



SUPPORTING CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMS WITH COVID RELIEF FUNDS

Nationwide Child Nutrition Waivers Expire June 30th

The waiver flexibilities that have allowed schools and other child nutrition programs to safely provide meals and ensure access to needed nutrition throughout the pandemic are currently set to expire on June 30, 2022. Congress has not renewed the US Department of Agriculture's authority to issue or extend nationwide waivers, so at this time, summer meals programs are expected to return to pre-pandemic rules this summer, and schools must follow usual program rules for School Year 2022-2023. This will leave program operators with less flexibility and fewer resources even as they continue to face supply chain disruptions, rising costs, and staffing challenges. It will also reduce kids' access to meals, especially in rural and hard-to-reach communities. According to an internal analysis, **the loss of waivers could translate to 95 million fewer meals being served in summer 2022**. And without waivers, schools may be forced to use general funds to make up for losses experienced by the school nutrition department, especially as families and schools navigate the transition back to applications and payments. While the state agency administering the child nutrition programs may be able to apply for some individual flexibilities, these are unlikely to fully replace the expiring nationwide waivers.

COVID Relief Funds Available to Support Child Nutrition Programs

There are a variety of COVID relief funding streams that could be used to support school and child nutrition programs after nationwide waiver flexibilities expire:

Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF)

- Authorized in March 2021 by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Provided \$350 billion in flexible funds to states, localities, tribes, and territories to help with COVID-related challenges and expenses
- Allocated by legislatures in nearly every state, though the governor has complete or limited control in a handful of states (including Arizona, Nevada, and New Hampshire); funds may be provided to non-profits to subgrant

Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund

- Authorized in March 2020 by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and further funded in December 2020 through the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, 2021
- Across both appropriations, provided more than \$7 billion to support elementary, secondary, and higher education
- Allocated by the governor; subgrants can be provided to local education agencies and institutions of higher education

Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund

- Authorized in March 2020 by the CARES Act and further funded through both CRRSA and ARPA
- Across the three appropriations, provided nearly \$200 billion in funds to support health and safety measures in schools as well as measures that improve students' social, emotional, and mental health and meet their academic needs
- State educational agencies apply to the U.S. Department of Education for funding, and local education agencies apply to the state for their allocations

Spending Ideas to Support Operations Following Waiver Expirations

Depending on the funding streams available, the needs of program operators, and the guidance of the state agency administering the child nutrition programs, COVID relief funds could be used to:

Support Summer Operations

- Offer meals at sites that operated in 2020 or 2021 but no longer qualify to offer meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option (SSO) in 2022 because of the expiration of the area eligibility waiver.
- Serve a take-home meal at SFSP or SSO sites that can only offer one meal per day in person.
- Serve take-home meals at SFSP or SSO sites for days that those sites cannot operate in person, such as weekends.
- Offset high fuel costs for [mobile meals operations](#).
- Provide home delivered meals to children who cannot access SFSP or SSO meal sites or who are participating in virtual or remote enrichment programming.
- Provide transportation support to help kids and families access summer meals sites.
- Fund meals for parents and guardians to encourage families to stay and eat meals on site.

Support School Year 2022-2023 Operations

- Offer take-home or delivered meals to students who miss school due to quarantines, classroom closures, or illness as well as those taking part in virtual learning.
- Incentivize or support adoption of the [Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\)](#) at schools that are eligible (individually or via grouping with other schools in the LEA) but not able to receive federal reimbursement at the highest rate.*
- Cover the reduced-price copay or offset unpaid meal debt.*

** These ideas in particular may require state agency and USDA approval due to restrictions on use of federal funds for these purposes.*

Address Labor, Inflation, and Supply Chain Challenges

- Provide “premium pay” or other additional compensation for workers to help with staff recruitment and retention.
- Hire additional staff or cover other additional labor expenses to increase staff capacity.
- Purchase equipment or supplies necessary to produce, package, transport, or distribute meals.
- Offer supplemental funding for food in recognition of high food costs that may exceed federal meal reimbursements.
- Provide guaranteed funding if meals are not eligible for federal reimbursement because of missing items or items that do not meet standards due to supply chain challenges.



For more information on the funding streams, spending trends, and details on ideas to support child nutrition program operations, see the full report at:

<https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/resource/leveraging-covid-relief-funds-mitigate-impact-child-nutrition-waiver-expirations>

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