

Innovative Strategies for Increasing Participation in the USDA Summer Meal Programs

Need a few ideas to kick-start a good summer program? Here are some suggestions, followed by examples of activities and initiatives that State agencies have undertaken to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

Recruiting New Sites and Sponsors:

- Identify gaps in service and select target areas for recruitment.
- Provide potential sponsors with specific information, such as eligible schools.
- Generate 'political will' by informing local elected leaders.
- Create and identify allies; attend meetings, provide information packets.
- Work with bureaucracies.
- Provide multiple opportunities for sponsor training.
- Investigate alternative sites and means of transportation.
- Implement a Web-based system for administering the SFSP within the State that can help sponsors complete and submit their application on-line and recruit potential sponsors, making the application and claim process easier.
- Conduct program outreach to potential sponsors and sites, including school districts currently offering meals only to summer school students through the National School Lunch Program and sponsors on the CACFP After School At-Risk Program.

Increasing Site and Sponsor Participation:

- Work with parks and recreation departments to ensure summer programs include meals.
- Encourage schools to work with migrant sites.
- Collaborate with universities to sponsor the program or host sites.
- Reach out to Tribes to be sponsors or host sites.
- Form partnerships with food banks and libraries.
- Let sponsors know about grant opportunities for activities.
- Create a summer Web site.
- Use GeoMapping software to quantify underserved areas.
- Share summer feeding site data with the Hunger Hotline.
- Create banners, yard signs, and flags and provide them to sponsors of open sites.
- Post site information on marquees.
- Provide schools with flyers they can send home with students.
- Provide information for school newsletters, school lunch menus, Web sites, laundromats, grocery stores, churches, recreation centers, health and welfare agencies, food banks, WIC agencies, medical clinics, libraries, and post offices.

- Use high school students as volunteers who need hours for lettering, Junior Honor Society, etc. – they attract siblings and friends.
- Market with university extension offices.
- Reach out to eligible schools that did not participate in the NSLP Seamless Summer Option or SFSP.
- Do outreach in unserved and underserved geographic areas to recruit new sponsors and/or sites.
- Encourage current sponsors to increase sites and add additional serving days.
- Recruit Child and Adult Care Food Program after school at-risk sponsors to participate in SFSP.
- Do outreach to Upward Bound program across the State.
- Reach out to faith-based and camp programs that serve youth from low-income areas.
- Network with other State agencies within the region to learn about their successes and to promote the SFSP.
- Provide a list of SFSP feeding sites with serving times and locations to be distributed to health clinics, WIC offices, unemployment offices, welfare offices, year-round schools, apartment complexes, community swimming pools, recreation centers, television stations, etc.
- Distribute promotional flyers to all sponsors describing ways to increase participation, including ways to add sites, increase access to sites, partner with community agencies to expand the scope of services, extend operating dates, and ways to attract children to sites.

Launching the SFSP:

- Promote the last day of school as a kick-off for SFSP.
- For Hunger Awareness Day, invite local elected leaders to serve lunch.
- Distribute flyers door to door.
- Mentor/train sponsors.
- Reach out to businesses, national and local.
- Provide certificates/awards at the beginning of the program.
- Reframe the image of SFSP (for instance, fighting obesity).

See what some States have done to increase sponsorship and participation in the Summer Food Service Program:

Connecticut

The towns of New Britain, Bristol, Hartford, and East Hartford developed an outreach plan and a flyer, and distributed the following to their summer program partners:

Summer Food Outreach Plan for 2013

Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do providing nutritious meals and snacks throughout the summer that we know children need to learn, play and grow. Following is some information that may be useful to you in expanding your reach this summer.

Top Sure-Fire Ways to Boost Summer Food Participation

- Consider community organizations for site expansion.
- Consider serving at nonparticipating eligible schools.
- Contact individuals in your professional and social network and solicit their support in marketing your summer meals program.

Bring More Sites to Kids...

As you may know, to establish a geographically eligible summer food site, it must be located where school records or census data show that at least 50 percent of children in the area are eligible for free or reduced price meals.

