



Mayors and Local Elected Leaders Can Be Champions for Summer Meals

During the school year, 22 million children receive free and reduced-price meals through the School Breakfast and National School Lunch Programs (NSLP). But when school is out, many low-income children relying on these school meals go hungry. To fill this gap, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides federally funded meals through the summer meals programs, including the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the NSLP Seamless Summer Option. These programs provide free, nutritious summer meals to children at approved sites in areas with high concentrations of low-income children. Unfortunately, these summer meals reach only about 16 percent of the eligible children.

As an elected leader in your community, you have the opportunity and ability to make a real contribution towards the success of the summer meal programs. Throughout the Nation, communities with elected leaders who have expressed strong support for the summer meals programs have shown increases in participation. In 2015, over 190 million meals were served during the summer months. Local leaders play a critical role because they are trusted sources of information and possess a clear understanding of the specific needs of their communities. Below are simple steps that you can take as an elected local leader to promote the summer meals programs and expand participation in your community. USDA also has many resources that can help. By working together, we can ensure no child is hungry this summer!

- Use your visibility to draw attention to summer meals by participating in the Annual National Summer Food Service Program Kick-Off Week. Events held during this week attract media attention, which helps spread the word to families that free meals will be available in their community.
- Empower your community organizations to champion summer meals! Let these groups know that Federal funds are available to support their efforts and that the city is supporting them as well. Highlight their efforts in local media and city newsletters or other publications, thereby gaining free press for summer meals and ensuring more families know summer meals are available for their children.
- Work with your executive team and let them know expanding summer meals is a priority for you and you are available to work with them to increase access for low-income children. Ensure that they are able to fully utilize the available USDA and state resources to effectively administer the programs.
- Establish a summer meals workgroup, with staff from your office, and other agencies in your State that have a vested interest in the health and safety of low-income children in the summer. Creative partnerships can lead to real change!
- Reach out to anti-hunger groups and the social service network to identify those areas that have the most need and work with them to educate their clients and



the community about where they can participate in the SFSP.

- Work with the superintendent to keep schools open in low-income areas to provide summer meals. Schools serve as ideal locations for summer meals programs because they are recognized as safe places that serve nutritious food. As you know, many children are hungry in the summer when they lose access to school meals.
- Ensure your other agencies are engaged in the summer meals effort. Departments of Education, Human Services, Agriculture, Housing and others that provide services to low-income citizens may have resources and can share information about summer meals with their clients.
- Promote summer meals through local human service agency newsletters, local newspapers, public service announcements and public speaking events.
- Consider providing funding to summer programs that provide enrichment activities. These are shown to reduce the achievement gap, ensure children are ready to learn when they return to school in the fall and improve student test scores statewide. While USDA provides funding for meals and the administration of the meals programs, many of these vital summer programs need additional assistance to fully serve the children in your state.
- Make it competitive! Start a “Mayor’s Challenge” to encourage healthy competition amongst your fellow mayors to increase participation in their cities.

USDA Resources

The USDA, Food and Nutrition Service has many resources to assist States and sponsors in administering USDA Summer Meal Programs. Some current resources include the following:

- **Power Up for Summer Fun!** Download and distribute Program flyers throughout your State.
 - English: http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/Summer_Flyer_En_508.pdf
 - Spanish: http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/sp-Summer_Flyer_508.pdf
- **Economic Benefits of Summer Meals.** Find specific information on State participation rates and how increases in participation can increase Federal financial support for your State. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/outreach/SNAPandSFSPmap.htm>
- **The FNS Website** has a subscription feature for any new guidance that is issued related to the SFSP. <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/USFNS/subscriber/new>
- **FNS Regional Office Contacts.** <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

