



April 1, 2025

Up to \$10k Grant offered to Expand Meal Access in Unserved Counties

Deadline to apply: May 12, 2025

Expanding access to nutritious meals and snacks in every Georgia county is a continuous priority for Nutrition Services. However, during fiscal year 2024, **56** counties in Georgia did not have a Happy Helpings meal site.

In order to address this gap and feed more children this summer, the Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is excited to announce the availability of start-up grants, offering up to \$10,000 to both new and experienced Happy Helpings sponsors.

These grants aim to increase the number of meal sites across the state and improve access to meals for children in underserved areas. DECAL encourages organizations and local community groups to apply for this funding to help meet the nutritional needs of Georgia's children.

To qualify, sponsors must complete the survey to apply for the grant by **Monday, May 12, 2025**.

Click [here](#) to apply.

Requirements:

- Must be an approved experienced Happy Helpings sponsor in good standing or an approved new sponsor prior to receiving funds.
- Must agree to operate a Happy Helpings meal site in one or more of the targeted counties. *Failure to serve meals in at least one of the designated counties during FY25 will result in returning the funds to DECAL.*
- Must complete the Happy Helpings start-up grant survey by 11:59 p.m. on May 12, 2025. Start-up grants will be evaluated using a point-scoring system. The higher number of points will result in a larger award amount.
- Applications must be approved by **June 23** to be eligible to receive a Start-up grant.
- Site(s) located in one or more of the target counties must be approved in your application before funds are distributed.
- Must sign a grant agreement amendment with DECAL.
- Must use grant funds on allowable Happy Helpings' costs.
- Must submit meal claims within 30 days.
- Must have the ability to share project outcomes including how funds were used along with photos by September 30, 2025.

Sponsors that receive the Start-up grant award will be notified individually. Grant awardees will be announced to all sponsors by June 16. Payments will be made on or before June 30, 2025.

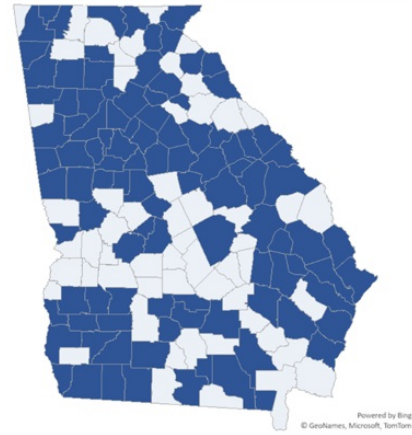
One of Nutrition Services' goals is to have a meal site in every county of the state. Last summer, you played a crucial role in our significant progress toward that goal by expanding meal service to 103 counties in 2024! Thank you!

If your organization has the capacity to expand your meal service in 2025, please consider serving meals and snacks in any of the following target counties:



FY25 Areas of Need: 56 Counties

1. Atkinson	13. Crisp	25. Jeff Davis	37. Oglethorpe	49. Twiggs
2. Bacon	14. Dade	26. Jenkins	38. Pierce	50. Upson
3. Banks	15. Dawson	27. Jones	39. Pulaski	51. Webster
4. Berrien	16. Dodge	28. Lincoln	40. Quitman	52. Wheeler
5. Bleckley	17. Dooly	29. Long	41. Schley	53. Wilcox
6. Brantley	18. Echols	30. Lumpkin	42. Screven	54. Wilkes
7. Brooks	19. Forsyth	31. Madison	43. Stewart	55. Wilkinson
8. Camden	20. Gilmer	32. Marion	44. Sumter	56. Worth
9. Charlton	21. Gordon	33. Miller	45. Taylor	
10. Chattahoochee	22. Grady	34. Montgomery	46. Telfair	
11. Cook	23. Haralson	35. Murray	47. Towns	
12. Crawford	24. Harris	36. Oconee	48. Treutlen	



Blue: HH meals were offered in these counties! White: Areas of Need

Start Planning Now for Summer 2025

Providing summer meals is a year-round effort. At any point throughout the year, there are things you can do to prepare for this summer!

