



Professional Standards



Guide to Professional Standards for School Nutrition Programs





U.S. Department of Agriculture • Food and Nutrition Service
Revised December 2020 • FNS-303

In accordance with Federal Civil Rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Civil Rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior credible activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at <https://www.ascr.usda.gov/filing-program-discrimination-complaint-usda-customer> and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Table of Contents

Introduction 2

Required Professional Standards for School Nutrition Employees:

- Directors, Managers, and Staff 3
 - Job Categories 3
 - Annual Training Requirements..... 3
 - Training Topics by Key Areas..... 4
 - Where to Find Training.....5
 - Recordkeeping Requirements 6
 - Annual Training Requirements for Each Job Category..... 6
- Hiring Standards for New School Nutrition Program Directors..... 10
 - Enrollment Categories 10

State Agency Standards 13

- Annual Training Requirements..... 13
- Training and Guidance for SFAs..... 14
- Hiring Standards..... 14
 - Minimum Criteria 14
 - Guidance on SFA Hiring Standards..... 15

Conclusion 15

Glossary 16

Links to Additional Resources..... 18

Appendixes 19

- Appendix A. SFA Director’s Guide to Professional Standards 20
- Appendix B. Manager’s Guide to Professional Standards for Training 22
- Appendix C. Staff Guide to Professional Standards for Training 24
- Appendix D. Ideas to Engage and Motivate Staff to Complete Annual Training Requirements 25
- Appendix E. Professional Standards Tools for Schools 27

Introduction

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has created required professional standards for State and local school nutrition program personnel. The purpose of this guide is to help you learn about these standards and find useful resources. Local school nutrition program personnel should refer to the final rule and consult with their State agency if they have specific questions. Similarly, State agencies should consult their USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Regional Office with any questions regarding the required professional standards.

The required professional standards consist of hiring standards and annual training requirements for school nutrition program directors of school food authorities (SFAs), State directors of school nutrition programs, and other staff. The annual training requirements and hiring standards have a simple goal. They help assure the success of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP).



Professional Standards



Assist State agencies and SFAs in recruiting, hiring, training, and retaining qualified school nutrition staff.



Enhance the image of school nutrition professionals and their influence in the community.



Build job skills and empower staff to lead and efficiently operate school nutrition programs.

Required Professional Standards for School Nutrition Employees: Directors, Managers, and Staff

Required professional standards apply to all school nutrition employees, whether the SFA operates the school nutrition program or contracts with a food service management company. SFA-level compliance with the required professional standards is included as a part of the Administrative Review (AR). This section explains job categories, training standards (annual training requirements, topics, and recordkeeping) for all employees, and hiring standards for new directors. Additionally, you will find valuable training resources.

Job Categories

Required professional standards vary by three job categories: directors, managers, and staff. At the local level, there are many different job titles of individuals who perform similar duties. The definitions below are general enough to cover most local school nutrition program employees and can be used to determine their job category:

- **Directors** plan, administer, implement, monitor, and evaluate all district-wide aspects of school nutrition programs. Regardless of its size, a SFA typically only has one director.
- **Managers** have direct responsibility for the day-to-day operations at one or more schools.
- **Staff** prepare and serve meals, process transactions at point of service, and review the free/reduced price applications, along with other routine work. Typically, staff do not have management responsibilities.

The appendixes include reproducible handouts for each job category. You may want to use these need-to-know summaries with your employees as well as administrators.

Annual Training Requirements

School nutrition directors not only have their own annual training requirements, but also oversee annual training requirements for managers and staff. Many SFAs have been providing training at or near the annual levels in the standards. As you implement the standards, keep in mind the following key points:

- The number of annual training hours required each year varies by job category (see Chart 1).
- Training must be job-specific and intended to help employees perform their duties well.
- Training is measured in hours, and may include shorter times. USDA suggests at least 15 minutes per training segment.
- Training needs are best assessed by an employee in consultation with his or her manager, director, or State agency. The USDA does not approve nor require specific training programs.
- Training may be obtained in many ways, such as: in-person or online classes, local meetings, webinars, or conferences.
- The State agency reviews training documentation during the Administrative Review.

Chart 1: Summary of Required Minimum Annual Training Requirements for School Nutrition Employees

Job Category	Annual Training Requirements*
Directors	12 hours
Managers	10 hours
All Other Staff (working 20 hours or more per week)	6 hours
Part-Time Staff (working less than 20 hours per week)	4 hours
Mid-year hires in all categories (January 1, or later)	One-half of training requirement for each job category
Temporary and acting employees, substitutes, and volunteers	Any annual training requirements are at the discretion of the State agency and may be required within 30 days of start date

*Annual training requirements apply to the 12 months between July 1 and June 30.

Training Topics by Key Areas

Use the USDA's list of suggested job-specific training topics to guide your choices (See Chart 2). The topics align with four key areas: nutrition, operations, administration, and communications/marketing. To help link training topics to key areas, the first number of each training topic's 4-digit code corresponds with that of the key area's codes, as indicated below.

Chart 2: Training Topics by Key Areas

Key Areas	Training Topics
Nutrition – 1000	Menu Planning (1100) Nutrition Education (1200) General Nutrition (1300)
Operations – 2000	Food Production (2100) Serving Food (2200) Cashier and Point of Service (2300) Purchasing/Procurement (2400) Receiving and Storage (2500) Food Safety and HACCP (2600)
Administration – 3000	Free and Reduced-Price Meal Benefits (3100) Program Management (3200) Financial Management (3300) Human Resources and Staff Training (3400) Facilities and Equipment Planning (3500)
Communications and Marketing – 4000	Communications and Marketing (4100)

Where To Find Training

Training opportunities abound. Below is a short list to get you started. Many of these choices are free or offered at a low cost. Some training costs may not be an allowable expense from the nonprofit school food service account. Check with your State agency if you have any questions about specific training you want to fund through your program.

- **USDA Professional Standards Training Database:** USDA's online Professional Standards Training Database has free to low-cost trainings available and is updated regularly. You can search the database by key areas, topics, type of training, and more. <https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>
- **USDA FNS Office of Food Safety:** USDA FNS Office of Food Safety offers food safety training, such as Produce Safety University, and other resources related to safe food handling. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/ofs/food-safety>
- **USDA FNS Team Nutrition:** The USDA FNS Team Nutrition initiative offers a variety of technical assistance resources, including an extensive resource library with downloadable materials, as well as webinars and trainings to support school professionals' needs. <https://TeamNutrition.usda.gov>
- **Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN):** The ICN offers free training, both online and in-person. You can also download and use their training resources to conduct local trainings. <https://theicn.org>
- **State agencies:** Your State agency will make at least 18 hours of training available to SFAs each year as part of the standards. Check with your State agency about available training options.
- **Professional Organizations:** Professional organizations are another option for training. Attend local chapter activities and, when possible, participate in State or national meetings.
- **Local In-Service Training:** Rely on experts within your own SFA, State agency, or community. For example, invite district experts to provide 15-minute mini-lessons on various topics each month as part of staff meetings. Another idea is to organize a special training session with an outside speaker, such as a local Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist (RD/RDN) or your kitchen equipment representative.
- **Food service Suppliers:** Check out training sessions sponsored by companies and trade groups. See if events offered by manufacturers, distributors, and brokers or commodity promotion groups meet your training needs.

