SPONSOR TOOLKIT:
COMMUNITY MEALS

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1.   INTRODUCTION

The national summer meals program is a lifeline for children in need, but it does not reach many of the kids who need help. Summer can be an especially hard time of year in rural communities, where lack of public transportation, the high cost of personal car ownership, and a limited number of summer meal sites all create unique hurdles for families who are unable to put food on the table.

The Community Meals model is an innovative approach to summer meals that seeks to address these challenges. Through creative partnerships with community members, sponsors can create new sites to help ensure that meals are more accessible for kids. Under the model, community members work with sponsors to turn their homes and yards into sites. This approach allows sponsors to decrease costs and has the potential to turn neighborhoods into places where kids can get a healthy summer meal.

While locations like schools and churches are prime locations for summer meal sites in most communities, in more rural places, these locations can be miles away from where children actually live. Based on previous research, we think Community Meals directly addresses this challenge. This summer we hope to validate our assumption and answer the question: does placing summer meal sites in neighborhoods reduce barriers to program participation, thus enabling more kids to receive meals in the summer. By piloting Community Meals, you will have a direct impact on your community and inform relevant best practices related to model expansion.

2.   BACKGROUND

No Kid Hungry (NKH) began experimenting with models like Community Meals in 2016 in response to a survey that revealed that 80% of children who could benefit from program participation eat most meals in the summer at home. Experimentation started with meal delivery, where meals were delivered directly to families in the hope that such meals would be considered reimbursable in coming summers. Families in the direct delivery pilots valued the ease associated with delivery and sponsors indicated that the model allowed them to reach a new, previously underserved, summer meals audience.

In response to the failure of Child Nutrition Reauthorization, in 2017 NKH conducted a pilot in which individual homes served as summer meals sites in a rural town that previously had only one open summer meals site. Parents or other caregivers in the home served as site supervisors. The pilot was designed to minimize distance traveled to receive meals, while still meeting existing regulations. During the two-week pilot, site supervisors served over 1,600 meals through new sites operated from their homes. The test provided proof of concept and demand for the new model with 94% of families expressing interest in future participation.

In 2018, NKH scaled the model, now known as Community Meals, to four states to determine the potential for impact. Over 30 families oversaw new sites in their homes and yards and served almost 7,500 meals to 250 kids that otherwise may not have had the food they need.

NKH is excited about the impact these families and the Community Meals model had in the lives of kids this past summer and believes the model has promise for other communities. What follows are early lessons learned about how to run the Community Meals model in conjunction with other summer meal sites. Some information is based on the direct experience of pilot sponsors while other information is based on validated best practices from more traditional mobile meal models. Because the model is so new, the toolkit is more about what we think and less about what we know. As a Community Meals sponsor your insights are valuable and have the potential to help others build on the amazing work you will do this summer.

3.   READINESS ASSESSMENT

The Community Meals model provides an opportunity to serve kids that may not have access to traditional meal sites. There are others way to increase access to food in the summertime and Community Meals is just one option. Community Meals requires months of preparation, creative thinking, and collaboration with community and state partners to be successful. Prior to moving forward, have an open conversation about the model with community leaders and families to determine if the model would meet an unmet need. Ask yourself the questions below before deciding to participate.

- **Is your community area eligible for summer meals?** Area eligibility is based on demonstrated community need through data from schools on free and reduced participation or the census. Community Meals will be hard to implement if your community is not area eligible. If you are unsure if your community is area eligible, reach out to your state agency or utilize the USDA Capacity Builder online. The Capacity Builder is an online tool that will show you which parts of your community are area eligible and the locations of previous summer meal sites.

- **Are there kids in your community that have not previously participated in the program that could benefit from summer meals?** If you are unsure, work with school districts to assess community need and compare that to previous program participation.

- **Have you exhausted your options for serving meals at more traditional site locations?** It may be easier to serve at a more traditional location like a church or community center due to existing infrastructure.

- **Does transportation seem to be a primary barrier for the kids that could benefit from the model?** To measure this, think about how far they would have had to walk last summer to get a meal. Anything over a mile is likely a transportation barrier.

- **Are there enough kids in the communities you would like to target to make the model sustainable?** It will be much easier to work with 10 sites that serve 10 kids than 20 sites that each serve five. Work with school districts to assess this or spend time observing target communities.

Additionally, it is important that you think about your organization and if Community Meals is a good fit for you. Running a successful Community Meals program will be harder and more time intensive than the traditional summer meals program, especially in year one. It is important that you consider not only your own capacity but also the capacity of those who would support you.

Spend some time thinking about your organization and speaking with your team before you move forward. The questions below may help start the conversation:

- **Have you run a summer meals program before?** Sponsors that have a long history with summer meals are the best fit for Community Meals. It is important that you have a strong understanding of the program rules and regulations before adding new variables to the program.

- **Do you have strong relationships with families in the community?** Recruiting families is the most challenging aspect of the model. Sponsors that have strong relationships with families in the community are likely to be most successful.

- **Does your team have the capacity to run additional sites?** To be successful, you should plan to dedicate at least 10 hours a week to Community Meals in the months leading up to the summer. The time allocated to the model will likely increase during the summer.

- **Are you in good standing with your state agency**? Community Meals is a new model and you will need to work closely with your state agency to ensure that you are doing everything in accordance with federal law. Sponsors that have a strong history of open communication with the state agency have found the model easier to implement.

