California State University
SAN MARCOS
SERVICE LEARNING
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO SELF-ADVOCACY: HOW TO OBTAIN PUBLIC BENEFITS- CALFRESH/SNAP

Sol Garcia-Haro



Page of Contents



1 ***Personal Statement: Why I am Doing This Guide***

2 ***What is CalFresh?***
Steps on how to advocate for yourself

3-4 ***Step 1: CalFresh Eligibility Guidelines and Tips***

5-6 ***Step 2: Gathering Documents*** + *Sol's Experience*

7-9 ***Step 3: How to Prepare for the Interview*** +*Sol's Experience*

10-11 ***For Transgender Individuals*** + *Sol's Experience*

12-13 ***For Undocumented or Mixed-status Individuals***

14-16 ***Step 4: How to Keep your Benefits***
Keeping track of your benefits
SAR7 and Recertification Renewal

A special thanks to Shelby Rogers (Service Learning & Civic Engagement) and Ana Ardón (National Latino Research Center-NLRC) for your support and guidance!



Personal Statement: Why I am Doing This Guide

DISCLAIMER: First and foremost, I am not a legal expert! I am a student with a computer, lived experience, and a drive for wanting to help others. As a student with lived experience I am motivated to help others who may need help accessing public benefits. This guide was created with the latest available research and resources to raise awareness about how to access food-related public benefits.

As we know, being a college student is not only stressful, but also expensive. Food insecurity is a major issue in college that affects a high number of students. If there is public aid for those who need funds for food, why is food insecurity so high within college populations? Jesus Chavarin-Rivas (2022) states in his research about the barriers college students face accessing CalFresh, that college students struggle with a variety of factors regarding applying to and accessing CalFresh, such as shame, lack of knowledge, fear, and hesitancy to share household information. Getting CalFresh can be a rough experience for most people, whether it is the way the county makes mistakes from time to time or never having the experience of applying for public aid. I want to ease some of the anxiety and frustration that may arise when applying and obtaining CalFresh.

I have been allowed to create something based on what I am passionate about for my Civic Engagement in Action Plan (I am a civic engagement ambassador on campus). Public benefits such as CalFresh are essential for our well-being; we have to eat! I want this guide to serve as a self-advocacy tool. I want you to feel more prepared and confident when seeking help via public aid. We should not have to struggle to eat.

I grew up on public benefits: Section 8, CalFresh, Medi-Cal, etc. I was also the main helper in the home for my mom. I would translate and research what needed to be done to get our benefits. After all this time, it can still be a confusing and weird experience. Applying for CalFresh as a student was different than my mom's application. Having to answer a call (ew) from the county was anxiety-inducing because it was unfamiliar. I want to make sure you do not feel as uncomfortable as I did.

People have made CalFresh guides before (and they are really helpful), and what I noticed was a lack of information about the interview process, what to do if you are transgender (preferred/birth name stuff), and what to do after you have your benefits.
This tool will not have all the answers for everyone's CalFresh cases (as you will see, CalFresh requirements vary case by case), but I hope it will still serve as a guide to getting the help you need no matter what barriers life (or the county) throws at you. It is possible!

I also want to emphasize that using public aid is not embarrassing and does not mean anything about who you are as a person. I know there have been many negative perceptions and stereotypes associated with people who use public aid (I grew up watching my mom experience this), but they are simply not true. Everyone needs a little support sometimes (even if they do not want to admit it).

There is power in understanding what you need help with and seeking it out. As college students, we should not feel ashamed of using public aid. Have you seen what is going on in the world? And you are still in college getting a higher education. Be proud of who you are and how far you have come! Most importantly, take care of yourself.

Okay, I am done hyping you up, let's go get groceries.



Applying to CalFresh online:

More information for Students applying for CalFresh:

Campus CalFresh Resources:

- You can request an appointment to meet with a County of San Diego Representative at the ASI Cougar Pantry.
- You can also walk-in and apply! **Walk-ins are available Tuesdays from 10am - 3pm at the ASI Cougar Pantry** on a first come, first serve basis.
- If you need further assistance or information, you can contact them at: **(760) 750-8200 or email Calfresh@csusm.edu**

So, what is CalFresh?

CalFresh, known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provides monthly food benefits to individuals and families with low incomes. It is the largest food program in California and provides an essential hunger safety net. CalFresh is federally mandated and, in California, is state-supervised and county-operated. The program issues monthly benefits on an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. Food may be purchased at any grocery store or farmers market that accepts EBT cards.

The CalFresh card looks like a debit card and you use it similarly, by swiping and providing your pin!





Students and CalFresh frequently asked questions

This guide will go over the information needed to advocate for yourself in 4 steps:

Step 1: CalFresh Eligibility Guidelines and Tips

Step 2: Gathering Documentation

Step 3: How to prepare for the Interview

Step 4: How to keep your Benefits

CalFresh benefits are provided in addition to any financial aid you receive. **CalFresh benefits do not negatively impact eligibility or total amount you receive in financial aid!**

CalFresh.https://cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/calfresh

STEP 1: ARE YOU ELIGIBLE?

Getting CalFresh as a CSUSM student

Note: If a person attends school but does not meet the student definition as required by CalFresh regulation, they can apply as a regular household, only needing to meet income guidelines.