Here's a guide for 2025:

During April:

- Review sites and ensure you are aware of the locations, operational hours, staff, and dates for monitoring.
- Think about how meals will be delivered to the sites, and how many will be served.
- Complete pre-operational site visits.
- Ensure administrative staff are trained.
- Complete application and renewal forms.
- Contract with a food service management company (FSMC), if necessary.
- Check with DECAL to determine if there are any potential sites lacking sponsors, or areas lacking sites and consider extending service to those areas.

Tips for Completing the Application:

- To minimize confusion and delays, only the program contact and/or authorized representative should be contacting the application reviewer. Keep in mind that the program contact is responsible for entering the information in the online application, GA ATLAS.
- Complete all forms in their entirety.
- The Food Service Permit Inquiry Form needs to be submitted/signed in every county where meals are being served prior to being submitted to DECAL.
- If utilizing a food service management company (FSMC) or acting as FSMC, ensure that numbers 42 & 43 are responded to correctly on the institution application.

Board of Directors Section:

- Ensure that all sections are completed for each board member.

- Any changes made to the Board of Directors (BOD) need to be supported with board meeting minutes.
- Ensure that the "delegation of authority" form is signed by an officer of the board (as defined on the form).

Management Plan:

- The plan should be updated annually.
- The percentage of time allocated to Happy Helpings for personnel/staffing should align with the allocation on the staff distribution report.
- Staff and duty allocations in the Management Plan must match the names of staff and duty time listed in Staff Distribution Worksheet.

Budget:

Specific Prior Written Approval (SPWA) submission and approval process

- Sponsors with an emergency request, are required to email the **SPWA request form** with supporting documentation to Gwendolyn.Howard@dec.al.ga.gov within 24hrs of purchase and then submit a budget revision to include the cost.
- For all other requests, sponsors are required to submit a budget revision to include the cost, upload the **SPWA request form** and supporting documents to the attachments list section in GA ATLAS and notify the budget team via email at Nutritionbudget@dec.al.ga.gov at least three days prior to making the purchase.
- DECAL will review the request and provide an approval or denial status in writing, including any special considerations or reasons. The SPWA will be signed and uploaded to the attachment list section in GA ATLAS.

Site Application:

- Site changes, including add-a-sites, need to be approved prior to making changes to an approved budget.
- Ensure to indicate days that the site will not serve meals during normal operating dates on #14.
- If site is outdoors (park, driveway, pool), please detail the plan if indicating that meals will be served indoors when answering #28.

Maximum Meal Count:

- The threshold for the maximum number of meals that can be served is 100.
- Sponsors that request a Maximum Meal Count (MMC) over the threshold prior to the initial approval of the site application must submit written justification to their assigned Application Specialist explaining why an increase is needed.
- Enrollment/registration information should be submitted to justify the increase for sites that are closed enrolled.
- Letters of authorization for sites located at unaffiliated schools and/or unaffiliated apartment communities can include information to justify the increase. A justification letter is not required for sites requesting the same MMC over the threshold that was approved the previous year. Additionally, if the request is over the MMC threshold, but under the approved MMC that was approved the previous year, no justification letter is required.
- If a request appears unreasonable/unsupported, then the MMC over 100 will not be approved.
- Sponsors that begin operations and later request a MMC over the threshold must submit written justification to their assigned Business Operations Specialist explaining why the increase is needed. Additionally, three consecutive days of daily meal count (DMC) forms must be submitted. If the request is unsupported, the MMC to provide more than 100 meals will not be approved.
- Sponsors requesting a MMC increase are required to indicate the additional children requesting a meal after all available meals were served on the daily meal count form. Sponsors do not have to serve any additional meals over the approved MMC in the site application. Note: If DECAL doesn't approve the requested MMC increase, then the cost of any additional meals served over the approved MMC will be the responsibility of the sponsor.
- All meal count increase requests must be reviewed and approved by DECAL prior to claim submission for the operating month.

Pre-Award Cost Request vs. Excess Funds Use Request

Excess funds are any amount of reimbursement or funds remaining which exceeded a sponsor's expenditures at the close of the FY24 Happy Helpings program. Excess funds must be retained and expended **solely** for food service operations or improvements.

When requesting to use excess funds for the Fy25 Happy Helpings program, an institution is required to submit a Pre-Award Cost Form **or** an Excess Funds Use Request Form. Here is how to determine which form to submit:

The Difference:

Pre-Award Costs: Costs that are incurred **in preparation of** the Happy Helpings Program when prior year funds are available.