Sites can be located **anywhere** within [the town] due to **town-wide eligibility**. In addition to the schools listed below, [the town] also has [X] census block groups that meet the eligibility criteria, [X] of which are newly eligible. The attached map(s) reflect the eligibility areas.

With this in mind, please consider increasing the number of sites you sponsor, including the following schools and community organizations: [To which was appended a customized list from within each town.]

Other activities in Connecticut included the following:

- The State agency established a strong relationship with End Hunger CT! Last year they funded adult meals for the parents of the children eating at SFSP sites, which significantly increased overall participation.
- The State agency transitioned to online claiming and application process for all sponsors;

this is more efficient and eased some of the administrative burden on both sides

- The Governor, who is an advocate for the program, sponsored two public service announcements highlighting the program.
- End Hunger CT! and the State agency created an online site locator; entering a ZIP code brings up sites and lists of activities. The State agency encouraged sponsors to furnish the latest information so that the Web site could be updated.
- End Hunger CT! created area profiles for all sponsors to let them know where the eligible areas are and what types of communities have a high need. They produced a lot of the background research for sponsors.
- One sponsor had a food truck and reported successful results.
- Each year, the Commissioner of Education sends letter to school superintendents. The State agency follows up with school food authorities to let them know the letter went out.
- Share Our Strength and End Hunger CT! began the Connecticut No Kid Hungry Campaign in March 2011. The campaign is focusing on increasing participation among eligible children in the SFSP and the Child and Adult Care Food Program's Afterschool Meal Program.

District of Columbia

Washington, D.C. worked with libraries to become summer program sites.

Florida

211 Summer BreakSpot Hotline: The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS) partners with 211 to operate a hotline number for families to call to find a site in their area. When a family calls for summer food information, they were also provided information on additional human services they might not have known existed.

Summer BreakSpot Website: DACS also has a Web site, <http://www.summerfoodflorida.org/> for families to visit read about the program, how it works, nutrition information, and a special feature that allows them to type in their city, zip code or county to look up participating sites in their area. The feature runs on Google maps and is linked to the DACS database that holds all of the site applications, address, meal service times and operating dates for each sponsor's sites.

Florida Sports Teams PSAs: In addition to the press events, DACS also contracted with the sports teams such as the Orlando Magic Basketball Team, Tampa Bay Rays Baseball Team, the Miami Dolphins Football Team and the Jacksonville Jaguars Football Team for public service announcements (PSAs). The PSAs feature the sports athletes and the Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Adam Putnam, and will air throughout the State.

Outreach: DACS provides outreach tools (posters, flyers, yard signs, business cards, magnets, and Web banners) in three languages (English, Spanish and Creole) to program sponsors and community partners such as County Health Departments, Florida Department of Health (DOH), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Pediatric Clinics, Child Care and After School Programs,

Work Force Centers, United Way, Florida Association of Food Banks, Florida School Nutrition Association (FSNA), Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), Florida League of Cities, Florida Association of Counties and Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF).

Bus Wraps and Billboards: DACS will wrap city buses in major markets this year (Jacksonville, Miami, Tampa, West Palm) as well as provide billboards to smaller market areas.

Direct Mail: The State agency partnered with Department of Children and Families (which administers SNAP in Florida) this year to provide a direct mail piece notifying all families on SNAP benefits with children in the state of Florida of the Summer BreakSpot Program this year. The mail-out will happen the third week of May.

Illinois

In partnership with the Illinois Office of Communications, there will be PSAs, Chicago Transit Authority Ads, new yard signs, and posters in SNAP offices, mainly in the Chicago area.