To be considered a college student on the CalFresh application, an applicant must meet **all** of the following 3 requirements:

1. Be a student between the ages of 18 and 49

2. Be enrolled in at least half-time in an institution of higher education

3. Be physically and mentally able to attend school and work

If you did not answer yes to all three questions, you are not considered a student for CalFresh and do not need to meet any additional **exemptions.**
The term student is very specifically defined by CalFresh regulations. There are additional eligibility requirements for people who meet the student definition (**student exemptions**).

Note: To be eligible for CalFresh, **college students** must meet the **income limit** and meet **at least one student exemption**.

WHAT is a student exemption?

Individuals who are defined as students must meet additional criteria to avoid being excluded from CalFresh based on their student status. These criteria include demonstrating that they receive a Cal Grant A or B, work a certain number of hours, participate in Work Study, or meet one of the other exemptions.
Student exemptions allows students to bypass the general restrictions and be considered for eligibility, based on certain criteria.
Applicants who meet the CalFresh definition of a student must meet **ONE** of the following exemptions to be potentially eligible for CalFresh.

- Student works in a paid position for at least 20 hours a week or 80 hours a month
- Eligible for Federal Work-Study and **HAS NOT** refused a work assignment
- Receives Cal Grant A or B
- Has an estimated Family Contribution (efc) of $0
- Enrolled in an Approved Local Program that Increases Employability (**LPIE**) at CSUSM
- Exerting parent control over a dependent of 6 years old or in between 6 and 12 with no adequate childcare or a single parent with a dependent of 12 years old or younger.

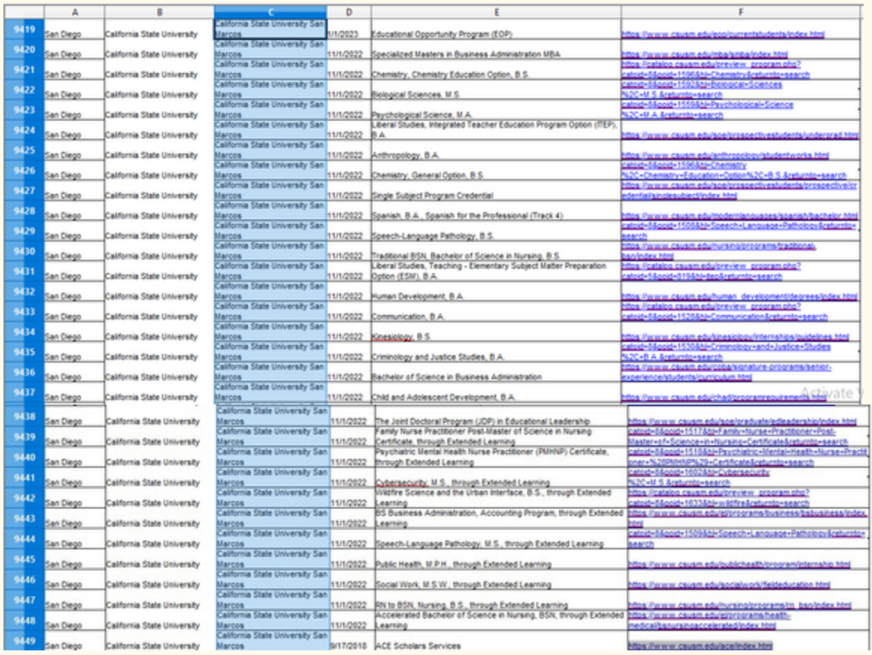
This a form for students to pre-screen if you are eligible for CalFresh as a college student. College students who meet both the regular eligibility criteria (like income) and have at least one check mark may be eligible for CalFresh.

Note: Students under the age of 22 and who live with their parents must apply together (even if they do not purchase and prepare food with you).

For CalFresh, there is no differentiation between **graduate students** and other students. Both are defined using the same criteria for students above. There are no specific exclusions for graduate students.

Students who are **military veterans** are subject to the student eligibility rule. There are no specific exclusions for students who are veterans.