Share your training with other school nutrition professionals using USDA's online Professional Standards Training Database!

<https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>

Simply submit any trainings you've developed to cnpntab@usda.gov for review and potential inclusion in the Professional Standards Training Database. When submitting your training for review, include the following information in your email:

- Training Title
- Training Topic(s)
- Brief Course Overview
- Length of Course and Credit Hour(s)
- Learning Objectives and Codes
(https://fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cn/ps_learningobjectives.pdf)
- Target Audience
- Format (online, in-person, etc.)
- Contact Person (name, email, phone number, mailing address, etc.)



- **Exhibits at Conferences:** At the discretion of your State agency, you and your staff may count up to 2 hours of visiting and interacting with exhibitors toward annual training requirements as long as they are relevant to core training topics. The Questions & Answers (Q&As) located at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/questions-answers-regarding-professional-standards-state-and-local-school-nutrition> provide more detail on how to acquire training hours through exhibits. Consult your State agency for guidance.
- **Other Resources:** Universities and community colleges are other training options. College courses can count when the course meets job-specific needs. In addition, Cooperative Extension or non-profit groups in your State or community may offer related training programs.



Take advantage of the interactive lessons, webinars, and much more from the ICN eLearning Portal!
<https://theicn.docebosaas.com/learn>

The ICN eLearning Portal system offers free, self-paced online courses that provide an excellent method of meeting professional standards annual training requirements. Courses can be taken over multiple sessions, on different computers and mobile devices, and they are coded with USDA Professional Standards Codes. It is free and easy to set-up an account.

Recordkeeping Requirements

The regulation does not specify the kind of records that must be kept. Records that list the employee name, employer/school, training title, topic/objectives, training source, dates and total training hours would be appropriate to demonstrate compliance with annual training requirements. Records must be maintained and made available to the State agency upon request. You may keep the records electronically in a local database, in paper files, or through the USDA Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) (<https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov>). If your State agency allows a 2-year period to complete training, keep in mind the following:

- Some training hours must be completed each year.
- An employee's annual training requirements for 1 year may be met with hours in excess of the annual requirement from either the immediately previous or the immediately following training year.

Documentation of annual training requirements is part of the Administrative Review, so while it is ideal for individual staff members to keep track of their own training, you must ensure it is available for State agency review. Whichever recordkeeping method you use, keep training records for 3 years plus the current school year. Open audits require different record retention periods. Check with your State agency for guidance.

Annual Training Requirements for Each Job Category

Directors help determine topics that may apply to all staff, such as food safety training, and provide training that matches staff duties. For example:

- Free and reduced-price meal applications training for program clerical staff and managers
- On-the-job in-service training using new equipment for food production staff

Use training as an opportunity to reinforce the skills of your managers and staff. Share your staff's successes district-wide. Training shows the entire school community that your staff continue to enhance their job-related skills and students enjoy knowing that adults are "in school" too!

While training that focuses on the day-to-day management and operation of the school nutrition programs is encouraged for directors and managers, time spent training other staff can count as training hours as well.

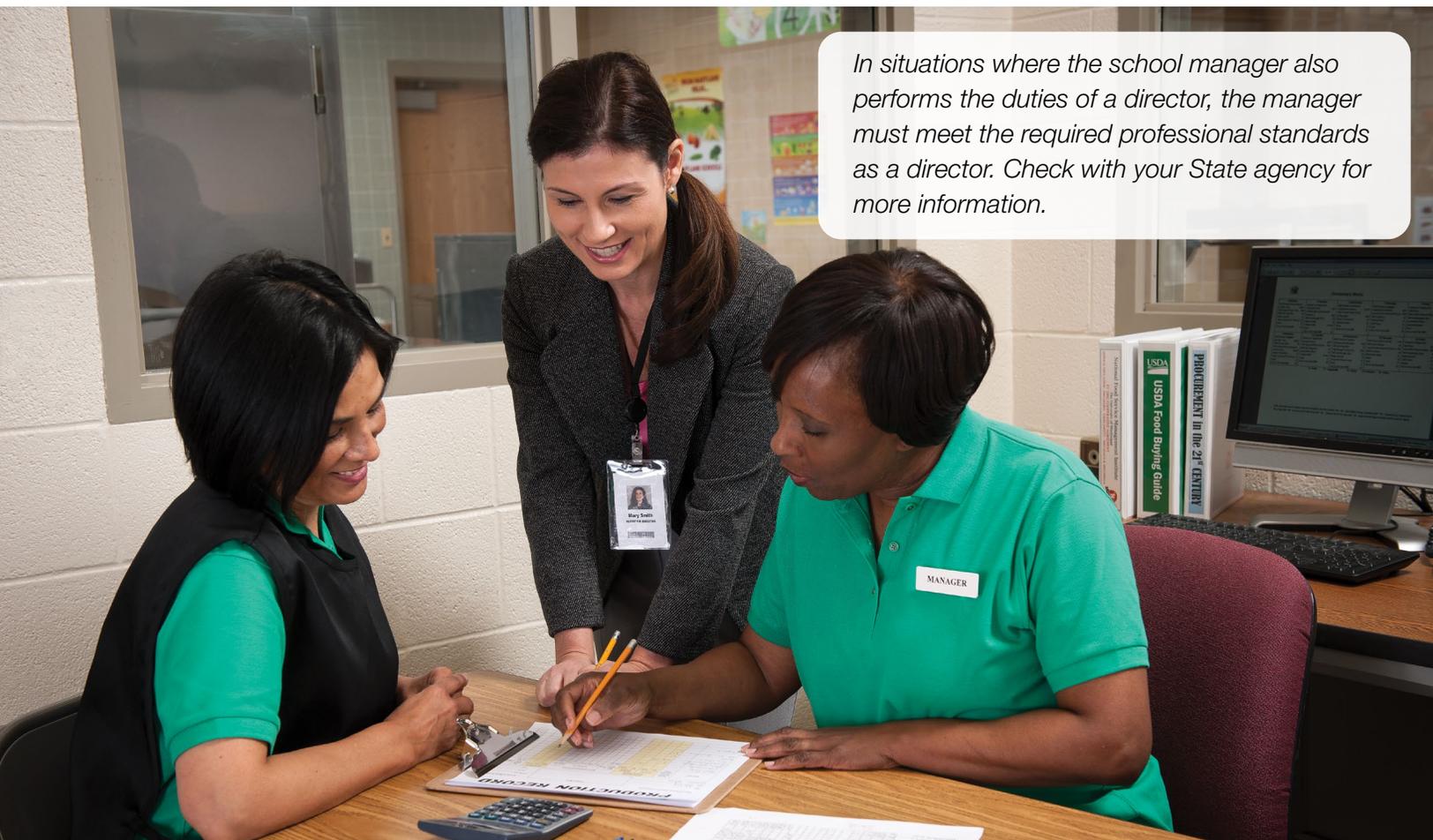
Let's take a closer look at annual training requirements for each job category. In this section, you will find examples for different training scenarios.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM DIRECTOR

As a director, you need a minimum of **12 hours of required training annually**. Here are some examples of how directors can meet or exceed annual training requirements:

Director Jessica is from a small rural school district of 1,200 enrolled students.	Director Stephen works in a school district with 5,000 enrolled students.	Director Leticia oversees a district with 57,000 enrolled students.
Attends online courses using the district computer lab, 4 hours	Completes college course with job-specific content; 1 credit equals 15 hours	Develops and provides training to staff, 8 hours personal training
Completes State-sponsored training, 4 hours		Attends job-specific national conference sessions, 10 hours
Attends local conference sessions, 4 hours		
12 hours total	15 hours total*	18 hours total*

*If authorized by your State agency, hours in excess of the minimum requirement in 1 school year may be applied to either the immediately previous or immediately following year.



