

St. Francis House Grant Draft

Abstract

St. Francis House, Inc. (SFH) is the only food pantry in Little Rock open five days a week with no eligibility requirements. Located in zip code 72204, the lowest-income zip code in the city, SFH served 7,631 unique individuals and logged 12,794 food pantry visits in the most recent reporting year, a 45% increase in monthly demand since 2023. At the same time, food costs are rising: staple proteins have increased 20% year-over-year per Arkansas Foodbank data. This proposal requests \$5,000 to purchase healthy proteins, fresh and canned produce, dairy products, and whole grains for SFH's Community Food Pantry over a six-month project period (July 1 through December 31, 2026). Grant funds will improve the nutritional quality of daily food bags, increase snack bag distribution for homeless neighbors, and strengthen monthly senior food distributions. SFH holds a clean 2024 audit, 55 years of uninterrupted service, and a projected annual operating budget of \$280,900 supported by individual donors, Episcopal churches, and community foundations.

History of the Organization

Founded in January 1970 as a social outreach of the Episcopal Church in Arkansas, St. Francis House has spent more than five decades doing one thing: opening its doors to neighbors in crisis and refusing to turn anyone away. That commitment is rooted partly in the legacy of St. Phillip's Church, an Episcopal mission that served Little Rock's Black community for 86 years before its building was claimed by the Interstate-630 urban renewal project. The people displaced by that highway became, in many ways, SFH's first community. SFH was formally incorporated on February 12, 1975. In 1988, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs awarded SFH a contract to house and serve homeless Veterans, a program that continues uninterrupted today across transitional housing, counseling, meals, laundry, and employment services. That 38-year federal partnership is itself a statement about organizational reliability.

SFH's mission is "to provide a means of addressing the critical needs of the under-served which are not adequately addressed by others in the community." The organization intentionally hires justice-involved individuals, providing dignified employment to people others overlook. In 2025, 263 volunteers contributed 4,383 hours, many of them former clients who now give back to the community that once sustained them. SFH's most recent audit (fiscal year ended September 30, 2024) returned a clean, unmodified opinion with no material weaknesses or findings. Total assets stand at \$1,937,479 with net assets of \$1,591,594. The Arkansas Community Foundation and the Dale & Janice Davis Johnston Family Foundation both provided grants to SFH in 2024 and 2025, reflecting the confidence of the local philanthropic community in the organization's capacity and accountability.

Need for Support

The individuals St. Francis house serves are working-age adults, seniors on fixed incomes, Veterans navigating reentry, and neighbors who have exhausted every other option the city offers. What brings them to SFH is simple: it is the only food pantry in Little Rock open five days a week that will serve any of them, regardless of income, address, or documentation. No other pantry in the city can say the same.

The need is not stable. In the most recent reporting year (October 2024 through September 2025), SFH served 7,631 unique individuals across 12,794 food pantry visits, an average of 51 visits every operating day. That represents a 45% increase in monthly demand since 2023. In that same year, 3,731 individuals walked through SFH's door for the first time. With continued pressure on food and energy prices, demand is not leveling off.

Understanding who those clients are matters. Eighty-one percent are unemployed. Thirty-four percent receive no government benefits whatsoever: no SNAP, no Medicaid, no housing assistance. For one in three of SFH's clients, this organization is the only external resource they will receive. An additional 1,396 clients are experiencing homelessness and depend on SFH's snack bags for daily caloric intake. Another 1,922 are seniors 60 and older, a population with fixed incomes and elevated nutritional needs tied to chronic disease management.

Because food insecurity in 72204 is structural rather than situational, the need cannot be addressed by telling people to look elsewhere. When the only no-barrier food pantry in a city's lowest-income zip code is stretched beyond its purchasing capacity at the same moment demand has risen by 45%, food quality suffers. According to Arkansas Foodbank pricing data, chicken thighs, a pantry staple, increased by 20% year-over-year, while SFH's food budget has not grown to match. The result is a pantry doing more with less, distributing more processed items at precisely the time its clients need fresh proteins, produce, dairy, and whole grains. Diet-related chronic disease is disproportionately concentrated in communities like 72204. What goes into a food bag is a health equity issue.