- **Do you have strong relationships with community partners that could help you promote the model?** Promotion is a big part of success when it comes to recruiting new families to serve as site supervisors. Sponsors who have strong partners to rely on have found that it is much easier to promote the program when others are willing to lend a hand or share through their own channels.

- **Can your organization afford to take a risk?** While sponsors have found that costs associated with Community Meals are comparable to their other summer meal sites, doing anything new is a risk. There is always a chance that one of your new site supervisors may be unable to comply with program requirements making it impossible for you to claim those meals.

Based on your assessment you may decide that Community Meals is not for you. Alternatively, if you think that Community Meals would help reach more kids in your community and you have the capacity needed to run the program, the next steps are to reach out to your state agency to receive guidance on implementation and begin planning.

4.   SPONSOR TIMELINE

The timeline below can help you think about planning for the summer. Sponsors from the pilot found that implementing Community Meals successfully can take months of proactive planning. Thus, it is important that you start planning early. As you read through the toolkit, use this timeline to guide your thinking.

January through February

- Reach out to your state agency to determine if Community Meals is allowable in your state
- Hold an internal meeting with your team to assess if you have the internal capacity to take on additional summer meal sites and a new summer meals model
- Hold an external meeting with community leaders to build interest and support for the coming summer

February through March

- Attend a summer meals sponsor training hosted by your state agency
- Conduct analysis to determine the best service areas for new Community Meal sites
- Develop a recruitment plan for new site supervisors and enlist help from community leaders
- Start recruiting new site supervisors in target areas

March through May

- Submit your summer meals sponsor application to your state agency
- Continue to recruit new site supervisors in target areas
- Develop a plan for meal delivery
- Finalize details associated with meal service
- Submit a letter to the local health department to notify them that you plan to operate a food service program that includes site locations
- Host a training for new site supervisors
- Promote new summer meal sites through local media and release a nondiscrimination statement

May through June

- Conduct pre-operational site visits
- Establish a monitoring schedule for all sites and alert them of emergency and inclement weather procedures
- Provide site supervisors with required program paperwork and nondiscrimination posters
- Begin meal service

June through September

- Continue serving meals
- Keep your state agency informed of changes to site operations
- Send reimbursement claims to your state agency

5. SEEK INPUT FROM YOUR COMMUNITY

As you build out new summer sites through the model, you will face many choices of where to serve meals, who to work with, and what resources are needed to ensure viable and effective operations. In some instances, you may need to seek input from your state agency or other community partners.

5.1 Informing Your State Agency

Before you begin planning for the summer, it is very important that you reach out to your state agency. Because the Community Meals model is new, your state agency may have questions about why you are interested in the model, and how and where you plan to serve meals. Through your conversations, work with your state agency to determine how many new sites you should take on and develop a plan for updating the state agency as your plans for the summer become more developed.

5.2 Building Community Partnerships

As planning moves forward for your summer meals program, it is important to reach out to other organizations in your community that may have a vested interest in the success of the program. Other organizations that work closely with the families you are hoping to serve (e.g., churches, schools, or local social service providers) can often provide valuable input in model development, especially when it comes to recruiting new site supervisors.

6. DETERMINE YOUR SERVICE AREA

At the same time that your team is building relationships in your community, you will also need to evaluate potential neighborhoods for new sites. This step of the planning process is about determining where more "traditional" sites may better serve community needs, while also assessing what neighborhoods might be best for summer meals expansion through the Community Meals model. As you move toward final selection of Community Meals site locations, the following considerations may be helpful:

- **Select locations in your community that are area eligible**. To operate an open site, the surrounding community must be deemed low-income through an area eligibility determination based on school free and reduced-price meal enrollment or census tract data. Schools can provide information about the percentage and number of low-income students who qualify for free and reduced-price school meals. Many state agencies also provide this information on their websites. To explore area eligibility using census tract data, use the [No Kid Hungry Averaged Eligibility Map](#).

- **Work to identify target communities that have previously been underserved.** New sites should not target children already receiving meals at other locations. The USDA [Capacity Builder](#) provides historical information about the location of summer meals sites during previous years. By taking this information and layering on information about the area eligibility status of given communities, it is possible to identify locations where program expansion may be appropriate.

- **Prioritize locations where children are already present.** Lastly, the site location should be in an area with a sufficient number and density of children so that federal reimbursement dollars for meals served significantly offset the costs associated with program operations. Work with the local school to identify neighborhoods with the highest need. You can also use the USDA [Capacity Builder](#) to conduct an even deeper analysis. The tool includes a data layer that provides information on the number of free and reduced-price eligible children in a given census block group.

Once target site locations have been identified in accordance with the criteria outlined above, the next step is to incorporate these site locations into your overall [sponsor agreement](#) with the state agency. Depending on when locations are finalized, this information may be included in your original sponsor application or added later when meal service dates and times for the location are finalized. While sponsor applications are subject to state or federal deadlines, sponsors do have the option to add additional sites throughout the summer.

7.   MAKE STAFFING DECISIONS

Hiring and training program staff and volunteers are both key to the success of any summer meals program. In addition to the normal decisions you make about how to staff your team, with Community Meals you also must consider how you want to staff your sites. Based on the work done in 2018 and conversations with other sponsors who have tested a similar model, there seem to be three ways to staff community sites:

- **Recruit someone who lives in the community to turn their home or yard into a summer meals site and ask them to serve as a site supervisor.** All pilot sponsors tested this model. Sponsors found that while it could be hard to find someone who was open to the idea, those that did, did an exceptional job as site supervisors. It seems that recruiting someone who lives in the community to be the site supervisor creates an increased sense of ownership and drives the site supervisor to conduct outreach essential to site success.

