

Boomerang Backpack Program Funding for the Future

A KLA Whitepaper for Project Proud

By:

Aaron Ott – City of Warsaw

Christian Moyer – Zimmer Biomet

Karen Myers – Everwise Credit Union

April 15, 2025

Table of Contents:

Executive Summary.....	pg 3
Program Background and Funding Gap Concerns.....	pg 4
Funding Strategies & Marketing Solutions.....	pg 7
Community Wide Impact	pg 9
Next Steps.....	pg 10
References & Citations.....	pg 12
Proposed Use of Prize Monetary Award.....	pg 13

Executive Summary

The Boomerang Backpack Program in Warsaw, Indiana, a local chapter of a larger initiative, is dedicated to alleviating childhood hunger by providing weekend food assistance to elementary school students. The local program faces a significant and growing funding gap, which poses a substantial threat to its capacity to effectively serve the increasing number of students in need. This financial shortfall directly impacts the program's ability to achieve its core mission and strategic goals.

The program's key goals, including the provision of consistent weekend food, the expansion of services to reach all eligible students, and the maintenance of program quality, are all fundamentally linked to the availability of sustainable funding. To address the funding gap and ensure long-term sustainability, the program needs to be considering a range of strategies. These include diversifying funding sources, with efforts to secure grants, cultivate individual donors, and establish corporate sponsorships. Additionally, the program is focused on strengthening community engagement and building robust partnerships with local organizations, schools, and the United Way to expand its financial base and broaden its overall impact across Kosciusko County.

Collaborative initiatives, such as the proposed establishment of a dedicated donation portal and the formation of an advisory group, are considered crucial steps toward streamlining fundraising efforts and enhancing transparency in fund allocation.

Program Background and Funding Gap Concerns

The Boomerang Backpack Program in Warsaw, Indiana, is a local chapter of a larger initiative dedicated to fighting childhood hunger. Warsaw Community School Corporation participates in the program.

As of late 2024, the Warsaw program was seeking to expand its services to reach all K-6 students in need and was working to bridge a funding gap to restore assistance during school breaks. There are also collaborative efforts like the "Together We Feed Them All" initiative to further support food security for students and their families within the Warsaw Community Schools.

The Warsaw program served 740 students at the end of the 23-24 school year. This was an increase from the previous average of approx. 400 students each year. The average cost per student for the school year was \$130 when the funding concerns were originally discussed in late 2024. With the number of participants increasing along with the increasing cost of foods, sustainable funding has become a critical concern. The program presently anticipates a need of \$90-\$100,000 per year to achieve its goals and mission.

This section details the Boomerang Backpack Program's core mission and goals, emphasizing the critical role that adequate funding plays in achieving them. The current funding shortfall directly impacts the program's ability to serve the community and fulfill its objectives.

1. Core Mission: Addressing Childhood Hunger

The Boomerang Backpack Program's central mission is to alleviate childhood hunger by providing weekend food assistance to elementary school students who lack consistent

access to adequate nutrition. This mission recognizes that food insecurity can significantly hinder a child's development, academic performance, and overall well-being. By supplying nutritious, easy-to-prepare meals for the weekend, the program aims to bridge the gap between school-provided meals and ensure that children return to the classroom nourished and ready to learn. Sufficient funding is essential to acquire and distribute these vital resources.

2. Program Goals and Funding Implications

The Boomerang Backpack Program strives to achieve its mission through the following goals, each of which is directly linked to the program's financial stability:

- **Goal 1: Consistent Weekend Food Provision:** The program aims to provide a reliable source of food for participating students every weekend throughout the school year.
 - **Funding Implication:** Consistent funding is crucial for purchasing sufficient quantities of nutritious food to meet the ongoing needs of the students. A lack of funds may force the program to reduce the amount or quality of food provided, directly undermining this goal.
- **Goal 2: Reaching All Eligible Students:** The program seeks to serve all eligible food-insecure elementary school students within the designated community.
 - **Funding Implication:** Expanding the program to reach all eligible students requires additional resources for food procurement, volunteer coordination, and logistical support. Limited funding restricts the program's reach, leaving some vulnerable children without assistance.