Louisiana

In Fiscal Year 2012, Louisiana reported a 5-percent increase in the number of summer program sites and a 22.82-percent increase in meals. The State agency used the following strategies to continue the momentum:

- Continued partnerships with the Mayor's office in New Orleans, Share Our Strength (No Kid Hungry Campaign), Second Harvest, and United Way to increase the number of sites in the New Orleans area
- Participated in Summer Outreach meetings scheduled by the various organizations in the New Orleans area
- Distributed a statewide media release (newspapers, television, and radio stations) in order to seek eligible sponsors for the summer of 2013
- Instituted a 211 call line to provide statewide site information
- Offered promotional information on the State agency Web site
- Distributed outreach materials to potential sponsors, Parish Police Juries and Councils, Community Action Agencies, Parish Food Stamp Managers, Public Superintendents, Public, Parochial, Private School Food Authorities (SFAs) (excluding RCCIs), Charter School contacts, Sponsor Contacts (excluding SFAs), and Contacts from a multiagency meeting with Share Our Strength
- Continued promotion to School Districts
- Communicated flexibilities available to SFAs
- Distributed a letter to school sponsors statewide encouraging returning participation
- Inserted program flyers in a summer program training registration mail-out

Maine

The State held an SFSP summit for sponsors with keynote speakers on best practices regarding increasing participation, etc. A Q&A panel allowed all participants to ask questions.

The State agency had a targeted focus in 2012 on recruiting sponsors for underserved areas. The strategy: Work county by county, in the grass roots.

The State presents statistics to potential sponsors about how many low-income children live in their county as well as the Federal funds they aren't taking advantage of. This opens the eyes of the sponsor to what a benefit the program could be, especially if it is already running a child-centered program.

Maine noticed a real lack of understanding of SFSP at the school administrator level (miscommunication of the reimbursement rates, etc.) and provided education about the program. They created a letter for superintendents and principals regarding the fact that they could have a SFSP and Federal funding because they have high free and reduced-price meal counts, and asked for a response back in order to explain to the State agency why they *wouldn't* become a site/sponsor.

The State agency looked at the last 3 years of reviews and listed findings, in order to target training to the areas that are most needed to help sponsors feel more confident about the program.

Worked with Hannaford Supermarket's Cooking Matters Program and is developing ideas on how to integrate with SFSP.

The Good Shepherd Food Bank in Bangor, a city which has historically not had SFSP, became a first time SFSP sponsor. In 2012, they opened two sites working closely with the housing authority to serve the meals. They kicked off the summer with a press conference and fun activities to draw the kids in, including bouncy houses and a bookmobile. In 2013, they will expand by three more sites.

Maryland

The State agency collaborated with the Governor's Partnership to End Childhood Hunger, Baltimore, Partnership to End Hunger, Maryland Hunger Solutions, and State and local government agencies to address summer nutrition. It also secured free public service advertising space on Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority buses; maintained a toll free hotline number to identify meal sites for the general public; and hosted a searchable summer meals Web site (www.mdsummermeals.org) for households to identify and map nearby meal sites.

Massachusetts

The State agency has had success with a very early SFSP kickoff (for sponsors) meeting in January, where they describe past year accomplishments, get people interested, and start planning for the following summer.

College interns have been very helpful in getting insight into participation or lack thereof – why do kids come or not? They sign up for a stipend or for free to do community outreach, including putting up posters, distributing flyers, etc. The number of interns is growing every year.

The State's Child Nutrition Outreach Program is centered at Project Bread. The State agency gives Project Bread a contract amount every year (a quarter of a million dollars for SFSP and the School Breakfast Program). This helps to avoid some of the red tape when each specific initiative or expense needs approval (for example, to get banners, magnets, etc.). Project Bread gives those out at the summer sites and also uses its own money for parts of these initiatives. Project Bread also has been helping sponsors create culturally appropriate menus for sites located in culturally diverse neighborhoods.

Massachusetts has grant money for start up for new sponsors and also for the cost associated with running activities at SFSP sites, made possible due to their partnership with Project Bread and also funding through the State budget.

The State launched a texting campaign in 2012 targeted towards teen participants. Teens could text the zip code to a phone number (managed by Project Bread) and the reply would provide the nearest SFSP sites. One key challenge was to make sure sponsors gave the State agency accurate location and times to communicate.

Massachusetts helped sponsors develop low- or no-cost activities to increase participation, including hosting dental care and insurance company wellness trucks and a mobile zoo at the site. Community outreach plays an enormous role in getting donated time/equipment/volunteers to run activities.

