



## SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The intent of the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is to serve nutritious meals to youth ages 18 and under at no charge during the summer months when school is not in session. The program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered at the state level by relevant agencies.

### WHO CAN SPONSOR THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM?

Sponsors must be organizations fully capable of managing a food service program. To be a sponsor, you must follow federal and state regulations, and be financially and administratively responsible for running your program.

#### Which types of organizations are eligible to become SFSP sponsors?

- Public or private nonprofit schools
- Units of local, municipal, county, tribal, or State government
- Private nonprofit organizations
- Public or private nonprofit camps
- Public or private nonprofit universities or colleges

### QUICK FACTS ABOUT SUMMER MEALS

#### They Fill the Summer Hunger Gap

When school is out, kids no longer have access to school breakfast and lunch, and their families' budgets are often stretched to the breaking point. A survey of low-income families shows that over 60% spend more on food during the summer, with an average increase of more than \$300 per month.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, research shows that kids are at a higher risk of food insecurity during the summer months.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT IS A SITE?

A site is the physical location, approved by the State agency, where program meals are served during a supervised time period. Sponsors may serve meals at one or more sites.

There are four types of meal sites:

- **Open:** At least half the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals, or a physical location is deemed 'area-eligible' based on census tract or block group data. All children are served at no charge.
- **Closed Enrolled:** At least half the children enrolled in an activity program are determined to be income-eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. All enrolled children are served at no charge.
- **Camp:** Offers a regularly scheduled food service as part of a residential or day camp program. Only eligible children may receive meals at no charge.
- **Migrant:** Primarily serves children of migrant workers. All children at migrant sites receive meals at no charge.

Meal service sites may be located in a variety of settings, including schools, recreation centers, playgrounds, parks, churches, community centers, libraries, day camps, residential summer camps, housing projects, migrant centers, or on Indian reservations.

## WHICH MEALS ARE ELIGIBLE FOR REIMBURSEMENT?

The following meals are eligible for federal reimbursement:

- All meals served to children 18 years of age or younger who attend an approved open site, closed enrolled site, or migrant site.
- Meals served to enrolled children at camps who are individually eligible for free or reduced-price school meals.
- Meals served to individuals over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs for persons with disabilities.

## QUICK FACTS ABOUT SUMMER MEALS

### Only a Fraction of the Need is Currently Being Met

Currently, six out of seven children who participate in school lunch during the school year do not have access to summer meals.<sup>3</sup>

### Families that Benefit from the Program View It Positively

Nine out of ten participating families would recommend attending the meal site to others and are interested in continued participation in the program.<sup>4</sup>

### Meals Support Activities that Combat Learning Loss

Summer nutrition is closely tied to summer learning loss, which has been shown to account for two-thirds of the ninth grade reading achievement gap.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>2013 Share Our Strength Summer Meals Survey. APCO Insight.

<sup>2</sup>Mark Nord & Kathleen Romig, *Hunger in the Summer*. Journal of Children and Poverty, 2006.

<sup>3</sup>*Hunger Doesn't Take A Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2019*. Food Research & Action Center.

<sup>4</sup>2013 Share Our Strength Summer Meals Survey. APCO Insight.

<sup>5</sup>Karl L. Alexander, Doris R. Entwisle, and Linda Steffel Olson, *Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap*, American Sociological Review, 2007.

## HOW MANY REIMBURSABLE MEALS CAN BE SERVED?

Most sponsors may be approved to receive reimbursement for up to two meals per day. Eligible meals are breakfast, lunch, snack (morning and/or evening), and supper. The only combination not eligible for reimbursement is lunch and supper. If your site primarily serves migrant children or you run a residential or day camp, you may be eligible to serve up to three reimbursable meals each day.

## HOW ARE SFSP MEALS PREPARED?

A sponsor may prepare its own meals, purchase meals through an agreement with an area school, or contract for meals with a food service management company (vendor). If your site has its own kitchen, you may want to prepare meals yourself. If your kitchen is not on the premises, you may still want to prepare your own meals and then transport them to the site. Meals you prepare yourself receive a slightly higher rate of reimbursement. Many government and private nonprofit sponsors lack the kitchen facilities to prepare meals themselves: in this case, you may arrange to purchase meals from a school, local hospital, or another public or private food supplier with approved meal preparation facilities.

## FOUR WAYS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM

- 1. Be a Sponsor:** Make an investment in the children in your community. If your organization already provides services to the community and has capable staff and good management practices to manage food service operations, you can administer the SFSP.
- 2. Host a Site:** Some organizations do not have the financial or administrative ability to run the program, but they can supervise food service for children as a site. Meal sites are most successful when paired with enrichment programming.
- 3. Be a Vendor:** Organizations with kitchens and food service staff – including schools, commercial companies, and public or private nonprofit institutions – can participate in the SFSP as vendors. Instead of administering or supervising a meal service site, vendors sell prepared meals under an agreement or contract with an approved SFSP sponsor.
- 4. Volunteer:** Even if your organization cannot take on the responsibilities of a sponsor or a site, you can team up with a sponsor to provide outreach materials to educate families about the program and help lead fun summer activities that encourage participation.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on summer meals and becoming a sponsor, as well as information on best practices to increase participation and resources for funding to support program operations, visit No Kid Hungry's Center for Best Practices website.