FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Emergency Food and Shelter Program

Accessible Version

About the Program

EFSP provides funding for emergency food, shelter, and support services to local nonprofit organizations and government agencies to distribute to people in need. The primary mission of EFSP is to supplement the work of local nonprofit organizations and government agencies that provide food and housing assistance to people experiencing economic crisis.

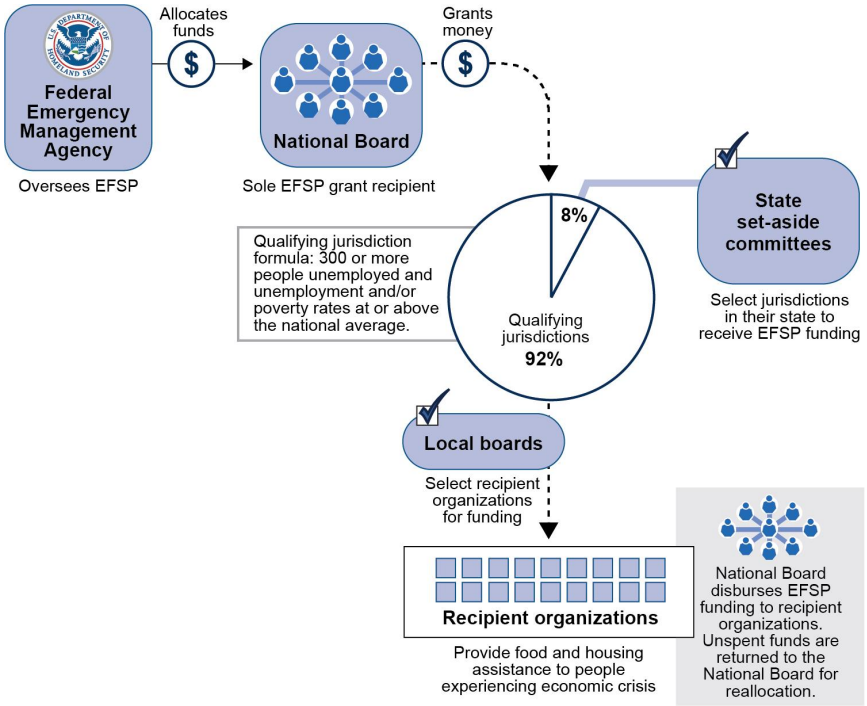
The Recovery Directorate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) oversees EFSP. EFSP is governed by a National Board, comprising (by statute) representatives from private nonprofit organizations and chaired by FEMA. The six private nonprofit organizations are the American Red Cross, Catholic Charities U.S.A., The Jewish Federations of North America (previously known as Council of Jewish Federations, Inc.), National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., The Salvation Army, and United Way. The National Board establishes the program's policies, procedures, and guidelines. United Way is also the program's fiscal agent and manages day-to-day program operations.

EFSP was created in 1983, as part of the Emergency Jobs Appropriations Act (Pub. L. No. 98-8), and established in 1987 in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Pub. L. No. 100-77), codified at 42 U.S.C § 11331 et seq.

Program Recipients and Beneficiaries

The National Board is the sole recipient of Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) grant funds. State set-aside committees, local boards, and recipient organizations are considered the subrecipients. The National Board and subrecipients work together to provide services to people in need (see fig. 8). Local boards and recipient organizations can set eligibility qualifications for people receiving services.

Figure 8: Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) Structure



Source: GAO analysis of Federal Emergency Management Agency documents. | GAO-23-105458

Funding Characteristics

EFSP funds may be used for a broad range of services:

- Emergency shelter: Lodging in mass shelters or hotels.
- Rent/mortgage and utility assistance: Emergency rent or mortgage payments of principal and interest charges or utility payments.
- Food assistance: Costs to provide food, groceries, and seeds at public food pantries or mass feeding sites.
- Equipment and other costs: Purchase and repair of equipment at locations providing mass shelter and food assistance.
- Transportation: Costs to transport people to emergency shelter or food assistance sites or to deliver food and groceries to people.

Up to 5 percent of EFSP funding can be used for administrative expenses.