The State agency has a close working relationship with Department of Transitional Assistance, which is the agency that oversees welfare. It also began focusing closely on the homeless population in 2012 in order to understand barriers to access and deal with the challenges specific to them.

New Hampshire

New Hampshire's challenge has been to bring on sponsors in the northern part of the State. Superintendents close down the schools during the summertime and busing is done through contract that doesn't extend into the summer. To address these challenges, the State agency has talked to churches. In the southern part of the State where schools are open through the summer, the agency has conducted outreach to superintendents and received interest in many schools starting programs in low-income communities.

The State started a partnership with Children's Alliance, which is a sister organization of an anti-hunger organization. The organization is trying to assess the needs for SFSP in the State and is researching the feasibility of introducing food trucks as mobile feeding sites.

The State agency implemented an online application online to expedite the application process and make it more user-friendly.

The State agency encouraged their largest sponsor to assess their capacity to expand to additional sites.

New Hampshire and Vermont began working together,, as the neediest area of Vermont is on the border of New Hampshire.

New Mexico

New Mexico set a goal of achieving over 5-percent growth in the number of sites, children, and meals for Fiscal Year 2013. The State implemented the following strategies to reach its goal:

- Identify unserved and underserved areas for targeted outreach.
- Meet with community leaders to encourage participation in SFSP Statewide.
- Get the support of the Governor's Office in promoting the program. In the past, the governor participated in SFSP kickoff events, which garnered much media coverage.
- Continue partnerships and work with advocate organizations such as The Appleseed Foundation, Student Nutrition Association, Food Distribution & Commodities Programs, and Hunger Initiative Committees. These partnerships have been instrumental in promoting SFSP statewide.
- Disseminate materials and promote the SFSP to community members, food assistance organizations, faith-based organizations, environmental agencies, cooperative extension organizations, parks and recreation programs, YMCA organizations, and other interested parties.
- Identify potential sponsors and mail them a letter with a sponsor and meal site pamphlet; follow up with phone calls.
- Issue a statewide media release announcements from the State agency.
- Work closely with the Public Education Department on promotion of Seamless Summer Option and SFSP.
- Disseminate posters and flyers to sponsors during the annual SFSP training, who in turn will disseminate the materials in their community.
- Maintain a Web site with a list of statewide meal sites to be accessed by the public.
- Maintain and staff a toll-free telephone line to provide program and meal site information to the public.

New York

New York City has had huge success using food trucks as mobile feeding sites – usually in a park location – with kids eating around the truck. At the end of the summer, they converted the trucks into kosher trucks so the trucks are multipurpose.

The State agency worked with SNAP offices to get the word out about the summer meals. SNAP put it on its Web site and they have a multilingual hotline.

New York City utilizes a 311 and a statewide 1-800 number that has 52 different languages available to callers. They have a mapping program on the agency's Web site. Sponsors can update their information online.

There is a SFSP campaign in all major New York State cities (NYC, Buffalo, Rochester, etc.), including subway hubs with SFSP posters.

The State distributes vinyl banners to sponsors to use at open sites to attract attention to the meal service/activities. It is developing razor flags that will attract additional attention to site locations.

Oklahoma

In Fiscal Year 2012, Oklahoma reported a 17.38-percent increase in the number of sites and a 13.52-percent increase in the number of meals. The State is using the following strategies to continue the momentum:

It disseminated program information to potential sponsors through its outreach brochure to all school districts currently participating in the NSLP, Food Distribution on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), local municipal and county governments, eligible 2012 SFSP sponsors, private and residential summer camps, private nonprofit organizations, Woman, Infants, and Children (WIC) participants, and SNAP and TANIF and Oklahoma Regional Food Bank recipients.

The State distributed a statewide media release (newspapers, television, and radio stations) to seek eligible sponsors for the summer of 2013. The State agency communications specialist sent the release to media contacts, all State superintendents, the FNS Regional Office, the State's REAC³H Coaches and all employees, as well as representatives from the Oklahoma Education Association, the Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administration, the Oklahoma State School Boards Association, and Professional Oklahoma Educators, and posted the release on the State agency Web site.

