



How to be a Summer Meals Champion! Best Practices from Across the Nation

Successful Summer Meal Program expansion requires careful preparation and intensive community-based efforts. It requires the sharing of ideas, innovations, and best practices across State lines and time zones. It involves a blend of collaboration that is diverse but united by a single vision: to feed more hungry children during the summer months.

Drawing from relevant examples, best practices by States, sponsors, and partners can serve as inspiration for Summer Meal Programs across the Nation. Each of the following topics is an important consideration in the planning of a successful Summer Meal effort. There are tips, stories of best practices in action, and links to further information.

Table of Contents

- [Kick-off Events](#)
- [Marketing](#)
- [Mobile Feeding](#)
- [Partnerships in the Community](#)
- [Proactive Planning](#)
- [Rural Outreach](#)
- [Site Activities](#)
- [Targeted Expansion](#)
- [Transportation](#)
- [Using Local Foods](#)
- [Utilizing Data](#)

Proactive Planning

Providing Summer Meals is a year-round effort. Whether it is fall, winter, spring, or summer, there is always some activity State agencies, sponsors, and partners can do to plan out a realistic approach to expand Summer Meal participation. Establishing timelines will ensure that your Summer Meal Program runs as smoothly as possible, and that no one is caught scrambling on the last day of school.

Spotlight on Denver, Colorado!

Three large Denver area sponsors, Denver Public Schools, Office of Children's Affairs, and Food Bank of the Rockies, collaborate to determine where the gaps in meal services exist within the metropolitan area. This collaboration has led to an increased number of sites being operated by each of Denver's largest sponsors. To build on this effort, the Colorado Department of Education, in partnership with Hunger Free Colorado, facilitates a partner meeting for all Summer Meal sponsors at the beginning of each year. These annual team meetings help foster sponsor relationships and focus efforts on expansion.

For more information, visit: <http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org/summer/>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,
- Direct contact with sponsors from previous summers,
- State agency support,
- State partner meetings, and
- Strong partners.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

- **Proactive Planning for State Agencies**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Proactive_States.pdf
- **Proactive Planning for Partners**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Proactive_Partners.pdf
- **Proactive Planning for Sponsors**

http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Proactive_Sponsors.pdf

Targeted Expansion

Expansion should be targeted toward areas where you see the greatest potential impact on childhood hunger. A data-driven approach to expansion can help to ensure your Summer Meal program reaches the right populations and that your resources are placed where they are needed most. Expanding in areas open to productive collaboration and new partnerships can strengthen your impact and enhance program sustainability. Always work to maintain the integrity of your program when expanding.

Spotlight on Denver, Colorado!

Colfax Avenue in Denver is known for its diversity of businesses and residents. It is home to establishments ranging from upscale restaurants to motels housing low-income and homeless families. However, the upscale scene doesn't tell the whole story. Within a two-mile stretch of Colfax, there are an estimated 15,000 children who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals, which means there are thousands of children who could benefit from a free nutritious meal during the summer.

Several Colorado organizations recognized this high need and joined together with a goal of feeding 1,000 children in the neighborhood. At first, the Colfax Community Network coordinated a site that fed 140 kids daily. Now, organizations along the Colfax Corridor have established seven open and two closed Summer Meal sites in Denver and neighboring Aurora. Community volunteers run the sites, which are located in parks, a library, several churches, and apartment buildings. Fun and educational activities at each keep children entertained for a while before and after they eat. The children receiving meals come from families from at least ten countries, including Vietnam, Thailand, Nepal, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

For more information, visit: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2013/08/19/colorado-partners-unite-to-fight-summer-hunger/>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,
- Direct contact with sponsors from previous summers,
- Family engagement,
- Reaching unserved areas of need,

- Strong partners, and
- Use of existing data to identify target areas for expansion.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Targeted Expansion

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Expansion.pdf>

Kick-off Events

Kick-off events are a great way to build awareness among parents, recruit volunteers, and create excitement around Summer Meals! Additional events during the summer help sustain the enthusiasm to keep participation high! However you choose to celebrate Summer Meals, it's important to make the events fun, fresh, and entertaining!

Spotlight on San Diego, California!

Families from around San Diego gathered at Skyline Hills Community Park to celebrate the Summer Fun Café Kick-off 2014. The midday event opened to a beautiful crowd as children flocked to San Diego marathon hero Meb Keflezighi during "A Walk with Meb." He spoke to excited children on the importance of good health, and how to make being healthy fun!