In situations where the school manager also performs the duties of a director, the manager must meet the required professional standards as a director. Check with your State agency for more information.

SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM MANAGERS

School nutrition program managers will focus on their own annual training but may also be responsible for training staff. Managers need **10 hours of required training annually**. Managers may help with recordkeeping for both themselves and their staff.

Here are examples of how managers can meet or exceed the training hours:

Manager Amy operates a small rural school cafeteria.	Manager Chris works in a small district and has cooking duties in addition to managing the kitchen.	Manager Gabriella oversees production in a kitchen that also produces meals for three satellite locations for a large district.
Completes a monthly online or webinar course offered by her State agency, the ICN, and/or her professional organization, 5 hours Attends 30 minutes of monthly training provided by director at 10 manager meetings, 5 hours	Attends a basic nutrition course through the ICN, 8 hours Completes online culinary classes from the ICN, 3 hours	Trains her staff on food safety standard operating procedures (SOPs) for food production and transportation, 4 hours Attends a regional conference for 8 hours of job-specific sessions plus 1 hour of State-approved exhibits, 9 hours
10 hours total	11 hours total*	13 hours total*

*If authorized by your State agency, hours in excess of the minimum requirement in 1 school year may be applied to either the immediately previous or immediately following year.



SCHOOL NUTRITION PROGRAM STAFF

All full-time or part-time staff involved with school meals need training. Staff's daily work is closest to the students (who are the customers); therefore, it is important for staff to have training to help them know what to do and how to do it.

Staff who regularly work 20 hours per week or more in school nutrition programs need at least **6 hours of required training annually**. In addition to keeping district records, you should encourage staff to keep their own training records. They may want to provide proof of training should they change schools or districts, or as a back up to your tracking method.

Here are some examples of how different program staff can meet or exceed the annual training requirements:

Cook Daryl prepares and serves food in a large school district.	Cashier Shandra was hired in February to work at the Point of Service (POS), so she only needs half of required hours.	Clerical Worker Brittany processes meal applications and provides administrative support in the school nutrition office.
Attends a food safety refresher course at the beginning of the school year provided by his director, 2 hours	Completes online course for reimbursable meals, breakfast and lunch, 1 hour	Attends 3 webinars offered by the State agency on free and reduced meal applications, claims, and other administrative duties, 3 hours
Attends four 15-minute manager's in-services for using the district's new production record and standardized recipes, 1 hour	Completes self-paced training module on how to operate the POS equipment, 1 hour	Completes a training on the software system the district uses for application processing, 2 hours
Completes a State agency-sponsored knife skills class, 3 hours	Attends a customer service class at a local conference, 1 hour	Attends a district business office training session on invoice and payments procedures, 2 hours
6 hours total	3 hours total	7 hours total*

*If authorized by your State agency, hours in excess of the minimum requirement in 1 school year may be applied to either the immediately previous or immediately following year.

PART-TIME STAFF

Staff working less than 20 hours per week need **4 hours of required training annually**. While the SFA must maintain copies of completed training, staff should also keep personal copies.

Consider these examples of how to meet or exceed the training needs of part-time staff:

Server Maria works during lunch service only.	Server/Dishwasher Kevin serves lunch and works in the dish room.	Breakfast in Classroom Worker Shannon works only in the breakfast program.
Attends the district's summer workshop that includes refresher training and updates on food safety, production records, and customer service, 6 hours	Attends cleaning/sanitation training specific to the serving line and dish room, 2 hours	Completes a training module for food safety, 1 hour
	Completes a self-paced training module on cleaning and sanitizing large equipment, 1 hour	Takes online breakfast reimbursement criteria and production records courses, 2 hours
	Attends two 30-minute on-the-job training sessions on lunch reimbursement criteria and promoting healthy choices to students, 1 hour	Completes on-the-job training module for the breakfast program, 1 hour
6 hour total*	4 hours total	4 hours total

*If authorized by your State agency, hours in excess of the minimum requirement in 1 school year may be applied to either the immediately previous or immediately following year.

VOLUNTEERS AND TEMPORARY, ACTING, OR SUBSTITUTE EMPLOYEES

The required professional standards do not require annual training for volunteers or employees in temporary, acting, or substitute positions. However, your State agency or Local Educational Agency (LEA) may have requirements for these positions, so be sure to check.

Hiring Standards for New School Nutrition Program Directors

The required professional standards also include minimum hiring criteria for new school nutrition program directors. The hiring standards affect directors hired on or after July 1, 2015. Directors hired prior to July 1, 2015:

- Can remain in their current positions without meeting the hiring standards
- May fill a new director position for the same LEA enrollment category or smaller without meeting the hiring standards
- Must meet the hiring standards for the larger LEA enrollment category when applying for a director position within that enrollment category

Enrollment Categories

Hiring standards depend on LEA enrollment size (see Chart 3). As enrollment increases, program demands and complexity follow. Thus, minimum requirements are higher for LEAs with enrollments of 10,000 or more students than for smaller districts. At all enrollment categories, the standards encourage directors with the minimum educational degree to pursue advanced coursework toward the next higher degree in a related field. Consult your State agency on guidance for any special or unique hiring situations.