Approved LPIE Programs at CSUSM



	A	B	C	D	E	F
9419	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	1/1/2023	Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)	https://www.csusm.edu/eop/currentstudents/index.html
9420	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Specialized Masters in Business Administration MBA	https://www.csusm.edu/mba/smba/index.html
9421	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Chemistry, Chemistry Education Option, B.S.	https://catalog.csusm.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=18&poid=1496&hl=Chemistry&returnto=search
9422	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Biological Sciences, M.S.	catoid=18&poid=1592&hl=Biological+Sciences%2C+M.S.&returnto=search
9423	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Psychological Science, M.A.	catoid=18&poid=1556&hl=Psychological+Science%2C+M.A.&returnto=search
9424	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Liberal Studies, Integrated Teacher Education Program Option (ITEP), B.A.	https://www.csusm.edu/soe/prospectivestudents/undergrad.html
9425	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Anthropology, B.A.	https://www.csusm.edu/anthropology/studentworks.html
9426	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Chemistry, General Option, B.S.	catoid=18&poid=1596&hl=Chemistry%2C+Chemistry+Education+Option%2C+B.S.&returnto=search
9427	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Single Subject Program Credential	https://www.csusm.edu/soe/prospectivestudents/prospectivecredentialprogramsdistrict/index.html
9428	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Spanish, B.A., Spanish for the Professional (Track 4)	https://www.csusm.edu/modernlanguages/spanish/bachelor.html
9429	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Speech-Language Pathology, B.S.	catoid=18&poid=1506&hl=Speech-Language+Pathology&returnto=search
9430	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Traditional BSN, Bachelor of Science in Nursing, B.S.	https://www.csusm.edu/nursing/programs/traditional-bsn/index.html
9431	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Liberal Studies, Teaching - Elementary Subject Matter Preparation Option (ESM), B.A.	https://catalog.csusm.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=18&poid=8196&hl=ba&returnto=search
9432	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Human Development, B.A.	https://www.csusm.edu/human_development/degrees/index.html
9433	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Communication, B.A.	https://catalog.csusm.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=18&poid=1576&hl=Communication&returnto=search
9434	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Kinesiology, B.S.	https://www.csusm.edu/kinesiology/internships/guidelines.html
9435	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Criminology and Justice Studies, B.A.	catoid=18&poid=1530&hl=Criminology+and+Justice+Studies%2C+B.A.&returnto=search
9436	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Bachelor of Science in Business Administration	https://www.csusm.edu/cba/signature-programs/senior-experience/students/curriculum.html
9437	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Child and Adolescent Development, B.A.	https://www.csusm.edu/chad/programrequirements.html
9438	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	The Joint Doctoral Program (JDP) in Educational Leadership	https://www.csusm.edu/soe/graduate/eddleadership/index.html
9439	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Family Nurse Practitioner Post-Master of Science in Nursing Certificate, through Extended Learning	catoid=18&poid=15173&hl=Family+Nurse+Practitioner+Post-Master+of+Science+in+Nursing+Certificate&returnto=search
9440	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) Certificate, through Extended Learning	catoid=18&poid=15188&hl=Psychiatric+Mental+Health+Nurse+Practitioner+%28PMHNP%29+Certificate&returnto=search
9441	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Cybersecurity, M.S., through Extended Learning	catoid=18&poid=16924&hl=cybersecurity%2C+M.S.&returnto=search
9442	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Wildfire Science and the Urban Interface, B.S., through Extended Learning	https://catalog.csusm.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=18&poid=16933&hl=wildfire&returnto=search
9443	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	BS Business Administration, Accounting Program, through Extended Learning	https://www.csusm.edu/gi/programs/business/bsbusiness/index.html
9444	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Speech-Language Pathology, M.S., through Extended Learning	catoid=18&poid=15099&hl=Speech-Language+Pathology&returnto=search
9445	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Public Health, M.P.H., through Extended Learning	https://www.csusm.edu/publichealth/program/mphsite.html
9446	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Social Work, M.S.W., through Extended Learning	https://www.csusm.edu/socialwork/fieldeducation.html
9447	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	RN to BSN, Nursing, B.S., through Extended Learning	https://www.csusm.edu/nursing/programs/rn_bsn/index.html
9448	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	11/1/2022	Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing, BSN, through Extended Learning	https://www.csusm.edu/gi/programs/health-medicalsciences/accelerated/index.html
9449	San Diego	California State University	California State University San Marcos	9/17/2018	ACE Scholars Services	https://www.csusm.edu/ace/index.html

https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/CalFresh/Students/Approved%20LPIE%20List.xlsxh

Income Eligibility and Household Information

Income Guidelines (October 1, 2024 - September 30, 2025)

Household Size	Gross Monthly Income (200% FPL)	Maximum CalFresh Allotment
1	$2,510	$292
2	$3,408	$536
3	$4,304	$768
4	$5,200	$975
5	$6,098	$1,158
6	$6,994	$1,390
7	$7,890	$1,536
8	$8,788	$1,756
Each additional member	+$898	+$220

What you are allowed to make depending on your household size!

STEP 2: DOCUMENTS THE COUNTY NEEDS!

If you fall under any of the document examples (like you pay child care, rent, and have a disability), it is important for you to give them proof of all of it so they can adjust your benefit amount accordingly (increase your amount).

You do not need to provide all these documents unless it applies to you!

Documents you may need/the county might ask for:

- Proof of Student Status
- Proof of Financial Aid (examples: TANF letter, financial aid award letter)
- Proof of Expected Family Contribution (EFC) of $0
- Proof of eligibility for work-study
- Verification letter of LPIE (if necessary)

Note: These can be copies of paperwork you have. They will tell you if they need documents with an official stamp, for example: an official college transcript.

Additional documents

- Proof of identification (examples: driver's license or identification card, passport, work or school ID, birth certificate, voter registration card)
- Social security numbers for everyone who is applying
- Proof of immigration status (examples: copy of your green card (both sides), a copy of your most recent paperwork for a U visa, T Visa, Asylum, Refugee or Parolee status, or VAWA petition. Naturalized U.S. citizens may be asked to provide a copy of their U.S. passport or naturalization papers)

Note: What if you cannot get the proof? Tell your case worker during your CalFresh applicant interview. CalFresh will generally accept a sworn statement as a last resort if you cannot get the documents needed.

