



**Date:** March 24, 2020  
**To:** Sweetened Beverage Tax Community Advisory Board (CAB)  
**From:** Jessica Finn Coven, Director, Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment  
**Subject:** Emergency Grocery Voucher Background and Eligibility

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Thank you for your support and input on the City of Seattle's efforts to keep food on the table for families and individuals most in need during this unprecedented pandemic. The Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE) appreciates the CAB's role and expertise in advising City leadership on where resources are needed to meaningfully address food insecurity and gaps in child health and development services. The City also wants to ensure that this grocery assistance and other emergency benefits are provided to people who need them most. We know that means including people impacted by systematic inequities and those vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The following information is provided in response to the questions raised about the grocery voucher program in your memo to the City Budget Office about Sweetened Beverage Tax revenue reprioritization. The memo provides background on the voucher program, information about households currently served, and how we plan to prioritize eligibility moving forward. Please let us know if you have any further questions or requests.

#### **Background on the Emergency Grocery Voucher Program**

On March 16, 2020, the City of Seattle announced provision of \$5 million in grocery vouchers to help families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The initial funding reached 6,250 families in need, each receiving a total of \$800 over two months that can be used to purchase any item at Safeway except for tobacco, alcohol, lottery tickets, or fuel. The City is working with the United Way of King County and other private and philanthropic partners to secure additional funding to allow expansion of this emergency benefit.

OSE leveraged the Fresh Bucks program infrastructure and relationship with Safeway to develop the grocery voucher program. While Fresh Bucks provides assistance to buy produce, the City knows people facing hardship due to COVID-19 need access to more types of food. To start off the new grocery voucher program OSE identified families already enrolled in other City programs, to receive \$800 in vouchers over two months to purchase food, cleaning supplies, and other household goods at any Safeway store in Washington state. The first round of \$400 in vouchers was mailed starting March 20, and the second round will be mailed in April.

#### **Families Served through First Enrollment**

To determine eligibility for the first enrollment into the grocery voucher program, several city departments worked together to identify those most in need who could also be enrolled quickly (OSE worked with the Department of Education and Early Learning, Human Services Department and Parks



and Recreation). Enrolling families and individuals already participating in city programs saved time since income eligibility and contact information was already available. The departments prioritized programs with closest ties to communities of color, those developed with extensive race and social justice analysis, and those providing childcare assistance. The decision to focus on childcare assistance was driven by the City’s desire to quickly identify families impacted by school and business closures. The City recognized that those closures would likely disproportionately impact those who already had difficulty affording childcare. We also began immediately working with the Mayor and offices of Labor Standards, Economic Development, Immigration and Refugee Affairs, and Civil Rights to establish a mechanism for reaching dislocated workers for a second enrollment in grocery vouchers. While the City would have liked to reach those workers directly in the first round of vouchers, we knew this would take longer because the data did not exist at the time.

Based on those parameters, the decision was made to automatically enroll families/households from the following programs. See Appendix A for demographics of the families served in each of the programs.

Program	Family/Household Eligibility
<p><b>Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program</b> ECEAP is state-funded and offers part-day and full-day preschool services for 3- and 4-year-olds from income eligible families.</p>	<p>All ECEAP families that are Seattle residents were enrolled in the grocery voucher program.</p> <p>ECEAP serves families at or below 110% of FPL with children between the ages of 3 and 5. Children from some families above the income limit are eligible if they have a developmental delay or disability or are experiencing environmental factors such as homelessness.</p>
<p><b>Child Care Assistance Program</b> CCAP provides income-eligible families in Seattle with financial assistance for childcare.</p>	<p>All enrolled families were enrolled in the grocery voucher program.</p> <p>CCAP is designed to serve families living in Seattle with income that falls between 200% and 350% of the FPL.</p>
<p><b>Seattle Preschool Program and Pathway to Seattle Preschool Program</b> The <b>Seattle Preschool program</b> provides free and affordable tuition for families to enroll children in high quality preschool with community-based organizations (CBOs) and providers across the city. <b>Pathway</b> provides half-day or full-day instruction for 3 and 4-year-olds from low income families.</p>	<p>Enrolled families below 350% of FPL were enrolled in the grocery voucher program.</p> <p>Families qualify for free tuition in these programs if they are at or below 350% of FPL.</p>