- **Recruit someone who lives in the community to turn their home or yard into a summer meals site and pair them with an experienced volunteer or program employee to co-manage the site.** While we are unaware of anyone who has tested this model, the approach may allow sponsors to quickly add additional community sites and minimize the burden placed on those in the community. Under this approach, the family would not have to be present every day but could help on demand to maintain the community feel. Another way you could use this approach would be to have an experienced volunteer or employee work with the family for the first weeks of the program, similar to a train the trainer model, where the family would be solely responsible for the site following the training period.

- **Recruit someone who lives in the community to turn their yard into a summer meals site and have an experienced volunteer or program employee serve as the site supervisor.** Other sponsors that were not part of the pilot have successfully used this approach. It is effective for sponsors who work with a team during the school year and utilize the summer meals program as a way to employ that team during the summer. Under this model, families essentially donate their yard for the summer but have no programmatic responsibilities.

It is important to set clear boundaries around roles and responsibilities to ensure that team members work together effectively and are empowered to take ownership of the program. To ensure that everyone knows what their role is, select one approach to pilot during the first summer. Piloting multiple approaches in the same community will likely create confusion and frustration for program staff. When staff and volunteers understand their roles and enjoy their work, they are more likely to continue the work the next summer, creating an environment of familiarity and trust within the organization and among children participating in the program.

8.   RECRUIT AND TRAIN SITE SUPERVISORS

No matter how you staff new sites, as a sponsor, you will be responsible for training and onboarding all site supervisors. This section provides guidance on how to best recruit and train new site supervisors that are also residents of target communities.

8.1   Recruiting Site Supervisors

The recruitment process for site supervisors is one of the main distinctions between Community Meals and other mobile meal programs. Sponsors who participated in the summer 2018 pilot reported that this process was both the most important and most challenging element of the model.

Before you start recruitment, think about how you will frame the program. Sponsors who piloted the program in previous summers found that it was best to frame the program as a volunteer opportunity or as a way to give back. Sites supervisors who related to this message were the most successful. When site supervisors saw the program as a volunteer position, they seemed to spend more time promoting the program to the community and thus, served more children.

To recruit new site supervisors, you can take many approaches. Using an application, online or paper-based, is strongly encouraged. The questions you ask should help you identify the best individuals to work with. An example of a paper-based application can be found in the appendix. No matter which method you use to recruit site supervisors, plan for recruitment to take much longer than expected. Sponsors found that it often took over two months to recruit and onboard new site supervisors, which made planning even more important. Based on conversations with sponsors about what they tried and wish they had tried, consider the following options:

- **Use a community-based approach to identify potential site supervisors.** While no sponsor used this approach to recruit site supervisors in the pilot, when the pilot was over every sponsor indicated that they wished they had. Under this approach, you would work with schools, social service nonprofits, and government agencies to identify individuals who may be the best fit for the program. To identify whom you might work with to select site supervisors, think back to the work you did earlier in the year to build support about the model in your community. Was anyone especially excited about the work? Did anyone have strong insights to share? These individuals or organizations may be great to engage as thought partners in the selection process.

  Once you have a list of individuals who you hope to engage as site supervisors, make direct asks of them to see if they are interested. This approach is more *closed* than the others because individuals are *selected* before they are asked.

- **Take a boots on the ground approach and reach out to families directly in target communities.** Sometimes the best way to market your work is to go directly to the community you hope to reach. Last summer one pilot sponsor used this approach. Weeks before the start of the program, her team went door to door in target communities and asked individuals if they would be home during the day, explained the model and asked individuals if they would be interested in being a site supervisor. They left an application with individuals who expressed interest and worked with families that returned the application.

- **Use an open application process and select families based on your service area criterion.** During the pilot, most sponsors used an open application process to recruit families. Two sponsors used an online application and the other used a paper application. Each sponsor placed flyers and postcards at key community locations with information about the model that included information about how interested individuals could apply. This process was effective at identifying many individuals who had an interest in the model, but sponsors found it difficult to convert interested individuals into trained site supervisors.

There is no right way to recruit a new site supervisor. As you think through your options consider what might work best for your community and remember that you can always test multiple approaches to learn what works best.

8.2   Communicating with Potential Site Supervisors

During the recruitment process, open communication is critical. When someone volunteers to turn their home or yard into a summer meal site and agrees to be a site supervisor, they are making a big commitment. By being open with individuals from the start, you can ensure that those that accept your offer truly understand the work they will do. While there are many important things to communicate to site supervisors, spend extra time covering the following:

- **Be clear with individuals that they must feed kids other than their own through the program**. If families ask why explain that this is because you want to be sure that all children have access to the food they need and know that not all parents are able to participate in programs like this one.

- **Encourage site supervisors to reach out to as many kids as they can**. Remember the goal of the program is to test if placing summer meal sites in neighborhoods reduces barriers to program participation, thus enabling more kids to receive meals in the summer. The only way to test this is if site supervisors are actively promoting their work and seeking to expand program operations.

- **Make sure individuals understand that they will have to keep daily records**. When you explain the program, explain that the only way your organization can run the program is with external financial support. This financial support depends on the number of meals served each day making it critical that paperwork is completed.

- **Alert families that someone from your team and potentially someone from the state agency will stop by periodically for site visits.** In the pilot, sponsors found that this deterred some individuals from participation. If someone seems concerned about the visits, explain that visits are a chance to ask questions and ensure that each meal service is the best that it can be.

