

## Information About and Directions for Completing:

### ***Meal Pattern Flexibility Request During Unanticipated School Closures***

#### **Background:**

On March 25, 2020, the USDA issued COVID–19: Child Nutrition Response #4, Nationwide Waiver to Allow Meal Pattern Flexibility in the Child Nutrition Programs in light of the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 public health emergency. This waiver allows the State Agency (SA) to grant meal pattern flexibility waivers to sponsors experiencing disruptions to the availability of food products resulting from the impacts of COVID-19. This waiver is applicable to the CACFP, SFSP, and NSLP/SBP meal patterns and is only active during the closure of local schools.

This form should only be completed if your organization is currently experiencing difficulty procuring and serving one or more components per meal pattern requirements. The SA will review the request and if approved, will require your organization to maintain records related to the basis for the request and the substitutions made.

*Special Note for Childcare Centers: Licensed childcare centers are subject to Mississippi State Department of Health (MSDH) regulations as well as USDA regulations. Please check with the MSDH before substituting meal components to ensure compliance with the nutritional requirements set forth in their regulations. The approval of meal pattern flexibility requests from the MDE-OCN does not constitute approval from MSDH.*

If granted approval for a meal pattern flexibility, please keep in mind that it is always best practice to provide children with a variety of healthy options that aligns as closely as possible with the Child Nutrition Program meal patterns.

#### **How to Complete Application:**

1. Enter School District or Sponsor Name, Contact Name, and Contact Phone Number.
2. Select the meal pattern your organization is currently serving.
3. List any components you are currently unable to procure. Keep in mind that the unavailability of one option for a component (for example, bananas for fruit) is not sufficient justification to not include the component in the meal service.
4. Provide a detailed description of efforts to obtain the unavailable component.

***Bad example:*** *My vendor is out of milk.*

**Good example:** *My vendor is out of milk. I also contacted two other vendors that service our area, and they cannot provide milk until May 1, 2020. All vendors' responses are in writing.*

5. Estimate the time period the components are expected to be unavailable. This should be based on the documentation of efforts to obtain the item.
6. Explain what food items you propose to substitute for the unavailable component(s).
7. List the names of all sites impacted. The site names listed should match the names in the Mississippi Application Reimbursement System (MARS).
8. Estimate the impact the substitution will have on program cost. In other words, will the substitution cost your organization more, less, or the same as providing the unavailable component would?
9. To submit the application, upload it in MARS and click the red "submit for approval button." It is acceptable, but not required, to include documentation (e.g. procurement efforts, pricing) with the application. Documentation must be maintained for 3 years plus the current year.

## **IMPORTANT NOTES**

- Per USDA, procurement requirements are not waived during the unanticipated school closures. Follow your procurement plan in obtaining quotes/bids.
- Quotes/bids should be solicited from multiple sources before determining that a component is unavailable.
- Increased cost may be a factor; however, you must maintain documentation of pricing "before and after" if this is part of the justification for a substitution.
- Should your organization receive a flexibility, we encourage you to revisit the availability of the item regularly and to resume the regular meal pattern as soon as possible.