- Proof of rent expenses (examples: copy of rental agreement, rent receipts, a letter from your landlord stating you live there and the rent amount- include proof of utility bills, phone bills, etc., it can help with your benefit amount)
- Proof of income from the last 30 days (examples: pay stubs, statement from employer, alimony check, award letter for unemployment or disability benefits)
- Proof of child support paid (examples: copy of child support check or payment stub)
- Proof of child or adult care costs (example: bills)
- Proof of disability (example: award letter)
- Proof of medical costs if 60+ or disabled (examples: receipts for prescriptions, copay, service animal costs, glasses, hearing aids)

Sol's Experience!

Disclaimer: CalFresh cases are case-by-case; this means what is required of you by the county will depend on your personal lifestyle (income, legal status, if you get FAFSA, etc.)

Proof/documentation of my lifestyle included:

- Identity: California ID and Social Security Number (and other things, but that is a transgender experience I will mention later)
- Proof of Income: Screenshots of my financial aid on **MyCSUSM** that included my Work Study amount, screenshots of my hours logged on **MyHR** (found in MyCSUSM for student workers), I also included an email sent by the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office that stated what grants I received for that year, for me it was Cal Grant B. When I received checks from CSUSM for my **work-study**, I also included them. If you have direct deposit, a screenshot from the website that has your total check amount with your legal name will do!

- Rent, bills, etc.: Screenshot of my lease with the total rent amount, screenshot of my rent total from my apartment complex app-that has my legal name on it, and I included utilities not paid for by my rent.

Note: Remember that almost all forms of documentation should include your legal name- this makes the process a lot smoother.

Note: Include screenshots or documentation of bills outside your rent like an electricity bill, phone bill, etc.

- If your name is not on the lease where you rent but you pay rent, you can submit alternative forms of proof like a letter by a **collateral contact**. Acceptable **collateral contacts** include employers, landlords, social service agencies, migrant service agencies, and neighbors of the household. The CalFresh office can contact these types of individuals to confirm admissions by the household. For example, the CalFresh office might ask an employer to send a letter confirming wages. Or, the CalFresh office might call a landlord or neighbors to confirm an address. You can also ask the county during the interview process what other ways you can provide documentation if this is your experience.

- Student proof: What is easiest, in my opinion, is to log into your **MyCSUSM**, click on **Student Center**, scroll down to **Financial Aid** where it will say **Account Summary**, under the Account Summary there will be a link embedded into **Account Itemization**, click that link and you will be able to choose what term you are looking for, once you have the Aid year you need as proof, click on **Printer Friendly Version**, and you will be able to download it.

This will include your class schedule and your legal name with your student ID (all the student proof you need!).

I also had to provide documentation for my partner, as we buy and make more than half our meals together and she is considered part of my household (this is something I will mention again in the interview information portion).

The documentation I had to provide for my partner was her:

- ID
- Social Security card
- Proof of her income in the form of paystubs.

Who is in the CalFresh household determines whose income needs to be counted and the amount of benefits the household receives.

A "**household**" can be a person living alone or a group of people living together who buy food and make meals together.

People who live together and purchase food and prepare meals together are grouped as a "household". Husbands and wives and their children under age 22 must be one household.

Note: In my case, I live with other roommates who I do not buy and make more than half my meals with, I did not need to provide any information about them because they are not considered to be part of my "household".

If you are only buying and making food for yourself, you alone are considered a 'household' and will only need to provide information about yourself!

STEP 3: ATTENDING AN INTERVIEW (over the phone or in person)

Interview process and information

Regardless of whether you do your CalFresh interview in person or over the phone, it may feel uncomfortable to answer questions you are unfamiliar with.
This section is to help you feel more prepared for your interview and to make sure you get your public benefits!

An interview is required before certifying your household to get CalFresh benefits. The interview can happen in person at the county office or by telephone (in most counties- San Diego being one of them). The interview may be held with the head of household, spouse, the authorized representative, or any other responsible household family member. An interview is required annually.

There is an option to **designate someone to help with your CalFresh application or benefits**.

You can allow a **helper** to do any or all of the following:

- Be an Authorized Representative on your application
- Spend your CalFresh benefits for you
- Speak to the county about your application (Release of Information)

An **Authorized Representative (the helper)** is a non-household member who can:

- Apply for benefits
- Complete work registration forms
- Complete required reporting
- Use the Electronic Benefits Card to purchase the household's food.

The **authorized representative** can do anything the CalFresh household recipient can do. The authorized representative can be anyone the applicant chooses to "represent" them. An eligible CalFresh household can also choose to have an authorized representative pick up its EBT card and buy its groceries.
This is someone **YOU** choose. To do this, you must (as the head of the 'household') click this as an option on the online application form or let someone know that you would like to do this (in an in-person interview).

Note: This can be useful for disability related reasons!

You can also apply over the phone with **211**!

- They can help complete your entire CalFresh application over the phone and answer questions along the way. They will also submit the application on your behalf. At the end of the application, they will let you know what documents you may need to provide to the county.
- Their process is especially beneficial for those who are disabled, elderly, homebound or lack transportation or childcare and cannot go to the County office to apply during office hours.

211 Website with CalFresh Info and Resources

An interview can take up to 30 Minutes to an Hour!

During the interview, the worker will ask for proof of some things on your application. They may ask things like:

- The number of people in your home who you purchase and prepare food with
- The money you get from your job or other sources
- Your housing costs, including rent, mortgages and utilities
- Medical expenses if you are disabled or age 60 or older
- Costs for child or dependent care
- Some of the things you own

The interview may be shorter if the documents needed are uploaded/sent in before the interview.

