



GATHERING FEEDBACK FROM FAMILIES: USING A SURVEY TO INFORM MEAL SERVICE

Asking families for their feedback about meal service can help you make informed decisions for your program and ultimately increase participation.

This resource details the use of a survey to gather feedback from families.

Within this resource you will find general guidance and a link to a sample survey so that you can see those recommendations in action. Note that the word “families” is used broadly throughout this resource to refer to adult decisionmakers i.e. parents, guardians and caregivers.

Getting Started

Surveys can be an effective and efficient way to gather feedback from families to inform meal service. If you're interested in administering a survey, begin by deciding how.

Administering a Survey In-Person

If you're offering in-person meal pick up, you can ask families to complete a survey while they wait in line or before they leave the distribution site. People's time is precious, so you'll want to keep the survey as short as possible (while still asking enough questions to collect the most useful information) to ensure that families can move along quickly. The survey can be administered on paper (be sure to have pens or pencils available) or online if you have tablets (like iPads) available for family use. For an online survey, you could also make a QR code using a free online generator and have families access the survey using their own smartphones.

Note that a survey administered in-person during meal pick-up will only reach families that are participating in the program. If you'd also like feedback from families that are not participating, you'll need to implement an alternative or additional method to collect feedback.



Administering a Survey Online

There are a number of upsides to administering a survey online, like the ability to reach more families- both those that are and those that are not currently participating in the meals program (relative to administering a paper-based survey in-person during meal distribution).

An online survey can also make it quicker and easier for your team to review the results, given that most platforms will automatically provide a summary of responses.

There are a number of free options available like [Google Forms](#) and [SurveyMonkey](#) (free if you use the basic plan). If your district already uses an online tool to survey families, use that as it is best to use something that families are already familiar with when possible.

Accessibility note: If you choose to administer a survey online and you know that there are families in your district or community with no or limited internet access, you or a member of your team can call those families to ask them the survey questions over the phone and enter their responses yourself.

Quick Tips



- Keep the survey short.
- Explain how the survey results will be used.
- Make the survey anonymous.
- Aim to make most questions close-ended like checkboxes or multiple choice.
- Ensure that you are providing feasible answer choices, as in options that you can really implement.
- Offer the survey in languages other than English, as applicable to your district or community.
- Put a “close date” on the survey so that families know you’d like responses by a certain day and time.
- Have other groups, like the Parent Teacher Association, help you spread the word about the survey.

While this resource focuses on gathering feedback from families, it's also important to gather feedback from kids/students! Think about how you can build your program with kids rather than for kids.



Deciding What to Ask

Once you've decided how you are going to administer the survey, it's time to develop the survey questions.

Offer the survey in multiple languages, as applicable. If there are primary languages other than English spoken by families in your district or community, be sure to offer the survey in those languages to be inclusive.

Include an introduction that explains the purpose of the survey. Use the description area under the survey title to explain how the survey results will be used i.e. to determine the best day and time to schedule meal pick up/distribution. This is also a good place to note whether or not the survey is anonymous and how any personal information collected will be used.

Consider beginning with demographic questions. Asking [demographic questions](#) can help you understand who the results are coming from- without asking for specific identifying information like names- to help you be more actionable with the results. For example, you can ask what school(s) their child(ren) are enrolled at or what sites they typically pick up meals from.

Aim to make most of the questions close-ended. [Close-ended](#) questions, like multiple choice and checkboxes, ask respondents to choose from a list of options. Asking more close-ended questions rather than open-ended questions can help reduce how long it takes to complete the survey, which may encourage families to complete the full survey and not just part of it. This can also make it quicker and easier for you to review the results. However, don't avoid open-ended questions altogether though- these can be useful for gathering feedback from families in their own words.

Decide what questions are required and what questions are optional. When using a platform like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey, you have the option to make certain questions required. This means that respondents will need to answer that question before the survey is submitted. Otherwise, when they hit the complete button, they'll be prompted to go back to that question or questions. Use the required feature for those questions that are most important to you.

Ensure that you're providing answer choices that are realistic. Expectation management is important when soliciting feedback. In recognizing that you have, among other things, budget constraints and nutritional guidelines to follow, you don't want to receive a lot of feedback that you cannot be actionable about. For example, it would not be good practice to have weekend or evening meal pick up/distribution times listed as options if labor contracts do not allow for it.

Sample Survey

You can see the guidance mentioned in this resource in action by checking out this [sample survey](#) set up in Google Forms. The sample survey purposely gives you a mix of questions as an example (topics are separated by section). You can choose which questions make the most sense for your meals program and also come up with new questions and answer choices of your own. What questions you ask will be impacted by what you are trying to learn through the survey.

Encouraging Responses

Use a variety of communication channels to help spread the word to families about the survey (and also to spread the word about your meals program in general). Think about how the families your meals program serves are used to getting information— like text and social media— and use those channels that they're already familiar with to share the survey link. Consider if there are groups, like the Parent Teacher Association, that can help you encourage families to complete the survey.

Reviewing the Results

After you've closed the survey, take the time to review the responses on your own and also with your team. Consider asking your team prompting discussion questions like, "Is there anything that surprised you?". Decide how the responses will inform changes to your meals program.

After the Survey

If you implement any changes to your program based on survey results, be sure to let families know. It will reinforce that their feedback was heard, considered and applied. For example, if announcing a schedule change, you could share that the new distribution time was determined based on survey responses. Sharing a full summary of the survey results is also an option.

Related Resources

[Conversation Starters for Designing More Inclusive School Meals Programs](#) – Students and their families are the most important stakeholders in school nutrition programs. These conversation starters can be used to guide conversations with school nutrition staff to (1) identify barriers that students and their families may face in accessing schools meals, and (2) generate ideas for engaging students and families as partners in designing more equitable meals programs.

[Let Your Community Shape Your Meals Program](#) – Discussion questions and stories for schools and nonprofit organizations looking to more meaningfully engage kids and their families in meal program design and delivery.

