



Libraries

Libraries, the leader in the fight against summer learning loss, are natural partners and ideal sites for Summer Meals. By combining meals with reading programs, library-based Summer Meal sites nourish children’s minds and bodies!

Go to [Resources](#).

A Perfect Fit!

Libraries are safe and accessible gathering places that exist in nearly every community. Many libraries, however, are unfamiliar with Summer Meal Programs, and may need more information and encouragement before agreeing to host a meal site. Here are talking points to use when recruiting library sites:

- **Summer Meals Benefit Children**

When school is out, low-income children who rely on school meals are harmed by the summer hunger and achievement gaps. Libraries are in a unique position to bridge both gaps at once by providing the healthy meals and enrichment activities our children need to thrive, all year round.

- **Summer Meals Benefit Libraries**

Engaging in Summer Meals supports library goals by attracting new users to the library, strengthening community partnerships, providing an opportunity to educate families about library services, and boosting overall participation in summer reading programs.

- **Summer Meals Benefit the Community**

Partnering with Summer Meal Programs allows the library to serve and strengthen the community, feeding children’s minds and bodies and creating a dependable “summer safety net” for local families.



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Spotlight on Ohio!

Since 1997, the Nelsonville Public Library has hosted Summer Meals as part of its summer reading program. Meals-on-Wheels deliver lunches that are served after the morning Book Camp activities, which sometimes include visits from magicians, storytellers, and puppeteers. The meals attract children who might not otherwise visit the library during the summer, inspiring many of them to stay after lunch to read independently.

Summer Meals at the Library

Hosting Summer Meals at the library is a team effort. It is important to involve all library staff in the Program planning process as they will have important insights on various areas of Program management.

Volunteer Recruitment

Library volunteer coordinators are key to staffing a library Summer Meal site. The number of youth participants, duration of the Program, and amount of prep and clean up required are important considerations when assigning volunteer shifts. Libraries may consider asking volunteers to commit to a minimum of five to ten shifts to provide the children with consistent role models during the summer.

Volunteers can come from a variety of sources, including service learning programs at high schools, area colleges and universities, faith-based organizations, or other local volunteer programs. At many library sites, Summer Meal Programs have served as a career development program for teens, helping to connect them not only with a free meal, but also with a constructive volunteer experience where they positively impact the youth through mentorship.

Before any volunteers start, they must attend a volunteer training. If the library has a large number of volunteers, the sponsor may consider visiting the library to run the training. If the library requires fingerprinting or background checks for new volunteers, allow ample time and resources to complete this process.



Meal Service

Facilities and custodial staff may be helpful in determining the library meal service location. The ideal location for meal service can vary, and may include a community room, a library café, or a nearby park. Ideally, the space will be accessible and easy to find. Consider your expected participation rate when selecting a location, and search for a space where you will not have capacity issues. Remember: meals must be consumed on-site!

Custodial staff can also arrange for extra garbage containers, liners, and other cleaning materials needed for after the meal. Encourage Summer Meal volunteers to keep the area clean to avoid adding to the custodial staff's workload.

Although meals served to adults are not eligible for reimbursement through Summer Meal Programs, it's helpful to have options available for adults, who may attend the library with their children. Local restaurants, food pantries, and catering companies may be willing to donate adult meals to a library program. Libraries may also encourage parents to bring brownbag lunches to enjoy while their children eat for free.

Marketing and Communications

Marketing staff can help with program outreach by creating fliers, tri-folds, banners, and other materials to distribute in the community. Connecting with local partners, such as schools, social service agencies, and other organizations frequented by families, is key to ensuring children and families in your community know about your program.

Library communications staff can draft press releases for the program kick-off and other special events happening throughout the summer. Publicizing site visits with local celebrities in television and print media, for example, is a helpful way to increase program excitement and turnout. Staff should also advertise the program in the library's newsletter, on its website, and in any social media updates. Make sure to understand the library's photo release policy before releasing any pictures to publicize the Program.

In Connecticut, the Norwalk Public Library joined other Summer Meal sponsors and sites for a "blitz" outreach campaign at the start of the summer, distributing door hangers and fliers throughout the community to ensure more families would be able to benefit.





Enrichment Activities

A Summer Meal Program is an excellent way to showcase the programs and activities a library has to offer, and also provides an opportunity to invite new volunteers to support the library's community outreach efforts. Reading, arts and crafts, cooking demonstrations, gardening, sports, games, and other activities can take place before or after the meal service. California's Lunch at the Library features lots of terrific ideas! <https://lunchatthelibrary.org/toolkit/programming/>

Community partnerships and creative programming will draw children and families to library sites. At the Fresno County Public Library, the University of California Cooperative Extension provided MyPlate nutrition education classes and the local Dollar General provided a grant to provide free books for kids. The Fresno Library also had special events and guest stars, such as an appearance from Parker T. Bear, the official team mascot of the Fresno Grizzlies, to keep children coming back. In addition to providing programs for children, parents also benefitted from the "information table," which highlighted library services, such as literacy classes for adults.

Resources

USDA

- *Read and Feed: Feeding Young Minds and Bodies During the Summer*
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/read-and-feed-feeding-young-minds-and-bodies-during-summer>
- *First Book*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/smt-first_book.pdf

California Summer Meal Coalition and California Library Association

Lunch at the Library

<http://lunchatthelibrary.org/>

Hunger Solutions New York

To Be Well Read... You Must Be Well Fed!

<https://youtu.be/PRvWkywe0GA>





Library of Virginia

To Be Well Read... You Must Be Well Fed

<https://youtu.be/QTvBm9u1bnU>

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.