In the online application, there is a section dedicated to finding a good time for the county to call you. **This section allows you to write the times and days you are available, Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m**.

Note: Although they ask, the county will most likely not respect this! They will call whenever, even if they send you a letter/confirmation of the date and time of your appointment.

- It is so important that you weigh the risks of answering/not answering. I would say if you are taking an exam or driving (something of that nature), do not answer. If you are in class, about to enter a work meeting, etc. I would highly recommend answering the call and explaining your absence after the fact.
- Missing the phone interview can lead to a delay in getting your benefits and the county marking your interview as missed and possibly denying you (if you miss a second interview), which forces you to have to start the application process again.

They tend to call the day the interview is scheduled but not at the times requested by the applicant.

Make sure to pick up **ALL** calls, the county may come from a blocked/unlisted phone number. If you don't qualify for Expedited Service, pay attention to your calls, especially the **1st and 2nd week after submitting your application.**

Although missing an interview can delay getting public benefits, the county cannot deny benefits within 30 days of applying due to a missed first interview. If applicants miss a second interview, the CalFresh office can deny the application. However, an applicant can call the CalFresh office to request an additional interview, but only if the office has not yet issued a denial. Once the CalFresh office has issued a denial, the applicant is permitted to start the application process again.

In other words, **bother the county!** Contact them if an interview is missed, call them if they deny your application because they made a mistake, **call, call, call**. I know it can be so annoying, but if you need this public aid, it is so worth it.



Sol's Experience!

Mine was around 25-30 minutes, but it is different for everyone!

- I submitted my online application Oct. 1 and received a call from the county for my phone interview Oct. 4 (I also qualified for **Expedited Benefits**; this means that the county had 3 days to process my application).

- I qualified by telling the county on the online application roughly how much I had in my bank account at the time (and the county said yikes do not worry we have got you).

The household (**Remember: A "household" can be a person living alone or a group of people living together who buy food and make meals together**) can qualify for **Expedited Benefits** if:

- It has less than $150 in gross monthly income and has $100 or less in "liquid resources" (any type of a resource that is either cash or that can be quickly converted to cash. They include things like money market accounts, accounts receivable, and cash on hand).

- Its monthly housing costs (rent or mortgage, and the standard utility allowance) for the month are more than the sum of its liquid resources and gross income for the month.

- The household includes a domestic violence survivor who is a resident of or on a waiting list for a domestic violence shelter and certifies as a separate household from the abuser if the separate household is otherwise eligible.

My case worker spoke pretty fast, and some of the questions confused me. It is okay to ask them to repeat things and to change your answer to previous questions after getting clarification. An interview will typically begin with the case worker verifying your identity by stating your legal name. They will then ask you questions about your proof/documentation. The case worker will also play recordings of information/legal things you are agreeing to.

They will ask you questions about your **'household'**; make sure you answer with accurate information so that you don't provide proof of things/people you do not have to.

If asked if you have roommates:

- State yes, if applicable

But **remember**: A **'household'** can be a person living alone or a group of people living together who buy food and make meals together. If that does not apply to your situation with roommates, state no to the question "do you share food costs like buying half the groceries/prepare meals together".

If you state yes to that, they will require you to upload documents (ID, SSN, paystubs, etc.) for your roommates.

- Even though you may not be considered a household with your roommates, if they contribute to your rent the county will ask. Simply tell them they pay _____ amount. For example, if your rent is $2000 and you pay $1000, you will provide the proof that you pay that and then tell the county worker in your interview that your roommate pays the remainder.

For my interview, they asked who I lived with (at the time, I lived with my partner and one roommate), and I stated my partner and roommate. They asked if my partner and I shared our groceries/prepared at least half of our meals together, and I stated yes. This made it so I would have to upload her information as well because this made my household size 2. For my roommate, I stated no to the question 'Do you share groceries/prepare half your meals together', and that made it so they were not included in my household size.

For Transgender Individuals

Research done by Wilson et al. (2020) showed that despite a lack of federal data on food insecurity among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals and households, research still demonstrates that LGBT people in the United States report high rates of food insecurity.

It is important that communities that already face challenges when accessing basic needs have all the support they can get. As a transgender individual, I understand how difficult it can be to survive in a world that places unnecessary barriers that make it easier for people to deny us our basic needs. I know this happens to other communities other than the LGBTQ+ community, and I do not want those individuals to feel like getting public aid is not worth it when it gets difficult. Lack of antibias training among government employees can lead to microaggressions or discrimination that discourages LGBTQ individuals from interacting with public benefits. In-person interviews can be taxing and may put LGBTQ people at risk of gender-disaffirming and anti-LGBTQ conversations with staff who have not been properly trained (Johnson-Green, 2020). My phone interview was not a pleasant experience, and I want to make sure other trans people are prepared for some pushback.

Note: First and foremost, take care of your mental health. Know your boundaries and when to stop an interaction that is making you feel uncomfortable. Remember, you can always try again (you can simply hang up, call the county back, and request a different case worker)!

Know that if your preferred name is not the same as your birth (legal) name, you may experience disaffirming conversations. If you have a support system you can go to after the call, I would recommend talking to someone about your experience. Be gentle to yourself and listen to your mental and physical needs.