Program Outcomes

According to FEMA data, in 2021 EFSP funded over 6,700 recipient organizations that spent approximately $29.6 million on emergency shelter expenses, $30 million on rent/mortgage and utility assistance, and $47.6 million on food assistance.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Continuum of Care

About the Program

The Continuum of Care program provides housing assistance to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The program is designed to promote a community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness. It requires communities to create a regional or local planning body, called a CoC. In its geographic area, the CoC coordinates homelessness services, planning, monitoring, and data collection and reporting. CoCs are also responsible for the collaborative process to create and submit a funding application.

HUD's Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs, within the Office of Community Planning and Development, administers the program. The CoC and Emergency Solutions Grants are collectively referred to as Homelessness Assistance Grants.

The CoC program was authorized by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended including by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (42 U.S.C. §§ 11381-11389). The 2009 act consolidated three separate homeless assistance programs into the CoC program. The CoC grant program regulations are found in 24 C.F.R. part 578.

Program Recipients and Beneficiaries

A Continuum of Care (CoC) may have one or more grantees or recipients in its area, depending on the structure of its funding application. The recipient disburses funding to subrecipients (local nonprofit and government organizations) to provide services. People experiencing homelessness who receive CoC services must meet eligibility requirements described in the CoC program regulations and in grant agreements.

Funding Characteristics

Eligible applicants designated by CoCs annually apply to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for funding to implement programs in their geographic area. CoC funding is awarded through a two-step process. First, a formula determines the maximum award a CoC can receive. The maximum award amount is based on the total available funding in conjunction with local conditions, costs of ongoing projects, and fair market rent increases. Second, a CoC applies through a competitive process that determines the amount awarded. CoCs are scored on available points described in the annual Notice of Funding Opportunity. HUD then provides funding to the CoC recipients, which distribute it to subrecipients. Recipients and subrecipients must match program funding.

CoC program funds may be used for five project categories or components.

- **Permanent housing**: Housing assistance and related services, including permanent supportive housing assistance for disabled people and rapid re-housing of people experiencing homelessness.
- **Transitional housing**: Housing assistance and related services for people experiencing homelessness, with the goal of interim stability and support towards permanent housing.
- **Supportive services only**: Supportive services, such as street outreach and referrals to other housing or necessary services, to people not receiving housing assistance.
- **Homeless Management Information System**: Costs related to hardware, software, and the personnel to establish and operate the system in each CoC.
- **Homelessness prevention**: Short-term or medium-term rental assistance and related services (limited to CoCs meeting certain performance standards such as having average length of homelessness of 20 or fewer days).

Up to 10 percent of a CoC recipient's funding can be used for administrative activities.

Program Outcomes

According to HUD data, in 2021, the CoC program served 326,126 people experiencing homelessness, including 41,394 families. There was a 53 percent increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness between 2021 and 2022. In 2021, 6,628 projects received more than $2.6 billion in CoC funding, with most projects (81 percent) and funding (90 percent) going towards permanent and transitional housing.

At least one CoC exists in every state and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. In 2021, there were 384 CoCs.

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Emergency Solutions Grants

About the Program

The ESG program provides emergency housing and shelter services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development administers this program. ESG and Continuum of Care programs are collectively referred to as Homelessness Assistance Grants.

ESG was authorized by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. It was reauthorized and renamed by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act of 2009 (42 U.S.C. § 11371-11378). HUD regulations for the ESG program, initially effective in 2012, and as amended, are found in 24 C.F.R. part 576.

Program Recipients and Beneficiaries

Recipients of Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) are states, territories, and metropolitan cities and urban counties. States receive and distribute ESG funding to areas that are not part of metropolitan cities and urban counties. Subrecipients receive funding from the recipients to provide services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness

To be eligible for ESG services, a person must meet the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) definition of homeless: lacking housing and staying in emergency shelter or qualifying for homelessness prevention assistance.

Funding Characteristics

Local jurisdictions and states apply to HUD for ESG funds as part of their consolidated plan. The plan, which also covers other HUD programs, describes how housing and other resident needs will be addressed over a period of 3–5 years. The consolidated plans are collaborative efforts among local governments, public and private entities, and community members.

ESG awards are noncompetitive and allocated using a formula. About 70 percent of funding goes to metropolitan cities and urban counties, about 30 percent to states, and 0.2 percent to territories. ESG funds are allocated based on the amount communities received in the prior year Community Development Block Grant funding. Metropolitan cities and urban counties are required to match ESG funds dollar-for-dollar, but states and territories are not.

ESG funds may be used for five project categories or components.