LEA enrollments are grouped into these three categories:

- 2,499 or less
- 2,500 to 9,999
- 10,000 or more

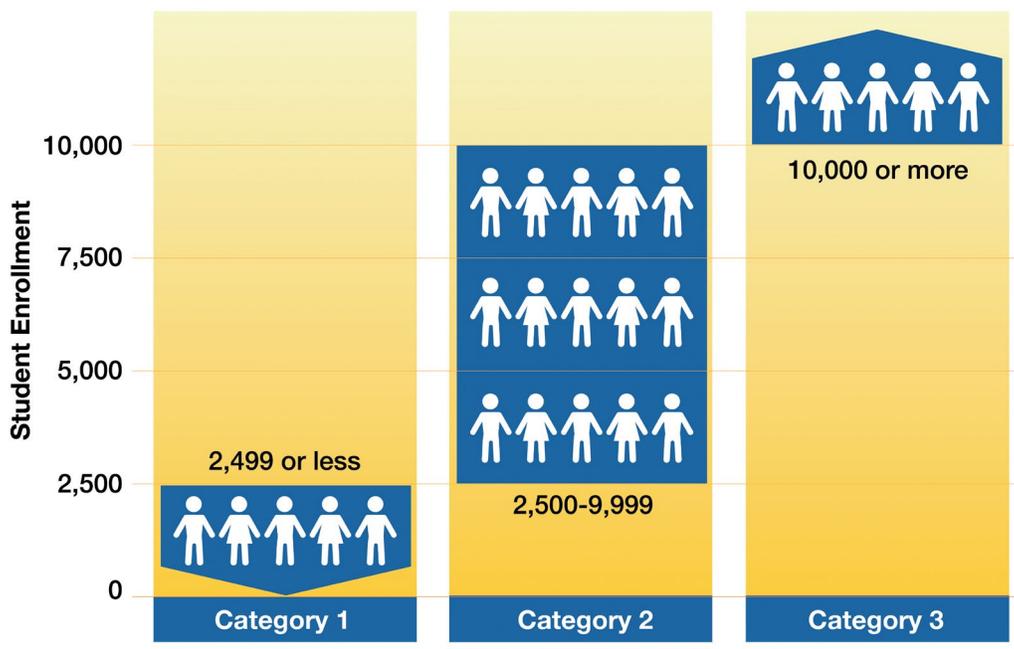


Figure 1: Local Educational Agency (LEA) Student Enrollment Categories

Chart 3: Summary of School Nutrition Program Director Professional Standards by Local Educational Agency Size

Student Enrollment 2,499 or less	Student Enrollment 2,500-9,999	Student Enrollment 10,000 or more
Minimum Education Standards (required) (new directors only)		
Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field;	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field;	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field;
OR	OR	OR
Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with any academic major or area of concentration, <i>and</i> either a State-recognized certificate for school nutrition directors or at least 1 year of relevant food service experience;	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with any academic major or area of concentration, <i>and</i> a State-recognized certificate for school nutrition directors;	Bachelor's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with any academic major or area of concentration, <i>and</i> a State-recognized certificate for school nutrition directors;
OR	OR	OR
Associate's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field, <i>and</i> at least 1 year of relevant food service experience; OR High school diploma (or GED) <i>and</i> 3 years of relevant food service experience.**+	Bachelor's degree in any academic major <i>and</i> at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition program experience; OR Associate's degree, or equivalent educational experience*, with academic major or concentration in food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field, <i>and</i> at least 2 years of relevant school nutrition program experience.	Bachelor's degree in any major <i>and</i> at least 5 years of experience in management of school nutrition programs.

Chart 3: Summary of School Nutrition Program Director Professional Standards by Local Educational Agency Size (Continued)

Student Enrollment 2,499 or less	Student Enrollment 2,500-9,999	Student Enrollment 10,000 or more
Minimum Education Standards (preferred) (new directors only)		
Directors hired without an associate's degree are strongly encouraged to work toward attaining an associate's degree upon hiring.	Directors hired without a bachelor's degree are strongly encouraged to work toward attaining a bachelor's degree upon hiring.	Master's degree, or willingness to work toward a master's degree, preferred.
		At least 1 year of management experience, preferably in school nutrition, is strongly recommended. At least 3 credit hours at the university level in food service management plus at least 3 credit hours in nutritional sciences at time of hiring is strongly preferred.
Minimum Prior Training Standards (required) (new directors only)		
At least 8 hours of food safety training is required either not more than 5 years prior to their starting date or completed within 30 calendar days of employee's starting date.		

*Consult your State agency for more information about equivalent educational experience.

**For LEAs with fewer than 500 students, and at the State agency's discretion, the SFA can be approved to hire a school nutrition program director who has less than the required years of food service experience, provided the applicant has the minimum education specified in the hiring standards for LEAs with 2,499 students or fewer.

+ At the discretion of the State agency, the SFA can hire a new director with documented volunteer or unpaid relevant food service experience on an individual basis.

For LEAs with 2,499 students or fewer, a State agency can approve an SFA to use the nonprofit school food service account to pay the salary of a school nutrition program director who does not meet the hiring standards so long as the SFA is complying with a State agency-approved plan to ensure the director will meet the required professionals standards.

State Agency Standards

State-level directors of school nutrition programs and distributing agencies (State directors) provide leadership in school nutrition. Exact job titles may vary State to State, however the contributions to statewide school nutrition success are similar. Regardless of job title, training and hiring standards apply to those with State-level administrative responsibilities for the NSLP, SBP, and the distribution of USDA Foods. Compliance with annual training requirements and hiring standards will be assessed as part of the Management Evaluation (ME).

If you are a State director, you have more than one interest in annual training requirements. Besides your own annual training requirements, you must provide or ensure State agency staff receive the required annual training. If you direct school nutrition programs, you must provide training opportunities for SFAs.

Annual Training Requirements

As a State director, you need at least 15 hours of training each year. Be sure to track your annual training hours and retain records for 3 years plus the current school year. Open audits require different record retention periods. Check with your USDA Food and Nutrition Service Regional Office for guidance.

In some States, one director covers both school nutrition and food distribution. In these instances, the annual training requirement remains 15 hours. In other States, oversight of food distribution reside outside of school nutrition programs. In these cases, the person with program oversight must meet the annual training requirements for the State director of distributing agencies.

Key areas and training topics are the same as those for SFAs (see page 4). FNS may specify additional topics and hours annually as necessary.

While the standards do not specify annual training requirements for State staff, State agencies responsible for NSLP, SBP, and/or food distribution must provide or ensure adequate training for staff to perform duties associated with school nutrition programs.

The State agency responsible for NSLP and/or SBP must assure at least 18 hours of State-sponsored training is available to SFAs annually. Many of the State agency's costs to provide training for staff and SFAs are allowable through the State Administrative Expense (SAE) fund.

The State agency may offer a variety of training formats, including:

- Conference calls
- Webinars
- Seminars
- Classes developed by the State agency and/or other groups



Training and Guidance for SFAs

Based on past Administrative Reviews, or surveys taken by your State agency, you may be aware of the most important training needs of your SFAs. Refer to these training topics and their related behavioral objectives when planning training.



SFAs will look to the State agency for specific recordkeeping information. State agency staff will review training records as part of the Administrative Review. States may give SFAs a 2-year period to complete the training hours. If this flexibility is offered, SFAs need to assure that:

- Some training hours must be completed each year;
- An employee's annual training requirements for 1 year may be met with hours in excess of the annual requirement from either the immediately previous or immediately following training year.

Hiring Standards

In addition to annual training requirements, the standards also establish minimum hiring standards for State directors hired on or after July 1, 2015 (see Chart 4). Be sure to share this section with State-level human resources and personnel staff.

All State directors in their position prior to July 1, 2015, can remain in their positions; the hiring standards apply to new directors only. Directors of distributing agencies must also meet the hiring standards to become a new State director of school nutrition programs. The standards encourage current State directors to work toward achieving the minimum hiring requirements.