Transgender Hotlines:

- Trans Lifeline's Hotline is a peer support phone service run by trans people for trans and questioning peers. 877-565-8860



- LGBT National Hotline 888-843-4564



Transgender Resources for Legal Name Change information:

- North County LGBTQ Resource Center FREE clinic (name and gender marker change)



- Information on name changes for trans people



Sol's Experience!

In my phone interview, I had issues with my birth vs. preferred name with documents needed to apply for benefits and during the phone interview. For documents needed to apply as a student, I had paperwork from CSUSM that stated my birth name and screenshots from **MyCSUSM** that used my preferred name.

What I did was include a screenshot of my **CSUSM online ID** that has my student ID with my preferred name **and** documents that had my birth name and student ID on it from the university, like an **Account Itemization** document that you can download.

➔ Go to your **MyCSUSM**, click on **Student Center**, scroll down to **Financial Aid** where it will say **Account Summary**, under the Account Summary there will be a link embedded into **Account Itemization**, click that link and you will be able to choose what term you are looking for, once you have the Aid year you need as proof, click on **Printer Friendly Version**, and you will be able to download it.

I included a screenshot of my **Preferred Name request** as added proof. I would recommend screenshotting the full page.

➔ You can find this in your **MyCSUSM**, in the **My Information** tab, there will be a link to the **Preferred Name Request.**

It can make things move along more smoothly to use the name and gender that matches your government documents.
In saying this, **it is important that you feel comfortable and confident advocating for yourself**. If they offer a preferred name and gender identity section, put what you feel comfortable with/what you want to be addressed as.

When I applied online, there was a section to put your legal name and your preferred name. For gender, the options are Female, Male, and I prefer not to answer. They have a blurb that states, “We regret that this question is limited. These are the only options currently allowed on the CalFresh application”.

- I marked Male although I was AFAB (assigned female at birth) because I changed my gender marker on my California ID to Male.

They had a section at the end of the application that stated:
Is there anything else you would like us to know about your situation? Feel free to give other details you think might be helpful for us to know. Otherwise, you can skip this question.

- For this section, I wrote that I am a Female to Male Transgender person that uses he/him pronouns and the preferred name Sol.

In my experience, my preferred name was not respected, and I was made to repeat my birth name over and over as confirmation, and the case worker used my birth name for the remainder of the interview (even though I explained my situation). The case worker stated that it was for legal purposes.

Tip for birth name (dead name) dysphoria: When asked to confirm your birth name, spell it out instead of saying it. This is different for everyone, but this helps me lessen my dysphoria related to my birth name and allows me to retain some control over how I use my birth name.

Other options:

- You could ask for the remainder of the interview to use your last name in cases where it is not not legally necessary to state your birth name.

- If they use Mr. and Ms., you could ask to use the identifier that best fits your gender identity.

There is a section on the online application that asks:
Would you like to ask for any interview support?
[It states] Select all that apply. Caseworkers may need more time to offer this support. Not all services may be available.

This includes things like:

- In-person Interview

- American Sign Language Interpreter

- Large print materials, etc.

There is also a section for “Something Else” that states, “List or describe any other support you need for your interview”.

This could be potentially used to express support regarding preferred name and pronoun use.

Applicant could state, “I need someone that can provide language that reflects my gender identity which is _____ and use of my preferred name _____ when it is not legally necessary to use my birth name. I use _____ pronouns and need to be referred to as such.”

For undocumented or mixed-status individuals



Many immigrants can get CalFresh, if you have any of these you can apply:

- Has citizenship
- Has a green card (for any length of time)
- Has refugee or asylum status
- Has parolee status for at least one year (Ukrainian parolees may qualify before one year)
- Has, or is applying for, a U-Visa or T-Visa
- Is an applicant for VAWA (Violence Against Women Act) relief
- Is a Cuban or Haitian entrant
- Is an Afghan entering with special Immigrant VISA (SIV), (SQ/SI) Parole, or other forms of humanitarian parole
- Is Hmong/Laotian or American Indian born in Canada
- Is a citizen of Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau. Also known as Compacts of Free Association (COFA) citizens

An individual does not qualify for CalFresh if:

They are here on a student, work, or tourist visa

They are here under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals)

They are here under TPS (Temporary Protected Status) unless they meet the other qualifying factors

They are undocumented

If you are not eligible because of your immigration status, you can always apply on behalf of other household members, like U.S.-born children.

Getting CalFresh will not affect your immigration status or your chances of getting legal permanent residency in the future.

For more information about immigration and public benefits, visit keepyourbenefits.org or text the word benefits to 650-376-8006.

This will take you to a **Public Charge Test Guide**. You will be able to use a **free immigration screening tool** from the Legal Aid Society of San Mateo. You will be asked a few general questions and get specific guidance. **The tool is anonymous and confidential.**

keepyourbenefits.org

Some federal public benefits are only available to certain "qualified" immigrants. **Qualified immigrants** include certain green card holders and people with certain other types of immigration status.
Many **qualified immigrants** must go through a five-year waiting period before they become eligible for benefits.
Refugees, asylees, certain Afghan and Ukrainian nationals, survivors of trafficking, domestic violence, and certain types of crimes may be eligible for some federal benefits as well.

