



# COMMUNITY MEALS: A New Model to Reach Kids in the Summer

Prepared October 2018

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

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Each year schools, nonprofits, and community centers seek new opportunities to provide much-needed summer nutrition to kids under the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). While many sponsors work actively to add new summer meals sites and increase meals served, the number of summer meals served nationwide continues to decline. The impact of this decline in service varies from community to community, but can be felt especially hard in rural America, where transportation and the high cost of personal car ownership create additional barriers for program participation.

In an attempt to increase the number of sites and summer meal participation, No Kid Hungry (NKH) ran an innovation test in summer 2018 in which families with children eligible for participation in SFSP served as site supervisors and managed new sites. New sites were placed in site supervisors' yards or inside their homes. The pilot ran in four locations across America where there were limited open summer meal sites. Designed to meet the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) requirements, the pilot demonstrated demand for the model, as well as technical and financial viability.

Now known as the Community Meals model, the work done in summer 2018 tested an approach that brought summer meals closer to where kids spend most of their time in the summer, their homes. To make the model work, sponsors worked to identify places in the community with unmet need and then recruited and trained individuals in those communities to be site supervisors. Based on early conversations with USDA and State Agencies, the model was implemented through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) under current law without regulatory changes.

## 2 BACKGROUND

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NKH began experimenting with new models to increase participation in rural communities in 2016 in response to a survey that revealed that 80% of children who could most benefit from program participation eat most meals in the summer at home. Experimentation started with meal delivery, where meals were delivered direct to families in the hope that such meals would be considered reimbursable in coming summers. Families in the direct delivery pilots valued the ease associated with delivery and sponsors indicated that the model allowed them to reach a new, previously underserved, summer meals audience.

In summer 2017, in response to the failure of Child Nutrition Reauthorization, NKH conducted a pilot in which individual homes served as summer meals sites in a rural town that previously had only one open summer meals site. NKH's partner in the town recruited 15 people to serve as site supervisors and run sites in their homes. The pilot was designed to maximize convenience for families and minimize distance traveled to receive meals, while still meeting existing regulations. While designed to be compliant with federal regulations, the 2017 pilot was privately funded. The test provided proof of concept and demand for the new model with 94% of families expressing interest in future participation and 88% of families agreeing that the new model filled a need that otherwise would have gone unmet. During the pilot, site supervisors served over 1,600 meals.

In summer 2018, NKH scaled the community-based model to four states to determine potential impact for kids in rural communities across America. A summary of the 2018 pilot is below.

### 3 SUMMER 2018 SPONSORS

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In summer 2018, the Community Meals model was piloted in four different communities for at least four weeks at each site. Sponsors were selected based on funding restrictions and an effort to include common SFSP sponsor types in the pilot.

- In California, NKH worked with the Butte County Office of Education to bring meals to kids across the county. There are over 30 distinct rural communities in the county, so nonprofits face an uphill battle in their efforts to reach hungry kids locally.
- In Colorado, NKH collaborated with Prairie Family Center, a dynamic nonprofit that is one of the only social service providers in the area and serves a growing number of low-income families with a limited staff. Located just miles from the Kansas border, Burlington, Colorado is home to 4,250 local residents.
- In Indiana, NKH partnered with Food Finders Food Bank to bring meals to neighborhoods not currently served by the summer meals program in Lafayette, Indiana. Lafayette's poverty rate is almost 15% greater than the national average and while there are already multiple open sites in the community, demand remains unmet.
- In Vermont, NKH joined forces with the school districts of Addison County Northwest Supervisory Union and Addison County Northeast Supervisory Union. With over 25 small communities spread throughout the county, it is not uncommon to drive for miles before hitting another town, especially outside of the Route 7 corridor

### 4 RESULTS

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In 2018, over 30 families oversaw new sites in their homes. The family site supervisors served almost 7,500 meals to 250 kids that otherwise may not have had the food they need.

Table 1: Summer 2018 Pilot Results					
	CA	CO	IN	VT	Total
Duration	6 Weeks	4 Weeks	4 Weeks	6 Weeks	20 Weeks
Site Supervisors	5	20	10	1	36
Kids Served	52	105	64	22	243
Meals Served	Breakfast & Lunch	Breakfast & Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	-
Total Meals	2,038	4,057	1,012	222	7,329

NKH is excited about the impact these families and the Community Meals model had in the lives of kids this past summer and believes the model has promise for other communities. In order for the model to be successful at scale, the model would need to meet demand from sponsors and site supervisors, be technically feasible, and be economically viable. We evaluated the success of Community Meals and assessed the future potential of the model in each of these ways.

