Case Study: Hunger Free Heartland

*Background and Start-up*

Hunger Free Heartland’s (HFH) primary mission is to be a catalyst to change by collaborating on solutions with the community to end childhood hunger. In 2011, The Salvation Army, Food Bank for the Heartland, and Hunger Free Heartland joined forces to bring free, nutritious summer meals to children in underserved neighborhoods through the Kids Cruisin’ Kitchen mobile meals program. A number of key partners supported the Kids Cruisin’ Kitchen effort. Feeding America and ConAgra Foods Foundation provided general funding, and the Mutual of Omaha Foundation provided funding to serve adult meals to parents. Communication and outreach support was provided by the Douglas County Health Department.

*Operating Model*

*Delivery Model*

By partnering with the Salvation Army, Western Division, HFH gained access to two disaster relief trucks that they used to deliver approximately 10,000 meals to children in need during the summer. HFH operated two mobile meals routes per day that span rural, suburban and urban settings. Each route has three site stops and runs Monday through Friday for 10 weeks of the summer. The routes are designed to serve breakfast and lunches, operating from 10:45am to 1:30pm each weekday, with each site stop lasting 30-45 minutes. Kids Cruisin’ Kitchen meets kids where they work and play by focusing on apartment complexes and parks as site stops.

*Program Operations*

HFH utilizes a vended model, where hot food is purchased from a food vendor, who delivers the food daily to where the trucks are located. The vendor unloads the food, checks it in, and loads it onto the Salvation Army trucks each morning. The vendor then picks up the empty food containers the next day. In the beginning, the program prepared food in-house. However, cost savings were realized by using a vendor, and so the program transitioned over to a vended model. While HFH acknowledges that serving hot meals is more logistically challenging, they continue to do so given that for many of the kids, this is the only hot meal they receive each day.

HFH relies on four team members per mobile route, including a paid driver, paid site monitor, and two volunteer food servers. The Salvation Army and Food Bank recruit volunteers for the program. HFH decided to incorporate volunteers primarily because they are positioned to spread the word about the program within their communities and organizations. HFH also has three paid staff people from the
organization who are partially dedicated to the program to support logistics, vendor management, site identification, outreach, and more.

Outreach for the program primarily occurs through word of mouth, placing door hangers in apartment complexes, and handing out business cards with information on the program and site locations. HFH found that bus advertising, radio ads, and billboards were less effective.

**Best Practices and Insights**

HFH shares the following insights and best practices with other organizations looking to start a mobile meals program:

- To manage fluctuations in demand, purchase shelf-stable food to keep in the mobile vehicle in the event that your planned food is not at the right temperature and cannot be served and/or demand is higher than anticipated.
- Identify inclement weather zones (which is required in Nebraska) and notify program participants from the first day where they can find you in the event of severe weather.
- Always have a contingency plan when working with volunteers (i.e., who to call if volunteers do not show up).
- Post a map online of where meal sites are located.
- Review participation information weekly in order to adjust demand assumptions at each site to minimize waste.

HFH is now focused on growth, evaluating the potential to add programming at each site, add evening meals to the overall offerings, and purchase additional vehicles to expand the number of routes operated and therefore, kids served.

For more information on the Hunger Free Heartland’s program, visit:  [http://hungerfreeheartland.org/](http://hungerfreeheartland.org/).
Case Study: CitySquare

Background and Start-up

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has hailed CitySquare’s Food on the Move program as “a model for the rest of the nation” and the organization proudly received the Governors Volunteer Award in 2013 for Community Leadership for its Food on the Move program. The program began in 2011 and initially focused on serving the Dallas, Texas area. The program has since expanded to serve Houston and Austin.

Operating Model

Delivery Model

The program serves approximately 8,500 meals daily during the summer focusing primarily on urban geographies (6,000 in Dallas, 2,000 in Houston, and 500 in Austin). In 2013, the program served approximately 250,000 meals to children and youth from low-income neighborhoods, making it the highest volume mobile meals program in the state. The program utilizes vans to run 14 different routes, stopping at a total of 100 sites each weekday. Sites include low-income apartment sites, churches, nonprofits, and summer camps.

CitySquare formed an important partnership with PepsiCo, who acts as the food vendor for the program. Originally, PepsiCo also delivered the food. Now CitySquare utilizes its own vehicles and hires drivers in order to create jobs in the local community. From a financial perspective, CitySquare has determined that it needs to serve at least 1,000 meals per day in order to make the program financially feasible. This volume necessitated the use of a food vendor, like PepsiCo, that could support large volume orders on a daily basis.

