The New Jersey State Council on the Arts, New Jersey Historical Commission, New Jersey Department of Human Services, and the New Jersey Department of Health

Families First Discovery Pass

Frequently Asked Questions for Program Partners 2026-2027

About the Program

The Families First Discovery Pass was launched in 2019 to help New Jersey's arts and cultural organizations reach new members of their communities by offering discounts to Families First card holders and WIC recipients. These cardholders receive cash and/or food assistance. The program is a collaboration between the State Council on the Arts, the Historical Commission, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Health.

Is there a fee to enroll in the Families First Discovery Pass program?

No. There is no cost to enroll in the program. You just need to register your organization and adhere to the minimum guidelines.

Is this a grant program? Will admission be subsidized?

No. The State Council on the Arts, the Historical Commission, the Department of Human Services, and the Department of Health are unable to offer grants to subsidize discounted admission at this time. However, we are able to offer certain marketing and promotional benefits for participating organizations. Our goal is to help address the financial barriers that prevent participation from all community members in the rich arts, culture, and history of New Jersey. The program can bring new audiences and open avenues for new partnerships and fundraising opportunities within your community, and we encourage you to promote your participation to other funders.

Are there any reporting obligations for participation?

Participating organizations will be asked to report attendance statistics and narrative feedback about usage of the discount annually. Plan to report the number of times the discount or offer was used - how many adults and how many children attended or registered online with the discount. Depending on your organizations' entrance and registration process, anything from handwritten tally sheets to your own digital admissions systems can help collect this information. Free entry organizations are exempt from this requirement but are asked to submit anecdotal program impact information.

Is participation required for State Arts Council or Historical Commission grantees? Will it affect my organization's ability to receive a grant from State arts and history agencies?

No. Although the State Arts Council and Historical Commission encourage their grantees to be accessible to all, participation in the Families First Discovery Pass is voluntary. It is not a requirement for funding through any grant offered by the State Arts Council or Historical Commission, nor is it a

determining factor in State granting decisions. However, participation in this program is an indicator of community outreach and greater accessibility.

How do I sign up? Is there a deadline?
Important Update: For the 2026-2027 program, we have updated the participation form. We are asking *all* organizations – returning participants and new – to fill out the updated form, regardless of whether or not your previous/existing offer remains active.

Organizations may sign-up at any time throughout the year. To sign up, make sure that your organization meets the minimum requirements and then submit your information via this online form. Promotional materials will be updated three times per year – in November, January, and May - listing all current participating organizations and their discount information. We also recommend that you have a place on your website where you can direct users to check for the most current information regarding your Families First Discovery Pass offer.

If your organization's offer will remain the same throughout the year, there is no action you need to take. We will continue making your offer unless you submit a new offer via email. If your organization needs to be removed from the list of participating organizations, you will have the ability to do so.

Setting a Discount and Policies

What kind of organizations are participating in the Families First Discovery Pass?
All types of organizations are encouraged to be a part of the program, including those that do not receive direct grants from the State Arts Council or Historical Commission. We will work with you to figure out how a discount can work for your specific programming. There are models for museums, historic sites, performing arts organizations, membership-based organizations, community centers, and schools. View our most current list of participating organizations and the discounts offered to get an idea of what you might choose to offer.

What are the requirements of an eligible discount?
Discounts offered must be:

- Available to the adult individual or family holding the Families First card or eWIC card. (NOT "free to children only")
- Offered through the regular admissions process, or redeemable in the same manner that other discounts at the organization are. (NOT "call for discount, not available at admissions")

As many organizations also offer virtual or hybrid programming, organizations should also consider what virtual opportunities can be offered at a discount or for free with code, and those opportunities that are already free to everyone. We also ask that offers regarding admission be for general admission, during all normal operating hours, or for every regular season performance, to be used at any time. (NOT "free after 5pm" or "every second Saturday").

What if my organization already offers membership or other benefits to families receiving state assistance? What if all of our programming is always free? Can we still participate?

If your organization offers benefits above and beyond the minimum benefits outlined above, such as free memberships, or if attendance is always free for all activity and all patrons, we would be happy to have you participate. Requirements for signing-up, minimal reporting, and staff training still apply, and we will promote your free program or admission to Families First card holders and WIC recipients as described.

My organization offers other discounts and accessible programming, such as rush tickets and free nights. Does this qualify my organization to participate?
No. The Families First Discovery Pass discount program is designed to promote standing discounts to general admission rates and virtual programming to individuals and families receiving cash and/or food assistance. Special-hours programming, free days, and other outreach alone do not meet the requirements for the program.

IMLS's Museums for All program, however, *is* a compatible program, and we can provide you with appropriate language to co-promote both programs. Unlike Museums for All, the Families First Discovery Pass program will directly promote participating organizations to eligible New Jersey families through direct marketing in benefits offices, food pantries, and direct outreach.

Is free or reduced entry to special, fee-based exhibits required?
No, entry to experiences that are treated as "upcharges" (e.g., IMAX movies, special exhibitions, etc.) is not required. However, organizations wishing to include admission to these activities as a part of their implementation of the program are welcome to do so.

May we limit the number of spots available to Families First card holders, depending on the program?
Yes. If you are a performing arts organization, a community arts center, or have similar capacity considerations, you may choose to limit the number of individuals per activity. An example of this might be, "10% of the house set aside for Families First Discovery Pass Program, as supplies last" or "One spot held per class, pending sufficient enrollment."

