

Answers for Program Operators

What do you know about the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Summer Meal Programs? With so much information out there, sometimes things can get confusing. Let's clear up some of the common misconceptions potential Program operators may have about Summer Meals!

1. **Myth:** Summer Meals are only for young children.

Fact: Anyone 18 and under can receive meals through USDA's Summer Meal Programs. Teens face the same risks of food insecurity in the summer, so Program operators should promote Summer Meals to both kids and teens.

2. **Myth:** Summer Meal sites have to be indoors.

Fact: Summer Meal sites can be located just about anywhere, as long as they meet Federal eligibility requirements. Talk to your State agency to see what options work best in your community.

3. **Myth:** Sites must provide an activity that is approved by the State agency.

Fact: There is no Federal requirement that sites provide an activity, but it is an effective way to bring children to your site, and keep them coming back. While offering good food will attract children, equally important is offering activities that are fun and provide children with opportunities to learn and grow. Site operators can be creative when planning these activities, and can develop programs that cater to the age group of children attending their site.

4. **Myth:** Mobile feeding is only permitted in rural areas.

Fact: The mobile feeding model may be used in any community – rural, urban, and even suburban areas. Each "stop" on a mobile feeding route is considered a site, and has to be area eligible, just like any other open site in the Program, and the children must remain at the site while they eat their meals. Work with your State agency if you want to participate under this model to effectively design your route, prepare menus, and schedule meal service times.



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5. **Myth:** Summer Meal Programs have too many paperwork requirements. It's too complicated for small organizations to administer.

Fact: Organizations of every size can participate and benefit from the USDA Summer Meal Programs. Small organizations can operate as sites under existing sponsors, which eliminates many of the administrative responsibilities of the Program.

6. **Myth:** The reimbursement my organization would receive as a sponsor is not worth the work it takes to apply and participate in the Program.

Fact: In recent years, many Program requirements including applications, monitoring and claiming, have been streamlined to make it easier than ever to serve Summer Meals. Existing sponsors and organizations that participate in other Child Nutrition Programs have new simplified application procedures and monitoring requirements.

7. **Myth:** To claim meals, sponsors have to submit complex documentation that compares total meals claimed against the actual costs or the budgeted costs in determining reimbursements to the State agency, before receiving reimbursements for meals served.

Fact: Simplified procedures allow reimbursement based on the number of meals served multiplied by the reimbursement rates. Sponsors can use this reimbursement to pay for any allowable cost, whether operating or administrative. This means that costs do not have to be specifically categorized as "operational" or "administrative" and sponsors do not have to report their costs or submit documentation to the State agency. Sponsors must however, continue to document costs and maintain such records for the State agency's review.

8. **Myth:** Only Program funds can be used to purchase meals for the Program. Meals made using donated foods are not reimbursable.

Fact: If your organization receives funds or donated foods from an outside source, they are permitted to use those resources to improve their operation of their Summer Meal Program. While Summer Meal Program funds must be used on approved allowable costs, as stated in Federal guidance, outside resources may be used at the discretion of the sponsor. For example, if a local food bank donates milk to a sponsor, the sponsor may use the milk, and spend the meal reimbursement on higher quality ingredients on the rest of the meal or other allowable administrative costs.



9. **Myth:** If a sponsor has Program funds left over at the end of the year, the money cannot be used and must be returned to the State agency.

Fact: With instruction given by the State agency, excess reimbursements may be used to improve the Summer Meal Program the following year or can be applied to other Child Nutrition Programs operated by the sponsor, including the National School Lunch, School Breakfast, and Child and Adult Care Food Programs. Excess reimbursements only need to be returned if you do not operate any other Child Nutrition Programs and do not intend to participate in the Summer Meal Programs the following summer. Please note, cost documentation is very important when tracking excess reimbursements.

For Additional Information

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and achievable for your Program. The Summer Meals Toolkit has even more creative ideas and resources at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>

Do you have more questions? Sponsors and the general public should contact their State agency for answers. State agencies should contact their Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) Regional Office.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-contacts>

USDA and its recipient institutions share responsibility for compliance and oversight to ensure good stewardship of Federal funds.