Excess Funds: Costs that will be incurred **during** the operation of the program when prior year funds are available.

When to Request Fund Use:

Pre-Award Costs: Prior to submitting the FY25 HH application or before the application has been approved.

Excess Funds: After submitting the FY25 HH application and budget.

Supporting documents that are needed for approval:

Pre-Award Costs: [Pre-Award Cost Form](#), invoices, quotes, allocation methods & Specific Prior Written Approval (SPWA) if applicable

Excess Funds: [Excess Funds Use Request Form](#), invoices, quotes, allocation methods & Specific Prior Written Approval (SPWA) if applicable.

Budget Representative	Institution Assignment	Email	Phone Number
Kristy Lanier	o (zero)- M Excluding Combo Sponsors	Kristy.Lanier@decals.ga.gov	(770) 359-4401
Gwendolyn Howard	N-Z Including Combo Sponsors	Gwendolyn.Howard@decals.ga.gov	(404) 651-7191

Advance Payment Requests Update

Sponsors can request advance payments to help cover the costs of operating the SFSP. These payments are intended to assist with cash flow and ensure that sponsors can provide meals without financial strain.

To be eligible for second and third advance payments, sponsors must certify that they are operating the number of sites for which the budget was approved and that their projected costs do not differ significantly from the approved budget.

Except for school food authorities (SFAs), sponsors must conduct training sessions before receiving the second advance payment. Sponsor must certify that it has held training sessions on Program requirements for site and sponsor personnel, before the release the second month's advance payment.

- Certification will require the completion and submission of the new DECAL-provided

Certification form- [2nd Advance Certification Form](#) .

- For additional details, please refer to the [Advance Payments in the SFSP #18 \(16-18\) Policy memo](#)
-

Upcoming Training and Technical Assistance

April 9-10, 2025

FY 2025 Happy Helpings New Sponsor Training

9:15 am - 3:00 pm

Join us for the FY 2025 HH New Sponsors Training, a comprehensive in-person session designed for new sponsors. This training will provide essential guidance on program requirements, compliance, and best practices to ensure successful participation.

This training is required for:

- New sponsoring organizations
- Experienced sponsors that did not operate the previous summer
- Experienced sponsors with a new Program Contact who have little to no knowledge of SFSP
- Experienced sponsors who fail to attend other allocated trainings, and
- If the State Agency deems required

Please contact Leslie Truman, Administrative Assistant, at (404) 657-1779 for assistance.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 16, 2025

Happy Helpings Budget Readiness

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Do you have the budget basics?

Join this webinar to learn:

- The purpose of the budget package.
- The purpose of all budget line items in GA ATLAS.
- How to prepare & develop a complete GA ATLAS budget package.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 21, 2025

Memo Monday

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Have you reviewed recordkeeping requirements for SFSP recently?

Please join this webinar for a refresher on the following policy.

- [SFSP Policy #5 - Recordkeeping Requirements for All Sponsors and Sponsored Facilities Participating in the SFSP](#)

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 22, 2025

Tuesday Tip! Active Play with Mixed Age Groups

1:30 - 2:00 pm

Wondering how to engage mixed age groups in active play?

Join this webinar to learn:

- How to maximize active play options for Early Care Education programs with mixed age groups,
- Developmentally appropriate practice and recommendations for active play for young children.

- How to apply these recommendations to adapt and design active play opportunities according to the needs of each age group.

Participants can earn one-half [0.50] state-approved hour(s) for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 23, 2025

**PALS Session 4: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings:
Families, Training, Resources, and Policies
1:00-2:00 pm**

Would you like to explore concrete strategies for family engagement around physical activity? During this session, participants will be able to explore developmental milestones and tools from CDC that support milestone tracking. In addition, free and low-cost resources that advance physical activities practices and how program policies support will be shared with participants.

Join this session where we cover the following objectives:

- How to recognize family engagement opportunities around physical activity.
- How to communicate with families about their children's physical activity.
- Ways to identify policy statements that follow the best practices for physical activity in Early Childhood Education (ECE) settings.