Public benefits available to **qualified Immigrants**:

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or CalFresh in California
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), or California Work Opportunities & Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) in California
- Social Security

Immigrants who are "not qualified" may still be eligible for certain benefits because they are known to the U.S. immigration authorities and considered "Permanently Residing Under Color of Law" (PRUCOL) and, therefore, at lower risk of deportation.

California benefits programs available to "not qualified" immigrants include:

- Cash Assistance for Program for Immigrants (CAPI): CAPI provides basic cash assistance for low-income elderly and/or disabled immigrants who are not yet eligible for SSI.
- California Food Assistance Program (CFAP): CFAP is a food assistance program that runs parallel to the CalFresh program, serving low-income green card holders who are not yet eligible for federal food stamp benefits.

Public Charge Information

Under the federal government's current definition of public charge, many will not trigger the public charge rule. For example, use of MediCal, CalFresh, housing programs, WIC, emergency and disaster relief, Head Start, free and reduced-cost school meals, stimulus checks, tax credits, and many other benefits are not part of the public charge test.

➢ Under the Trump administration, many questions have come up regarding public benefits and immigrants. It is currently unclear how the Trump administration will proceed regarding a new "public charge" regulation at DHS.

Further information can be found here:

Latest on public charge:

Take a closer look at public charge:

To find free or low-cost assistance, go to ilrc.me/gethelp.

Current recommendations for community members:
Continue using the public benefits programs you and your family qualify for and need!

If you have questions about how it might impact your immigration situation, contact a trusted legal services provider.

If you have questions for yourself or your family members who may be undocumented, you can get free legal advice through campus!!

FREE legal advice found here:

Campus legal resources for undocumented or mixed-status individuals:

In English

In Spanish

STEP 4: OKAY I GOT MY BENEFITS, NOW WHAT?

If you are approved for CalFresh, you will usually get two separate pieces of mail with:
1. Your EBT Card
2. Your PIN Number

- Just like a debit card, you will need your PIN number to use your EBT card.

(They have a new EBT card now that features “Tap to pay” so you can make a purchase by holding or tapping the card on a contactless-enabled card reader)

Note: You can also use EBT SNAP benefits to purchase groceries online at Amazon, Walmart, Instacart, etc. Unfortunately, you cannot use CalFresh to pay for delivery.

- EBT cards are accepted at most grocery stores, corner stores, and farmer’s markets. **Your benefit amount will be reloaded on your card every month.**

I would recommend getting the **ebtEDGE** app!

EBT Cardholders can manage their CalFresh benefits using the **ebtEDGE Mobile or web application**. This is like a bank app where you can see your funds, freeze a card if you lose it, etc. It is good for keeping track of how much you have and when your benefits get replenished.

Apple app (IOS)

Google Play Store (Android) app

Web version

Make an account for your CalFresh Benefits!

I find this is the easiest way to keep track of your benefits and for submitting documents. This is how you do that!

- Make an account here: https://benefitscal.com/AccountManagement/create-account/AMCYA?lang=en

Video on how to create an account

If you already have a case number because you applied online before making an account that is okay! All you have to do is link your case to your account.

Here is a video on how to do that:

- You can find your **case number** on mail that the county sent you about your CalFresh case. It will be located on the right corner of the letter!

Keeping your benefits:

Once approved, two different forms of recertification are required to maintain CalFresh Benefits. The first recertification period is the **SAR7** at the six-month mark, while the second is the **Recertification Renewal**.

- **SAR7** Semi-annual report must be submitted 6 months after your application. It is a form that updates your county about changes to your situation. You must fill it out 6 months after you apply, even if you do not have changes to report.

Video that explains how to submit SAR 7 Report:
https://youtu.be/NkL2MJfNUnc?si=Ahl9f0b5FInIEpIS

- You can submit this information online, in-person, or through mail. (I think the easiest way is online!)

<u>You will need to report about the following from last month:</u>

- **Your address**
- **Income from work or other sources** (like government benefits, pensions, or unemployment insurance)
- **Expenses** (like housing, utilities, medical, and childcare costs)
- **People on your application**

<u>Common documents include:</u>

- **Paystubs** from the last **30 days** and **benefits award letters** if you have income from work or other sources.
- Your **last pay stub** and a **letter from you or your employer** if you lost a job.
- A **bill or statement with your name and address** if you moved.

Examples of documents you can use:
https://benefitscal.com/Help/documents-verification/DOC?lang=en



The **Recertification Renewal** is a required form all CalFresh recipients must fill out to maintain their benefits. Renewal Recertification must be completed six months after the SAR7 (one year after the initial submission of your application). If you fail to submit your Recertification, your benefits will be discontinued, and you will need to reapply.

Video that explains how to submit your Recertification Renewal:
https://youtu.be/-Ny78jf1ttY?si=GTMRxDz9jfQHTEg4

- This can also be done online!

To complete your CalFresh recertification online, all you have to do is:

- Log in to your **BenefitsCal account**
- Go to your **'Things to Do'** section and click **'Submit Recertification'** and then click **'Start** your **recertification'**
- Remember to complete the recertification by the 'Due Date' located on 'Submit the Renewal' section along with submitting any documents
- Complete all sections in the CalFresh Recertification screen, and/or upload documents (if required)
- You will be able to edit, add and delete information for your recertification
- Once completed, click 'Submit' to complete your recertification
- The County will reach out for your CalFresh **recertification interview**

The interview will be similar to your first interview, they just want to know what has changed in your life, household and income-wise!

