



A SUMMER MEALS CASE STUDY

FOOD FOR PEOPLE: LEVERAGING INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS TO EXPAND ACCESS TO SUMMER LUNCH

Food for People

Food for People is the official food bank of Humboldt County, California – a large, rural county that spans both mountainous terrain and coastal areas. The food bank resides in Humboldt's largest town, Eureka, but provides services throughout the entire county, including the Hoopa Valley Reservation in the east.

In 1997, Food for People began operating the Summer Food Service Program to provide free lunch to children and teens during the summer months while school is out. Given the size of the county and the diverse geography, combined with the need for summer meals (60.6% of all Humboldt County school children qualify for free or reduced-price meals), Food for People leverages unique public and private partnerships to implement a mobile meals operation designed to reach as many children as possible. These partnerships enable Food for People to provide summer meals county-wide – there are 120 miles between the farthest two sites!

Unique Partnerships to Increase Access to Summer Meals

When Food for People began their summer meals program, they knew that they would not be able to reach children across the county alone, due to limited capacity and resources. To extend the food bank's capacity and to reach as many children as possible, Food for People has built longstanding partnerships with public and private entities to assist in summer meals operations. Food for People procures individually bagged lunches from a local vendor, the Humboldt Senior Resource Center, and partners with United Parcel Service (UPS) and Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) to deliver meals to the summer lunch sites.

Every summer, Food for People hires a temporary summer driver to pick up lunches from Humboldt Senior Resource Center using a vehicle repurposed from standard food bank operations. The driver arrives each day at 6AM and packs the meals into coolers to be delivered to each site. The driver then delivers the coolers to UPS and HTA for loading onto their trucks and buses, respectively, to be delivered to summer meals sites across the county. UPS and HTA deliver the coolers either directly to summer meals sites or close enough so that site staff can drive to pick up the coolers at a predetermined location, usually a bus stop. For example, HTA will load coolers onto their



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buses and then drop the coolers off at bus stops on their normal service routes, where site staff meet to retrieve them. Collectively, staff and volunteers drive over 500 miles each day to deliver meals to summer lunch sites.

In 2018, Food for People served 21 summer lunch sites across the county. The sites included Boys and Girls Clubs, family/community resource centers, groups providing summer activities, youth centers, and parks and recreation programs. These sites provide fun activities for children to play and continue to learn over the summer, in addition to receiving a summer lunch. Sites are staffed by a mix of volunteers and staff from the partner organizations that host the summer meals sites.

Promoting the Program

To promote their summer meals program, Food for People leverages additional community partnerships. They have standing PSAs on local radio stations, give interviews to local media outlets, publish information in various print and digital news sources, and include the program in a list of summer activities published each year by the local *North Coast Journal*. They also have a standing spot on the “Community Calendar” on local television, distribute flyers at schools and grocery stores, and write social media posts for Facebook and Twitter.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

In 2018, Food for People served 11,683 meals to approximately 300 kids per day across 20 summer meals sites. While the program has longstanding success and respect across the county, it is not without its challenges. Delays in delivery can be caused by everything from road construction, to a substitute driver who is not familiar with the program and the need to strictly adhere to a schedule, to weather variability. For example, large temperature fluctuations across Humboldt County sometimes create situations over the summer where a driver picks up the coolers in 65-degree weather, only to drive them across long distances into 110-degree weather. All coolers are packed with ample ice packs, and sites do temperature readings of the food for safety. On rare occasions, coolers may arrive at a distant site in 110-degree heat and be too warm to serve. Over the years, Food for People has learned to have back-up nonperishable foods at sites so that children do not miss out on getting a meal when such challenges arise.

The USDA reimbursement for meals served does not fully cover total program costs each summer. In addition to public and private partnerships that assist in day-to-day operations and spreading the word about the summer lunch program, Food for People could not operate their summer meals program without local funding partners who help to cover the considerable costs associated with moving lunches across the county.

While this impressive summer lunch program does not come without its challenges, Food for People recognizes the importance of summer nutrition and is proud to serve Humboldt County children year after year to keep them nourished, healthy, and active while school is out.