8.3   Selecting Site Supervisors

In the event that you use an open process to recruit new site supervisors, you will likely have more individuals express interest than you are able to work with. When possible, use a rolling process to select and onboard new site supervisors. Based on results from last summer, it can be very hard to convert applicants into trained site supervisors. Last summer only about 35% of individuals who applied through an open process ended up volunteering their time as site supervisors.

As you review applications think about where each individual lives and how that relates to the criteria you set related to your target service area. In the case that three individuals apply from the same neighborhood, it is unlikely that it will make sense to select all of them for program participation.

You can also use application questions as early indicators for who might be a good site supervisor. Sponsors who participated in the pilot found that one of the easiest ways to tell if someone would be a good site supervisor was if they had a plan for how they would promote their site to other families at the time they applied. Another way was to look at how many other children they thought they might be able to serve. Site supervisors who listed larger numbers were often more excited about the program and wanted to do whatever they could to help their communities. As a rule, encourage each site supervisor to serve a minimum of ten kids each day. Some site supervisors will serve more and some will serve less, but setting a target will likely help site supervisors stay on track.

When you know what site supervisors you are going to select, you should call to let them know that they have been selected for the program. On the call, explain program details an additional time to ensure that they know what they have signed up for. If they want to participate, follow up by sending a letter or email that includes additional details about the program. A sample letter can be found in the appendix. Be sure to also follow-up with individuals who are not selected. This can be a simple call or letter alerting them that they were not selected that includes additional information about where they can find summer meals in your community. An example can be found in the appendix.

8.4   Onboarding Site Supervisors

You are responsible for onboarding all new site supervisors. This includes ensuring that every site supervisor attends training and undergoes a background check.

One of your main administrative duties as a sponsor is to ensure that site supervisors have been trained appropriately. When site supervisors are empowered with the knowledge they need, they are better able to manage for and ensure smooth operations. The type of information you share with Community Meal site supervisors should essentially be the same as what you would share with any other site supervisor. As part of the training, make sure to include background information on the program, details associated with meal delivery and reporting, and your expectations about site supervisor responsibilities.

Last summer sponsors found that when they were working with more site supervisors they had to provide more training options than expected. This ranged from hosting many training sessions to providing one-on-one trainings at the residences of new site supervisors. Early on, it became clear that some site supervisors had transportation issues and required additional accommodations. During the recruitment process, spend time speaking with potential site supervisors about what training options might work best for them.

Previous sponsors found that new site supervisors found it helpful to have additional materials to take with them following training. Think about providing all site supervisors with an additional guide that explains Community Meals to compliment the site supervisor guide provided by USDA. It may also be helpful to think about questions new site supervisors have and create a frequently asked question document that could serve as an additional training component. Most pilot sponsors create binders for site supervisors that included all training materials and required paperwork so site supervisors could quickly review what they had learned prior to program operations.

When individuals have completed site supervisor training it is strongly encouraged that you run a background check to ensure that it is safe for that individual to work with children. Last summer sponsors explained this by telling potential site supervisors that as such, they were essentially volunteers of the organization and thus, required to undergo a typical volunteer screening process. While background checks are encouraged, state agencies do not require them.

9.   FINALIZE MEAL SERVICE

Similar to other summer sites, meals prepared and served through Community Meals must satisfy all Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) federal meal pattern requirements. Additionally, meals should be served in a congregate setting to be eligible for reimbursement. Under the Community Meals model, meals are considered to be in congregate when children who are not directly related to the site supervisor are in attendance for meal service.

9.1   Selecting a Vendor or Self Preparation

When you prepare for meal service, there are four important choices you must make about the meals you are going to serve. The first question you must answer comes down to who will prepare meals served. Will your organization take on this work or will you work with a vendor? When making this decision, think about what has worked best in your community before and your organizational capacity.

Procuring meals from a vendor or food service management company may be appropriate when you do not have a dedicated volunteer base to prepare meals or access to a licensed kitchen facility. Food vendors vary in size, from small catering companies that provide food service only, to national companies that provide both food service and opportunities for greater partnership. Other organizations, such as school districts and food banks, can also act as vendors in the event they themselves are not sponsoring a program. If you decided to work with a vendor to prepare meals served, it is important to consider the following as part of your selection process:

- **Select a vendor that allows changes to the order within 24 hours ahead of the delivery window.** This allows for greater responsiveness to shifts in demand, which can reduce food waste and unnecessary expenses. The number of meals needed through Community Meals will vary throughout the summer and while site supervisors usually have a good idea of how many kids they will serve at their site, numbers can fluctuate, especially during the first few weeks of the program.

- **Prioritizes vendors that have the capacity to prepare boxed meals that are geared toward children.** Expertise in preparing boxed meals will make transportation and delivery much easier for your drivers. It is important that vendors understand all summer meal requirements and have experience developing boxed meal menus that children enjoy.

- **Work with a vendor that will let you taste the food they prepare to ensure that your vendor will produce quality meals.** Children are more likely to be consistent participants in your program if meals are culturally appropriate and reflect their preferences. During the summer, your vendor should solicit input from site supervisors about what meals the children like best and modify menus accordingly.

Self-prepared meals are a great option for program sponsors who are able to prepare and deliver meals. This option provides a much greater level of menu flexibility and gives the sponsor the opportunity to conduct taste tests and incorporate local food items on short notice. If you decided to prepare meals served yourself, think about the following:

- **Make sure your team understands meal pattern requirements.** Sponsors that prepare their own meals are expected to do so in accordance with federal regulations. This includes food procurement and maintaining proper documentation on file. Additionally, sponsors are required to prepare meals in a licensed kitchen or food prep facility that meets health code regulations.

