



SFSP Action Guide



Introduction

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), federally funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and state-administered by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) School Nutrition Unit, ensures that children have access to healthy meals during the summer, which is critical for their health and well-being. When school lets out, millions of children lose access to school breakfast, lunch, and afterschool meals that are available during the regular school year. Communities across the state have an opportunity to invest in Colorado's youth by filling the summer meal gap through collaboration, innovation, and collective action.

The 2020 Community Innovation in Summer Meals Grant funded by Share Our Strength was awarded to the CDE School Nutrition Unit to expand access to summer meal sites, foster community partnerships, and promote best practices shown to maximize participation and access in the SFSP. The CDE School Nutrition Unit awarded grants of \$5,000 to four returning SFSP sponsors serving a total of over 1 million meals across 128 meal sites. This resource highlights the best practices found through the work of the awarded sponsors: Adams 12 Five Star School District, Douglas County School District, Greeley 6 School District, and Gunnison-Watershed School District. Action steps for each best practice are provided to jumpstart implementation.

Best Practices #1: Involving Community Partners

Benefit: Engaging partners in the SFSP can expand reach and help meet the unique needs of a community. Partners can help address barriers and identify new opportunities to maximize participation.

Steps to Get Started

- a. Engage key stakeholders – The first step is determining who needs to be at the table during the SFSP planning phase. These stakeholders understand the needs of their communities and can bring different perspectives to the planning phase. Examples of partnerships include:
 - i. Local governments—mayor's office, libraries, parks and recreation departments, county extension offices
 - ii. Non-profit organizations – Groups serving low-income children (e.g. YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, local food banks, food pantries, 4-H)
 - iii. Other local organizations - WIC clinics, hospitals, local businesses, faith-based organizations, housing complexes
 - iv. Families and caregivers

- b. Think outside the box with partnerships to increase program awareness, maximize participation and combine services for families. Some partners may be able to reach families directly and help promote the local summer meal program or become a summer meal site, while other partners may be able to provide funding or resources for on-site activities or meal service equipment.

Snapshot of Success:

Gunnison-Watershed School District found unexpected partners within their district and community. School transportation staff assisted the nutrition services department during school shutdowns in the spring of 2020 due to the pandemic. Transportation delivered meals to mobile meal sites. Other district staff members, such as substitute teachers, were hired as additional nutrition services staff in the summer. A coalition of hunger partners was formed to promote food access programs to the broader community.

Best Practices #2: Marketing/Outreach

Benefit: Raising awareness of summer meals is a key strategy to attract more children to summer sites and increase participation.

Steps to Get Started: Branding is an essential piece of developing a marketing plan. Branding creates an external identity for the program, increasing visibility and recognition in the community. Identify which methods of marketing and outreach are possible for your program. Possible marketing and outreach methods are below:

- a. Media and events – Engage the media through public service announcements (PSAs), hold a summer kick-off event, promote via local newspaper.
- b. In-person outreach – find trusted organizations in the community to help spread the word about the summer meals program. Common trusted organizations include schools, community centers, and faith-based organizations. Grassroot efforts through local community groups can help spread the word and may volunteer their time to assist with on-site activities at meal sites.



- c. Social media – Online outreach, including paid advertising and social media posts, can reach a wide audience for relatively low or no cost. It is important to include a direct link to where program information is available if it is not included in the original post.
- d. Additional tools and resources for marketing and outreach:
 - i. [CDE Summer Outreach toolkit](#)
 - ii. [No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices "Promote Summer Meals" webpage](#)

Snapshot of Success: Greeley 6 School District utilized grant funding through the Community Innovation in Summer Meals grant for marketing and promotion of the summer meal program. Marketing the meal program at Greeley 6 starts with the staff. All staff wear shirts advertising their program. Large magnets were purchased for school buses and yard signs and banners were displayed throughout the community. To encourage students to return to meal sites, golden tickets were placed in meal bags on various bus routes. Youth participants who found the golden tickets could choose a prize, including summer games or toys. A catchy tune was played through a speaker on the bus routes, like an ice cream truck. When families heard the tune, they knew the bus was in the neighborhood and meals could be picked up. Social media posts were shared strategically and frequently, including targeting social media platforms popular to youth. Posts were shared on community pages to ensure families in need were reached.

Best Practices #3: Adult Meals

Benefit: Serving adult meals in the SFSP can provide an opportunity for families to eat together. This may help to increase program participation and reduce the stigma associated with receiving free summer meals.