Minimum Criteria

State director positions require a bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree in one of the specified fields. Candidates with advanced degrees (master's or doctorate) in one of the specified fields can have a bachelor's degree in any field. See Chart 4 for specifics on degree majors.

For States where one individual is responsible for both programs, the school nutrition program standards apply. The Federal requirements are minimums. A State agency may add criteria, such as years of relevant program experience, to these hiring standards.



Chart 4: Minimum Hiring Standards for New State Directors

Minimum Requirements for State Directors	School Nutrition Program	Distributing Agency
Minimum Education Standards	Bachelor’s degree from related major* OR master’s or doctorate degree in one of the specified fields* regardless as to the field of the bachelor’s degree.	Bachelor’s degree from any major
Knowledge & Experience	Extensive relevant knowledge and experience in areas such as institutional food service operations, management, business, and/or nutrition education.	
Skills & Abilities	Additional abilities and skills needed to lead, manage, and supervise people to support the mission of school nutrition programs.	
State Requirements	State agencies may have requirements in addition to these hiring minimums.	

*Related majors include food and nutrition, food service management, dietetics, family and consumer sciences, nutrition education, culinary arts, business, or a related field. For information on equivalent educational experience, check with your USDA FNS Regional Office.

Guidance on SFA Hiring Standards

State directors of school nutrition programs must fully understand the hiring standards for SFA-level directors. In some situations, State agencies will review any unique circumstances and provide guidance. For example, for districts with enrollments of under 500 students, State agencies may authorize the selection of an SFA-level director that meets education requirements but does not have 3 years of relevant food service experience.

Conclusion

The professional standards for all local and State school nutrition professionals help ensure a capable workforce. Tiered training requirements were developed to match the needs of employees. Hiring standards for new school nutrition directors assist local districts in recruiting and hiring qualified leaders. Hiring standards for new State-level directors ensure leadership at all levels is prepared to meet program challenges. Both the State agencies and USDA provide support and resources to the SFAs to meet annual training requirements and hiring standards. Most importantly, the required professional standards help all schools to provide safe, nourishing meals that model and foster wise food choices in children today for a healthier tomorrow.

Glossary

Administrative Review (AR) means the comprehensive evaluation of school meal programs by State agencies of School Food Authorities (SFAs) participating in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program. The AR includes both Critical and General Areas of Review.

Allowable and non-allowable training expenses pertain to costs associated with training that are allowable or not allowable uses of the nonprofit school food service account (schools) or State Administrative Expenses (SAE) funds (State agencies). Director, manager, and staff training is an allowable use of the nonprofit school food service account. SAE funds may be used for training State agency staff and SFAs through a variety of training formats. States may contract or partner with other organizations (ICN, State Nutrition Association, etc.) to provide training. College tuition and expenses to help a newly hired director meet hiring standards are not allowable expenses.

Equivalent educational experience refers to college credits completed by an individual who does not possess a bachelor's or an associate's degree. For example, to meet the hiring standard of an associate's degree, a person would be expected to have at least 60 college credits, which is generally the number of credits required by a college or university to confer an associate's degree.

Food Service Management Company (FSMC) means a commercial enterprise or a nonprofit organization that acts on behalf of a School Food Authority (SFA) by managing or directing any aspect of the school meal program(s) and must meet applicable program requirements. The SFA must request documentation from the FSMC to show compliance with the annual training requirements.

Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN), formerly known as the National Food Service Management Institute, is the only federally funded national center dedicated to applied research, education and training, and technical assistance for child nutrition programs.

Key Areas of professional standards are suggested training categories developed by the USDA to better organize training. The four key areas are Nutrition, Operations, Administration, and Communications/Marketing. Each key area has several topics and specific training subjects.

Learning Objectives describe what participants should know or be able to do at the end of training.

Local Educational Agency (LEA) means a public board of education or other public or private nonprofit authority legally constituted within a State having administrative control of schools.

Management Evaluation (ME) means a periodic assessment of the accomplishment of program objectives and compliance assessment of State agency and local program operations, including compliance efficiency, effectiveness, and quality of service, that results in a report that indicates review findings, observations, and noteworthy initiatives.

Mid-year hire means a person who is hired later in the school year, typically January 1 or later.

Part-time staff, as related to professional standards, means staff working less than 20 hours per week. Part-time staff must complete at least 4 hours of training annually. Staff working less than 40 hours weekly may be considered part-time by the SFA. However, staff regularly working 20 hours or more weekly must complete at least 6 hours of training annually.

School Food Authority (SFA) means the governing body responsible for the administration of one or more schools and with the legal authority to operate the school nutrition program therein or be otherwise approved to operate this program by FNS.

School nutrition program director plans, administers, implements, monitors, and evaluates all district-wide aspects of a school nutrition program. Regardless of its size, an SFA typically only has one director.

School nutrition program manager is directly responsible for the day-to-day operations of school nutrition programs for one participating school or group of schools within a larger SFA.

School nutrition program staff is involved in the operation of the meal program for a participating school, but does not have managerial responsibilities, such as planning and supervision. The annual training requirements for a program staff person are job-specific, but they may take training that prepares them to assume managerial duties in the future.

School year pertains to the academic year, typically July 1-June 30.

State-level director of distributing agency is responsible for the distribution of USDA Foods at the State level.

State-level school nutrition program director is responsible for the administration of the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program at the State level.

State-level staff work in the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, or USDA Foods distribution at the State level.

Team Nutrition is an initiative of the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to support the child nutrition programs through training and technical assistance for food service, nutrition education for children and their caregivers, and school and community support for healthy eating and physical activity.

Training hour is equal to 60 minutes of actual training time. Smaller increments of time can be accumulated to achieve required training hours for each job category. USDA suggests at least 15 minutes per training segment. For example, if a training agenda sets aside an hour for a training activity, but includes a 10-minute break, only 50 minutes contributes to annual training requirements.

Training Topics pertain to relevant program subject matter within each key area. For example, under the key area of Nutrition, training topics include menu planning, nutrition education, and general nutrition.

USDA Professional Standards Training Database allows school nutrition staff to search for training that meets their learning needs. Each listing contains information about the training, including how to access, the developer, date, learning objectives covered, and more.

USDA Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) is an optional, free, record-keeping web-based tool available from the USDA that can be used to keep track of required training hours.

Links to Additional Resources

Hiring Flexibilities Under the Professional Standards

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-030119>

This final rule adds four flexibilities to the hiring standards for new school nutrition program directors in small local educational agencies (LEAs) and new State directors of school nutrition programs under the Professional Standards regulations for the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.

Institute of Child Nutrition, University of Mississippi

<http://theicn.org>

<https://theicn.docebosaas.com/learn>

The Institute of Child Nutrition offers a variety of free training, both online and in-person to help school nutrition professionals meet the professional standards annual training requirements.

Professional Standards Regulations for State and Local School Nutrition Programs Personnel

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-030215>

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/fr-050715a>

This final rule establishes minimum professional standards for school nutrition personnel who manage and operate the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program.