- **Plan your menu well in advance to keep costs down and ensure that you have enough storage.** Bulk food purchasing can help keep costs low, but also requires advanced planning and access to storage space and refrigeration If you have a relationship with your local school food service director, consider reaching out for additional direction and help with menu planning.

- **Remember that preparing meals takes time and additional labor.** Sponsors who prepare their own meals must account for paid or volunteer staff needed for meal preparation. Most sponsors assign a team member the responsibility of sourcing, purchasing and picking up. Once the food has been picked up, volunteers can prepare the meals.

Sponsors who piloted the model in 2018 used both vended (75%) and self-prepared (25%) meals. Most sponsors found that the easiest approach was to continue to do whatever they had done previously. Sponsors who elected to prepare meals themselves tended to have more direct experience with food service (i.e. they had previously worked in a kitchen or were a food service director) than sponsors that worked with a vendor. All sponsors who worked with a vendor selected their vendor based on the criterion listed above.

9.2   Serving Cold or Hot Meals

The second question you must answer comes down to what type of meals you will serve. Will your organization serve hot or cold meals? Just like with other sites, there are tradeoffs in any decision to serve hot or cold meals to children as part of your Community Meals program. When making this decision, think about how you will transport food to ensure that food remains at the appropriate temperature. You should also consider:

- **Cold meals are easier to transport than hot meals from a logistics perspective.** Cold meals can be easier and less costly to transport due to the space required to keep hot meals hot during transit. Meals served cold may also be easier for children to eat in locations without a table and chairs and are easier to clean up.

- **Some sponsors in 2018 found that it was easier to keep cold meals at temperature allowing them to ensure food safety.** On short routes, cold meals can be kept at temperature using only ice packs, and other readily available materials. On the other hand, to keep hot meals at temperature sponsors may have to purchase new equipment like hot boxes and carrying bags that can be expensive to acquire.

- **Children may prefer the variety that can be offered by serving hot meals.** Many children are accustomed to lunches they receive through the national school lunch program, which are often severed hot. In the summer, some children look for the same variety that they see during the school year, which can be challenging to achieve using only cold meals. That said, with careful menu planning variety can be incorporated into programs that only serve cold meals.

All sponsors who piloted the model in 2018 served cold meals that were eaten cold. During the planning phase, one sponsor explored serving hot meals but ultimately decided to serve cold meals due to concerns from the local health department. When possible, it seems that cold meals work better for the Community Meals model than hot meals. There may be special exceptions to this when sponsors have experience transporting meals hot meals through a mobile meals program.

9.3   Finalizing Meals Served

The third question you must answer is about what meals you will serve each day. Will you serve breakfast and lunch, just lunch, or one of the other allowable meal combinations. When making this decision, think about the kids in your community, what meals might benefit them the most, and how you will serve meals in compliance with new regulations related to meal times. The following may be helpful for consideration:

- **New regulations dictate that three hours must elapse between the end of one meal service and the beginning of another.** For sponsors that plan to serve lunch and supper, an additional elapsed hour is required. For sponsors that plan to serve two meals a day, this means that meal service may have to start early and be served for a shorter window of time than in previous summers.

- **Work with site supervisors and children in the community to determine which meals will work best for Community Meals.** As a summer meals sponsor you may think you already know what meals work best in your community, but new locations may alter previous patterns. Reach out to your new site supervisors to learn more about what they think might work best and if they are unsure, ask them to do an informal survey with the children and parents in the community.

- **Transporting two meals a day can be challenging unless one of those meals is shelf stable.** While state requirements vary, in most states site supervisors are required to take the temperature of meals served if they are not served within an hour of delivery. If you plan to serve two meals a day with one delivery, this means that site supervisors will be responsible for completing additional paperwork related to the temperature food is served at. Risk can be minimized by serving one cold or hot meal within in an hour of meal service paired with a shelf stable meal for the following day.

During the 2018 pilot, 50% of sponsors served breakfast and lunch and 50% served only lunch. Sponsors found that the easiest approach was to serve the same meal types through Community Meals that they were serving at their other summer sites. Sponsors who served breakfast and lunch served a cold lunch paired with a shelf stable breakfast. All sponsors elected to deliver meals right before the lunch hour. With new regulations around meal times, it may be easiest to serve only one meal through Community Meals during the first summer and adjust accordingly during following summers.

9.4   Serving Parent and Site Supervisor Meals

The fourth and final question you must answer is for whom you will provide meals. Will you provide meals for children and the site supervisor, provide additional meals for other adults in the community, or will you only provide meals for children in attendance? While there is limited data on whether or not adult meals drive participation, during the 2018 pilots, site supervisors theorized that doing so may have increased participation. Due to the neighborhood focus of the program, site supervisors reported that parents often attended meal service with their kids and stated they wished they could have provided them with meals. As you make your decision about whom you will serve, consider the following:

- *Program adult* **meals are an allowable program expense, but** *adult* **meals are not.** USDA allows sponsors to use [federal reimbursement to cover the cost of meals for "program adults" as an administrative expense.](#) A program adult is an adult who is doing work, volunteer or otherwise, that directly relates to the meal service. Under the Community Meals model, meals for site supervisors are likely the only adult meals that would fall into this category. Providing meals for site supervisors may serve as a nice gesture for those helping to run summer meals sites, but it also means that you will need to budget more carefully.

