



Base Request – Cougar
Cupboard Food Funds



CENTER FOR STUDENT ADVOCACY & COMMUNITY



FY 25-26



FY 2026 Base Request – Cougar Cupboard Food Funds

Cougar Cupboard opened in January 2020 serving close to 70 students a week prior to COVID-19. Since, the Cupboard has grown exponentially. In FY24, because of the generosity and support of the Student Fee Advisory Committee the cupboard transitioned to a new location in the University Lofts. In the short two months of open operation (i.e. April and May) the program distributed over 97,000 pounds of free food to over 3,200 student visitors per month. Even with the record-breaking service and usage, national research suggests that a campus our size should anticipate serving over double that many students.

It is our goal to be a nationally recognized pantry for our ability to adequately meet our diverse student needs and alleviate food insecurity as a barrier for student success. It is a practice of the cupboard to provide service to our students with dignity and includes offering practical, healthy, culturally responsive, food options. We aim to accommodate a variety of preferences and dietary needs of our students. As a result of visiting the cupboard each week, we hope that they feel supported and empowered to persist in their degree attainment.

The Cougar Cupboard operations are supported by the Houston Food Bank, which provides free food deliveries of primarily fresh produce. TDECU also provides an annual sponsorship of \$20,000. Even despite these resources, ongoing food drives, individual donors, and other occasional corporate sponsorships, the student need still outweighs what these partners can provide.

Milk	
Cost per gallon (discounted, and including delivery)	\$2.15
Students served per month for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	1000
Cost per month	\$2,150
Total Cost for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$12,900
Students served per month for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	500
Cost per month	\$1,074
Total Cost for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	\$3,222
Total Cost	\$16,122
Bread	
Estimated Cost per loaf (including delivery)	\$1
Students served per month for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	1000
Cost per month	\$1000
Total Cost for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$6,000
Students served per month for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	500
Cost per month	\$500
Total Cost for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	\$2,000
Total Cost	\$8000
Culturally Relevant Foods	
Cost per month for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$2,000
Total Cost for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$12,000
Cost per month for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	\$1,000
Total Cost for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	\$4,000
Total Cost	\$16,000
Nonperishables	
Cost per month for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$1,000
Total Cost for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$6,000
Cost per month for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	\$500
Total Cost for Non-Peak Months (May-Aug)	\$2,000
Total Cost for Peak Months (Sept-Nov, Feb-April)	\$8,000

Additionally, the Houston Food Bank cannot regularly provide staples of a healthy diet, including milk and bread. Limited nonperishable items provided by the Food Bank also limit options for a consistent healthy diet. Furthermore, about ¼ of students who use the Cupboard are international students. These students have frequently requested that the Cupboard

provide food that they eat in their own cultures, and the Houston Food Bank is very rarely able to provide these foods for the Cupboard. Since food insecurity is defined as not only a lack of access to food, but rather a lack of consistent access to foods that support a healthy diet, it is imperative for the Cougar Cupboard to provide students with options for a well-rounded diet.

Now settled into our new location, the current fall numbers project an average of over 2,000 to 2,500 visits per month. Considering this level of utilization, a review of **anticipated costs for needed food items is as follows:**

Meeting students' essential needs is directly tied to student success. Students experiencing basic needs insecurities are more likely to miss, fail and/or drop classes, are less likely to purchase needed textbooks, and are more likely to leave their university altogether. Over 38% of students who enrolled in the Cougar Cupboard reported had considered dropping out of the university due to financial concerns. Support to this program will make a huge impact to thousands of Cougars by increasing access to what they need so that they can focus on their education.

DSA Strategic Initiative:

Increase the retention rate of Pell-eligible FTIC

- Having access to the Cougar Cupboard will alleviate some financial stress from students so they can focus on their academics
- DSA Values: Care, Community, Integrity

Increased Alumni Engagement/Giving to DSA

- Students using the Cougar Cupboard have graduated and continue to support the cause either by volunteering or donating items
- DSA Values: Care, Community, Empowerment

Increased Grants/Donations to DSA

- Cougar Cupboard is a program that folks want to support and it is a growing program that needs support
- DSA Values: Collaboration, Care

Lowering Costs for Economically Disadvantaged

- Any enrolled student at the University of Houston is able to utilize the Cougar Cupboard and get up to 30 pounds of groceries per week
- DSA Values: Community, Care

Increased Student Engagement

- Students volunteer for the Cougar Cupboard and there are opportunities for collaboration with other academic and campus partners
- DSA Values: Collaboration, care, community

Funding Request- FY2026

Milk	\$16,122
Bread	\$8,000
Culturally Relevant Food Options (i.e. halal)	\$16,000
Nonperishable Supplements	\$8,000
<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>\$48,122</u>
<u>Admin Fee</u>	<u>\$2,887.32</u>
Total	\$51,009.32