- **Goal 3: Maintaining Program Quality:** The program is committed to providing high-quality, nutritious, and age-appropriate food items. It also prioritizes the discreet and dignified distribution of backpacks.
 - **Funding Implication:** Adequate funding enables the program to purchase nutritious food and maintain efficient and respectful distribution systems. Financial constraints may force compromises in food quality or distribution methods.

- **Goal 4: Fostering Community Engagement:** The program relies on strong community partnerships, including volunteers, donors, and local organizations, to support its operations.
 - **Funding Implication:** While volunteers provide invaluable support, financial resources are needed to coordinate their efforts, raise awareness of the program, and cultivate new partnerships. A stable financial base enhances the program's ability to engage the community and build long-term sustainability.

- **Goal 5: Ensuring Long-Term Sustainability:** The program is committed to establishing a sustainable funding model to ensure its continued operation and impact.
 - **Funding Implication:** Diversifying funding sources, seeking grants, and establishing endowments are essential for the program's long-term viability. The current funding gap hinders these efforts and threatens the program's ability to serve future generations of students.

Funding Strategies & Marketing Solutions

I. Goals

The primary goals are to increase awareness of the Boomerang Backpack Program in and around Warsaw, raise funds to sustain and expand its reach, and recruit and retain volunteers. Secondary goals include educating the community about childhood food insecurity, building strong local partnerships, and establishing the program as a key community initiative.

II. Target Audiences

The program aims to reach direct stakeholders (students, families, school staff, and current volunteers), community supporters (local residents, businesses, religious and civic groups, foundations), and an extended network (alumni, statewide organizations, and online communities interested in giving).

III. Key Messages

The program addresses childhood hunger in Warsaw, highlighting its negative impact on students and presenting the Boomerang Backpack Program as a solution that provides weekend meals to children lacking adequate food at home. Key messages emphasize the program's impact through success stories and data on improved well-being, and include a clear call to action for donations, volunteering, and spreading awareness. Transparency regarding the use of donations and program outcomes is crucial.

IV. Strategies and Channels

- **Awareness:** Digital strategies include a comprehensive website, consistent social media engagement, targeted email marketing, SEO, and online

partnerships. Community awareness is built through local media outreach, events, print materials, school engagement, and community partnerships.

- **Fundraising:** Fundraising strategies encompass online donations, social media fundraising, email appeals, crowdfunding, direct mail, fundraising events, corporate sponsorships, grant applications, individual giving cultivation, and in-kind donations.
- **Volunteer Recruitment and Retention:** Volunteer recruitment focuses on online applications, promotion, partnerships with volunteer centers, event participation, and highlighting volunteer impact. Retention strategies prioritize meaningful experiences, training, support, recognition, and fostering a positive community.

V. Evaluation

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) include website traffic, online donations, social media engagement, email metrics, volunteer numbers, funds raised, children served, and media mentions. Data is collected through website and social media analytics, donor and volunteer records, surveys, and media tracking. Regular reports are provided to the board and stakeholders, along with an annual report summarizing activities and outcomes.

VI. Sustainability

Sustainability is pursued through a diversified funding strategy, including recurring donations and endowment exploration, community ownership by engaging local support, and program growth planning with a strategic plan for future expansion.

Community Wide Impact

Our focus is on sustainable options for Food Insecurity. For sustainability, we are partnering with local school corporations and service organizations. To date, our team has reached out to all schools in Kosciusko County; and has met with staff members from Warsaw and Tippecanoe Valley schools. We shared our proposed funding needs and gaps with service organizations K21 and United Way to see if they could help and take on future funding for the program. We also brainstormed to look for additional funding options to fill gaps and provide sustainability of the program in the future. Ideas brainstormed include sponsor a student for the year – this could be at school registration, ask local community churches to take on commitment to donation, look for specific grant opportunities, and look to other service organizations for donations.