- **Sponsors can charge for adult meals, but having site supervisors collect payments may be a challenge.** In many instances, adults that are not doing work related to the program are willing to pay a small fee for a summer meal. These adults may be parents or grandparents related to children in the community, or simply other adults who wish to support the program. Sponsors who elect to serve and charge for adult meals should work closely with site supervisors to ensure that all payments are collected and returned in a timely manner.

- **While serving adult meals may help increase attendance, the number of adult meals served may be unpredictable at first.** As a sponsor, you should have a good feel for the number of kids who will attend each site. Adults may be more challenging to forecast because there is no way to know which adults will want to eat at the site and which ones will prefer to eat at home.

During the 2018 pilots, 50% of sponsors provided meals for site supervisors and 50% only provided meals for the children in attendance. Site supervisors who received meals seemed to be grateful, but it was unclear if the meal played into their decision to manage a site or their willingness to do so again in the future. No sponsors served adult meals, but all reported that they wished they had come up with a way to provide meals for other adults.

10.   DEVELOP DELIVERY PLAN

Success with the Community Meals model depends on developing a smart plan for delivery. There are many ways you can deliver meals and plan your routes. Each of these factors directly affects your bottom line and represents an opportunity to seek efficiencies that support program sustainability.

10.1   Meal Delivery Options

It is your responsibility to figure out how you will deliver meals served. The type of vehicle used and the procurement method can vary greatly based on the organization running the program. The following options may be helpful to consider in your planning:

- **When possible use a vehicle that your organization already owns.** This will reduce costs related to vehicle procurement, insurance, and minimize wear and tear on personal vehicles. Depending on the number of sites and the types of meals served, it is possible to cover a large service area with minimal storage space.

- **Reduce costs by borrowing or renting a vehicle from a partner organization.** In the instance that your organization does not own its own vehicle, you can reduce costs by borrowing a vehicle from another organization in the community or renting. If you elect to rent a vehicle, consider renting for the length of your program to minimize the number of times you have to pick up and drop off the vehicle.

- **Work with a vendor who will handle meal delivery for you.** Some vendors are willing to deliver for the sponsor. If you are worried about procuring a vehicle and plan on using a vendor, this may be the easiest option and can minimize delivery times.

- **As a last resort, ask drivers to deliver meals using their own vehicles and reimburse for the miles traveled.** This option may be easy to set up at the start but can create additional hurdles for planning. Make sure drivers know reimbursement rates upfront and have signed contracts that clearly state what will happen in the instance of an accident.

In the 2018 pilots, sponsors used a wide variety of delivery options, with 50% of sponsors reimbursing drivers for miles traveled, 25% using an organization owned vehicle and 25% working with a vendor who managed meal delivery. No one approach seemed better than another, but it was important that sponsors consider all options before making a choice about what would work best for them.

10.2   Planning the Delivery Route

When scheduling a delivery route, it is imperative to keep in mind that the time window for meal delivery to sites must be respected. Timed routes must include enough margin to avoid chronic delays and they must be efficient to justify equipment, fuel, and labor costs. As a sponsor, you should also consider the number of routes you would like to have.

The length of the route will affect fuel and staffing costs for programs that pay drivers. For this reason, routes should be carefully designed to connect sites in the most strategic way that reduces travel time. Using an online routing tool may make it easier to plan your route. MapQuest provides an easy-to-use route planner that will reorder sites to minimize distance traveled. As you confirm site locations, planning your route may help you identify additional unserved neighborhoods.

Depending on how many sites you have and the distance between them, you may want to consider having multiple routes managed by multiple drivers. During the 2018 pilots, route distances varied from four to thirty-six miles. Not surprisingly, this led to variability in the time it took drivers to complete their routes, ranging from one to four hours. One sponsor that had many sites and the longest overall delivery route elected to hire additional drivers and ended up with four short routes. It seems that having a shorter delivery window worked better for site supervisors and drivers. If your delivery route is going to be more than 15 miles long consider hiring an additional driver to reduce the delivery window.

Before the summer starts, have someone on your team drive your delivery route to ensure that there are no barriers to delivery. As the summer goes on, be prepared to modify or refine delivery routes as you figure out the most efficient means to reach children at each site. If a site ends early during the summer while others remain in operation, this may be another opportunity to reevaluate established routes. As program needs evolve, keep in mind that sites have published windows of operation dependent upon state agency approval. Consequently, if updated delivery routes cause a change in arrival time, sites may need to delay service until the previously announced meal service time to ensure program compliance. Alternatively, you can work with your state agencies to update meal service times in accordance with route changes and publicize the new times.

11. BUILD EXCITEMENT

Creating a sense of excitement in your community about summer meals is essential to success. Last summer sponsors found that the most effective way to do this was to send postcards and flyers home with students before school let out for the summer. An example of a letter you can send home through schools is included in the appendix. Serving meals right when school lets out may increase the probability that the families who could benefit from program participation will remember where meals will be served.

When working with site supervisors, sponsors also found that a grassroots approach to outreach was an effective way to promote. In every pilot state, site supervisors who took the time to speak with their neighbors about the program in-person had the highest participation rates. This in-person approach to outreach seemed to make parents in the community feel better about the work that was being done and gave them a chance to see how they too might benefit from participation. Other site supervisors took to social media to reach out to neighbors who might be interested. This gave site supervisors an additional, personalized engagement point that helped encourage participation.

