



Pictured L-R: Houston Food Bank summer meals kick off event- Superintendent Dr. LaTonya M. Goffney, TX House Rep. Armando Walle, No Kid Hungry Texas Director, Stace Sanchez-Hare; Summer mobile meals van

COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING SUMMER MEAL PROGRAMS

During a recent session in May at the MegaCon event in Austin, 2024 leaders came together to brainstorm ways to help increase access to Summer Meals programs for students and families. This resource is the result of that time spent together working in groups to discuss and jot down these examples as we brainstormed ideas.

Summer is a time for connection, exploration, and fun! Summer nutrition programs make sure children and young people have the nutrition they need to do just that. During the school year, meals are available to kids through school breakfast and lunch. But kids lose critical access to meals during the summer when schools are out. To fill this gap, many local schools and community organizations nationwide operate summer meal programs to provide meals to kids at no cost.

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 \(SFSP\)](#), which is available to schools and qualifying non-profit organizations. School Food Authorities can serve summer meals through SFSP or the [National School Lunch Program Seamless Summer Option \(SSO\)](#). Both programs offer free summer meals to kids and teens at eligible locations with some small differences in program regulations.

In rural communities, [non-congregate meal programs](#) like grab & go, home delivery, and parent pick-up can operate where congregate meals are not available in order to reach even more children during the summer months.

Rural non-congregate meals and traditional congregate meals form a Summer Meals program that can better combat summer hunger.

Engagement and Feedback

Student and parent engagement is an essential way to gain support for Summer Meals programs by building awareness and building relationships with families. Some ways to do this include setting up a table at school sponsored events such as parent-teacher night, talent shows, field days or other school or district sponsored events where Child Nutrition services can meet and talk with family members and students about Summer Meals. This provides opportunities to answer questions and receive feedback about your school meal program.

In addition, student feedback in the area of taste testing is a great way to see if what you have designed will meet the needs of your participants. If possible, have these events across all grade levels to adjust for varying tastes. Food demonstrations are a good way to increase nutrition education, cooking skills and taste testing at the same event. Some districts have shared how helpful it is to pilot potential menu items with their Summer meals participants where they can gather feedback before the next school year.

Other ways to gather feedback may involve parent and student surveys where you ask a few questions about the school meals programs and what items students enjoy. Some districts have offered incentives to students (e.g. school swag, gift cards or whatever it is that is in your budget and students will appreciate, it doesn't have to be costly). Businesses such as Sam's Club and Kohls often have a community budget set aside for these types of scenarios where they can support your efforts. Asking for student feedback helps to build trust with them, but only if you listen to their feedback and make changes to show that you value their feedback.

Popular Food Items

As consumers we will go back to places where we enjoy the food being served. Here in Texas we have many Child Nutrition leaders who have had success in this area by serving the items that students enjoy. For example, at Smithville ISD, they recreate popular items at local fast food restaurants with a healthy twist such as hot honey pizza, tochos, crunch wrap supreme, breakfast biscuits similar to breakfast sandwiches, and many more items.

Sinton ISD has increased school meal participation by celebrating Christmas in July. She prepares typical holiday menu items that students enjoy, they have decorations and the students love it!

Promotion

Kick off events are a fantastic way to increase visibility for your Summer Meals sites before the meal programs start in the community! These events typically boost participation for a few days and increase awareness about the program. Invite local celebrities, news stations, community organizations, have a bounce house, petting zoo, and partner with other organizations to help fund this event.

Families can text 'FOOD' (to access information in English) or 'COMIDA' (to access information in Spanish) to 304-304 or call 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-Hambre to find free summer meals nearby

[Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#)

[TDA Summer Outreach Communications toolkit](#).



Summer meals site San Antonio

Community Collaboration and Volunteers

Feeding your community requires many hands, collaboration is key in building support, preventing burn out and in creating sustainability. Partners can include the city, local library, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCAs, AmeriCorps (for volunteers) and other community orgs or government agencies that focus on students and young people. It can also be helpful to pair up with other for distribution sites (such as food pantries, parks and recreation agencies and other community feeding sites). Sponsors can include public or private nonprofit schools, units of local municipal, county, tribal or state government, non-profit organizations, summer camps, universities or colleges.

Activities

One of the best ways to encourage young people to participate in summer meals is to ensure there are on-site activities - particularly if you're operating a congregate site. If your organization can provide enrichment or physical activity programming at an existing meal site or can introduce meals at a location where activities are already occurring, reach out to a local program sponsor to find out how you can collaborate to keep young people engaged and well fed throughout the summer months.

Young people enjoy being outside (weather permitting), summer sponsors have had success with water activities, setting up near splash pads, using activities promoted by other organizations such as [5 A Day](#) or check out the [Alliance for a Healthier Generation's activities resources](#).

Book clubs at local libraries can be a great enrichment activity where meals can be part of programming. In general, overlapping services via community partnerships is a way to tap into already established resources that young people are already using. For example, partnering with leaders organizing mobile health clinic services by providing meals for school aged kids can be a way to make sure meals reach families who need them. It helps to reach out to local businesses for In-Kind donations (e.g. bath & body works, Sam's Club etc.).

This can be as simple as visiting local businesses and asking for donations to incentivize participation or to showcase at upcoming events (e.g. kick off events). Whoever makes an In-Kind donation can receive a shout out and their organization can share handouts at the feeding site. Businesses such as Sam's Club have a budget for community involvement.

Meal Assistance and Resources

It's helpful for summer meal sites to provide as many wrap-around services as possible such as SNAP assistance services or emergency food. Some sites have seen success with share tables that can help redistribute food items.

Summer meal site sponsors can also encourage families to reach out to their local food bank, call 211, or visit 211texas.org for additional resources and support.



Bulk meal bags for distribution

For more information check out the [Summer Meals Fact Sheet](#)

For more information: Go to <https://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/programs/summer-meals>