Questions & Answers Regarding Professional Standards for State and Local School Nutrition Program Personnel

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/questions-answers-regarding-professional-standards-state-and-local-school-nutrition>

The Questions & Answers (Q&As) memorandum provides an overview of the policies related to the professional standards requirements for State and local school nutrition program personnel.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Food Safety

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/ofs/food-safety>

The Office of Food Safety's mission is to protect people served by FNS programs from foodborne illness. They develop food safety education, instruction and technical assistance resources to support FNS program operators. The Office of Food Safety relies on science-based food safety research and works closely with external food safety partners to make sure their resources are useful and reflect current knowledge.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Professionals Standards

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>

Includes links to a variety of useful resources related to required professional standards, including: the Final Rule; Technical Assistance Webinars; Questions and Answers (Q&As), Key Areas, Training Topics, Learning Objectives; and the Training Tracker Tool and Database.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Team Nutrition

<https://TeamNutrition.USDA.gov>

The Team Nutrition website provides access to a variety of technical assistance and training-related resources for Child Nutrition Programs.

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Professional Standards Training Database

<https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>

Allows school nutrition staff to search for training that meets their learning needs. Each listing contains information about the training, including contacts, dates, learning objectives covered, and more.

Appendixes



Appendix A. SFA Director's Guide to Required Professional Standards

The required professional standards include annual training requirements for all program staff and hiring standards for new directors (See Chart A). These Federal standards became effective July 1, 2015. The goal of the required professional standards is to help you and your staff maintain or acquire the knowledge and skills needed to successfully manage and operate school meal programs.

Chart A: Minimum Annual Training Requirements for Directors, Managers, and School Staff

Position	Defined As	Annual Hours*
Director	Responsible for managing school nutrition programs for all schools under an SFA	12
Manager	In charge of the operations of a site (or several sites)	10
All Other Staff	Works 20 or more hours weekly in direct program support	6
Part-time Staff	Works less than 20 hours per week in direct program support	4

*If hired on or after January 1, only half of the required hours for that school year are required.

WHAT QUALIFIES AS TRAINING?

Training should apply to an employee's work duties. In addition to your own training, you should plan to assist your managers and staff with training. Consider these options for job-specific training:

- In-house training services
- Structured, on-the-job training
- Online courses
- Local school nutrition organizations' educational events
- State agency-sponsored training
- Training you conduct for staff
- Meetings sponsored by food service partners (vendors and commodity groups), including exhibits (as allowed by your State agency)
- College courses with job-specific content

A full 60 minutes of training count as 1 training hour. You can include shorter times. For example, four 15-minute in-services equal 1 training hour. Not all activities will count toward training – they must be job-specific.

Your State agency provides guidance on using funds from the non-profit school food service account for training. Many costs are allowable expenses.

Training records are now part of the Administrative Review. Be sure to record annual staff training and keep on file for 3 years plus the current school year. Open audits require different record retention periods. Check with your State agency for guidance. USDA offers an optional web-based Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) to track training for you and your staff. Find the PSTTT online at <https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov>.

Check with your State agency to see if it allows a flexible 2-year period to complete the training hours. If so, be sure you and your staff complete some training each year (July 1-June 30) and meet the total number of hours needed for 2 years.

WHAT ARE THE HIRING STANDARDS FOR NEW DIRECTORS?

The required professional standards also include hiring standards for new directors based on student enrollment levels. If you are a director hired before July 1, 2015, the new hiring standards do not apply. This is still true if you change director jobs but stay in the same or lower student enrollment category. However, if you change director jobs and move to an LEA with a higher enrollment category, the hiring standards will apply.

WHERE DO I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Looking for free and low-cost training? USDA maintains an online searchable library of trainings at <https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>. Additionally, your State agency must offer at least 18 hours of free training each year, so contact your State agency and/or check out its Web site for more information on State-sponsored training. Whether you plan to continue to serve in your current position or aspire to obtain other positions within the school nutrition programs, training helps you perform effectively today, while preparing for tomorrow.

More details, including hiring standards for new directors, the Q&As (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/questions-answers-regarding-professional-standards-state-and-local-school-nutrition>), and several other helpful resources may be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>.



Appendix B. Manager’s Guide to Required Professional Standards for Training

All district-level school nutrition employees must complete annual training requirements (See Chart B). These Federal standards went into effect July 1, 2015. The training requirement is to help you and your staff maintain or acquire the knowledge and skills needed to successfully manage and operate school meal programs.

Chart B: Minimum Annual Training Requirements for School Nutrition Managers and Staff

Position	Defined As	Annual Hours*
Manager	In charge of the operations of a site (or several sites)	10
All Other Staff	Works 20 or more hours weekly in direct program support	6
Part-time Staff	Works less than 20 hours per week in direct program support	4

*If hired on or after January 1, only half of the required hours for that school year are required.

WHAT QUALIFIES AS TRAINING?

Training should apply to an employee’s work duties. In many cases, your director and school district will help you find training. They may also assist in identifying training for your staff. Consider these options for job-specific training:

- In-house training services
- Structured, on-the-job training
- Online courses
- Local school nutrition organizations’ educational events
- State agency-sponsored training
- Training you conduct for staff
- Meetings sponsored by food service partners (vendors and commodity groups), including exhibits (as allowed by your State agency)
- College courses with job-specific content

A full 60 minutes of training count as 1 training hour. You can include shorter times. For example, four 15-minute in-services equal 1 training hour. Not all activities will count toward training – they must be job-specific. Ask your director for guidance.

Your director may ask you to help with record keeping. Training records are now part of the Administrative Review. Be sure to keep training records from online courses or other classes completed by you and your staff for a period determined by your director. USDA offers an optional web-based Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) to track training hours. Find the PSTTT online at <https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov>.

Check with your director to see if your State agency allows a 2-year period to complete the training hours. If so, be sure to complete some training each year (July 1-June 30) and meet the total combined hours needed for 2 years.

WHERE DO I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Looking for free and low-cost training? USDA maintains an online searchable library of trainings at <https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>. Additionally, your State agency must offer at least 18 hours of free training each year, so contact your State agency and/or check out its Web site for more information on State-sponsored training. Whether you plan to continue to serve in your current position or aspire to other positions within the school nutrition programs, training helps you perform effectively today, while preparing for tomorrow.

More details, including hiring standards for new directors, the Q&As (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/questions-answers-regarding-professional-standards-state-and-local-school-nutrition>), and several other helpful resources may be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>.



Appendix C. Staff Guide to Required Professional Standards for Training

School nutrition employees have annual training requirements. These Federal standards went into effect July 1, 2015 (See Chart C). The total hours of annual training requirements depend on your work schedule. The goal of training is to help you maintain or acquire the knowledge and skills needed to successfully operate school meal programs.

Chart C: Minimum Annual Training Requirements for Staff

Position	Defined As	Annual Hours*
All Other Staff	Works 20 or more hours weekly in direct program support	6
Part-time Staff	Works less than 20 hours per week in direct program support	4

*If hired on or after January 1, only half of the required hours for that school year are required.