Children took part in fruit and veggie games with prizes, impromptu workout sessions with Meb, an inflatable jumper, crafts, music, face painting and other activities centered on good nutrition and wellness. Boosters from the San Diego Padres were on the scene providing an extra burst of excitement!

After working up an appetite, children received a barbeque lunch served by Mayor Kevin Faulconer, Boston Marathon winner Meb Keflezighi, Schools Superintendent Cindi Marten, and California Department of Education Director of Nutrition Services Sandip Kaur. Summer meals for children were served through the Seamless Summer Option of the National School Lunch Program. General Mills provided funding for the cost of the adult meals at the kick-off.

No family left the event empty-handed as everyone received a bag of fruit and vegetables from the San Diego Food Bank and Feeding America San Diego. Almost 1,500 children and their parents were in attendance.

For more information, visit: <http://sdvoice.info/community-gathers-at-summer-fun-cafe-kickoff-2014/>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,

- Allies to champion Summer Meals,
- Family engagement,
- Outside sources of funding for adult meals,
- State agency support,
- Strong partners, and
- Support from State and local elected leaders.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Hosting Events

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Events.pdf>.

Partnerships in the Community

Partnerships in the community can yield untapped resources, including deep knowledge of local needs, prime site locations, and greater outreach to the public. A strong network of partnerships can be built by uniting a wide range of public and private partners, such as food banks, afterschool associations, community centers, and State and local organizations, towards a common goal of addressing childhood hunger. Building a coalition of organizations with a like-minded focus helps facilitate increased access to healthy Summer Meals for children and teens.

Spotlight on Red Lodge, Montana!

“Lunch in the Sun” starts each morning in the kitchen of the Red Lodge Boys and Girls Club as the cook prepares all the meals for both the Boys and Girls Club and the Summer Meal Program. The Boys and Girls Club, however, is not the Summer Meal sponsor. Calvary Episcopal Church sponsors and is administratively responsible for the Program, while most of the training and site preparation is done by AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers who serve with the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation. Additional volunteers who help set up and serve the meals come from organizations all over town.

Everyone, from the mayor to the child receiving a meal, has had a part in making this Program a success! In true Red Lodge fashion, rather than let the weight of this Program rest on one organization, the community decided to band together to see that children are healthy and well-nourished during the summer months. In 20 days, 74 community volunteers gave 113 hours to serve 515 free meals to local kids – what a great first year!

For more information, visit: <http://mfbn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Summer-Food-Best-Practice-Guide.pdf>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,
- Renewed connections with AmeriCorps VISTA,
- Strong partners, and
- Support from State and local elected leaders.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Partnerships in Your Community Toolkit Page

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-PartnershipsInYourCommunity.pdf>

Mobile Feeding

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 Summer Meal site. Children must remain at the site while they eat their meals. A successful mobile feeding model requires community collaboration, advance planning, and creativity to effectively design routes, prepare menus, and schedule meal service times.

Spotlight on Browning, Montana!

It’s hard to miss the giant truck with oversized pictures of fruits and veggies and the words “Kids Eat Here Free” covering its sides. Even if you cannot see the truck, you are sure to hear it! Music blasts from the speakers sitting on the cab of the truck, letting the neighborhood know healthy meals have arrived.

A large window on the side of the truck pulls open to form an awning and fold out picnic tables are set up underneath. The cook scoops chili, cornbread, carrots, an apple, and milk onto plates for kids as they come to the window. The kids talk and laugh together in the shade of the truck as they eat their lunch.

Before the food truck started coming to their neighborhood, these kids would have to cross multiple busy streets, with no crosswalk and no adults to guide them, to reach the schools where summer meals are served. Now all these kids have to do is wait for the truck to pull up to receive free and healthy meals in the safety of their neighborhood!

For more information, visit: <http://mfbn.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Summer-Food-Best-Practice-Guide.pdf>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Reaching unserved areas of need,
- Ability to leverage community resources, and
- Strong partners.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Mobile Feeding Model

http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Mobile_Feeding.pdf

Marketing Summer Meals

Marketing can be done in a variety of ways, and should be tailored to the specific communities you are trying to reach. Different groups may require different marketing strategies: consider literacy, language barriers, and the age of your target population when marketing your program. Teenagers, for example, may require a different messaging strategy than younger children. Messaging should always focus on the many benefits that Summer Meals programs have for communities and individual children (e.g., economic, health, academic achievement).