## 4.1 DEMAND

Without demand, the Community Meals model is unsustainable. In order to assess demand, surveys and interviews with sponsors and site supervisors were conducted. Learnings that illustrate demand for the model are below.

- When promoting the model to sponsors, interest was high and recruitment was relatively easy. All sponsors learned about the model via word of mouth and most who learned about the pilot expressed interest in participation.
- At the conclusion of the summer, 100% of sponsors indicated in a survey that they would be interested in continuing their work under the model next summer.
- 100% of sponsors selected a survey response that indicated that they would be very likely to recommend the Community Meals model to another SFSP sponsor.
- In interviews with sponsors, they indicated interest in the model because they believe it meets an unmet need and is a unique way for families to participate. One sponsor noted, "It worked well for a rural setting and it worked well for families... the program seemed to give families a chance to help themselves and improve their communities."

Demand for the model from site supervisors was also strong.

- In locations where sponsors used an open process (e.g. an online application rather than direct asks of community members) to recruit site supervisors the number of applications exceeded organizational expectations. For example, in Indiana, 36 families applied to be site supervisors.
- At the conclusion of the summer, 90% of site supervisors indicated through a survey that they would be very interested in serving meals next summer.
- 86% of site supervisors said they would be very likely to recommend participation in the model to a close friend or family member.
- When asked why they were participating, 89% of site supervisors noted that before the program they had a hard time providing food for their families in the summer.
- Families indicated that they were aware of other families in the community that could use help feeding their kids and that they wanted to do what they could to help them. One site supervisor said, "I am trying to just reach out to the people I know. There are lots of people here that can use the help." 100% of families indicated in a survey that they enjoyed feeding others kids in their community.
- When surveyed about previous participation in the summer meals program, 94% of site supervisors indicated that before Community Meals they had not brought their children to a summer meals site. When asked for further explanation, most site supervisors cited distance as the primary barrier.

## 4.2 TECHNICAL FEASIBILITY

To be technically feasible, sponsors and site supervisors had to prove that they could operate the model in full compliance with federal law. Sponsors proved early on that this was possible. When surveyed and interviewed about their experiences, sponsors focused on meal preparation, site visits and reviews, and meal delivery.

- When interviewed about the ease of implementation, sponsors noted that the model functioned like mobile meals. Additionally, sponsors already running mobile meals programs found that they could incorporate Community Meals into their approach with limited effort.

- When asked to estimate the maximum number of Community Meal sites they could work with, sponsors reported that they could work with up to 10 site supervisors without making changes to organizational capacity.
- All four sponsors elected to serve cold meals delivered cold and three out of four sponsors relied on vendors for meal preparation. Cold meals delivered cold are likely the only meal option that would work with the model due to challenges with keeping hot meals at temperature.
- For this model to work, vendor flexibility is important. The three sponsors that utilized vendors worked closely with them in advance to ensure that they could make changes to meal counts with only 48 hours of notice.
- On average, sponsors indicated that delivery took just under two hours for a 20-mile route. Some sponsors split this time between multiple drivers while others relied on one primary driver.
- All sponsors were able to complete the required site visits and reviews. This, however, was the most time-consuming component of the model. Because all sites were new, sponsors completed all three visits. Were the same families to participate next summer, time spent on site reviews and visits would likely decrease.

Some site supervisors had a harder time with the model than others.. Required information sessions, program training, and background checks served as early indicators for compliance. Families that were unable to complete all three were not eligible to be site supervisors. Approximately one-third of individuals that applied ended up becoming a site supervisor. The data that follows is based only on responses from those individuals that were site supervisors.

- All 36 site supervisors who participated in the program completed required program training and underwent a background check.
- When asked about serving meals to kids other than their own, site supervisors seemed to indicate that their homes have always served as natural convening places for kids in the community, making recruitment easy. One site supervisor stated, “We often have two or three kids over here all year round that are saying they’re hungry. We always want to make sure that their parents know they are here and that they are eating.”
- Over 75% of sites complied with the congregate requirement, with the majority of noncompliance coming from a handful of site supervisors. To measure compliance with the congregate requirement, site supervisors were required to complete an additional form where they reported the number of kids they fed other than their own. To meet the requirement, site supervisors had to list a positive number of kids from outside of the home. The primary reason for noncompliance was a lack of data (i.e., the site supervisor did not share the form with the sponsor or the sponsor did not share the form with NKH).
- Site supervisors served an average of six kids each day where three were their own and three were unrelated. The range of kids each site served was wide, with sites serving anywhere from 2 to 18 kids. In each state, there were sites that fed over 10 kids for the duration of the summer.
- To ensure program compliance, program paperwork was collected from sites daily. One site supervisor noted, “Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this great program... the paperwork was honestly not that bad because I was able to keep up with each meal.”
- When surveyed about reporting requirements, 89% of families indicated that they agreed that the program paperwork was easy to manage.

