PROJECT PROPOSAL: PILOT NUTRITION ACCESS PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

The Nutrition Access Program (NAP) is a three-year initiative developed by the Ontario Tech Student Union (OTSU) to address a challenge that many student communities face across Canada, impacting their academic success, health, and overall well-being. This project aims to create a sustainable, structured, scalable, and student-centred response that not only supports students through accessing food supplies but also prioritises their overall wellness, dignity, and long-term success.

The program will be rolled out in three phases, which are the following:

- **Year 1 (2025 - 2026):**
  Pilot and evaluate the necessity of further food accessibility on campus through two food initiatives: Snack & Go (weekly) and The Breakfast Table (monthly). The evaluation will be based on the participation levels, student feedback, and observed impact on food insecurity, helping to determine the long-term need and sustainability of these programs.
- **Year 2 (2026 - 2027):**
  Use the student data and student feedback from Year 1 to evaluate and refine the program through scalable models that best meet student needs. Potential options may include such a food gift card system, food hampers, or the development of an internal filtering system in collaboration with the University. Further analysis will be conducted to determine which model corresponds most to our student population needs, accounting for its effectiveness and sustainability as well as budget constraints, staffing capacity and space availability.
- **Year 3 (2027 - 2028):**
  Evaluate the outcomes, secure ongoing funding, and formalise NAP as a permanent, institutionally supported service.

GOALS

1. **Support Student Wellness and Academic Success.**
   To improve student well-being and academic performance by providing access to nutritious food options throughout the academic year.
2. **Foster Equity, Accessibility, Dignity, and Mutual Aid.**
   To create inclusive and stigma-free food assistance services that are accessible to all students, especially those disproportionately affected by food insecurity, such as international and low-income students.
3. **Build Sustainable Student-Led Solutions.**
   To develop a long-term, scalable food support system that is informed by student feedback, research, and leadership, and supported through ongoing funding and partnerships.
4. **Ensure Inclusive Access Regardless of Dietary Needs**
   To build a food support service that respects and accommodates diverse dietary restrictions and cultural food preferences, ensuring inclusive, barrier-free access and setting a foundation for flexible, student-centred solutions.

TIMELINE

Year 1: Pilot & Data Collection Phase (2025–2026)

Objective: Launch and assess two core food support initiatives on both campuses.

Programs to Implement:

1. **Snack & Go Program (Weekly on Monday):**

Provide accessible, ready-to-eat or grab-and-go food options to students every week, while supplies last, provided by CSRs.

Locations:

- North campus: SHA 115 (OTSU desk)
- Downtown campus: CHA 105

2. **Breakfast Table Program (Monthly):**

Offer a monthly community Grab and Go breakfast to build community and provide nutritional support.

This initiative aims to alleviate food insecurity on campus and provide nutritional support through distributing items such as pre-packaged food and fruits.

Occurrences: First Wednesday of each month in the morning.

Key Actions:

- Track participation, demand, and student feedback across both programs.
- Collect and analyse usage data of Phase 1 offerings, including breakdowns by demographics such as international students vs domestic students.
- Conduct a needs assessment across campus through various anonymous surveys.
- Start to identify the common dietary restrictions and preferences to tailor the future programming of the NAP, ensuring it is inclusive to all students.
- Engage student executives to:
    - Benchmark NAP against other student nutrition models across universities.
    - Identify best practices and successful structures that could inform Year 2 planning.
    - Develop and test simple methods to track participation, demand, and satisfaction (e.g., sign-ins, surveys, anecdotal feedback)

Year 2: Expansion & Model Development (2026–2027)

Objective: Evolve the program based on Year 1 findings and peer research into a more sustainable and targeted support model.

Strategic Options for Implementation (based on research, KPI and staff's suggestions):
Develop a student gift card program to provide financial assistance for Food purchases in emergency situations.

Key Actions:

- Investigating partnership with local farms in the area to create and provide low-cost food
    - Hampers monthly students on campus.

- Investigate a partnership with on-campus food services to implement a points-based card system that allows students to access free meals through existing campus facilities.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of Year 1 participation and survey data to assess impact, gaps and trends (e.g., usage by campus, student type, and time of year)
- Pilot an internal referral process in collaboration with University departments to test secure, dignified ways to identify and support eligible students.
- Draft operational models for scalable support options (gift card, hamper system or hybrid), outlining administrative requirements, costs, and staffing requirements.
- Initiate conversations with potential partners (e.g. grocers, food service providers, farms) to assess feasibility for cards or hamper-based models.
- Develop a structured student experience feedback loop, ensuring that recipients remain central to program design and decision-making
- Benchmark privacy and dignity practices from peer institutions with food support programs.
- Build internal capacity by mapping workflows, training needs, and risk management procedures to support any expanded delivery model.

Key Considerations:

- Resource availability and external partnerships.
- Administrative feasibility and equitable distribution across campuses.
- Privacy, dignity, and accessibility for recipients.
- Creation of a separate budget line dedicated to food access / NAP programming.
- Empowering student executives to advocate to the board and finance committee for long-term funding solutions.
- Design an internal referral and screening process that enables academic and student support staff to proactively identify and assist students experiencing food insecurity.

Year 3: Evaluation & Long-Term Sustainability (2027–2028)

Objective: Formalise the chosen model into a permanent, well-supported student service that is sustainable, inclusive, and responsive to evolving according to students' needs.

Key Actions:

- Evaluate the impact and outcomes of Year 2 implementation using quantitative data (participation rates, distribution metrics) and qualitative feedback (survey, testimonials).
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis to support the case for long-term investment and demonstrate value to stakeholders.
- Secure ongoing funding and institutional support, including:
    - Multi-year budget planning with Finance
    - External funding partnerships (e.g. donors, grants, community organisations)
- Establish a feedback loop with student users, including advisory groups or regular check-ins, to ensure continuous improvement and lived-experience alignment.
- Incorporate NAP into the OTSU support structure (e.g. student services, wellness office, or executives...) to ensure operational continuity beyond student turnover.
- Develop and publish annual reporting or transparency tools (e.g., impact report, dashboard) to demonstrate accountability and program success.
- Create training and documentation to support smooth transitions between student leadership and staff each year.

OTHER NOTES

Budget:

Phase 1 (2025-2026):
The budget for this project is being allocated from the approved wellness budget. $1500 (for the north campus) and $1000 (for the downtown campus) is allocated for the year round.

Phase 2 (2026- 2027):
The budget for NAP will be determined during the budget process and will be subject to approval from the budget committee (2026-2027).

Phase 3 (2027 - 2028):
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Key Actions:

- A motion for a referendum will be brought forward at the 2025 AGM to propose the introduction of an ancillary fee, with the intention of presenting it to the student body at large for a vote in 2026.
- Regardless of the outcome, a motion from the board needs to be brought to create a dedicated budget line for the Nutrition Access Program, ensuring financial recognition and support for the program moving forward.