Site supervisors may find it helpful if you provide them with postcards that include when and where meals will be served. When you provide promotional materials for your site supervisors you ensure a degree of standardization across sites that can be helpful for families. You can also place flyers and postcards at key community locations like the library, grocery store, laundromat, or local social service agencies. For more ideas and resources to promote your summer program check out NKH's summer meals outreach toolkit.

12. BEGIN PROGRAM OPERATIONS

As you ramp up your efforts for the summer and once meal service has begun, many programmatic details must be managed. The summer will come faster than you think and thus it is important that you think about four important elements of planning that are key to program success.

12.1 Site Visits and Reviews

The first important element you must consider is how you will conduct site visits and site reviews. Conducting site visits and reviews is not only required by federal law but also ensures that site supervisors feel confident in their program operations. Last summer most sponsors found that it was helpful to have one person conduct all monitoring visits to create a sense of consistency across sites. This, of course, may vary by organization and organizational capacity. During the course of the summer, sponsors are required to do three monitoring visits for all sites. With additional Community Meal sites, you should plan for each round of visits to take more time than in past summers. Required visits and reviews include:

- **Pre-Operational Site Visits:** Before meal service begins, sponsors are required to visit all sites to ensure that they have the capability and facilities needed to provide meal service for the number of children they will likely serve. Last summer, sponsors found that this visit was an excellent opportunity for site supervisors to ask additional questions about program operations. While these visits may not take much time for traditional summer meal sites, plan on spending at least 20 minutes with each Community Meals sponsor to ensure that they feel excited and prepared about the program to come.

- **Site Visits:** During the first week of meal service, sponsors are required to visit all sites again. In previous summers sponsors were able to waive this visit for returning sites, but based on new guidance at the federal level, this is no longer allowable. The purpose of the first site visit is to ensure that program operations are running as planned. Last summer sponsors used this as an early opportunity to provide final reminders about the program. These visits will likely take 20 minutes as well.

- **Site Reviews:** Between the first and fourth week of meal service, sponsors are required to conduct a full site review of all sites. Sponsors are required to conduct a site review even if program operations last for less than four weeks. In most states, sponsors should expect to observe the full meal service during the review. The purpose of this visit is to ensure that sites are running in full compliance with federal law. Sponsors should expect to spend about an hour at each site review.

Federal law requires that sponsors document all site visits and site reviews. Work with your state agency to ensure that you use the correct forms for each visit type. Once you have secured the correct forms and have a plan for how you will complete the visits, work with your team to develop a record keeping process. To be in compliance with the law, sponsors must maintain all records for a minimum of three years.

12.2   Ongoing Site Promotion

The second thing you must plan for is how you will promote your sites once meal service has begun. A few weeks before meal service is scheduled to start, work with families to come up with a promotional plan that works for them. This includes a public announcement about program operations before meal service starts and continual promotion while meals are served, both of which are required for compliance with federal law. Last summer sponsors worked with sites to place a statement about service in the local paper.

When meal service starts, site supervisors are required to continually promote their sites to ensure that the site is truly open to the public. Last summer most site supervisors created posters that they placed in their windows that listed what meals would be served when. Looking back on the summer, sponsors reported they wished they had provided site supervisors with yard signs to support program promotion. While the posters allowed sites to meet requirements, some sponsors felt that a yard sign would have been more inviting for individuals that did not have a previous relationship with the site supervisor.

12.3   Program Paperwork

The third component you should be prepared for is maintaining program records. For your organization to receive federal reimbursement, you are required to keep records that detail program operations. Work with your state agency to ensure that you are collecting all required information as laws vary from state to state. In addition to records related to site visits and reviews, you should expect to track and maintain a record of the following:

- **Training Records:** Sponsors are required to keep a record of when they conducted required training and who attended. Last summer sponsors found that the easiest way to do this was to have a sign-in sheet at each training for site supervisors and administrative employees. To be consistent with federal law, records should indicate who attended, when they attended, the topics covered, and a signature of each attendee.

- **Daily Meal Count Records:** This form tracks the number of meals served at every site. All site supervisors are required to complete this form for every meal service. Last summer sponsors found it was helpful to provide a binder with blank daily meal count forms and a completed form for site supervisors to look back at as an example. While it is not required, sponsors from last summer also thought it was useful to collect daily meal count forms from sponsors at each delivery. This seemed to create a greater sense of accountability and reduced the number of misplaced forms. When possible, try to review forms on a rolling basis to ensure that site supervisors are completing the form with 100% accuracy. If you notice a mistake, ask your driver to walk through the form an additional time with the site supervisor at the next delivery.

- **Race and Ethnic Data:** One time during the summer, sponsors are required to collect racial and ethnic data from each site. You can collect this data at another scheduled site visit or site review. While accuracy is important, when sponsors are unsure of the racial or ethnic status it is allowable to guess.

While keeping detailed records can be time-consuming, doing so allows you to ensure that your program is the best it can be. Just like your records related to site visits and reviews, plan on keeping these records for at least three years. Lastly, be cognizant of any language barriers site supervisors may have. If your site supervisor speaks Spanish as their primary language, be sure to provide forms that have been translated accordingly. Most state agencies already have forms in other languages available for download on their websites.