Program Operations

In order to serve 100 sites each day across the 14 routes, Food on the Move employs a “hopscotch” method with each site. Under the method, one site team will arrive at a site 15 minutes before the mobile vehicle in order to set up the picnic areas. When the mobile vehicle arrives, a second site team will distribute the food and then move on to set-up the next site. The first team will remain behind to clean up that site, before moving onto the next site to distribute the food. In order to encourage consistent participation among kids, the site teams distributed “club cards” to kids, and punched the card each time the child returned for a meal. On Friday’s the site teams collect the cards, and children that participate in the most days receive a small reward. Across the summer, Food on the Move could also determine how many children participated regularly enough to earn a fitness award, and provided those 1,400 children with certificates.

Best Practices and Insights
CitySquare highlights two critical best practices for the success of Food on the Move. First, they rely heavily on AmeriCorps members as staff. Without the 80 AmeriCorps members dedicated to their program, they would not financially be able to operate. Second, they have created a streamlined, web-based meal distribution tracking system that enables site coordinators to track daily distribution of meals at each site. This information feeds through the online system where it can then be used to update the food orders for the next day and be submitted directly to the vendor. Utilizing an online tracking and ordering system has enabled CitySquare to waste only 0.002% of its total food expenses.

CitySquare shares the following additional insights and best practices with other organizations looking to start a mobile meals program:

- Consider bringing in an organization like Playworks to conduct training and to track participation at each site.
- Negotiate with the food vendor to ensure the per-meal cost is less than the SFSP reimbursement rate, so that SFSP offsets both food and non-food costs.
- Have a system that allows leftover food to be carried forward to the following day for use.
- Utilize a family picnic style to encourage kids to stay on-site to eat.

For more information on CitySquare Food on the Move, visit:  [http://www.citysquare.org/programs/hunger/food-on-the-move/](http://www.citysquare.org/programs/hunger/food-on-the-move/)
Case Study: Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee

Background and Start-up

Second Harvest Food Bank of Northeast Tennessee started the Lunch Express mobile meals program in 2012. The program received a $50,000 start-up grant from the ConAgra Foods Foundation, which was awarded through the national Feeding America food bank network. The Food Bank started the Lunch Express to supplement meals served through their existing fixed feeding sites. They wanted to increase services focused on kids located in rural areas that could not reach fixed sites.

Operating Model

Delivery Model

The program focuses on rural areas and serves approximately 300 meals per day for about 16,500 meals per summer using four retired school buses the organization purchased. The program operates four mobile meals routes with eight stops per route each weekday for 10 weeks.

Program Operations

In order to make the operations of a geographically dispersed program work, the Food Bank stores the mobile vehicles at a centralized location in each county. The drivers and site monitors meet at the centralized location to pick-up the mobile vehicle each day. Food is prepared in-house at a local church by food bank volunteers every Wednesday. In the beginning the program used a vendor, however the lack of flexibility in being able to adjust meal counts on short notice led to their internalizing this function. All food is sourced by the Food Bank. Volunteers bag enough meals for a full week. A driver from the Food Bank will deliver the meals to the centralized locations to be loaded onto the mobile vehicles. The mobile vehicles are deployed from the centralized locations to each route. Each site stop lasts 15 minutes and kids eat on the school bus. Kids are provided with an activity sheet to take home.

Best Practices and Insights

In addition to finding a centralized location within each county in order to save on time and fuel expenses, the Food Bank shares the following insights and best practices with other organizations looking to start a mobile meals program:

- Source mobile vehicle drivers from schools (i.e., retired school bus drivers or drivers on summer break) as they already have completed background checks and are licensed.
- Focus program on rural counties that do not have existing fixed sites.
• Leverage the knowledge of social workers to identify the best site locations.

For more information on the Lunch Express, visit http://www.netfoodbank.org/. 
Case Study: Arkansas Dream Center

Background and Start-up

The Arkansas Dream Center mobile meals program started in 2013 through a partnership between Arkansas No Kid Hungry, the Hunger Relief Alliance and the Department of Human Services. The program was started as a way to supplement existing fixed feeding sites, particularly in rural areas where large distances had to be traveled in order to access the existing sites.

Operating Model

Delivery Model

The program serves 54,000 meals per summer, or approximately 800 meals per day. The program operates eight routes and serves approximately 60 total sites each day. The program duration is 11 weeks, Monday to Saturday. The Center leases vehicles for the program, in order to eliminate maintenance and insurance costs associated with purchased vehicles, and pay for vehicles only when needed in the summer.

