

Guide to starting a school canteen

So, your school has decided to investigate opening a canteen/food service - this is a great way to encourage healthy eating amongst students and the wider community. To ensure the food service is a financially viable business we encourage you to consider the following steps.

1. *School community support*

Starting a school canteen/food service requires the support and commitment of the whole school community; parents, students but more importantly, your Principal and parent body. It is imperative to consider the needs and wants of the entire school community. Facilitate a meeting with your school Principal and the parent body to discuss what sort of food service your school should have. For example:

- onsite canteen/food service operated by the parent body; or incorporated school board
- management contract
- licensing agreement
- local arrangements with external providers such as another school or shop.

2. *Form a canteen committee*

This is a good time to form a canteen committee, including parents interested in being part of the decision making process for all planning. You should also consider inviting school staff, school health nurse and perhaps some senior students. The canteen committee may also form the core of your parent volunteers in the canteen/food service.

3. *Survey the school*

Send a survey out to the entire school community to gauge their needs, wants and expectations. Find out how many days' parents/staff would like the canteen/food service to operate; spending capacity; who may be willing to volunteer; and popular menu ideas. Consider offering an incentive for completing the survey e.g. raffle draw for a healthy food hamper.



Now that you know the school community will support the canteen/food service the planning can continue. Keep in mind, if there is limited support at this stage, you can always park the idea for a couple of terms and then revisit your options.

4. Create an 'action plan'

Once you have collated your survey results and are able to gauge the needs and wants of your school community, you can create an 'action plan'. Identify tasks, develop a checklist, timeline and delegate jobs amongst your canteen committee/parent body. Schedule regular meetings to check in with each other. This will keep the momentum going to achieve all tasks that will lead to the opening of your canteen/food service. Your 'action plan' may include but is not limited to:

- drafting of a canteen policy
- audit of canteen facilities and equipment
- nominate/employ a canteen supervisor; contact your State/Territory authority (e.g. Fairwork) about obligations, responsibilities and wages
- training; e.g. food safety and hygiene training; food allergy training; menu planning and/or nutrition
- menu planning
- creating a plan for launching the canteen.



Planning and organisation is the key to successfully opening your canteen/food service; communicate clearly with everyone involved and keep the Principal informed every step of the way.

5. Develop a canteen/food service policy

A policy is a formal document adopted and endorsed by the school community that sets out the aims and principles of the canteen/food service. It can help to bring about and sustain change and provides guidance for all food and drinks offered in the school setting.

6. Audit canteen/food service facilities

Does your canteen/food service have all necessary appliances and equipment to operate? Take an inventory of fridges/freezers, cookware, crockery and utensils to see what your canteen/food service may be lacking before the doors open. Some suppliers provide loan equipment (e.g. fridges, freezers) as long as you are stocking their products.

A word of caution: do not enter into a strict agreement about purchasing particular products and/or a minimum volume associated will loan equipment.

Other missing items such as spoons, cups etc. may be donated by the school community provided they are in good condition. Small appliances such as blenders and toasted sandwich machines must be purchased new and preferably be commercial grade to ensure warranties are not void.

7. Register with the local council

Like all food businesses, the canteen/food service must be registered with the local council as a food business. They will also be able to tell you what level of food preparation is permitted in your canteen/food service i.e. if you are permitted to prepare food from scratch with raw produce, such as lean meat. The Environmental Health Officer or an Authorised Officer at the council is a great resource for all your food safety and hygiene concerns and you can expect a yearly inspection from them – as the proprietor, you can always contact them if these visits are not occurring.



8. Menu planning

Things to consider:

- What are the government policy/guidelines in your State/Territory?
- Do you have enough people required to make certain lunch items?
- How will items be packaged to go out to students and staff?
- Is the menu based on seasonal produce?
- Have you developed a pricing formula specific to your school to ensure you cover all overheads associated with operating the canteen/food service.

9. Launch day

The launch of your canteen/food service is an exciting time! Ensure that the whole school community is involved by opening the doors on a school assembly day or plan a special celebration to mark this momentous occasion.

Not only will this generate excitement amongst students, parents will want to be a part of it too so hopefully it will generate lots of volunteers! Canteen/food services are an integral part of the school community. They provide students with nutritious food throughout the day and the opportunity to learn to make healthy food choices and they are a place where parents of the school community can come together to socialise whilst doing their bit for the school. Strive to make the canteen/food service a place devoid of negativity and gossip, and committed to providing healthy food and drink choices for staff and students.

Invite your local member of parliament, local media as well as Canteen Associations and Networks to join in the celebration.

10. Review and evaluate

Part of the 'action plan' should include a plan to review and evaluate the canteen/food service. Consider if the canteen is financially viable; that the menu is achievable and popular; and the pricing is sufficient to cover operating costs.