Tippecanoe Valley Schools

The number of students has risen over the past three years, they are anticipating at least 120 students next school year 2025-2026. School year 2024-2025, 139 students, cost \$69.43 (so far this year) per student School year 2023-2024, 120 students, cost \$103.08 per student School year 2022-2023, 115 students, cost \$121.84 per student Each week a meal is packed for each student. Each bag consists of 4-5 items to make a meal and usually includes a small snack. Their current funds come primarily from a local church. They have applied for a grant but have not heard the outcome.

K21 Health Foundation - K21 was not open to grant requests but they have made charitable donations in the past.

United Way (serving Kosciusko) - United Way was open to receiving re-occurring giving donations through payroll_deduction donations and other donations for the program and will then disburse funds to area schools; They agreed to this per having an Advisory Group/Board formed to make decisions. The group/board would consist of one representative from each school participating, two people from the Kosciusko community and one person from the United Way.

Next Steps

Currently, the Boomerang Backpack programs operate as separate entities within each school district, with each group fundraising solely to support its own district. In Kosciusko County, the program is affiliated with the larger Fort Wayne organization. As we continue our discussions, we need to consider whether it would be more beneficial to remain part of this larger group or to consolidate efforts and bring all operations under the county's umbrella. This decision could impact our fundraising strategies and the overall effectiveness of our support for local students.

We spoke with Darren Bickel at the United Way about establishing a donation portal for large companies and individuals to contribute to Kosciusko County. This portal would facilitate the collection of donations, which, guided by an advisory group, would be distributed among the local school districts. We propose that the advisory group include one representative from each school district, one community representative, and one representative from the United Way. Additionally, Darren suggested implementing a

subscription model, allowing community members to make monthly contributions to the portal based on their preferred donation amount.

In conclusion, the future of the Boomerang Backpack program in Kosciusko County presents an opportunity for significant growth and impact. By evaluating the benefits of maintaining our connection to the larger Fort Wayne group versus consolidating efforts within our own county, we can make informed decisions that best serve our local students and families. Establishing a dedicated donation portal, as discussed with Darren Bickel from the United Way, would streamline fundraising efforts and enhance transparency in fund allocation. The proposed advisory group, comprising representatives from each school district, the community, and the United Way, will ensure that diverse perspectives guide our initiatives. Furthermore, implementing a subscription model for community donations could foster sustained support and engagement. Ultimately, by collaborating and leveraging local resources, we can strengthen the Boomerang Backpack program, ensuring that every child in Kosciusko County has access to the essential support they need to thrive.

References & Citations

Boomerang Backpacks. *Boomerang Backpacks*, www.boomerangbackpacks.org. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.

Warsaw Community Schools. "Boomerang Backpack Program Receives Donation from Lake City Bank." *Warsaw Community Schools*, 29 Nov. 2022, www.warsaw.k12.in.us/article/1863265. Accessed 24 Mar. 2025.

Individuals that had personal contact and communications

Jeri Purdy – Boomerang Backpacks Board Member
jeri.purdy@gmail.com

Stavrani Niarchos Christos – Warsaw Community Schools
Boomerang Backpacks Program -Coordinator
schristos@warsawschools.org

Tracey Akers, Welcome Center Coordinator, Former School Nurse
Warsaw Community Schools
trakers@warsawschools.org

Kearstin Criswell - Mission Point Community Church
kearstin@missionpoint.net

Darren Bickel - United Way of Whitley & Kosciusko Counties
darren@uwwk.org

Rich Haddad – President & CEO of K21
Rich@k21healthfoundation.org

Lisa Harman - President & CEO Live Well Kosciusko
lisaharman@livewellkosciusko.org

Jenna Burton – Tippy Valley Schools
burtonj@tvsc.k12.in.us

Proposed Use of Prize Monetary Award

Prize money could be utilized in several ways to benefit the Boomerang Backpack Program and help ensure its future sustainability. Our team proposes donating the prize money to the Program to start a marketing campaign. The program leaders should decide the initial steps for the marketing campaign. However, our team advises that the initial focus be on a campaign or the preparation of materials to raise awareness of the program and the critical issue of its lack of sustainable funding. The prize money could be further leveraged by seeking a matching in-kind donation of services from local marketing consultants.

“Helping to fight childhood hunger one Boomerang Backpack at a time.”