- **Street outreach:** Essential services (such as case management and transportation) to connect unsheltered people with emergency shelters and health services.
- **Emergency shelter:** Activities to operate shelters and supportive services (such as case management and child care) for people living in those shelters.
- **Rapid rehousing:** Activities to rapidly rehouse people experiencing homelessness.
- **Homelessness prevention:** Activities to prevent homelessness through relocation and stabilization services, and rental assistance.
- **Homeless Management Information System:** Costs related to hardware, software, and personnel and to other activities associated with using this data system.

In addition, up to 7.5 percent of a recipient's ESG allocation can be used for administrative activities.

Program Outcomes

According to HUD data, in fiscal year 2019, 196 metropolitan cities and 115 urban counties received ESG funding across all 50 states and five territories. Also, according to HUD data, 285,470 people received emergency shelter services in fiscal year 2022.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

About the Program

SNAP is the largest domestic nutrition assistance program and is administered by the Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service in partnership with states, which operate the program locally. The goal of this program is to help low-income individuals and households obtain a more nutritious diet by increasing their food purchasing power.

SNAP provides benefits on an electronic benefits transfer card, which may be used to purchase food at authorized retailers. SNAP benefits generally only can be used for food to be prepared or consumed at home. As of September 2021, 254,350 retailers were authorized to accept SNAP benefits.

SNAP was authorized by the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, as amended, but its predecessor, the Food Stamp Program, existed in some form since the 1960s. SNAP regulations are found under 7 C.F.R. part 273.

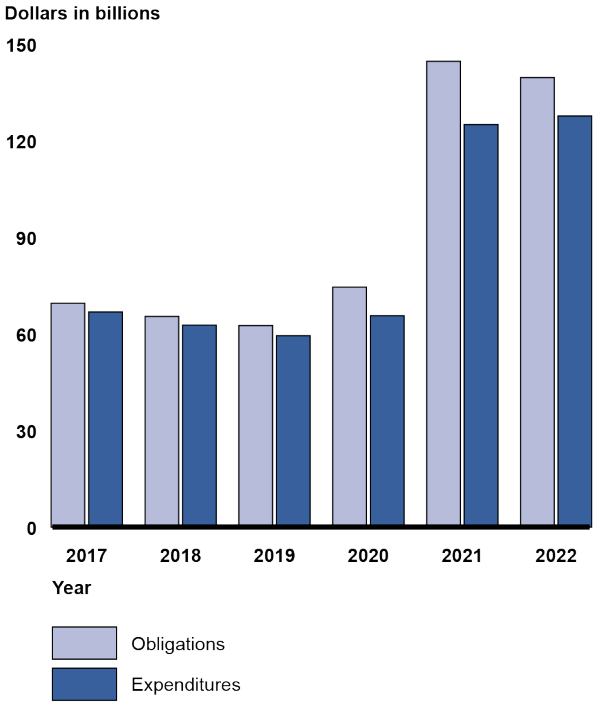
Program Recipients and Beneficiaries

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides assistance to eligible low-income individuals and households. Generally, to be eligible for SNAP benefits, a household's gross monthly income cannot exceed 130 percent of the federal poverty level. SNAP benefits are provided in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Funding Characteristics

Federal funds cover the full cost of SNAP benefits. Administrative costs are shared between the federal government and the states. Program obligations increased significantly in fiscal year 2021, reflecting a higher appropriation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, increased participation, and larger maximum benefit amounts to recipients.

Figure 9: Obligations and Expenditures for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Fiscal Years 2017–2022



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Agriculture data. | GAO-23-105458

Accessible Data for Figure 9: Obligations and Expenditures for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Fiscal Years 2017–2022

Year	Obligations (dollars in billions)	Expenditures (dollars in billions)
2017	69.56022436	66.77189578
2018	65.45340837	62.72257088
2019	62.60592253	59.43221332
2020	74.54234175	65.62085433
2021	144.6550638	124.9987016
2022	139.587331219	127.617957774

Note: In addition to annual obligations, SNAP received supplemental funding to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This figure does not include the supplemental funding from COVID-19 relief laws.