WHAT COUNTS AS TRAINING?

Training should apply to your work duties. In many cases, your manager or director will provide training. Options for job-specific training include:

- In-services
- On-the-job training
- Online courses
- Local school nutrition organizations' training events
- State agency-sponsored classes
- Meetings sponsored by food service partners (vendors and commodity groups), including exhibits (as allowed by your State agency)
- College courses with job-specific content

A full 60 minutes of training count as 1 training hour. Shorter times can count, too. For example, four 15-minute in-services equal 1 training hour. Not all training activities will count - they must be job-specific. Check with your manager or director.

Your district needs to keep training records for all school nutrition employees. Your manager or director will tell you how to track and report your training. Be sure to keep your own training record in case you change schools or districts.

Check with your manager or director to find out if your State agency allows a 2-year period to complete the training hours. If so, be sure to complete some training each year (July 1-June 30) and meet the total combined hours needed for 2 years.

WHERE DO I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

Looking for free and low-cost training? USDA maintains an online searchable library of trainings at <https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>. Additionally, your State agency must offer at least 18 hours of free training each year, so contact your State agency and/or check out its Web site for more information on State-sponsored training. Whether you plan to continue to serve in your current position or aspire to obtain other positions within the school nutrition programs, training helps you perform effectively today, while preparing for tomorrow.

More details, including hiring standards for new directors, the Q&As (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/questions-answers-regarding-professional-standards-state-and-local-school-nutrition>), and several other helpful resources may be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/professional-standards>.

Appendix D: Ideas to Engage and Motivate Staff to Complete Annual Training Requirements

Make the process of completing annual training requirements fun! Here is one idea to get you started.

Incorporate a reward badge program to make annual training requirements exciting while rewarding staff for their efforts!

Directors, managers, and staff can earn a badge for each key area by completing one or more trainings under a specific key area. There can also be an opportunity to earn achievement badges by completing trainings in more than one key area. You can even create a friendly competition with staff by earning badges!

Earn badges using the USDA's Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) or you can download badges from the Team Nutrition Web site (<https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/professional-standards-training-reward-badges>) to highlight staff members' success.

Badge sticker pages are provided as part of this guide. Use the pocket attached to this resource to store your team's badge sticker pages. Additional badge sticker pages can be ordered from [TeamNutrition.usda.gov](https://www.teamnutrition.usda.gov).

CRITERIA FOR EARNING BADGES:

- Complete two trainings in any of the key areas (Nutrition, Operations, Administration, and Communications/Marketing) and earn a badge for that specific key area.



- Earn an achievement badge:
 - Earn a badge in **one** out of the four key areas and receive a **Bronze** badge!
 - Earn badges in **two** out of the four key areas and receive a **Silver** badge!
 - Earn badges in **three** out of the four key areas and receive a **Gold** badge!
 - Earn badges in **all four** key areas and receive a **Platinum** badge!



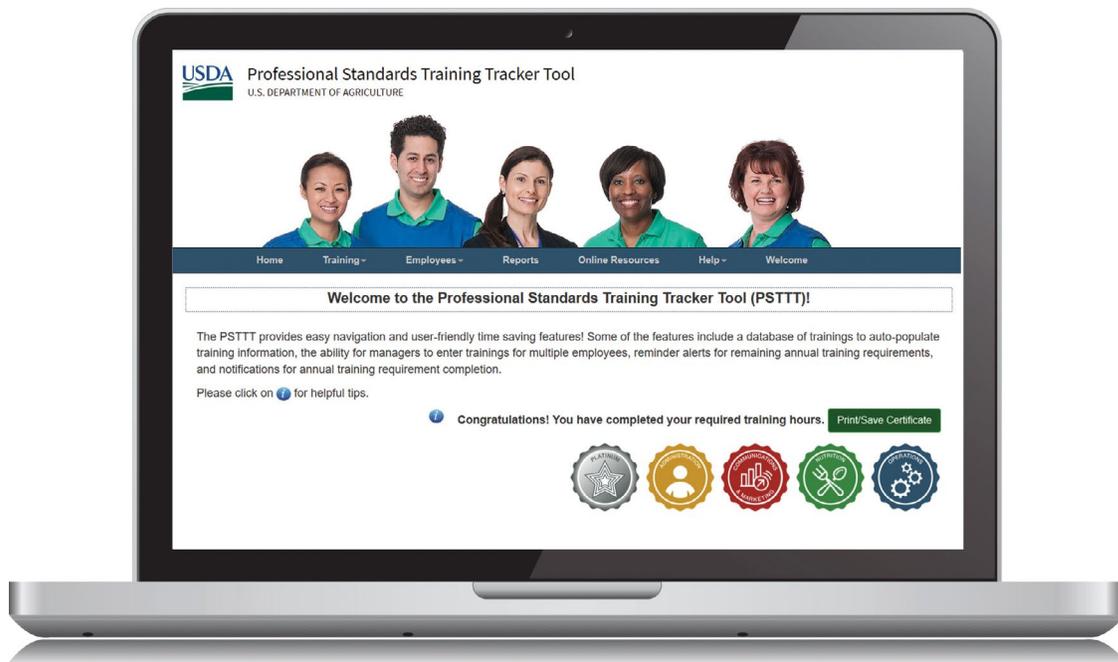
MAKE BADGES A SOURCE OF PRIDE – THEY RECOGNIZE ADVANCEMENT IN SKILLS AND PROFESSIONAL ACHIEVEMENT!

- Employees can display their earned badges on name tags or kitchen aprons.
- Managers can display badges earned by staff on bulletin boards or next to employee photos (if displayed).
- Badges can be displayed on employee lockers or cubbies.
- Create a friendly competition between schools for the team who can earn the most badges.

TRY THESE IDEAS TO RECOGNIZE STAFF FOR COMPLETING THEIR ANNUAL TRAINING REQUIREMENTS!

- Give staff the opportunity to select training topics for in-service meetings.
- Feature staff as “Employee of the Month” for completing trainings.
- Award staff with a prime parking spot for the week or month for completed training.
- Let staff pick school menu or feature their favorite recipe for completing training.
- Work with your staff to come up with ways they would like to be recognized.

Check it out! The USDA Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT) is available to help you keep track of training hours.



The USDA Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool (PSTTT)
(<https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov>) is a voluntary, free, web-based tool.