How it Works

Who is eligible for free or discounted tickets/admission/services through the program?
Participating organizations must extend the discounted rate to individuals and families that participate in the NJ WIC Program, and/or those that have a Families First Card. Both programs issue one card per household. Therefore, the name on the card may not be the person who requests the discount.

The Families First card is the card on which individuals and families receiving cash and/or, food, assistance receive their benefits. The eWIC Card is the process by which the WIC Program (Women, Infants and Children) provides benefits to pregnant and breastfeeding women, and children up to the age of five.

The discount must extend to the adult individuals attending, not only children. It is likely that patrons will visit your organization or attend your event with someone, so please consider extending the discount to cover at least two people.

Do patrons use the Families First card or eWIC card as payment?
No. The Families First cards and eWIC cards are simply used to show that patrons are eligible for your discounted rate but *should not* function as a method of payment. Patrons must use a method your organization accepts such as cash, credit card, check, etc.

Can I accept a Families First card over the phone, or through an online ticketing system? Do they have ID numbers?
Yes, it is possible to set-up a system to accept the Families First Discovery Pass discount virtually. Some organizations may select to have a discount code – i.e. "FFDP" or "WIC." You may advertise this discount and code on your own website, or if you're afraid it will be abused by the general public, you can choose to only share the code with Families First Discovery Pass card holders via the Discovery Pass promotional website. Please include the discount code when you sign-up for this program.

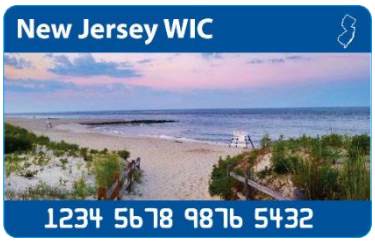
Alternatively, all Families First cards start with the same six digits… **610434**. Places that require a code could say "enter the first six digits of your Families First Card Number." Please do not ask for the entire card number, as that must remain confidential per the contract with our card vendor.

Are patrons with benefit cards from other states eligible for this rate?
It is not required, but highly encouraged. This program aims to increase accessibility for everyone, and many families travel to visit our cultural assets in New Jersey. Know that each state's benefit access card looks different.

What does the New Jersey Families First card look like? Does it have the cardholder's photo on it?

A new chip-enabled, tap-to-pay New Jersey Families First card is being rolled out. During the transition organizations should accept both the current card and the new chip/tap card as proof of eligibility. These materials will be updated when you no longer need to accept both cards. The cards do not have photos on them. Also know that there is usually only one card issued per household, so the name on the card may not be the individual who requests the discount. It could happen that a two-parent family of four receives SNAP benefits, and the parent who is bringing their child(ren) to your venue is not the person named on the card. Therefore, we do not recommend you ask for a photo ID in addition to the Families First card.

What does the eWIC card look like?



NJ eWIC cards do not include a photo. Like the Families First Card, there is usually only one eWIC card issued per household, but benefits extend to an entire family. Therefore, we recommend you do not ask for a photo ID in addition to the eWIC card.

About the DHS and Families First Card

What is the Department of Human Services (DHS)?

Within the DHS, the Division of Family Development (DFD) provides leadership and supervision to the public and private agencies that deliver cash assistance and support services to individuals and families. DFD oversees a number of programs to support New Jersey residents. Among the programs are Work First New Jersey, the state's cash assistance program; NJ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); child support services, and child care services.

What is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)?

SNAP is a federal food assistance program designed to alleviate hunger and malnutrition among income-eligible households. Program eligibility is based upon household size and income, resources and expenses for shelter, utilities, and dependent care.

What is Work First New Jersey (WFNJ)?

WFNJ provides cash for a limited time to income-eligible families, single adults and couples without children working towards self-sufficiency. There are also non-cash benefits such as short-term housing support, child care, job search and readiness assistance. New Jersey's cash assistance program for families is known as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). New Jersey also has a program for single adults and couples without children, known as General Assistance (GA).

What is the Families First Card?

The Families First card is New Jersey's Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card. It is how program recipients receive their benefits.

NJ SNAP recipients use their Families First card at point of sale terminals to redeem food assistance benefits. WFNJ recipients who receive cash assistance can also access their benefits at a point of sale terminal or at an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM).

How many families/households in NJ receive benefits on a Families First card?

Since the programs are transitional in nature, each month sees a different group of residents receiving assistance, but the number of active families/household in a given month is approximately 450,000. Demographics information is always changing but children consistently make up the largest percentage of citizens benefitting from the program.

How do I get a Families First card?

You also can pre-screen for NJ SNAP or WFNJ eligibility by visiting www.NJHelps.gov.

About the DOH and WIC Program

Family Health Services is a Division within the NJ Department of Health (DOH) that administers programs that enhance the health, safety, and well-being of families and communities in New Jersey.

The New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children is commonly known as WIC. WIC is a successful public health nutrition program that provides wholesome food, nutrition education, and community support for income eligible women who are pregnant and post-partum, infants and children up to five years old.

How can I apply for WIC?
You may pre-screen for WIC on the Participant Portal: https://wic.nj.gov/participantportal/.

The Families First Discovery Pass Program is a partnership between the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, the New Jersey Historical Commission, the New Jersey Department of Human Services, and the New Jersey Department of Health.