Oklahoma compiled a list of faith-based organizations of all denominations in Oklahoma and disseminated approximately 1,300 SFSP letters and brochures to them. This list was obtained from a Web site called ChurchAngel.com.

The State conducts annual training for all new and returning sponsors through Distant Learning

video conferences. Returning sponsors have the opportunity to opt for the online training. Video conferences were conducted for mainly new potential sponsors. Returning sponsors had the option to do training online.

In 2013, the Oklahoma Education Department identified an area of the State for targeted outreach. Partners in this effort include local faith-based organizations, school districts, and the Regional Food Bank.

To increase participation by Latinos, Oklahoma mapped out eligible migrant sites and that are underserved or not served. All eligible migrant sites, which are schools, were sent information on the program and training dates.

Pennsylvania

The [Pennsylvania Department of Education's](#) Press Office prepared an article about the SFSP to insert into legislative packets for the House of Representatives and the Senate. The article encourages legislators to communicate with business and political leaders within their constituency. The Area on Aging's Senior Community Centers operate the Meals on Wheels Program, providing meals to senior citizens. The State is exploring how agencies can team with the Summer Food Service Program by sponsoring youth programs or vending meals for current sponsors providing meals to children. Transportation coordination is also encouraged.

There are many libraries in small towns across Pennsylvania that provide reading programs to children. This makes libraries ideal as sites for feeding children. Over 400 libraries in Pennsylvania have been contacted to encourage their participation in the program. A pamphlet and survey have been included. Staff attended a Library Workshop in York where SFSP staff talked about benefits of libraries participating in the SFSP.

Outreach to Nonprofit Organizations: The State identified counties in Pennsylvania where there few or no SFSP sites; and further identified nonprofit agencies in eligible areas by using several different free online databases. One is MelissaData, a data quality solution base that assists businesses to target their products to specific regional areas. The second database used is from the National Center for Charitable Statistics. This database provides high quality data on nonprofit organizations and their activities for use in research on the relationships between nonprofit organizations, government, and commercial areas. The Tax Exempt World database is the third one used and is an information service the helps identify tax-exempt organizations.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education continues to build partnerships to expand access to Child Nutrition Programs. Using these partnerships, it has been able to advertise the SFSP so more children can be fed. Some of its partners include:

- The Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center, which has long been an active advocate for the Child Nutrition Programs, meets with nonprofit organizations to inform them of how they can incorporate the SFSP into their current activities.

- The Central Pennsylvania Food Bank provides informational workshops on how organizations within their region can sponsor or become a site for the Summer Food Service Program. Department of Education staff provide support and assistance to the food bank by attending these informational sessions.

In Pittsburgh, the [Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank's](#) outreach efforts include prioritizing outreach based on need. They have planned and organized information sessions in assisting nonprofit organizations in southwestern Pennsylvania in eliminating barriers. As a result of these information sessions, task groups are forming to help potential sponsors start a SFSP in their area. Department of Education staff has provided support and assistance to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank by attending these information sessions. This model can serve for other areas to encourage community support in underserved areas.

Outreach Tools: In anticipation of the need for extended outreach in rural areas, and in cooperation with Commonwealth Media Services, the Department of Education filmed an outreach video, *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation*, for distribution to rural school districts and nonprofit agencies not currently participating in the program. This video is used at school board meetings, meetings of associations, and other outreach sessions to enhance the expansion efforts.

The University of Pennsylvania's Fox Leadership Program developed a Web site that has been made available to the Department of Education for the purposes of locating summer sites providing meals. This site, www.pasummermeals.com, will help citizens searching for meals in their vicinity, advocacy groups who wish to identify opportunities for expansion of the summer meals programs, and Department of Education staff to assist families who call searching for nearby feeding sites.

Puerto Rico

The State agency gives awards to the three school food districts that reach the highest increase in participation and program improvement. Lunchroom supervisors of the winning districts get to attend the annual School Nutrition Association conference.