SFH brings 55 years of community trust, a volunteer force that grows from within its own client base, a 38-year federal contract, and a financial track record recognized by multiple Arkansas funders. What it cannot do on its existing budget is consistently source higher-quality food. That is a concrete, solvable problem, and this grant is the solution.

Project Description

The Healthy Food Access Expansion project will direct \$5,000 toward purchasing healthy proteins, fresh and canned produce, dairy products, and whole grains for SFH's Community Food Pantry between July 1 and December 31, 2026. This is not a new program – it is a quality upgrade to an existing operation with a 55-year record, designed to close the gap between what SFH currently distributes and what its clients actually need.

Activity 1: Daily Food Bag Enhancement. Lewis assembles and distributes food bags to an average of 51 clients per day. Those bags are built primarily from donated and commodity foods, which skew toward processed, high-sodium, and low-protein items. Grant funds will allow SFH to regularly integrate healthy proteins, produce, dairy, and whole grains into daily bags as a consistent component of what every client receives. Ricky, who collects donated food from local partners including Chick-fil-A, will coordinate supplemental sourcing. Target: at least 30% of bags during the project period will include one or more grant-purchased items, tracked through Lewis' weekly distribution logs.

Activity 2: Snack Bag Expansion. SFH currently distributes pre-packed snack bags three times per month to neighbors experiencing homelessness who cannot store or prepare food. Grant funds will increase this to four times per month and ensure every bag includes a shelf-stable protein (nut butter, canned fish, or dried legumes) and a whole grain item suited for clients without refrigeration access.

Activity 3: Senior Distribution Strengthening. Each month, SFH holds a dedicated food distribution for seniors 60 and older (1,922 senior cases in the most recent year). Grant funds will support low-sodium proteins, dairy alternatives, and produce in senior boxes. UAMS SAVE Program medical students, who already visit SFH monthly, will assist with on-site capacity during these distributions.

Goals, Objectives, and Methods

Goal 1: Increase the nutritional quality of food distributed through the Community Food Pantry.

Objective 1.1: By December 31, 2026, at least 30% of daily food bags distributed during the grant period will include one or more grant-purchased healthy food items – a protein, produce item, dairy or dairy alternative, or whole grain – as tracked in Lewis’ weekly distribution logs.

Method: Lewis will use an updated bag assembly checklist that designates a slot for a grant-purchased item in each daily bag. Ricky handles bi-weekly purchasing through the Arkansas Foodbank and local suppliers; Philip reviews stock every Friday to inform the following week's order.

Objective 1.2: By December 31, 2026, snack bag distribution will increase from three times per month to four, and 100% of bags will include at least one shelf-stable protein and one whole grain item, as documented in Christina's distribution log.

Method: Christina will use a standardized snack bag checklist reflecting the updated item requirements and assemble bags the business day before each distribution event, targeting approximately 3,000 bags over the six-month period.

Goal 2: Strengthen SFH's senior food distribution program.

Objective 2.1: By December 31, 2026, every senior food box distributed during the grant period will include at least one low-sodium protein, one dairy or dairy alternative, and one produce item purchased with grant funds, as confirmed in monthly senior distribution records.

Method: Staff will set aside a portion of each bi-weekly food purchase specifically for senior boxes. The Community Outreach team will coordinate with UAMS SAVE Program students for additional on-site support during monthly distributions.

Time Period

The project period runs from July 1, 2026 through December 31, 2026.

Month	Activity
July 2026	Initial food purchasing; updated bag checklist; begin 4x/month snack bag schedule
August 2026	Review first-month bag composition data; adjust purchasing as needed
September 2026	Senior distribution enhancement fully in place; mid-point report submitted
October 2026	Quarterly data review; adjust snack bag contents based on client feedback
Nov - Dec 2026	Final push on all objectives; collect evaluation data; draft final report

Personnel

No grant funds are requested for personnel. All staff costs are covered through SFH's existing Community Outreach budget (\$117,695 in salaries; \$27,102 in benefits). Key project personnel:

- Darlene, Interim Executive Director -- project oversight and funder reporting
- Christina – client intake; maintains distribution tracking logs used for evaluation
- Lewis — daily bag assembly and distribution; implements updated packing checklist
- Ricky – donated food collection; manages bi-weekly grant-funded food purchasing

In 2025, 263 volunteers contributed 4,383 hours supporting food sorting, bag assembly, and distribution. At Arkansas's estimated volunteer labor value of \$15.34/hour, that represents \$67,235 in annual in-kind support, and volunteers will continue throughout the project period at no additional cost.

