



Common Challenges and Best Practices

Children are America's greatest treasure, and ensuring they have the proper nutrition to learn, grow up healthy, and reach their full potential is one of our most important duties as parents, families and community members.

More than 21 million children receive free and reduced price meals during the school year through the National School Lunch Program but, when school lets out, many low-income children no longer get a healthy breakfast or lunch. USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) was established to help low-income children continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. Sponsors and sites are champions in running SFSP and in closing the hunger gap for these children.

Here are ideas for sponsors and sites on how to avoid and manage common challenges, and best practices to help communities increase access and expand their summer meals services.

Program Participation

Challenge: Maintaining the program's financial efficiency

Solution: Maximizing Participation

Some of the strategies that sponsors and sites can use to maximize program participation include:

- **Increasing the number of sites served.**
 - o Sponsors can contact their local parks, recreation department, public libraries, and summer camp programs to find out if they are interested in receiving meals during their summer activities.
- **Increasing the number of meals served.**
 - o If a site is serving only breakfast, consider serving lunch and/or an afternoon snack as well.
- **Expanding the length of the program.**
 - o If possible, sponsors and sites can start their program in the beginning of June until August to maximize the period of time that children are fed.



Cost Consideration

Ensuring program success by monitoring financial efficiency

Challenge: Predicting the amount of meals needed for a site

Solution:

- Keep continuous communication with the site supervisors to identify participation patterns.
- Adjust your meal dispatch by considering how factors such as weather and/or time of the month/day of the week may affect site attendance.
- Utilize geo-mapping and Census's data to research the communities surrounding the feeding site.

Challenge: Food Waste

Solution:

- Survey the kids to determine what kind of meals they like to consume.
- Address issues on how the meals are prepared, transported and served.
- Consider serving culturally appropriate meals appealing to the children in the community. A good resource is utilizing geo-mapping data.

SFSP Kick-off Events

Kickoff events are one of the best alternatives to promote summer feeding programs. It is a fun way for children to start the summer and for families to obtain information.

Challenge: Putting together an event and getting people to participate.

Solution: The following steps can help when coordinating your event.

- **When to Have It:** The best times to host an event is at the beginning of June (Summer Kick-Off Week), right after the school semester ends, a week before the program begins or during the first day when the feeding site starts operating.
- **Where to Have It:** The place will depend on the amount of people expected, funds available and sponsor capacity. Some good examples include: community centers, public library, recreational parks, or the feeding site.
- **What to Do:** Some of the activities to keep kids entertained include: Games, talent shows, music, sports, dance performances, bands and movies.
- **How to Promote It:** Use resources such as Public Service Announcements (PSAs), flyers, community bulletin boards, youth center, city website and newspapers.



Summer Meals Toolkit

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Partnering with Businesses

Sponsors and sites can benefit from local businesses during their summer meals program by taking advantage of the resources and support they can provide.

Challenge: Obtaining local businesses' support

Solution:

- Contact your local Chamber of Commerce to obtain a list of local businesses in your area and determine those that are most aligned with your objectives.
- Send correspondence outlining the purpose, scope and benefits of your program.
- Extend an invitation to visit the feeding site.
- Ensure that all in-kind donations are in compliance with tax and accounting standards.

Resources

[USDA Food and Nutrition Service SFSP Best Practices](#)

[Share Our Strength National Summer Meals Summit Summary](#)

[Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach](#)

[Minnesota Department Of Education SFSP Toolkit](#)



Summer Meals Toolkit

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.