Rhode Island

The Stop and Shop Foundation provided the local Food Bank with a 3-year grant to increase the number of sponsors and access to SFSP. State agency staff reached out to nontraditional community-based organizations (including Salvation Army), and has a working relationship with the University of Rhode Island's Nutrition Program to develop ideas geared towards increasing participation.

Sites are advertised through 211.

Sponsors are getting creative in utilizing volunteers to help run successful summer programs. The Work to School teacher at Woonsocket Area Career and Technology Center and School Food Service Director collaborated and started a program. The students at the career high school

are required to have a community service component as a SkillsUSA graduation requirement. The teacher put out the word and the school was able to recruit six student volunteers. For most of these students this was their first work experience. They trained, scheduled, and monitored them. The summer lunch program ran every weekday for 7 weeks. The student volunteers were assigned to city parks, playgrounds, and a community center in a low-income housing project. The student volunteers were armed with coolers of bagged lunches and cartons of milk, Frisbees, children's books, and a few games. More than 9,200 lunches were served.

The students' dedication, efforts, and achievement was recognized by Sodexo School Services and were featured as Sodexo Education's Performance Zone March 2013 feature story. Each month Sodexo recognizes outstanding students or groups of students whose story can serve as an inspiration to other students around the country. The W.A.C.T.C students were featured in a Sodexo Performance Zone poster and educational materials displayed in over 750 schools across the country. In addition to being featured in a national campaign the students have received a \$500 donation from Sodexo Education for their organization, the Woonsocket Chapter of SkillsUSA. The student group plans to use the funds to support the SkillsUSA program Bags of Dignity.

Tennessee

The Tennessee Department of Human Services sponsored a Summer Summit with current and former sponsors, public and private nonprofit organizations, and representatives of the Latino community (held at the Second Harvest Food Bank of Middle Tennessee).

The State encouraged all current sponsors of At-risk afterschool care programs to participate in the SFSP.

Working closely with the Department of Education, Tennessee identified and recruited schools that did not participate in 2012.

Vermont

The Vermont statewide 21st Century programs had a full day event in February 2013. The State agency educated participants about afterschool programs and encouraged them to extend into the summer and take advantage of SFSP.

In summer 2013, the State is working on increasing enrichment activities at existing sites in order to increase participation; and partnering with community organizations to make this happen. Vermont has found that parents want activities to justify spending gas money to drive them to a site (especially in rural communities.)

Hunger advocates proposed a bill to require schools with summer programs that meet for more than 3 days per week and that are in a low income area to provide food to kids. It makes them eligible for open summer sites. That pushed school administrators to look at summer programs as

feeding as well as educational opportunities. Principals and superintendents expressed interest after receiving this information.

The State agency has a close relationship with Hunger Free Vermont and, as a small agency, relies on them to conduct outreach and produce flyers, etc. Hunger Free Vermont targeted two counties where they conducted extensive outreach activities in 2012 that led to an increase in participation. They produced “campaign signs” with steel inserts so they could be posted in the ground in yards and along major streets. They also produced large posters that listed site locations and times they served meals.

Hunger Free Vermont also nurtured relationships with schools asking them to serve meals throughout the summer. They assisted them in finding ways to deliver food to sites, including using retired Rotary Club volunteers to pick up and drop off meals at sites. They also made connections with community organizations to conduct enrichment activities

The State agency took the required SFSP training conference in Burlington on April 5th as an opportunity to challenge sponsors to think more broadly about after school and summer programs.

The State agency has conducted virtual trainings so rural sponsors don’t have to travel in winter to meetings. These trainings are on the agency Web site.

The Burlington School District works closely with a local farm to produce fresh fruits and veggies for its menus. It incorporates farmer visits into activities at the sites. The district also received grant funds from No Kid Hungry and will utilize their texting campaign.

The Burlington School Food Project collaborates with the Burlington Parks and Recreation Department to advertize the program. It holds an annual Kids Day in May to promote SFSP and families can sign up their children for parks activities throughout summer.