

No Kid Hungry Strategies for Sponsor Retention

Retaining strong sponsors is critical to the success and growth of summer meals programs. In 2014 Share Our Strength worked with the Food Research and Action Center to conduct a national survey of sponsoring organizations across the country. The survey found that sponsors are generally satisfied with the program and that most plan to return to the program. Those who were uncertain about returning to the program indicated that there were many reasons for potentially leaving – and all indicated that support to address those issues might help them continue sponsoring the program.

Feedback from sponsors and experience in the field suggest three primary strategies for ensuring that sponsors return to the program each summer:

- Provide ongoing two-way communication to identify and address challenges
- Foster relationships among sponsors and between sponsors and state agencies
- Provide resources to help sponsors succeed

This resource provides a timeline with specific actions to help you retain strong summer meals sponsors.

----- Quarter 1: January, February, March ----- Planning, Preparing and Applying

Communication

- **Share application and training information:** Sponsoring organizations may have many other programs they run throughout the year, so you can help keep them focused and on time by sharing information such as SFSP sponsor application releases, application deadlines and training dates early in the year.
- **Survey sponsors:** Early in the year is also a good time to survey sponsors, which can both provide feedback on how you are supporting sponsors and timely information about a sponsor's intentions to return.
- **Conduct targeted outreach calls to sponsors:** Instead of surveying all sponsors, you may want to call a targeted list of sponsors—large sponsors, organizations that are the only sponsor in an area, or relatively new sponsors—to identify those who may not return, offer support or identify gaps that other sponsors will need to fill.

Relationships

- **Include sponsors in planning meetings:** Early in the year, consider including sponsors in your state or local planning process to engage them in efforts to expand summer meals.
- **Host additional conversations with state agencies:** Building a strong relationship with state agency staff was among the top advice from the 2014 Sponsor Survey. Consider partnering with the state agency to hold additional webinar trainings, an “Ask the State Agency” call, or meeting to increase opportunities to connect.
- **Introduce mentor sponsors:** If an organization is a new sponsor or considering becoming a sponsor, connect them to a more experienced sponsor to ask questions and consider how the program can best work for their organization.

Resources

- **Share information about grants:** Early in the year is a critical time for securing the funding to maintain or expand summer programs. Share local opportunities and information about available No Kid Hungry grants.
- **Share information about best practices:** The [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices website](#) is a clearinghouse of resources to help sponsors grow and improve their programs.
- **Share information about webinars:** The No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices presents webinars from January through June to share best practices, tools and examples from the field to expand access to summer meals. [View previous webinars](#), and [subscribe](#) to our newsletter to get updates about upcoming webinars.

Connecting sponsors to the state agency in Dallas

Following summer 2013, the Texas Hunger Initiative and United Way of Metropolitan Dallas started a sponsor council in Dallas. The second meeting of the group included a question and answer session with the Texas Department of Agriculture and the USDA, giving sponsors the chance to ask questions directly and in person. Sponsors reported this to be one of the greatest values of the new council.

----- **Quarter 2: April, May, June** -----
Planning, Promoting and Launching

Communication:

- **Send reminders:** Applications are out and trainings, either required by the state or optional for sharing best practices, are happening this quarter; sending updates and reminders can help.
- **Provide technical assistance:** While some concerns can only be addressed by the agency, you may be able to help a returning sponsor answer program questions or explore new ideas.
- **Promote activity options for sites:** Activities drive participation at summer meals sites. Offer to connect sponsors who do not provide enrichment activities at sites with sponsors who do.

Relationships:

- **Support shared summer promotions:** Sponsors can amplify the message to their communities about summer programs by coordinating their plans, such as establishing a kick-off day or week, using the same call-to-action (Text to find summer meals!) or pooling media and advertising resources.

Resources:

- **Share outreach materials:** Send any collateral that your organization or the state agency prints for promoting programs; you can also share No Kid Hungry [outreach materials](#) that can be downloaded, edited and printed.

Keeping in touch with Sponsors in Arkansas

No Kid Hungry Arkansas partners with the state agency to track the application status of sponsors, providing technical assistance and encouragement to sponsors who haven't yet started or have stalled in the application process. This focus resulted in an 86% retention rate in 2013.

----- **Quarter 3: July, August, September** -----
Adjusting and Maintaining Participation

Communication:

- **Share success stories:** As you receive information or pictures from sponsors about their programs, share them widely with other sponsors as encouragement and recognition of hard work.

Relationships:

- **Connect sponsors to make adjustments:** Sponsors may be experiencing similar challenges or need help meeting the needs of their sites or communities. You could host regular sponsor conference calls or connect sponsors facing similar issues.

Resources:

- **Share resources to keep up participation:** The Sponsor Survey found that low participation was the greatest barrier experienced by sponsors, so to keep sites from suffering from drop off later in the summer, you could send the frequent flyer card template ([English/Spanish](#)) or additional promotional materials.

----- **Quarter 4: October, November, December** -----
Assess, Thank and Start Again

Communication:

- **Check in with the state agency:** This is a good time to check in with your state agency both to update your list of sponsors' contact information and to make sure you are aligned in your plans for working with sponsors. State agency staff will have important information about sponsors, including sponsors who need extra support or those who are not in good standing with the state agency.
- **Give public thanks and recognition to sponsors:** Not only are sponsors a critical stakeholder in ending childhood hunger, many are driven to run programs by the need they see in their community. Thank them by:
 - Sending a certificate of thanks signed by an elected official or other prominent figure
 - Recording a message from an elected official or other prominent figure
 - Adding a reception to sponsor debriefs or forums and publicly recognize sponsors

Relationships:

- **Host a sponsor debrief session:** Convening partners to debrief provides an opportunity to celebrate the successes and hard work of program sponsors who served meals during summertime, as well as engage in program planning activities for the year ahead. [Use our sample invitation, agenda and facilitation guide.](#)
- **Consider forming a sponsor council:** In some cities or states, sponsors have come together to form councils or other collaborative working groups. This can provide many benefits, including smarter planning for site locations, sharing best practices, bulk ordering of supplies or meals, and coordinating outreach and promotion of summer meals programs.

“Thank You!” from North Carolina No Kid Hungry

North Carolina No Kid Hungry has found great value in saying “thanks!” to the schools who sponsor summer meals. The campaign attends school nutrition conferences and publicly rewards schools offering summer meals, which serves to elevate the role of School Nutrition Director, connect schools’ summer programs to the statewide effort, and motivate staff to continue growing programs. The rewards are simple – No Kid Hungry sunglasses or lapel pins – but displayed with pride; they also provide a conversation starter for interested schools.