



SUMMER MEALS IN YOUR COMMUNITY – ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Studies show that children and young people are at higher risk for hunger, obesity, and learning loss during the summer months. Fortunately, summer nutrition programs can address these challenges. The need for healthy meals doesn't end with the school day or when summer begins. However, less than 14% of children living in low-income households receive a summer meal. Elected officials can help ensure kids have access to summer meals.

What is the Summer Meals Program?

Federal summer nutrition programs are funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered by a designated agency in each state. Most program providers choose to serve meals using the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) available to schools and qualifying non-profit organizations. However, schools also can choose to serve summer meals through the National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

Summer Meals are free to all children 18 years of age or younger who drop-in at an approved open site where no sign-up is required or are enrolled in a closed site where children are engaged in other programming. Summer Meals sites include places like schools, libraries, community centers, and parks. Some program sponsors operate mobile meal programs where buses or food trucks travel from location to location, bringing summer meals to children instead of having kids go to their nearest site for a meal.

Summer Meals Resources

- [Summer Meals Fact Sheet](#)
- [Summer Food Service Program Overview](#)
- [Childhood Hunger in Your State](#)

Summer 2023 Operations Update

In approved states beginning summer 2023, Summer Meals sponsors can operate non-congregate programs (including "grab & go" style programs and home delivery) in rural communities without access to a congregate meal site. For an overview of USDA's non-congregate guidance and the potential impact of providing non-congregate meals, check out [Making the Most of a Moment: Non-Congregate Meal Service in Rural Areas](#).

Learn more about Summer Meals by visiting [No Kid Hungry's Center for Best Practice's website](#)

Ways to Engage

One of the major barriers to children participating in Summer Meals is the knowledge of the program's existence. By shedding light on the importance of summer nutrition, elected officials can raise awareness about the Summer Meals program in their community. There are several strategic ways that elected officials can help raise awareness:

1) Issue a Summer Meals Proclamation

Use this **Summer Meals proclamation template** ([state](#) or [local](#)) to declare the availability and importance of Summer Meals in your community. By magnifying the importance of ending summer hunger, your community will increase awareness of existing sites, grow interest in opening new meal sites, and reinforce ending childhood hunger as a priority for your administration. *Be sure to amplify the message by promoting the proclamation through local media and social media!*

2) Pave the Way for Summer Meals Sites in Your Community

In many towns and cities, summer meals sponsors must be granted access to public facilities like community centers and parks. Make this approval process seamless so meal sites can open up quickly where children gather, learn and play.

3) Promote the No Kid Hungry Summer Meals Texting Hotline and Meal Finder

Text "FOOD" or "COMIDA" to 304-304 or visit [here](#) (English) or [here](#) (Spanish) to find their nearest meal site. Families can also visit NoKidHungry.org/whatsapp to access the texting line via WhatsApp messaging service. Check out No Kid Hungry's [Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#) to download sample graphics, flyers, and social media language for easy outreach and promotion. Leverage existing communications channels, including your city's website, 311 or 211 call centers, and newsletters, and include a reminder at the conclusion of city press conferences or community meetings.



Visit a Summer Meals Site!

Experience the program in action by visiting a Summer Meals site while also leveraging media interest to raise awareness in your community. During a site visit, you can:

- Engage with children, parents, and families. *Try taking a turn serving meals!*
- Listen and learn about the experiences of Summer Meals providers.
- Invite and host reporters to publish a story about Summer Meals. *Be sure to share ways how children can access meals in their neighborhoods!*
- Build relationships with community members.

Kick it up a notch!

Consider sponsoring a Summer Meals kick-off or spike-event. These high energy events are a great way to increase awareness and boost participation. Kick-off events are best held in June and spike events are mid-summer to help reinvigorate participation in Summer Meals.

For questions, contact:

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