Steps to Get Started:

- a. Consider starting small with a pilot site. When choosing which site is right for your pilot, choose an open site where adults are more likely to accompany their children (i.e. apartment complexes). Promote the availability of adult meals in marketing and outreach efforts.
- b. Determine if adults will be charged for meals or if grants and donations may be used to cover the cost of the adult meals. It will be necessary to know the cost of each adult meal – both in food cost and labor – to ensure the adult meal costs are covered.
- c. Think about developing modified meals that use the same ingredients as the youth meals but may appeal more to adults.

Snapshot of Success: Douglas County School District RE-1 (DCSD) used grant funding to provide adult meals free of charge at apartment complex sites, allowing the entire family to have a meal and eat together. They found that children felt more comfortable seeking out and accepting free meals when their parent or guardian could do the same. DCSD saw daily adult participation and increased participation with kids. DCSD played a unique role in being present for the community as they were able to provide free meals for the whole family.

Best Practices #4: Mobile Meals

Benefit: Implementing mobile meal routes in the SFSP can help to meet the needs of the community. Mobile meals can improve the access that children have to free summer meals and increase program participation.

Steps to Get Started:

- a. Determine mobile routes and serving locations. Consider where there may be clusters of participants who currently do not have access to programs or transportation. Look for areas that are easily accessible and [area eligible](#).
- b. Plan for mobile meal service needs:
 - i. Transportation: Determine how the meals will be delivered and served. Meals can be delivered via vans, buses, or mobile food truck. Determine if meals can be served and counted directly out of the vehicle or if a “pop-up” serving station is needed.
 - ii. Equipment: Determine what equipment is needed to keep foods at temperature during the duration of meal service (i.e. coolers, ice packs, or hot boxes). If the sponsor does not have equipment on hand, additional equipment may need to be purchased or donated.
 - iii. Menu planning: When menu planning for mobile meals, think through the ease of preparing and serving menu items.
 - iv. Staffing: Determine who is responsible for the delivery and service of mobile meals. If the sponsor does not have staff available or vehicles for service, think about partnering with a school transportation department or partner with vehicles for delivery.
- c. Establish how mobile meals will be promoted. Seek out partners that may assist in promotions and marketing.
- d. For more information on starting a mobile program, visit the No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practice [Mobile Meals Toolkit](#).



Snapshot of Success: Adams 12 Five Star Schools (Adams 12 SD) implemented five mobile meal sites with the awarded funds, doubling the number of total meal sites to ten. The mobile meal sites reached families who would not otherwise have access to the traditional meal sites due to distance away from their homes. A mile between a home and the site was enough to cause barriers in accessing the site. Mobile meals allowed Adams 12 SD to identify and provide meals to a cluster of homeless families, migrant families, and children in need of a meal. A comprehensive marketing approach was used to increase participation, including yard signs and social media. Adams 12 SD worked with leasing offices of low-income complexes to promote the program and utilized student volunteers who canvassed neighborhoods to help spread the word.

Best Practices #5: Applying for Funding

Benefit: Additional funding from outside sources can provide additional tools and resources for a program that may not be possible through SFSP reimbursement alone.

Steps to Get Started:

- a. Identify what your program needs additional funding to support. This may include technology (i.e. tablets for meal counting) and equipment for mobile meals, marketing support, or supplies for activities at sites.
- b. Seek out local organizations or businesses in the community who may have funding available to support the summer meal program. When working with partners, have a clear plan of what their funding will be used to support.
- c. Apply for grants – Many organizations have grants that support summer meal programs: local and national hunger organizations, state agencies, USDA, local governments, and community-based organizations. When applying for grants, write a compelling story explaining the need for funding, include specific examples of how the funding will be used if awarded, and details of the desired outcome.

Snapshot of Success: Adams 12 Five Star School District received the Share Our Strength Community Innovation in Summer Meals grant to fund their first mobile meals program. The sponsor secured additional funding from another source to cover the costs of adult meals. A key takeaway from Adams 12 School District is to adopt the “just do it” mentality. This additional funding allowed the program to take the leap and feel secure enough to implement new best practices. After implementation, the sponsor realized the increased participation could cover the costs on its own and expects to run a mobile meal route in the future.

Conclusion

Implementing these best practices can help maximize participation and access to nutritious meals during the summer. Developing strong community partnerships, raising awareness of summer meals, serving adult meals, or incorporating mobile meal routes can be used to remove the barriers that children and families may experience when accessing summer meals. As part of implementation, programs should also consider how outcomes will be evaluated. Identifying successes and opportunities can help determine how to best implement the best practices for future program operations. For additional resources, visit No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices and the CDE Summer Outreach Toolkit.

