Our Community

- ◆ 13% of people experience food insecurity
- ◆ 11% of adolescents self report going to bed hungry at least sometimes because there is not enough money for food at home
- ◆ 30% of adolescents do not eat breakfast
(up from 18% five years ago)

What is Food Insecurity?

A person is food insecure when they lack regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life. This may be due to unavailability of food and/or lack of resources to obtain food.

A Growing Problem

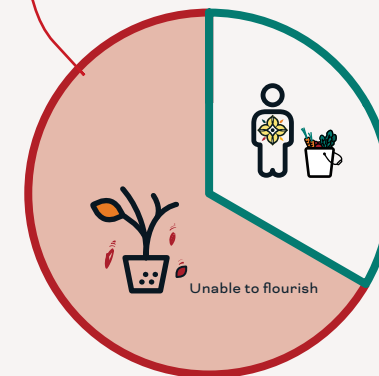


Data from the McCreary 2023 Adolescent Health Survey and Food Banks Hunger Counts.

Not Just a Problem of Economics

Many students would benefit from nourishing school food programs. It's not just those economically vulnerable families who stand to benefit.

- ◆ Only about one-third of children between the ages of 4 and 13 years eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruit daily.



- ◆ About one-quarter of children's calorie intakes are from food products not recommended in Canada's Food Guide.
- ◆ One-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of students in secondary schools do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school.

No community is untouched by these challenges.

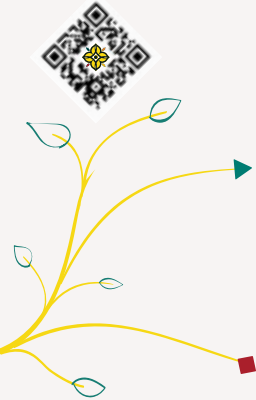


Flourish! is working with many partners to ensure students have consistent, stigma free access to food at school, to ensure hunger is not a barrier to learning.

Where to go for help?

There are a number of organizations and individuals who work tirelessly to provide food in our community.

For an up-to-date listing of what is available for families, please refer to “**Food Security Resources**” listed on our website’s Food Literacy resource page (you can follow the QR code in this card). →



Family Stress

Parents will endure a lot of stress before allowing their children to go without. Even students coming to school with food may benefit profoundly from school food programs. Supporting families and helping ease the strain of having to provide through challenging economic times can make a meaningful impact on household stress.

It's not our role to decide who does and doesn't need food.

Only students and staff themselves know if they need food that day. Making sure we have it to offer can make a big difference.