12.4   Maintaining Open Communication

Communicating openly with your state agency and site supervisors is key to program success. Throughout the summer you should expect to receive questions from both groups on an ongoing basis. Planning for these questions in advance may help ensure smooth program operations. During the planning process think about how you will communicate changes or updates related to the following:

- **Making changes to the number of meals needed each day:** Make sure site supervisors know the process for updating the number of meals they need each day. You should expect that the number of meals needed will vary. By communicating how updates can be made, you can avoid confusion from site supervisors and potentially prevent food waste, reducing overall costs. Last summer, most sponsors provided site supervisors with contact information for one person and asked them to call or text with changes at least 48 hours in advance.

- **Adjusting program operation days:** Be clear about the process site supervisors should use if they cannot manage meal service on a specific day. All families are busy and sometimes things come up in the summer. This means that even if a site supervisor said they would be available for every day of program operation, they may not be. As a sponsor, you should have a plan for overseeing sites in an emergency situation. If a site is supposed to be open and it is actually closed, you can be found incompliant. Last summer sponsors found that one-week notice was enough time for them to prepare and a reasonable ask of site supervisors.

- **Informing your state agency:** Work with your state agency to determine how informed they would like to be. Some state agencies may want to know the details of your daily operations, while others may be more hands-off. At the start of the summer make sure you know how informed your state agency would like to be and develop a plan to update them accordingly.

13. CONCLUSION

We hope you're excited about the impact you will have this summer through the Community Meals model. Your experience and insights can have a direct impact on best practices related to the model and we look forward to learning from you throughout the summer. Thank you for the work you do to ensure that all kids have access to a healthy meal in the summertime. As questions come up, reach out to us at innovations@strength.org.

14. APPENDIX

14.1 Community Meals Outreach Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

This summer our community is piloting a new program designed to make sure that all kids in <insert community> have easy access to healthy meals.

As you may know, many families rely on school breakfast and lunch to help ease tight budgets. But when summer arrives, and school meals are no longer an option, it becomes harder to make ends meet. This summer pilot program helps families stretch their resources and ensures that children receive nutritious meals throughout the summer and return each school year ready to learn.

<Insert organization name> is looking for community volunteers to turn their yards or homes into a place all kids can get a healthy meal. Volunteers selected for the program will receive healthy, kid-friendly <insert meal types> delivered directly to their door <insert details about when meals will be delivered> that they will then serve to kids in the neighborhood. To be accepted, volunteers must agree to serve meals to children from outside their home, attend a program training and complete basic paperwork. We are excited for the opportunity to support our community through this program and encourage you to apply if this program is right for your family.

An enrollment form is attached for your convenience. If you are interested in participating in the program, please fill out the attached form and return it to <contact name> at <form pick up location> by <deadline>. You can also apply online at <online application link>. Accepted families will be notified of their acceptance by our team.

Thank you for your interest! If you have questions or need more information, call <contact name> at <contact Number> or email at <email address>.

Sincerely,
<Name>

14.2   Community Meals Site Supervisor Application

This summer our community is piloting a new program designed to make sure that all kids in <insert community> have easy access to summer meals!

<Insert organization name> is looking for community volunteers to help this pilot program be a success. Volunteers will work with <insert organization name> to turn their yards or homes into a place all kids can get a healthy meal. Volunteers selected for the program will receive healthy, kid-friendly <insert meal types> delivered directly to their door <insert details about when meals will be delivered> that they will then serve to kids in the neighborhood.

By completing this form you are expressing interest in volunteering with this program. Completing this form does not guarantee you a spot in the program. If you are selected, someone from the team will reach out with additional information. Your responses are confidential.

Contact Information

First Name: _____   Last Name: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____   State: _____   Zip: _____

Email: _____   Phone Number: _____

Application Questions

1. Why do you want to volunteer with this program?

2. How many kids do you think you can serve through the program?

3. How will you promote the program to families in your community?

_____   _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature   Today's Date

14.3   Community Meals Acceptance Letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

You have been accepted to the summer meal delivery program managed by <insert your organization name>. We are excited to have you in the program! By serving meals in your home or yard to your children and other children in the community, you will ensure that more children have the food they need this summer.

Your acceptance is contingent on completing program training. <insert details about when your training will happen and what families should expect>. At the training, you will be given additional resources that explain the program in more detail. Please let our team know if these times do not work for your schedule. Any families that to do not complete training will be unable to participate in the program.

Meal delivery will start on **<insert start date>** and end on **<insert end date>**. During the program meals will be delivered on **<insert delivery days>** at **<insert delivery window>**. You must be home during the delivery window to receive the meals. If you are unable to serve meals on a given day please let our team know at least **one week in advance** of that delivery by texting <insert contact name> at <phone number>.

You will receive <insert meal types> for each child participating in the program. Based on your application, we will be delivering meals for **<insert the number of children they listed on their application>.** If you need to make adjustments to the number of meals you need please let our team know as soon as possible by calling or texting <insert contact name> at <phone number>.

Again, we are excited to have you in this program! If you have questions or need more information, call <contact name> at <contact Number> or email at <email address>.

Sincerely,
<Name>

14.3   Community Meals Rejection Letter

 Dear Parent/Guardian,

We regret to inform you that you have not been accepted to the summer meal delivery program. There was great demand for the program this year and we were unable to accept all interested applicants. Next year we hope to run the program again to serve a greater number of families, which will require additional volunteers.

If you are interested in free summer meals for your family, meals will be provided at <insert details about other SFSP options in your community>. You can also text FOOD or COMIDA to 877-877 for additional information.

Again, we are sorry we were unable to offer you a spot in the program this summer. If you have questions or need more information, you may call <contact name> at <contact Number> or email at <email address>.

Sincerely,
<Name>