Spotlight on Alabama!

To spread the word about Summer Meals throughout the State, the Alabama Department of Education contracted with a design firm to develop and launch the “Break For A Plate” marketing campaign. Break for a Plate is a multimedia campaign with a website <http://www.breakforaplate.com>, logos, graphics, print advertisements, billboards, flyers, brochures, posters, and yard signs to raise awareness and enable sponsors to conduct outreach efforts to promote Summer Meal Programs across the State of Alabama. All the materials are located on the website for free download. This marketing campaign produced dynamic results for summer 2014, yielding huge increases in the numbers of sponsors and sites providing Summer Meals!

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources and
- State agency support.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Communication Strategy and Resources

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit-communication-strategy-and-resources>

Rural Outreach

Expanding access to Summer Meals for children in underserved rural areas is a priority for USDA. Innovative partnerships and creative programming – particularly around the rural transportation challenge – have helped State agencies, sponsors, and other partners overcome the barrier, connecting even more children with healthy, summer food.

Spotlight on Anthony, New Mexico!

Children who live in the Franklin Vista Apartments, in this southwestern town near El Paso, do not have to walk far to receive a healthy breakfast and lunch. The Gadsden Independent School District sets up tables each day for children to gather under the covered porch of the apartment community center for a nutritious meal.

Food is prepared at the local elementary school, where it is distributed to schools, churches, and other community sites, including Franklin Vista Apartments. Throughout the summer, sites sponsored by the school district provide an average of 2,000 lunches and 1,900 breakfasts each weekday.

Children at the apartments receive meals through the Seamless Summer Option of the National School Lunch Program. The meals help children maintain healthy eating habits, with access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Volunteers from the Children's Reading Foundation of Doña Ana County provide free books and read stories to keep children engaged.

The summer meals site at the Franklin Vista Apartments is one example of the way USDA is working with States and local partners to expand access to healthy meals for kids in the summer. USDA Rural Development has funded many community infrastructure projects in this small town, including the Franklin Vista Apartments complex.

For more information, visit: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/08/27/ensuring-healthy-meals-during-the-summer-helps-kids-head-back-to-class-ready-to-learn/>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,
- Direct contact with sponsors from previous summers,
- Renewed connections with USDA Rural Development,
- State agency support, and

- Strong partners.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

- **Rural Challenges**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Rural_Development.pdf
- **Reaching Unserved and Underserved Areas**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Unserved_Areas.pdf.

Transportation

A common challenge for Summer Meal sponsors is a lack of transportation to bring children and meals together. Many sponsors throughout the country have responded to this challenge with innovations, such as retrofitting buses and shuttles, tapping community volunteerism, and utilizing other models of collaboration to either bring children, or deliver meals to sites. In addition to planning, partnership, and creativity, taking advantage of funding opportunities has enabled many sponsors to overcome transportation barriers.

Spotlight on Huntsville, Alabama!

In its second year as a Summer Meal sponsor, Huntsville City Schools recognized that action was needed to help children get to the city's public school sites. To meet this challenge, the school district partners with the City of Huntsville to offer free bus passes for children ages 18 and under to ride the Huntsville Shuttle to the sites. The specially designed bus passes are distributed to schools, prior to closing, and Summer Meal sites.

In addition to offering free bus passes, the school district partners with faith-based and community organizations to transport children to sites using school buses. Huntsville City schools also sells meals to adults – \$2.50 for breakfast, \$4 for lunch and dinner – which encourages children and parents to participate and helps the school district pay the operational costs at the schools where they offer the meals.

For more information, visit: http://www.waaytv.com/appnews/free-summer-meals-for-kids/article_9f8aaf34-fe08-11e4-9ffa-331a9b43a1d4.html

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,
- Strong partners, and
- Support from State and local elected leaders.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Summer Meals and Transportation Challenges

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Transportation.pdf>

Site Activities

Summer Meal sites play an important role in feeding kids' bodies and minds when school is out of session. Many sites provide not only healthy meals and snacks, but also offer physical activity and enrichment activities to keep children and teens engaged and coming back. Finding free and low-cost activities to incorporate into your Summer Meal Programs helps boost attendance and makes the meal service more fun, for children and volunteers alike. Community partners may be willing to facilitate activities for children or families, and local businesses may offer to donate books, toys, and other supplies to enhance your program.

Spotlight on First Book!