Participants can earn one [1.0] state-approved hour(s) for attending this training in its entirety.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

April 29, 2025

**Product Formulation Statements & Child Nutrition Labels
10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Would you like an overview of Product Formulation Statements (PFSs) and CN Labels? Join this webinar to learn:

- How these documents provide a way for a manufacturer to demonstrate how a processed food product may contribute to the meal pattern requirements, and
- Helpful tips to support a compliant nutrition program.

[\[Register Now\]](#)

Notes: This is a two-step process:

- Step 1: After registering in GA ATLAS, you will receive a Training Confirmation email immediately from Georgia DECAL Help Desk -helpdesk@cnpus.com with a registration link to attend the webinar (**check your spam/junk folder**).
- Step 2: You must then register for the training using the link provided on the Training confirmation e-mail.
- If you should have an issue with registering, please contact Leslie Truman prior to the day of training.
- [Click here](#) if you need a refresher on how to register for training in GA ATLAS.

Please note: Only the Program Contact (PC) can self-register within GA ATLAS. If an additional person will be attending, please contact Leslie Truman, Administrative Assistant, at leslie.truman@decal.ga.gov or (404) 657-1779 for assistance.

Training Resources

In Case You Missed It: Webinar Recordings Now Available!

If you missed a webinar, please visit the [Training and Technical Assistance](#) webpage for

previously recorded webinars. This month's training highlight is the [Happy Helpings Procurement Readiness](#) webinar.

It discussed relevant procurement practices when procuring food & non-food items, how to develop formal solicitations, and how to incorporate local sourcing practices into a meal service.

No Kid Hungry *Georgia Summer Meal Webinar Series*

Expanding Your Reach: Your Rural Non-Congregate Summer Meal Service

No Kid Hungry experts, school districts, and community sponsors shared their experiences and best practices in maximizing the impact of rural congregate meal service. Whether you were an experienced sponsor or considering starting your first rural non-congregate site, this session provided best practices and tools to kick off planning for your rural non-congregate summer meals program for 2025.

[\[Watch Recording Here\]](#)

Reaching Rural Families with Grab & Go: Ideas for Transforming Summer Meal Programs

This webinar explored innovative grab-and-go program models tailored for rural non-congregate summer meal programs. Participants learned about invaluable lessons, integrity plan insights, and effective staffing and volunteer strategies. It also highlighted diverse multiple meal and bulk distribution models that successfully addressed the unique challenges of rural settings.

[\[Watch Recording Here\]](#)

Smart Hiring: Leveraging Student Workers for Impactful Summer Meal Programs

High school and college students brought energy, creativity, and much-needed support to summer meals programs. From boosting capacity to strengthening community ties, student workers offered a fresh perspective that made a real impact. In this webinar, participants explored the benefits and challenges of hiring students, shared best practices for recruitment, and provided key resources to streamline the hiring process. It was designed for summer meals program operators looking to enhance their teams.

[\[Watch Recording Here\]](#)

Together We Serve: How Schools and Community Organizations are Boosting Summer Meals

Participants attended an insightful webinar on how community-based organizations and school districts collaborated to expand summer meal programs in 2025, with a special focus on non-congregate service models. This event was designed for sponsors, partners, and state agencies eager to explore innovative strategies for leveraging partnerships to meet community needs and increase access to summer meals.

Guest speakers, including school district leaders and representatives from community organizations, shared their successful partnership models and innovative approaches. Attendees learned about real-world examples of how partnerships effectively met the needs of communities and enhanced summer meal programs. The session concluded with a live Q&A where the panel of experts answered participants' questions.

[\[Watch Recording Here\]](#)



Nutrition Ed Nook

Legumes: Vegetable or Protein?

Legumes are the April Harvest of the Month (**English** and **Spanish**) spotlight.

Legumes are a nutritious staple in diets worldwide, as an inexpensive source of protein, vitamins, complex carbohydrates, and fiber. Along with being a highly nutritious food, evidence shows that legumes can play a crucial role in preventing and managing various health conditions.

Legumes have a nutrient profile similar to both the protein foods group and the vegetable foods group, making them versatile enough to be considered either a vegetable or a protein food. This class of plants includes beans, peas, and lentils.