You made it!
I know this is a lot of information but knowledge is power. You are a capable human being and can get through whatever life throws at you.
Seek help when you need it and do not be afraid to advocate for yourself and others.

¡Sí se puede!



References

211 San Diego. (2025, March 28). CalFresh - 211. https://211sandiego.org/food-assistance-resources/calfresh-food-assistance/

Associated Students, Inc. California State University San Marcos. (n.d.). Applying for CalFresh |

Associated Students, Inc | CSUSM. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.csusm.edu/asi/services/calfresh/cfappointment.html

Associated Students, Inc. California State University San Marcos. (n.d.). CalFresh eligibility |

Associated Students, Inc | CSUSM. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.csusm.edu/asi/services/calfresh/eligibility.html

California Department of Social Services. (n.d.). CalFresh. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.cdss.ca.gov/calfresh

California Government. (2021). Food stamps. California State Portal. https://www.ca.gov/departments/178/services/60/

California Policy Lab. (2021). Student eligibility criteria for CalFresh. https://www.capolicylab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/College-student-eligibility-criteria-for-CalFresh.pdf

Chavarin-Rivas, J., Doherty, A., Dizon-Ross, E., Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, & The Regents of the University of California — Berkeley. (2021). Addressing the barriers college students face when accessing CalFresh food benefits. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED652956.pdf

Deloitte. (n.d.). BenefitsCal. Together, we benefit. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://info.benefitscal.com/renewCalFreshaccountUpdate

GetCalFresh. (n.d.). Before you apply. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.getcalfresh.org/en/apply?source=studentsportal

GetCalFresh. (n.d.). Immigrant guide. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.getcalfresh.org/immigrantsGetCalFresh. (n.d.). SAR 7 information. https://www.getcalfresh.org/en/sar7info

Immigration Advocates Network. (n.d.). Legal directory - Nonprofit resource center. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.immigrationadvocates.org/nonprofit/legaldirectory/

Immigrant Legal Resource Center. (2022). The latest on public charge. https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/Closer%20Look%20at%20Public%20Charge%20Post-Election.pdf

Immigrant Legal Resource Center. (2024). Overview: Public benefits for noncitizens in California. https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/CA%20Public%20Benefits%20for%20Noncitizens%20.pdf

Immigrant Legal Resource Center. (2025). Trump's executive actions: Impact on immigration benefits processing. https://www.ilrc.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/Impact%20on%20Immigration%20Benefits%20Processing.pdf

Legal Services of Northern California. (2019, March 18). Failure of the CalFresh program to act on an application within 30 days. LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits. https://calfresh.guide/failure-of-the-calfresh-program-to-act-on-an-application-within-30-days/

Legal Services of Northern California. (2023, June 9). Authorized representatives. LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits. https://calfresh.guide/authorized-representatives/

Legal Services of Northern California. (2023, August 28a). Households receive CalFresh benefits. LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits. https://calfresh.guide/households-receive-calfresh-benefits/

Legal Services of Northern California. (2023, August 28b). Households receive CalFresh benefits. LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits. https://calfresh.guide/households-receive-calfresh-benefits/

Legal Services of Northern California. (2024, March 31). How the CalFresh program verifies information. LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits. https://calfresh.guide/how-calfresh-verifies-information/#references

Legal Services of Northern California. (2025, January 4). Expedited (emergency) CalFresh benefits. LSNC Guide to CalFresh Benefits. https://calfresh.guide/expedited-emergency-calfresh-benefits/

National Women's Law Center & Food Research and Action Center. (2024). Gender and racial justice in SNAP. https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Gender-and-Racial-Justice-in-SNAP-Updated-2024.pdfNational Women's Law Center, & Emerson National Hunger Fellows. (2021). Gender and racial justice in SNAP [Report]. https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/SNAPbrief.pdf

Propel. (2024, August 6). The guide to EBT/CalFresh in California. https://www.propel.app/snap/state/california/

San Diego Hunger Coalition. (n.d.). CalFresh for college students. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.sandiegohungercoalition.org/calfresh-college-students

San Diego Hunger Coalition. (2024). College student and CalFresh eligibility. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55130907e4b018f9300f3e63/t/66ad0f594947da175a84c99a/1722617700171/College+Student+Toolkit+for+CalFresh+2024-SDHC+%281%29.pdf

University of California, San Diego. (n.d.). CalFresh eligibility. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://basicneeds.ucsd.edu/food-security/calfresh/eligibility.html

University of California, San Diego. (n.d.). Recertification. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://basicneeds.ucsd.edu/food-security/calfresh/maintaining-calfresh.html

University of California, San Diego. (n.d.). Regulation quick reference. Retrieved April 5, 2025, from https://www.cdss.ca.gov/calfreshoutreach/res/toolkit/quickreference/regulationquickreference_e_students.pdf

Wilson, B. D. M., Badgett, M. V. L., Gomez, A. G., & University of California. (2020). "We're still hungry": Lived experiences with food insecurity and food programs among LGBTQ people. https://escholarship.org/content/qt23x444hz/qt23x444hz.pd

VERSION DATE
APRIL 11, 2025