According to the National Summer Learning Association, more than half of the achievement gap between lower- and higher-income youth can be explained by unequal access to summer learning opportunities. Children who were given access to books over the summer, after three summers, performed an astounding 35 to 40 percent better on reading achievement tests than those without access to books over the summer months.

First Book, the nonprofit social enterprise, is a partner with USDA to make it easy for Summer Meal Programs to use books to build engaging programming at meal service sites. Here's what sponsors, partners, and sites can do to add books and reading enrichment activities to Summer Meal Programs:

- Sign up with First Book. All Summer Meal Program sites are eligible to sign up with First Book. Registration is easy and free.
- Use kick-off events as opportunities to distribute books. Consider hosting a "Books on Wheels" program as part of your Summer Meal Program launch.
- It is easy for your Summer Meal Program volunteers to use books and free downloadable resources from First Book for summer fun activities with children.
- If additional funding is needed to bring more books to your community, First Book can help host a Virtual Book Drive.

For more information, visit: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2015/05/20/adding-a-helping-of-books-to-nutritious-summer-meals/>

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

- **Site Programming**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-SiteProgramming.pdf>
- **Hosting Events**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Events.pdf>
- **First Book Program**
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-singFirstBookatYourSummerMealSite.pdf>

Using Local Foods

Summer Meal sponsors and sites from coast to coast are increasingly bringing local and regional produce onto the menu and teaching kids where their food comes from. With harvests at their peak and farms in full production, summer is a perfect time to highlight local products and feature food, agriculture, and nutrition education in Summer Meal site programming.

Spotlight on Wenatchee, Washington!

Summer Meals served by the Wenatchee School District Food Service have gone retro! After years of boxed lunches, students and staff encouraged the school district to switch to meals with farm fresh foods especially locally sourced fruits and vegetables, like the sweet cherries from Yaksum Canyon Farm, apricots from Cloudview Ecofarms, and peaches from McManus Family Fruit.

So far, four local farms have provided fruits to be included in each lunch bag, and cabbage and kale as ingredients for Mexican coleslaw and other vegetable side items. The school district places sharing bowls that sit atop each lunch table, so kids who do not want to eat something in their lunch bag can put it into the bowl and take out something that they do want to eat. Since sandwiches and vegetables are wrapped in plastic film or in plastic bags, the sharing is made easy and it really cuts down on waste. Rarely do you see any fruit being placed in the sharing bowl though. For this reason, each bowl is primed with extra fruits or vegetables in case any of the children are still hungry when their lunch bags are empty.

For more information, visit: <http://www.wenatcheeschools.org/>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources and
- Strong partners.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

- **Using Local Foods in Summer Meals – How States Can Help**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Local_Foods_States.pdf

- **Using Local Foods in Summer Meals – How Partners can Help**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Local_Foods_Partners.pdf
- **How Sponsors Can Use Local Foods in Summer Meals**
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Local_Foods_Sponsors.pdf

Utilizing Data

Local data can be used to strengthen your Summer Meal programs and better meet the needs of your community. Census information regarding hunger and poverty-related projects and free and reduced-price lunch participation rates are helpful data sources to use when advocating for the program. The FNS Capacity Builder, which pulls data from a variety of sources, is one particularly helpful data tool State agencies and sponsors can use when mapping their sites.

Spotlight on Chicago, Illinois!

The Chicago Summer Food Work Group meets year-round, bringing together local and State-wide community organizations, public agencies, and sponsors to strategize on ways to expand Summer Meals Programs in the Chicago area. Members include the Archdiocese of Chicago's Food Service Professionals, Chicago Public Schools, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, Chicago Housing Authority, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and Illinois No Kid Hungry Campaign.

Mapping tools have helped members of the work group focus on ensuring that children of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have access to summer meals at culturally-competent sites. The members also collaborate on outreach and strategies to ensure that children have access to nutritious meals at safe and trusted neighborhood sites. For this work group, mapping out the locations of all the sites in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs is essential to ensure that sites do not overlap and are located in areas of need.

For more information, visit: <http://blogs.usda.gov/2014/08/19/summer-meals-serving-chicagos-many-neighborhoods/>

What worked to make Summer Meals a success?

- Ability to leverage community resources,
- Direct contact with sponsors from previous summers,
- State agency support,
- State partner meetings,
- Strong partners, and
- Use of existing data to identify target areas for expansion.

Want to learn more? Go to the [Summer Toolkit!](#)

Using Data

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Data.pdf>