Program Outcomes

SNAP provided benefits to 41.2 million people in 21.6 million low-income households in fiscal year 2022. The average monthly individual benefit was $232.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Emergency Food Assistance Program

About the Program

USDA's Food and Nutrition Service administers TEFAP, which helps supplement the diets of low-income individuals by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. TEFAP provides more than 120 food products, including canned, frozen, dried, and fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as eggs, meat, poultry, fish, nuts, dairy products, and grains. The types of food USDA purchases for TEFAP vary based on the preferences of each state and agricultural market conditions.

TEFAP was first authorized in 1983 to distribute food purchased by USDA. USDA issues regulations and guidance for the program and provides oversight by reviewing and approving state TEFAP plans.

TEFAP was designed to help reduce federal food inventories while assisting low-income individuals. Because food inventories had largely been depleted by 1988, the Hunger Prevention Act of 1988 authorized funds to be appropriated for the purchase of USDA foods specifically for TEFAP. The program was formally named The Emergency Food Assistance Program under the 1990 Farm Bill. The Emergency Food Assistance Act (as amended) continues to govern program operations, while the Food and Nutrition Act authorizes funding for TEFAP's entitlement commodities.

Program Recipients and Beneficiaries

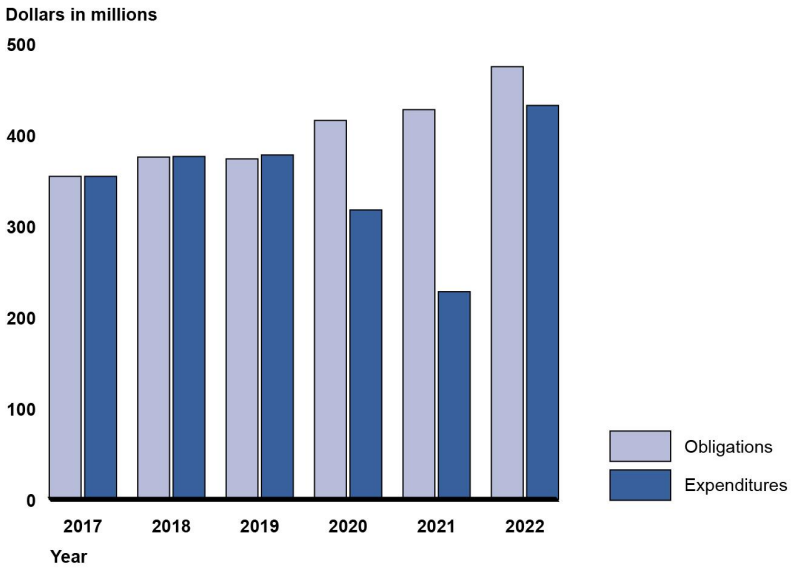
The Department of Agriculture (USDA) allocates and distributes food under The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) to state agencies, which often are state departments of health and human services, agriculture, or education. These agencies select local agencies, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to local organizations, such as soup kitchens, pantries, or shelters that directly serve the public.

State agencies determine program eligibility rules and allocations to local recipient agencies. TEFAP foods may reach individuals who do not qualify for other food assistance programs or may supplement assistance provided by other programs. State~~s~~ agencies have discretion to set eligibility standards for program recipients as long as the standards meet broad requirements outlined in program regulations. Generally, eligibility standards are based on a household's income or eligibility for other income-based federal, state, or local food, health, or other assistance programs. Organizations that provide prepared meals must demonstrate that they serve largely low-income people.

Funding Characteristics

USDA allocates and distributes food and administrative funds to state agencies according to a formula that takes into account the number of people in the state who are poor or unemployed. The majority of funding is used to purchase food, and the remainder is used for administrative support for state and local agencies.

Figure 10: Obligations and Expenditures for The Emergency Food Assistance Program, Fiscal Years 2017–2022



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Agriculture data. | GAO-23-105458

Accessible Data for Figure 10: Obligations and Expenditures for The Emergency Food Assistance Program, Fiscal Years 2017–2022

Year	Obligations (dollars in millions)	Expenditures (dollars in millions)
2017	354.203094	354.236092
2018	375.4687	376.165504
2019	373.428788	377.802747
2020	415.652364	317.410627
2021	427.479719	227.760472
2022	474.540209	432.091857

Note: Figure does not include funding from COVID-19 relief laws. In some years, expenditures may exceed obligations because states may continue to expend funds after the end of the fiscal year.

Program Outcomes

In fiscal year 2021, TEFAP provided 1.3 billion pounds of food with a value of $1.68 billion.