



Reaching Unserved and Underserved Areas

Summer Meal Programs are designed to ensure that all children can continue to receive nutritious meals when school is not in session. Unfortunately, not all children who need the good nutrition of Summer Meals have access to sites close to where they live. This toolkit page provides tips to help target areas that are eligible for Summer Meals but have no sites or have sites that have low rates of participation, or only serve one meal, or operate for a very short period during the year.

Go to [Resources](#).

Identifying Unserved and Underserved Areas

When thinking about underserved areas, it is important to consider the number of children who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals compared to the number who receive a Summer Meal. Schools serving large attendance areas need a lot of summer sites to feed all of those children who regularly depend on school meals during the school year. Schools with small attendance areas may need only a few.

Also, summer sites need to be in a place that children can reach without transportation. School buses are often too costly for school districts to operate in the summer. Think about how children will walk there. Consider the path they must take and try to place sites where they do not have to cross major roads or barriers, such as walls, buildings, fences, that are unsafe.

“Underserved” can also mean not having enough meals when school is out. These are areas where sites only serve one meal or only serve a few days a week or a few weeks a year. Encourage existing sites to serve another meal or to stay open for longer periods of time and recruit additional sites that may be able to fill the gap in those areas.



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Data Sources

- *School Attendance Data* to compare with site meal count data. Also consider that some children who ride buses to school may not have access during the summer months.
- *Census Data* can highlight “pockets of poverty” that the attendance data from a large school district might miss.
- *Public Housing and Other Civic Data* provided from a department of welfare or zoning commission may be used to identify additional pockets of poverty.
- *Site Data* over the course of the summer can help determine if there are certain times when children cannot reach the site or when more sites may be needed in the area.
- *Data from Partners* whose organizations may help identify areas where groups of children are in need of Summer Meals.

Geo-Mapping

Once sources of data have been identified, geo-mapping software can create a visual tool that can help you clearly see where sites are needed. USDA’s Capacity Builder uses mapping technology and data from a wide variety of sources to help determine areas of need and identify potential partners.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/capacitybuilder>

How States Can Help

In addition to identifying unserved or underserved areas, State agencies have a role to play by bringing in new sites and sponsors and reaching out to successful sponsors and partners to help increase participation at sites with low attendance.





Once underserved areas are identified, State agencies can share their data with summer partners. By working together, State agencies and partners can leverage resources and have a larger impact. State agencies and partners can use these data to develop outreach strategies and local sponsors in those communities. State agencies and partners may want to target faith communities, public housing, libraries, schools, parks, and police departments as potential sites and community outreach partners.

State agencies also can reach out to successful sponsors to let them know where they could consider expanding. These successful sponsors bring Summer Meal Program management and supply chain experience to areas that may have few resources. In addition State agencies can encourage existing sites to stay open longer or to serve another meal.

How Partners Can Help

Partner organizations can help State agencies by identifying new sponsors, pinpointing new sites, and raising awareness of open sites. In particular, private organizations may also be able to provide additional funding for outreach or excess program expenses. For example, a local hotel may be able to donate a bus to drive meals to the site or drive kids to the site. A local dairy council may be able to donate milk coolers.

Many statewide advocacy groups, local organizations, public or private agencies, and large school districts have experience with, and systems for, communicating with the public. Sponsors of sites with low participation rates should consider working with local community partners to assess barriers and develop solutions to reach more children in these areas.

Mobile Meals Model

A mobile meal service involves transporting meals to children, rather than making the children travel to a site. In unserved or underserved communities, access to meal service sites operated by schools, parks and recreation departments, and private nonprofit organizations is often limited. In urban areas, violence and traffic safety concerns are examples of issues that may limit viable site options. In these cases, mobile meals may provide the flexibility sponsors need to reach children who do not have access to more traditional sites.





For more information on the mobile meals model, see SFSP 02-2014: *Mobile Feeding Options in Summer Feeding Programs*.

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/mobile-feeding-options-summer-feeding-programs-0>

Promising Practices

Here are some strategies that State agencies, partners, sponsors, and sites can use to identify and serve children in areas that are underserved.

- Gather feedback from sponsors at the end of each year's Program operations about site attendance, any barriers that children had to attending the site, and any areas where children may have been congregating in the summer that could be future sites. Additionally, geomapping using census data, can help identify underserved populations.
- Review findings and observations made during sponsor and site reviews to identify areas in which sponsors would benefit from training.
- See the *Communication Strategy and Resources* page of the Summer Meals Toolkit for assistance on increasing participation rates. Sometimes, a "walking bus" model is used in less safe areas or a mobile meal service is used so that kids do not have to walk as far to get a meal.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit-communication-strategy-and-resources>
- Consider reaching out to refugee, migrant, Tribal, other youth and community groups and informing them about Summer Meals and asking where kids may be congregating.
- Conduct media outreach in other languages.
- Ask police departments where the most underserved and neediest communities may be. If a site is in an unsafe area, consider asking the police to be present so parents know it's a safe area.





- Add fun activities at the feeding site to reduce stigma and ensure kids return to the feeding sites.
- Offer recognition awards to sponsors who are expanding into unserved and underserved areas.

The following examples include strategies States have implemented to reach unserved and underserved areas.

Pennsylvania

The Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank prioritizes outreach by organizing information sessions to assist nonprofits in unserved and underserved areas to eliminate Program barriers. Department of Education staff helped by attending the information sessions and offering support to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Multiple methods, including organizing information sessions, creating an outreach video, operating a website, and establishing task groups to help potential sponsors have helped to increase participation in unserved and underserved areas of Pittsburgh.

Maine

Maine's Department of Education focused on recruiting sponsors for underserved areas by working at the county level. The State agency reviewed the previous 3 years of monitoring reports and listed findings to target training to high-need areas to help sponsors feel more confident about the Program. Additionally, the State agency provided statistics to potential sponsors about how many low-income children live in their county as well as available and underutilized Federal funds.

Oregon

The Centennial School District won a USDA award for *Service in Distinctive or Rural/Underserved Communities* through housing and community development organization partnerships in the Portland metro area. Children who were previously unable to leave their apartment complexes due to busy roads, unsafe conditions, and other reasons were able to participate in Summer Meals.

Oklahoma

The State agency mapped out eligible migrant sites that were underserved or unserved and provided information on Summer Meal Programs and training dates.





Resources

USDA

- *Mobile Meals*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Mobile_Meals.pdf
- *Rural Challenges*
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/sfsp/SMT-Rural_Development.pdf
- *Summer Food in Indian Country—Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hor5nosE3NY>

Food Research and Action Center

Summer Food Mapper

<http://www.fairdata2000.com/SummerFood/>

University of Missouri

The university has a database of National Interactive Maps that create customizable maps showing which areas with high percentages of poverty or participation in free and reduced lunch programs. You can also filter the search to look at the zip code, city, county, or State level.

<http://ims2.missouri.edu/tool/maps/default.aspx>

For Additional Information

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and achievable for your Program. For additional questions, sponsors and the general public should contact their State agency for help. 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/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>

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

