

Summer EBT: Making the Program Work for Families

RESOURCE FOR STATE AGENCIES — FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 2025 NO KID HUNGRY CAREGIVER SURVEY

METHODOLOGY

In December 2025 and January 2026, No Kid Hungry surveyed 1,053 caregivers of school-age children (ages 5-18) in households with incomes consistent with free or reduced-price meal eligibility. This included 485 families who received Summer EBT in 2025, 112 families in Summer EBT states who did not, and 456 families in states that did not offer the program. The survey was available in English and Spanish. Results for participants and for families in non-offering states are weighted to be representative. The findings below highlight opportunities for states to make Summer EBT/SUN Bucks more accessible and responsive to families' needs.



KEY INSIGHTS

Communicating With Families

1. BUILD AN ONLINE ELIGIBILITY CHECKER AND, WHERE FEASIBLE, AN ENROLLMENT CHECKER.

What families told us:

68% of both participants and non-participants wanted to know how to check a child's eligibility. It was the top request among participants. About half of non-participants who didn't apply weren't sure their child was eligible (**52%**).

Recommendation(s):

- An eligibility checker shows whether a child could qualify. An enrollment checker shows whether a child is already enrolled or still needs to apply.
- For more information on designing useful eligibility and enrollment checkers, check out this resource on [Leveraging Technology for Summer EBT](#).

2. SEND ISSUANCE NOTICES THROUGH MULTIPLE CHANNELS

What families told us:

48% of participants said their card arrived, or benefits were loaded, without any explanation. Participants preferred email (**69%**), mail (**51%**), and text (**51%**), and many chose more than one.

Recommendation(s):

- Use multiple channels and include the card name, benefit amount, and expiration date in each notice so families get what they need through whichever channel reaches them first.

3. HIGHLIGHT THE EXPUNGEMENT DATE AND 122-DAY WINDOW ACROSS MATERIALS.

What families told us:

Most participating households (**88%**) used their full benefit, but among those who didn't, the top reason was not knowing the benefits had expired (**46%**).

Recommendation(s):

- Make the expungement date easy to find. Issuance notices, card mailers, program webpages, and outreach materials are all places families look.
- If possible, periodic reminders as the date approaches can reinforce it. Consider targeted outreach to those with expiring benefits.
- For more information on redesigning notices to families, see this resource on [designing agency communications](#).





Answering the Questions Families Are Asking Most

4. PUBLISH A PLAIN-LANGUAGE FAQ

What families told us:

Among the **17%** of households that had difficulty finding information, most didn't know where to look (**59%**) or where to direct their questions (**52%**). Non-participants wanted to know what foods are allowed (**54%**) and where benefits can be used (**48%**).

Recommendation(s):

- Post the FAQ prominently on the state website.
- Cover eligibility, how to apply, allowable foods, participating retailers, and a named point of contact.
- A named point of contact for additional questions is especially helpful here.
- If you are interested in an [example](#) of a plain language FAQ document see this example.

5. EXPAND CUSTOMER SERVICE AHEAD OF PEAK ISSUANCE

What families told us:

Among households that had difficulty finding information, **37%** were not able to get through to customer service.

Recommendation(s):

- Offering email and chat alongside phone gives families more than one way through during the busiest periods. Chatbots can also answer common questions, which helps reduce wait times for other families.

Reaching Families Who Are Not Connected To Benefits

6. REACH OUT TO ELIGIBLE FAMILIES WHO NEED TO APPLY BEFORE THE SUMMER BEGINS

What families told us:

Among participants who received benefits in both 2024 and 2025, **24%** said receiving benefits was easier in 2025. Their top reasons were earlier notification of eligibility (**54%**) and benefits arriving earlier (**35%**).

Recommendation(s):

- For families who need to apply, earlier awareness gives them time to apply early, which moves benefits into their hands sooner.

7. PAIR AGENCY CHANNELS WITH SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS' CHANNELS

What families told us:

Schools were participants' top information source (**42%**) but reached only **11%** of non-participants. Non-participants relied more on government agencies for information (**27%**), yet were less connected to assistance programs overall (**68% vs. 92%** of participants).

Recommendation(s):

- Share ready-to-use robocall scripts, emails, and flyers with schools and community partners in the spring so they can reach families before summer.

LEARN MORE:

For more ready-prepared templates and resources, check out the [No Kid Hungry templates and resources on Summer EBT](#).

To learn how to engage schools in outreach, check out this resource on [partnering with schools](#).



Easing The Application And Card Delivery Process

8. SIMPLIFY THE APPLICATION AND OFFER IT IN MULTIPLE LANGUAGES AND FORMATS.

What families told us:

35% of applicants found the application somewhat or very difficult.

Recommendation(s):

- Offer a clear paper application alongside the online version, with prompts that explain what to fill in and why. Provide it in the languages families in your state speak.

9. OFFER A SELF-SERVICE PORTAL FOR APPLICATION STATUS AND ADDRESS UPDATES.

What families told us:

Among participants who had difficulty finding information, **28%** did not receive updates on their application or enrollment status. Separately, **10%** of participants had trouble receiving their card by mail.

Recommendation:

- Let families check their status, update their address, and request a replacement card online. Verify addresses and remind families to update them before cards are mailed.