



Summer 2013 in Arkansas: A Summer Meals Success Story

SUMMARY

In 2013 the state of Arkansas saw record growth in summer meals programs, serving an additional 1.6 million more meals to low income kids, the largest meal increase in the country. The Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign helped lead the charge for this growth by executing on strategies honed during previous summers and bringing critical assistance and resources to the schools and community organizations that serve kids around the state. The campaign worked collaboratively with the USDA, state agencies and nonprofit organizations to set goals, address barriers to success, and measure progress.

BACKGROUND

The Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign launched in fall 2010 as a partnership between the Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance, the Office of Governor Mike Beebe, and Share Our Strength. The Campaign maintains a strong collaboration to help guide their work that includes the Arkansas Department of Human Service (DHS), Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and the Arkansas Department of Health. Expanding access to summer meals is a key goal of the campaign.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

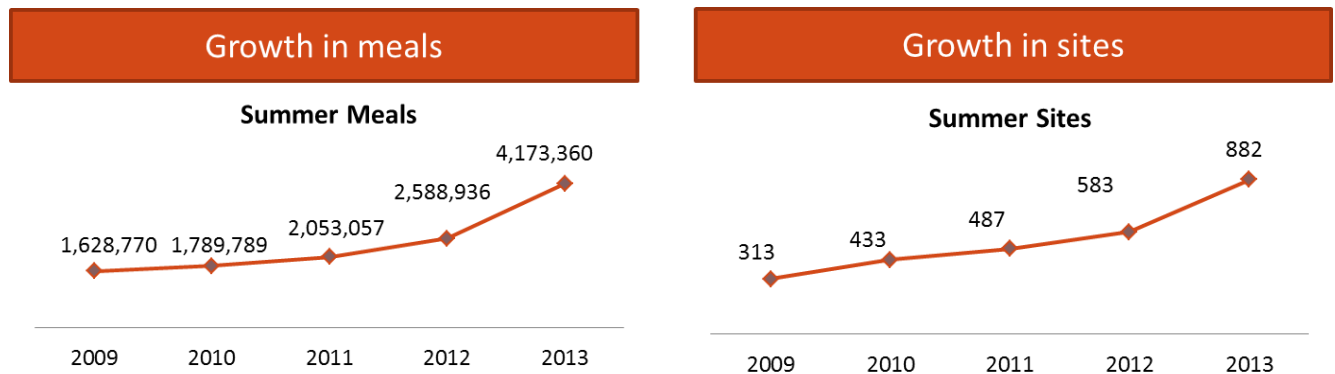
Successful outreach for summer meals in 2011 and 2012 and the positive experiences that resulted from that outreach served to build a framework for future growth and impart critical learnings about what it takes to achieve large-scale change in summer meals. In 2013, the campaign was able to apply lessons learned toward action on the ground, focusing on the following strategies to guide their work.

- *Collaborative Planning:* Since its inception, the campaign has worked closely with state agencies to develop common goals and coordinate their efforts on the ground. This included an agreement with DHS to share real-time data about the application process and meal service around the state, allowing the campaign to monitor their recruitment process and to measure progress toward goals. In 2013, the USDA named Arkansas a target state for a new summer meals assistance program, bringing additional regional and national capacity to the state.
- *Targeted Site and Sponsor Recruitment:* In late 2011, the campaign identified key areas around the state to target for increasing summer meals infrastructure and developed a team of field staff. Members of the field team were local to the communities and able to develop strong relationships with the schools and community organizations in these underserved areas, providing technical assistance and assistance through small grants. By summer 2013, staff had developed both deep relationships in these communities and enough experience with summer programs to identify strong prospects for new sites, provide assistance to sponsors and sites looking to grow their programs, and discern good opportunities for investing grant money for capacity building.

- *Retaining Strong Program Sponsors:* A 2012 evaluation of the campaign’s summer work revealed two critical learnings: the strongest sponsors are those who have already been a sponsor in prior years, and second, many sponsors choose not to return to the program. In 2013, the team focused heavily on sponsor retention, reaching out to all sponsoring organizations to develop a stronger relationship, understand their intentions for continuing the program, and providing assistance and resources to help strong sponsors stick with and grow their program.
- *Providing Small Grants:* The campaign continued their successful strategy of providing small amounts of funding to sponsors to help overcome barriers to serving more kids – from purchasing items to support meal service like coolers or kitchen equipment to providing additional staff capacity.
- *Addressing Barriers to Program Expansion:* The campaign identified two primary barriers facing sponsors as they worked to administer summer meals programming: the need for overly-burdensome health inspections at sites that supervise children for more than 10 hours a week and the state agency’s capacity to support program growth. The campaign worked with the Arkansas Department of Health to put in place a variance for summer meal sites, allowing them to meet a reasonable standard for serving kids in 2013. The campaign also contracted with DHS to extend their capacity, helping to conduct an initial review of new sites to identify potential problems prior to DHS sending staff for a formal review.

2013 RESULTS: THE LARGEST INCREASE IN THE COUNTRY

According to USDA data, Arkansas had the largest increase in summer meals served of any state in the country for 2013. In just one summer, schools, agencies and community organizations served about 4 million summer meals, an increase of 1.6 million meals over the previous summer. The state also saw a 78 percent increase in the number of sites serving summer meals, 882 sites compared to 583 the previous summer. Arkansas’ success is so impressive that it’s attracting national attention.



Preliminary data provided by Arkansas Department of Human Services

CONTINUING SUCCESS IN 2014

In 2014 the campaign has set a goal of increasing the number of summer meals served by more than 10 percent. Through their efforts they plan to maintain 85 percent retention rate of 2013 sites and sponsors, increase total summer meals sites by 150 or 17 percent, and make sure that all counties serve meals in 2014.