Program Operations

The food for the program is sourced through a vendor relationship with PepsiCo. A paid driver and site monitor operate each route. At each site stop, the drive and site monitor set-up a covered picnic area and distribute meals out of coolers. In the future, the program is seeking to secure buses so that kids can come on-board to eat their meal, allowing the program to add sites that would not be possible otherwise.

Best Practices and Insights

Arkansas Dream Center shares the following additional insight and best practice with other organizations looking to start a mobile meals program:

- Take the mobile vehicle around to schools before summer break begins in order to show kids what to look for during the summer. This early outreach will build awareness of and and trust in the program.

- Find program champions that care deeply about serving kids
Case Study: NYC Department of Education

Background and Start-up

The NYC Department of Education began its SchoolFood mobile meals program in 2010 in order to serve healthy meals to children during the summer where they play. Recognizing that most children do not want to go back to their school during the summer to receive meals, they deployed their food trucks to beaches, parks, and libraries. Any child under the age of 18 is able to get free meals through the food truck.

Operating Model

Delivery Model

The program started with one food truck, leased through a grant from Share Our Strength. The program expanded to two trucks during the summer of 2011, which were outfitted with refrigeration and running water and purchased through a grant from Wal-Mart. By the end of Summer 2013, SchoolFood was operating four food trucks. The program is now serving meals 7 days per week.

Given the significant volume of children in NYC, the food trucks park at the same location for the duration of the day (11:00am to 3:30pm). By keeping the truck in the same location each day, the program is able to serve the maximum number of children in that location and not lose service time driving in traffic to different sites. Because of the heavy traffic in NYC, the program realized that they were not able to guarantee when the truck would arrive at the sites, which was confusing to children who would show up at a particular time only to find the truck had not arrived.

Program Operations

Over the years, the active engagement of community partners has enabled SchoolFood to increase participation in the program. The NYC Department of Education has engaged city agencies, hunger advocacy groups, parks and housing authorities, and other nonprofit partners to provide “boots on the ground” outreach for the program. Every week, these partners have a conference call to discuss how each mobile meals site is doing. Partners then deploy volunteers or staff to particular sites to pass out flyers and knock on doors in an effort to actively increase participation at each site. Through these partnerships, the NYC Department of Education has created a campaign-style movement around the SchoolFood program within the city that has resulted in the mobile program serving over 6,000 meals per day. While the number served through mobile meals programs is only about 6% of the more than 7.6 million total meals served by the NYC Department of Education during the summer, the Executive Director of the program is quick to note the value that the program holds for the individual children who receive meals through the program each summer.

Best Practices and Insights
The NYC Department of Education shares the following insights and best practices with other organizations looking to start a mobile meals program:

- If you are serving a large urban environment, investigate the various permits that you need to allow you to park at particular sites in order to avoid issues with other permitted vendors. Additionally, look to see if the city or state will offer subsidies for things like electricity and staff fringe benefits.

- If you are serving a large number of children (beyond the capacity of your food truck to store the meals), employ an additional vehicle with extra stock to travel with, but out of sight of the food trucks to replenish meals. SchoolFood has an extra truck with the capacity to store up to 4,000 meals, which travels around to each food truck every hour during the day to restock the food supply.

- Engage partners in your community with a common interest in seeing the program succeed and use these partnerships to galvanize a movement that increases participation among children in the program. Partners can send volunteers or staff to promote the program within their respective spheres of influence.

- In a multi-cultural urban community, it is important to translate the promotional materials into multiple languages. SchoolFood’s materials are translated in 6 languages.

- It is imperative that you understand the costs associated with each truck. To do so, reference historical participation data as a base line then monitor how many meals each truck is serving daily and balance your budget accordingly.

For more information on SchoolFood, please visit their website at: [http://www.schoolfoodnyc.org/OurPrograms/breakfast.htm#summer](http://www.schoolfoodnyc.org/OurPrograms/breakfast.htm#summer)

**Additional Reference:**

**Sponsor in Focus:** Over the first year and a half of the program, the NYC Department of Education brought together partners (i.e., parks department, housing authorities, hunger advocacy groups, and other city and nonprofit partners) to focus on increasing summer meal delivery. Eventually, they developed a system where they hold weekly phone calls during which partners come together to share information across the sites and discuss how each is doing. The partners then deploy volunteers and staff to the sites as needed to distribute flyers in 6 languages and knock on doors to promote the program in a concerted, boots on the ground effort to get more children involved in the program. This creative, collaborative “campaign style” outreach has led to considerable increases in participation.