Tips for Success

Using School and Census Data

Unlike other Child Nutrition programs, eligibility for participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is usually made on a site basis, rather than a child basis. Once a site is determined eligible to participate, all meals at the site are served free of charge to participating children. SFSP sponsors need a way to target their outreach efforts to areas which are likely to be eligible for the Program and to determine whether a site in a specific location is eligible to participate.

Two main sources of area-based information on income eligibility are recommended to document SFSP site eligibility and to target outreach and expansion efforts: (1) the percentage of enrolled children in an elementary school who are eligible to receive free and reduced price meals (family incomes at or below the 185 percent of poverty); and, (2) census data showing the percentage of eligible children in an area. This information is often available through the State agency operating SFSP.

Key Issues in the Use of School and Census Data

"Open Site" vs. "Enrolled Site"

To be eligible to participate and receive payment for meals served to children, most SFSP sites are either an:

• Open site - a site located in an area in which at least 50 percent of the children living in that area are eligible for free or reduced price school meals; or

• Enrolled site - a site with income applications from families of children at the site which show that at least half the enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals.

Most sponsors choose to operate open sites. While enrolled sites may be appropriate in some cases, they require additional effort. Acquiring applications from families of participating children is often difficult. In addition, if the site's enrollment increases, the sponsor must continue to ensure that at least half of the enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced price meals.

School Data

Schools keep data on the number and percentage of children who are eligible for free or reduced price meals in the School Lunch or Breakfast Programs.

However, there are situations when census data is more helpful than school data when establishing area eligibility. For various reasons, not all eligible children participate in the school meals program. Also, when there is district-wide school busing, meal participation figures do not always match those of the area's children.

While the use of school data is preferred, reviewing both sources of data together as the most accurate way to determine site eligibility is recommended. When these sources conflict, consult your State agency to determine which is the more reliable source of area data for your particular site.

For more information on school data please visit:
www.fns.usda.gov/pd/cnpmain.htm

Obtaining School and Census Information for Site Eligibility

The following steps should be taken when attempting to document your sites' eligibility:

• Call your State SFSP agency first to see if they can help. If you give the State the address of your proposed site, they may be able to tell you—based on their access to school or census data—if it would be eligible as an open site.

• If the State agency does not have the school data you need, contact your local schools and tell them you are interested in operating one or more SFSP sites. You will need to obtain from the school a letter which includes their total enrollment, the number of children eligible for free and reduced price meals, and the boundaries of the school's attendance area (this shows that your proposed site is within the area served by a particular school). In some cases, it may be necessary to contact school district officials to obtain some or all of this information.

• After consulting school data if you cannot establish area eligibility, contact your State agency to obtain census data. The State agency will have a list showing the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced price meals. Your State agency or other sponsors can provide advice regarding the best way to obtain this boundary information. Raw data files are available at your state agency for geo-mapping.

Targeting SFSP Outreach at the State or Sponsor Level

The key steps when using school and census data to target recruitment of new sponsors or sites are:

• Analyze the school and census data to determine the areas of greatest need. The census data may be better for this purpose since it is more easily shown on maps and can be coded for easy identification of areas with various levels of need by using different colors or backgrounds;

• Get a list of current SFSP sites from your State agency to see which areas are already served;

• Analyze the data to match areas of need with areas and levels of service. Some people mark the location of sites on wall maps of the city. It is then relatively easy to see if there are areas of need without sites; and

• Identify potential sponsors or sites in the areas of high, unmet need and begin contacting them.

This system can also help you: (1) prioritize your personal contacts, going first to the areas of unmet need with the highest percentage of eligible children; and (2) assess the need for SFSP outreach for potential funders and other interested parties.

Area Eligibility Map

You can use the area eligibility map to see if a potential site is in an area where it can be an open site.

To access the area eligibility mapper please visit http://216.55.182.132/FairData/SummerFood/map.asp?command=scope&map=0

Or call your local state agency and they will be able to give you information on your area. Find which state agency administers your Summer Food Service Program here:
www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm

For more ideas please visit our SFSP Training Videos webpage where you can view webcasts and videos on how you can become a SFSP site, sponsor, or advocate or to enhance your existing activities.
www.fns.usda.gov/outreach/webinars/summer.htm

Food, Fun & Sun!

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