

National Summer Meals Survey Major Findings

To help inform strategies for increasing access to summer meals, Share Our Strength partnered with APCO Insights in 2013 to conduct a national survey to learn more about what low-income families' lives are like during the summer and their interest in summer meals programs.

Is there a need for nutrition assistance amongst low-income families?

- Nationally 43% of low-income families find it harder to make ends meet during the summer and 32% sometimes find themselves without enough food during the summer months.
- Of families that participate in the free and reduced-price lunch program, more than half (54%) find it harder to make ends meet during the summer and 43% sometimes find themselves without enough food during the summer months; 73% of families report spending more on food during the summer than during the school year.
- Most low-income families (62%) report spending more on food during the summer with an average increase of \$316 more per month.

Where are low-income children spending their time during the summer?

- Most low-income children (80%) are at their homes during the summer, and even more (86%) eat lunch at home most days – few are already participating in programs that can serve federally reimbursed summer meals.

Are low-income families interested in summer meals programs?

- Most low-income families (68%) are interested in summer meals programs, especially those that have a demonstrated need for food assistance.
- Of those that have participated in summer meals programs in the past, nine out of ten would recommend attending the site to others and the same number are interested in using the program again.

Do low-income families know about summer meals programs?

- Only 40% of low-income families report being aware of locations for free summer meals and only 17% report their child/children having received those meals. Thus, only one in four families that know about the program have chosen to participate in the past.

What do low-income families want in a summer meals program?

- Above all, low-income families are looking for safe sites with staff that they trust; 72% of respondents said this was necessary to consider sending their child to a summer meals site.
- The second highest concern was serving healthy, wholesome meals with 62% reporting it to be necessary.
- After safety and meal quality, families are looking for sites that are convenient to access, and engaging activities. They also believe the presence of recreational activities and the opportunity to socialize will make more kids want to participate.
- In free responses to what families know about the program, association with schools was the most commonly occurring theme. This reinforces the idea that schools are an ideal sponsor and site for the program.

How do low-income families want to hear about the program?

- Overall, schools are the most reliable source for receiving materials about programs followed by places of worship and grocery stores; 67% of WIC recipients want to receive information through WIC offices.
- Direct mail and websites (particularly among urban and suburban respondents) are the most desired channels to receive information about programs and should be part of local and statewide outreach plans.

What messages might appeal to low-income families about summer meals programs?

- Stress that sites are at safe, local places – and feature the name, specific location and hours of operation if possible to increase credibility and ease of access.
- Emphasize that meals are healthy follow federal nutrition guidelines and that they are free to all children age 18 and younger.
- Highlight activities that are available at the site and emphasize the fun, social aspects of the program.

Want to learn more about the survey findings and what this research can mean for strengthening your summer programs? Looking for more ideas and resources related to summer meals?

Visit <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals> for more about this research, best practices for increasing access to summer meals and examples and templates of helpful materials for achieving your goals.

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