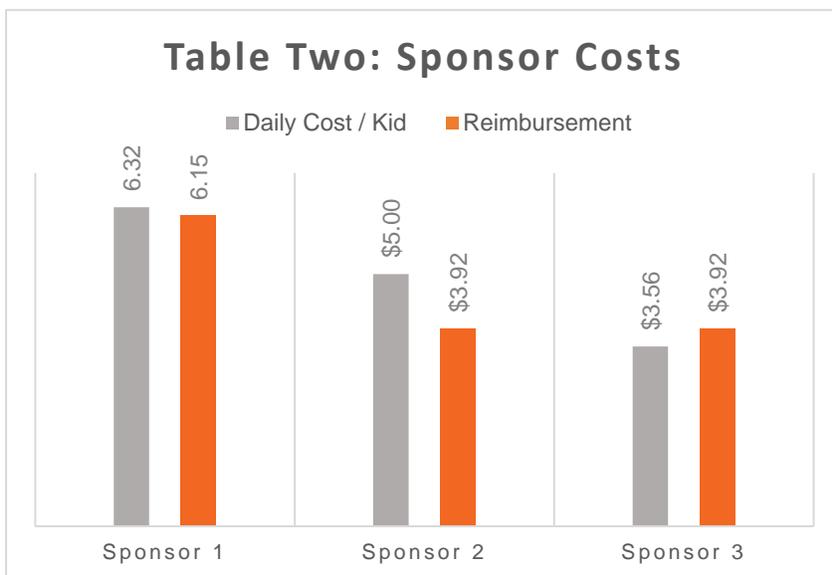
#### **4.3 ECONOMIC VIABILITY**

Economic viability was assessed from the perspective of the sponsor. To determine if the model was economically viable, NKH compared program costs to rural 2018 rates and looked to state agencies for

guidance on federal reimbursement. This was an important factor in the model evaluation because if costs are prohibitive for sponsors, scale is not an option. Based on data collected from sponsors and conversations with state agencies, NKH believes the model is economically viable.

Sponsors were able to operate the model with costs comparable to federal reimbursement rates. For this analysis, sponsors were required to submit a statement that detailed costs related to the model. Costs that otherwise would not be considered sunk were then summed to determine program cost and then divided by the number of meals served to provide a direct comparison to federal reimbursement rates.<sup>1</sup>

One sponsor was excluded from this analysis due to questions about data reliability. While two of the three sponsors spent more on the model than the reimbursement rate, this spending pattern was consistent with program spending on the other summer meal sites.



Based on conversations with relevant state agencies and the program paperwork sponsors shared, it is likely that USDA will provide reimbursement for meals served in three out of four states. One state agency was uncomfortable funding the work and asked to use the pilot as a chance for model observation.

Of the three other states, two are expected to provide a complete reimbursement and the other is expected to provide reimbursement for 70% of meals served. While data shared from sponsors is positive, NKH has the greatest number of outstanding questions related to economic viability. Given the small sample size, NKH feels that more research needs to be conducted in order to understand true model costs and to assess if costs vary depending on sponsor type.

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<sup>1</sup> Daily cost per child was calculated by summing actual food cost, program supply cost, direct labor costs, and meal transportation cost. This number was then divided by the total meals served accounting for the number of breakfasts and lunches. Cost data was shared by sponsors and thus accuracy may vary from sponsor to sponsor.

## 5 CONCLUSION

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The summer 2018 pilot demonstrated the potential of families and sponsors working together to turn neighborhoods into places where kids can get a healthy meal. While promising, there is more to learn before identifying the Community Meals model as a best practice. Next year, NKH plans to make intentional investments in two states to assess what the model looks like at scale and to determine whether it is a transformative model for serving meals to kids in rural areas.

Without new models, summer will continue to be the hungriest time of year for many children. A successful pilot in summer 2019 could be transformative. We know that nonprofits and families are ready to do more to feed more kids. Community Meals could be a great way to meet this unmet need.