Appendix E: Professional Standards Tools for Schools

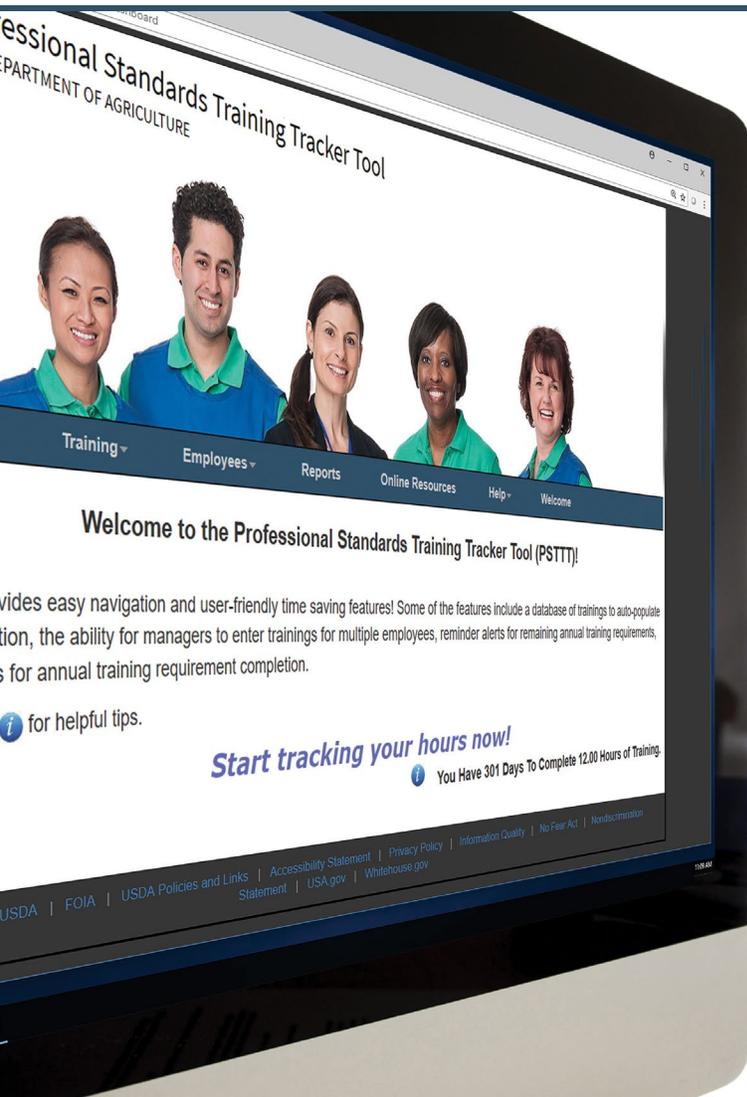
Professional Standards | Tools for Schools

Check out the USDA Professional Standards Training Database!
<https://professionalstandards.fns.usda.gov>

The USDA Professional Standards Training Database provides direct access to a wide range of free and low-cost trainings in a variety of formats!

- Videos
- Webinars
- Online Trainings
- Training Documents
- Face-to-Face Trainings

Each training listing contains information about the training, how to access the training, learning objectives, and more!



Record training hours in the free web-based Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool!

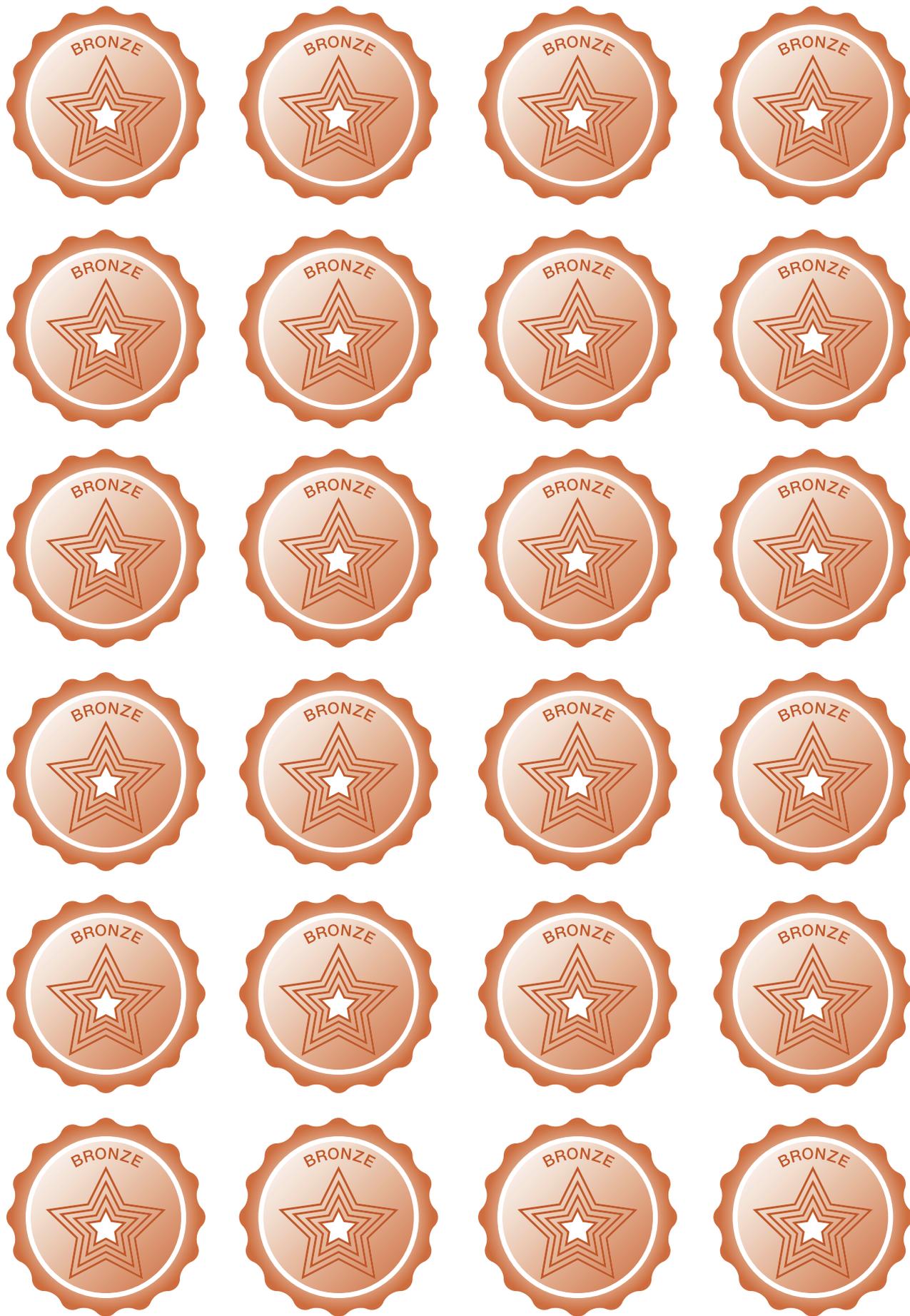
<https://pstrainingtracker.fns.usda.gov>

The Professional Standards Training Tracker Tool provides easy navigation and user-friendly timesaving features including:

- Creating a user profile and selecting your job title and user role
- Auto-populating school or State agency information
- Adding, editing, and/or deleting training records
- Printing a certificate of completion
- Uploading supporting documents
- Additional manager/director controls that allow for:
 - adding employees to a roster
 - maintaining training records for each employee
 - printing certificate of completion for all employees
 - adding, editing, deleting training records and uploading supporting documents for multiple employees at the same time

Start tracking your training hours today!







U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service
FNS-303
Revised December 2020

This guide is available to download from Team Nutrition at
TeamNutrition.USDA.gov

