

Retaining Sponsors

Keeping successful sponsors is just as important as, or sometimes even more important than, locating and signing new ones. A dual focus on recruiting sponsors and retaining experienced sponsors is vital to maintaining strong, sustainable Summer Meal Programs.

Go to [Resources](#).

Did You Know? A national Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) study found that about 8 percent of sponsors did not return to operate a Summer Meal Program the following summer. Reasons ranged from local personnel issues to financial problems. <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/feeding-lowincome-children-when-school-is-out-the-summer-food-service-program>

Training

Effective training is the foundation of a successful sponsor. State agencies must train sponsors in all necessary areas of Program administration and ensure that sponsors fully understand their responsibilities. Here are some innovative approaches:

- **Targeted Training**

To meet the specific training needs of sponsors, solicit their feedback at the end of each summer. Additionally, review findings and observations made during sponsor and site reviews in the previous summer to help identify areas in which sponsors would benefit from focused training.

- **Online Training**

Offer sponsors training through an online training module. Sponsors have been very receptive to this alternative to classroom-style training, because it does not require the money and extra time for traveling. This is particularly useful in larger and rural States where traveling to training could be very costly for a potential sponsor.



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- **Training Themes**

Keeping sponsors engaged is critical to delivering effective training. Hold a series of themed training sessions across the State to get sponsors excited to begin their outreach. For example, a Hawaiian luau theme can help get everyone thinking about summer. Themes can be carried through with decorations, refreshments, training games, and even clothing and accessories.

- **Administrative Review Forms**

To help prepare returning sponsors for the coming summer, provide administrative review forms prior to the start of Program operations. Providing these forms, along with a PowerPoint presentation, complements formal training and helps sponsors clearly understand expectations. When reviews take place during the summer, sponsors are more likely to meet Program requirements.

Technical Assistance

The best way to correct problems at the sponsor level is to prevent them in the first year. New and existing sponsors may need additional support through technical assistance to help ensure their success in the Program. Here is an example of one way to provide technical assistance:

Mentoring by Field Monitors

Set up a mentor-monitoring program, where each new sponsor is assigned a mentor from your State agency's monitoring staff. Mentors may:

- Assist new sponsors the first week of operation;
- Check paperwork and recordkeeping requirements;
- Troubleshoot during site reviews;
- Help prepare the sponsor for their administrative review; and
- Provide one-on-one assistance in preparing budgets.

Mentors can also be assigned for returning sponsors with new staff, and with larger sponsors, should specific problems arise.



Communication

Open lines of communication among State agencies, sponsors, and sites establish strong working relationships that lead to successful Summer Meal Program operations. Here are some ideas to help build effective communication:

- **Embrace a Customer Service Mindset**

Viewing sponsors as your “clients” can be an effective way to ensure their needs are met both at the initial stages of approval in the spring and throughout the summer. Ensure your office is prepared to respond to sponsor inquiries and provide technical assistance as needed.

- **Conduct Exit Interviews**

When a sponsor leaves or decides not to return to the Program the following year, it is important to understand why. Ask sponsors directly about why they chose to leave in exit interviews, and send surveys to exiting sponsors for more information. When you understand the problem, you can develop strategies to correct the issue through enhanced training or the development of tools designed to prevent the problem from happening again.

- **Meet with Decision Makers**

Ask high-ranking, well-known members of the community, such as the school superintendent or school board members, to meet and discuss the merits of administering Summer Meals to local school officials. For example, ask local influential speakers to present to these decision makers about the number of unserved children in the area, and the potential reimbursement amounts that could be a revenue source for the school district if they administer the Summer Meals Program. A careful and well-planned presentation concerning need and potential lost funding may lead to more schools participating in Summer Meals.



Outreach

By providing outreach assistance and support, States can help existing sponsors expand their Programs. Here are a few innovative and successful outreach strategies:

- **Give a “Call-out”**

Many school districts have “call-out” phone systems, which leave automated messages at students’ homes to inform parents and guardians of various issues. Have school districts send “call-outs” to all of the households in their districts to publicize Summer Meals before school lets out and throughout the summer.

- **Seek Publicity Through Other State Agencies**

State agencies can coordinate with the State Medicaid, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other agencies to publicize Summer Meals. Place “Summer Meals stuffers” in beneficiaries’ mailings. A “Summer Meals stuffer” should provide basic information about Summer Meals and State agency contact information.

- **Develop Ready-to-use Outreach Materials for Sponsors**

In addition to training materials, develop ready-to-use outreach materials for sponsors such as a brochure to help recruit new sites. Similar to the USDA brochures, State-developed resources can provide basic information as well as State-specific contact information for interested sponsors or sites.

Resources

Food Research and Action Center

State Agency Summer Nutrition Sponsor Retention Strategies

This resource includes information on establishing sponsor retention plans.

<https://frac.org/research/resource-library/state-sponsor-agency-summer-nutrition-sponsor-retention-strategies>





Share Our Strength

- *No Kid Hungry Strategies for Sponsor Retention*
This resource provides a timeline with specific actions to help you retain strong summer meal sponsors.
<http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/resources/No%20Kid%20Hungry%20Strategies%20for%20Sponsor%20Retention.pdf>
- *Colorado No Kid Hungry Summer Meals Evaluation*
This evaluation of Colorado No Kid Hungry Campaign's Summer Meals expansion efforts identifies what strategies and tactics are most effective to increase participation and improve outcomes in the Summer Meals Program.
[http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/resources/Colorado Summer Evaluation Case Study.pdf](http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/sites/default/files/resources/Colorado%20Summer%20Meals%20Evaluation%20Case%20Study.pdf)

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>

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