Program	Family/Household Eligibility
<p><b>Child Care Nutrition Program</b> CCNP is part of the USDA’s Child and Adult Care Food Program, which also regulates school lunch. This program ensures children have nutritious food options in childcare by providing reimbursements to eligible providers.</p>	<p>Tier 1 site providers, provider staff, and the households they serve were enrolled in the grocery voucher program.</p> <p>The following criteria qualify a site as Tier 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Site location where any school has at least 50% or more of the enrolled children certified eligible for free or reduced-price meals.</li> <li>• Site location in a census block group that is deemed eligible for the program by the USDA based on the estimated household income from the American Community Survey.</li> <li>• Site provider’s income is at or below 185% of FPL.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Seattle Parks School-Age Care and Preschool Programming</b> These are before and/or afterschool programs for preschool-age children and children 5-12.</p>	<p>Families/households receiving City scholarships for these programs were enrolled in the grocery voucher program.</p> <p>Families at or below 200% FPL are eligible for scholarships.</p>
<p><b>Fresh Bucks</b> Fresh Bucks provides income eligible individuals with vouchers for fresh fruits and vegetables. People enroll through Community-Based Organization (CBO)s and health clinics, as well as a public lottery that is currently open through the end of March.</p>	<p>Households enrolled into the Fresh Bucks program between December 2019 and March 2020 by one of 11 partner community-based organizations (CBOs) were enrolled in the grocery voucher program.</p> <p>The City prioritized people who enrolled through a CBO because of the intentional outreach to communities most impacted by diet-related disease and food insecurity, specifically Black/African American, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, immigrants and refugees, and those who speak a primary language other than English.</p> <p><b>The 11 partner CBOs are:</b> Atlantic Street Center, Casa Latina, Children’s Home Society of Washington, Got Green, Horn of Africa Services, InterIm CDA, Lake City Collective, Latino Community Fund, Somali Health Board, South Park Information and Resource Center, United Indians of All Tribes Foundation.</p>

**Determining Eligibility for Additional Emergency Grocery Vouchers**

The City anticipates further funding for these vouchers will become available through private and philanthropic partners. The Mayor’s Office and OSE staff are working across departments and incorporating community recommendations to determine eligibility.



#### Eligibility for Second Enrollment

Per direction from the Mayor's Office, the next set of vouchers (when funded) will be prioritized for displaced workers. The Mayor's Office, in partnership with the Office of Labor Standards, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs, and the Office for Civil Rights, is working on a process to direct vouchers to at least 2,000 households with displaced workers who:

1. Experience structural or institutional barriers to accessing support from the government (e.g. language barrier, fear of deportation, experienced domestic violence, do not qualify for other benefits); and/or
2. Require assistance immediately and are not yet receiving other types of support (i.e. recently unemployed and not receiving benefits until claims are processed).

We are still in conversation with departments about how to distribute these vouchers equitably and in a way that respects privacy of information held by CBOs and other organizations working with these communities. Any plans developed are pending legislation currently under review by City Council.

#### Defining Eligibility for Future Grocery Voucher Enrollments

OSE is also working with departments and stakeholders to determine criteria for future recipients, should funding to support more than two rounds of vouchers become available. Currently that approach includes prioritizing people historically impacted by structural inequities, as we know that a nation-wide emergency like the COVID-19 outbreak only exacerbates those inequities. We are also prioritizing people increasingly vulnerable to the health and economic impacts of the outbreak. While defining criteria we are also considering factors such as maintaining privacy of enrollees.

The City will continue to use forthcoming information about the most impacted communities (such as the recent Community Attributes report cited in your memo) and incorporate core values and budget principles from the CAB. SBT revenue provided the initial funding for this program, and the City values the community voices and public health expertise the CAB brings to the table.

Thank you again for your partnership with the City during this trying time. We will continue to look to you for input and guidance as we develop programs that provide food to our neighbors most in need.



## Appendix A

### Demographics of Emergency Grocery Voucher Enrollees

Each City program that enrolled households into the first round of emergency grocery vouchers records demographic data slightly differently. The following tables provide the information available about demographics of grocery voucher recipients from each program. Demographic information on the enrollees from the Parks and Recreation before and after school programs is not currently available.

#### Fresh Bucks Participants

The following tables show the demographics of emergency voucher recipients who were identified through Fresh Bucks.

Race	Percent
Asian	23%
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%
Black/African American	39%
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish	19%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
White	9%
Prefer not to answer	2%
Prefer to self-describe	4%

Preferred Language	Percent
English	46%
Spanish	16%
Chinese	14%
Amharic	6%
Tigrinya	4%
Somali	4%
Vietnamese	3%
Oromo	3%
Prefer to self-describe	2%
Khmer	1%
Arabic	1%
Russian	1%

Age Range	Percent
18-29	12%
30-39	21%
40-49	18%
50-59	13%
60-69	16%
70-79	14%
80 or older	7%



CCAP, ECEAP and Seattle Preschool Program Participants

The following tables show the demographics of emergency voucher recipients who were identified through childcare assistance programs.

Race	Percent
Black/African-American	40.1%
Hispanic/Latino	21.8%
White	13.7%
Two or more races	10.7%
Asian, Asian-American	9.7%
Unknown/other	2.5%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.0%
Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander	0.6%

Preferred Language	Percent
English	66.2%
Spanish	13.7%
East African	12.8%
Other	4.8%
Chinese	2.8%

Child Care Nutrition Program (CCNP)

The following tables show the race/ethnicity of CCNP Tier 1 site providers and children served whose households were identified to receive emergency vouchers. CCNP does not collect information on preferred language.

Race/Ethnicity of Provider	Percent
Black or African American	42.5%
White	30%
Asian	10%
Unknown	10%
Multiple Race/Ethnicity*	7.5%

\*includes 100% of providers identified as Hispanic/Latino ethnicity as well as another race/ethnicity.

Race/Ethnicity of Children Served	Percent
White	36%
Black or African American	34%
Multiple Race/Ethnicity*	21%
Asian	4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Unknown	2%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%

\*includes 9% of children identified as Hispanic/Latino ethnicity as well as another race/ethnicity.