

PRESS RELEASE/FAQ



Food Bank
OF NORTHEAST GEORGIA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FOOD BANK OF NORTHEAST GEORGIA GOES DIGITAL TO PINPOINT COUNTIES WITH FOOD INSECURITIES

This change will provide the food bank and corresponding agencies with new data and insights to make more effective changes in communities across Georgia.

ATHENS, Ga., Feb. 2, 2022 —The Food Bank of Northeast Georgia launched a new initiative allowing them to use Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) forms collected over the past eight years to see which counties are in need of food bank access. This will allow previously unseen disparities to be brought to light for the goodness of the community.

TEFAP is a federal program that provides emergency food assistance at no cost to low-income families. The Food Bank of Northeast Georgia, along with other food banks across the country, collect these forms from families receiving food assistance. The problem with the previous TEFAP collection system was the entirely paper process which prevented any data analysis that could improve the distribution of food across Georgia counties. By digitizing and processing the data received on these forms, the organization can now provide more accurate assistance to their 200 partner organizations across 14 counties in the state of Georgia.

Moving forward, the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia has a system digitizing forms through _____ software and can now more efficiently acquire data used in visualization models to target low-income families and their locations. In addition, 200 distribution agencies now have access to a training pamphlet on how to navigate the fully-digital system. Just like any organization, data can be key with food banks when given the resources and analysis to make business decisions that change the future for the better. This step towards digitization



is the first of many that will have a lasting impact on our communities as a whole.

“We are excited for this opportunity to better serve our community and are looking forward to using the data insights for the new Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#)). Specifically, digitization of the TEFAP will allow us to see which counties are in need of special assistance,” said Jenna Vaisvil, Development Manager.

The paper form will still be used and transferred digitally which makes it an easy switch for the respective agencies.

“My life has been so much easier since the digitization process of the TEFAP forms. We no longer have to worry about searching through thousands of paper copies, and can easily access the forms when needed,” said Sarah Williams, FBNEGA Employee.

As we move forward, we hope to install a fully-digital system using devices on food bank sites. Any donations are welcome to assist in making this vision a reality and can be made on the [Food Bank of Northeast Georgia's donation page](#).

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About the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia:

Founded in 1992 with headquarters in Athens, Ga., the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia ([FBNEGA](#)) is a non-profit organization dedicated to ending hunger in 14 counties. With the help of 200 partner agencies, the food bank distributes more than 13 million pounds of food to their respective counties. For more information, visit <https://foodbanknega.org/>.

FAQ

What does the Food Bank of Northeast Georgia do?

The Food Bank of Northeast Georgia ([FBNEGA](#)) is a non-profit organization founded in 1992 that works to end hunger in fourteen counties of Georgia. The FBNEGA works with local, regional, state, and national product partners to distribute donated/surplus food to human-service agencies, who then distribute the food to people in need.

What is a TEFAP form?

The Emergency Food Assistance Program ([TEFAP](#)) eligibility form is a form used by The Food Bank of Northeast Georgia (FBNEGA) to determine an applicant's location, household size, and annual income in order to qualify them for food assistance. This form is given to a person upon arrival at a Food Bank location and is required to be filled out prior to receiving assistance. If eligible, this program provides free emergency food assistance to low-income Americans.

What is the TEFAP form currently used for at the FBNEGA?

The FBNEGA is not currently utilizing the information filled out in the TEFAP form. While the fulfillment of this form is legally required, no further analytics are currently performed on the forms once they are completed. This is unfortunate because there is information inside of this form, particularly county and household size, that could be useful to the FBNEGA.

What are some of the benefits of digitizing the form for future use?

As briefly mentioned above, certain information within the TEFAP form could be extremely beneficial to the FBNEGA if used properly. For example, an applicant's county is a piece of data that could help the FBNEGA determine where their services are needed most. They can then use this information to allocate their resources more efficiently. In addition, considering that most businesses and organizations have moved to electronic systems, digitizing the forms would reduce the amount of paper files the FBNEGA works with. This would increase employee efficiency and simplify the process of withdrawing useful information from these forms.

What kind of tools are out there that can aid in digitizing the form?

According to [Hyland](#), Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is a technology used to extract data from “printed or written text from a scanned document or image file.” Through the use of OCR, the information filled out by an applicant on paper would be turned into machine-readable text that can be organized and analyzed as data.

How will data visualization tools be utilized to improve processes for the FBNEGA?

In addition to implementing OCR software for the FBNEGA to simplify their form processing operations, we also plan to do some data visualizations for them. The value that these visualizations will bring is insight into the information filled out on an applicant's TEFAP form that will be easy to understand for anyone at the Food Bank. While a database full of applicant names, addresses, counties, household sizes, and more may look confusing or cluttered to a non-technical person, data visualizations will provide simple and intuitive visuals of the data, making it readable to all. This way, the FBNEGA will be able to better evaluate the data in the TEFAP most important to them, such as county and household size.

Moving forward, what is in store for the FBNEGA in terms of future tech improvements?

Future technological progressions for the Food Bank include possibly converting the TEFAP into a digital-only form. If a number of food distribution agencies agreed to incorporate tablets into their offices, the OCR software could be eliminated from the process and forms could be saved into a database much easier. We are hopeful that a slow integration of technological improvements (such as OCR) into the Food Bank system will motivate the organization and its partnering agencies to continue making more advancements in the future.