Beans are incredibly versatile and packed with protein, fiber, and essential vitamins and minerals like folate and iron. They are a great pantry staple, adding color, flavor, and texture to meals. Examples include kidney beans, pinto beans, white beans, black beans, lima beans, fava beans, and soybeans.

Peas are rich in vitamins A and C. Fresh peas are extremely versatile, paired well with many vegetables, herbs, rice, beans, grains, cheese, and more. Examples include chickpeas, black-eyed peas, pigeon peas, split peas, green peas, snow peas, and sugar snap peas.

Lentils are highly versatile, offering a rich, earthy texture that enhances any dish with added fiber and nutrients. They can add thickness and bulk to recipes and are an excellent source of protein and dietary fiber. Types include green, brown, black, red, yellow, and orange lentils.

Integration:

- **Tuscan White Bean Pasta**
- **Beanie Dip**
- **Pea Guacamole**
- **Roasted Zesty Chickpeas**
- **Lentil Plantballs**
- **Barley Lentil Soup**

Education:

- **Explore** legumes like beans, peas, and/or lentils with program participants using their senses to describe how they look, feel, taste, and smell. For example, compare the colors and textures of kidney beans and red beans, or the flavors of peas and lentils. Consider adding participants' favorites to the menu based on their feedback.
- **Read *One Bean***, by Anne Rockwell. What happens when you plant just one little bean? A fundamental childhood experiment charmingly unfolds in this first science book about planting and observation.
- **Grow** a bean in a bag with program participants! Place a damp paper towel inside a clear plastic bag, then add a bean seed. Seal the bag and tape it to a sunny window. Watch as the bean sprouts and grows over the next few days, observing the roots and shoots develop. This hands-on activity is a great way to learn about plant growth and the life cycle of a bean.
- **Talk** with families about how participants can help with meal preparation such finding and removing small rocks or other seeds and planting parts from dried beans and lentils.
- **Bonus:** Send recipes home with families for them to incorporate legumes into their meals!
- **Want ECE legume-themed resources?** Check out Quality Care for Children's **Harvest of the Month toolkit** for more ways to engage ECE students.

Conversation:

- Have your program participants eaten any type of legumes?
- Which type of legume do they enjoy the most: beans, peas, or lentils?
- What different legume would they like to try?

Share your Harvest of the Month stories and menu integration of legumes with Nutrition Education Specialist, Morgan Chapman, MPH, MCHc at morgan.chapman@dec.al.ga.gov.

Physical Activity Corner

Spring Into Action with Physical Activity

Spring is here – the perfect time of year to start fresh and keep moving. It's almost time to take out those shorts, running shoes, bicycles, and get moving again after the cold winter.

Whether it's planting a garden, going for a run, or taking a walk around your neighborhood, there are plenty of activities to keep everyone moving and active outside this spring season. Simply moving and sitting less helps build the momentum of our bodies to move forward. This may include walking, running, jogging, visiting the gym, yoga, kickboxing, or dancing.

Be sure to be mindful of drinking water while being active, especially as we shift into the warmer months. Staying active contributes to a healthy lifestyle that decreases risk of chronic diseases, enhances mental health, and improves overall wellbeing.



How will you get active?

Integration:

- [Explore Georgia in Spring](#)
- [Georgia's Longest Hiking Trails](#)
- [Why Movement is Important for Kids?](#)
- [GA State Parks and Trails](#)

Education:

- **Read** aloud the book, *I Am Spring*, by Rebecca and James McDonald.
- **Watch** the video on [Healthy Lifestyles with the CRC: Strategies by Georgia Tech](#).
- **Talk** with families about ways ways to spring into action with fitness at home, in their community, childcare centers and adult care centers.
- **Bonus:** Share #KeepItMoving, #SpringIntoAction #HealthyLifestyle, #SpringFitness pictures and events that are happening in your communities.

Conversation:

- What is your favorite spring physical activities?
- How do you spring into action after a cold winter?
- Why is spring the best season to get outdoors and exercise?
- Why is it important to keep moving daily?
- What are the keys to a healthy lifestyle?

Share your #DECALPhysicalActivity, #SpringFitness, #SpringIntoAction, #HealthyLifestyle, #KeepItMoving stories and pictures with Physical Activity Specialist, Tina McLaren, MPH at tina.mclaren@dec.al.ga.gov.