Projected Budget

Project Budget / Requested Amount

Item (Quantity X Unit Cost)	Total
Healthy Proteins approx. 800 lbs X \$2.50/lb avg -- fresh/frozen chicken, canned tuna/salmon, dried and canned beans (chicken up 20% YOY per AR Foodbank data)	2,000
Fresh and Canned Produce approx. 600 units X \$2.00/unit -- low-sodium canned vegetables, 100% juices, seasonal fresh produce	1,200
Dairy and Dairy Alternatives approx. 400 units X \$2.00/unit -- shelf-stable milk, soy/almond milk, canned evaporated milk (shelf-stable selected for clients without refrigeration)	800
Whole Grains approx. 500 units X \$2.00/unit -- whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, rolled oats, whole-grain cereal (min. 3g fiber)	1,000
Total Requested	5,000

Organization Budget -- 2026 (Projected)

Source	Amount
Charles Taylor Foundation program grant support	25,000
Christmas Gifts annual Christmas letter campaign and gifts	106,000
Episcopal Churches Income direct support from Episcopal churches	22,000

Individual Donors individual donor contributions	22,500
Other Groups / Churches community and other group contributions	32,000
Interest and Miscellaneous Income interest income and miscellaneous revenue	3,100
Shrimp Boil Fundraiser – St. Mark’s annual community fundraising event	15,000
Individual Income – SSEF individual donor support – SSEF	8,000
Episcopal Church Income – SSEF Episcopal church support – SSEF	8,500
Other Groups / Churches – SSEF group and church support – SSEF	28,800
Mini Grants small program and project grants	10,000
TAP Bus Pass Program Income transit assistance program reimbursements	44,000
Arkansas Foodbank In-Kind Support subsidized purchasing and USDA commodity distributions -- est. project-period value	500
Volunteer Labor (In-Kind) 263 volunteers X 4,383 hrs X \$15.34/hr	67,235
This Grant Request (pending) Healthy Food Access Expansion, project period only	5,000
Total Organization Budget	280,900

Note: VA federal contracts (Re-Entry Program, \$958,237; SSVF, \$4,281,944) are separately budgeted through SFH's Veterans programs and do not appear above. The \$5,000 request represents approximately 1.5% of projected operating expenses, well within the IRS one-third threshold.

Evaluation Plan

SFH has maintained a daily operational tracking system since April 2023. The evaluation plan builds on that existing infrastructure, so there is no additional cost and no new systems to set up. Assessment is built directly into the methods.

Throughout the grant period, Lewis will keep a weekly tally of how many food bags included grant-purchased items, giving the team a running percentage against the Objective 1.1 target of 30%. Christina will log each snack bag distribution event, including count and item contents, to track Objective 1.2. All grant-funded purchases will be tracked as a distinct line item in SFH's bookkeeping system, keeping financial reporting clean and auditable.

At project close, the team will pull together all data. For Objective 1.1, weekly bag logs will be totaled to calculate the percentage meeting the healthy item standard over the full six months – the goal is 30% or higher. For Objective 1.2, snack bag records will confirm protein and whole grain inclusion reached 100% by the final distribution month. For Objective 2.1, monthly senior distribution records will confirm every senior box met the nutritional item requirement.

SFH will submit a mid-point progress report in September 2026 and a final project report in January 2027, each including distribution numbers, bag composition data, purchasing records, and a narrative account of outcomes against each objective. If September data shows something is off-track, staff will adjust during the October review period. The Community Outreach team's ongoing case management relationships with returning clients will also provide informal qualitative feedback that informs the final report narrative. Numbers tell most of the story – but the people who waited in that line on a Tuesday morning tell the rest.