Eat Healthy and Live Active

Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month 2024-2025 Calendar

The Georgia Early Care and Education Harvest of the Month is a collaborative campaign between Quality Care for Children, Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning, Georgia Department of Human Services, and Georgia Organics. The campaign aims to encourage healthy eating habits by promoting a different local, seasonal fruit or vegetable each month.

Visit Quality Care for Children’s Farm to [ECEwebpage](#) to access a variety of classroom resources, including activity ideas linked to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS), recipe ideas, a book list, and family newsletter to help you promote a new vegetable or fruit each

month.

For school-age children resources, visit the Georgia Department of Education's Harvest of the Month [webpage](#).

Dates to Remember

DATE	EVENTS
April	Harvest of the Month: Legumes
April 9 & 10	Happy Helpings New Sponsors Training- In Person Training
April 16	Happy Helpings Budget Readiness- Webinar
April 21	Memo Monday: SFSP Policy- Webinar
April 22	Tuesday Tip! Active Play with Mixed Age Groups- Webinar
April 23	PALS Session 4: Best Practice for Physical Activity in ECE Settings: Families, Training, Resources, and Policies- Webinar
April 29	Product Formulation Statements (PFS) & Child Nutrition (CN) Labels- Webinar
May 12	Deadline to complete the survey to apply for the HH Start-up Grant
June 16	HH Start-up Grant Awardees will be announced to all Sponsors
June 23	HH Start-up Grant: Applications must be approved to be eligible to receive grant funds
June 30	HH Start-up Grant Awardees: Payments will be issued
September 30	HH Start-Up Grant Awardees: Ability to Share Project Outcomes, Fund Usage, and Photos

Decal Download

NASLEE Leadership Academy & Pre-K to College Sweepstakes

DECAL’s own Workforce Supports Supervisor Angela Shelton has been

accepted into the 2025 cohort of the National Association of State Leaders in Early Education (NASLEE) Leadership Academy. It is a 12-month executive leadership program specifically designed for state early education administrators. Angela joins us on this episode to talk about the NASLEE Leadership Academy.

On the next ...

DECAL
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New Episodes Every Wednesday!

This Week's Topic:
**NASLEE Leadership Academy
Fellow Angela Shelton & Pre-K to
College Sweepstakes**



Angela Shelton
Workforce Supports
Supervisor

Bethany Whetzel
Treasury Program Director,
Georgia Office of the State
Treasurer



Georgia Dept
of Early Care
and Learning
BRIGHT FROM THE START



Also on this episode, our eighth annual Path2College, Pre-K to College Sweepstakes is now underway. This program not only raises awareness about the importance of saving for college but also provides substantial financial boosts for both students and their classrooms. Joining us to talk about that is Bethany Whetzel, Treasury Program Director with the Georgia Office of the State Treasurer, our partner in the Pre-K to College Sweepstakes.

Listen to the episode [here](#).

Happy Helpings Resources:

The following documents were covered in previous newsletters:

- [Updates to SFSP Procurement Templates](#)
- [Transitioning from Happy Helpings to CACFP At Risk Afterschool Meals](#)
- [Unanticipated School Closure Waivers Available](#)
- [Commercial Recall: BrucePac Meat and Poultry](#)
- [After School Programs Required to Apply for License or Exemption to Participate in At-Risk](#)
- [And Justice for All Posters](#)
- [Notify DECAL When Updating Your Bank Information](#)
- [Procurement Methods At-A-Glance](#)
- [Have You Determined this Summer's Food Cost & Procurement Methods?](#)
- [Identifying the Difference between Pre-Award Cost Request vs. Excess Funds](#)
- [2025 SFSP Reimbursement Rates](#)
- [Check you Email Messages in GA ATLAS](#)

How was my Customer Service?

Provide feedback on your experience with the Nutrition Team



Click on the icon on the right to participate in the customer service survey. Responses are anonymous.



Nutrition Division

Marketing & Outreach

**Cindy Kicklighter
Joann Kilpatrick**

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

**Nondiscrimination Statement: English
Nondiscrimination Statement: Spanish**

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