



SUMMER MEALS IN YOUR COMMUNITY – ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT FOR MAYORS

It's a stark reality that children face heightened risks of hunger, obesity, and learning loss during the summer months. This is a pressing issue that demands your attention. Thankfully, summer nutrition programs exist to combat these challenges. The need for nourishing meals doesn't cease with the school day or the onset of summer. Shockingly, less than 14% of children from low-income households benefit from a summer meal. This is where mayors can play a crucial role in ensuring that children have access to summer meals.

What is the Summer Meals Program?

Federal summer nutrition programs are funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and administered by a designated agency in each state. Most program providers choose to serve meals using the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), which is available to schools and qualifying non-profit organizations. However, schools can also choose to serve summer meals through the National School Lunch Program's Seamless Summer Option (SSO).

The Summer Meals program was designed to reach kids with the nutrition they need over summer vacation, but has historically only reached a fraction of the kids who need it - In fact, 6 out of 7 kids who may have needed summer meals have historically missed out. That's because major barriers stand in the way, particularly in rural communities, where families face many barriers when accessing summer meals, including lack of transportation, fuel costs, work schedules, and extreme weather.

In 2022, Congress enacted significant improvements to how we reach kids with food they need during the summer, including a permanent, nationwide Summer EBT program, beginning in the summer of 2024, to provide eligible families with a \$40 grocery benefit per child per month, and a nationwide non-congregate option for summer meals programs in rural areas without traditional congregate sites to allow meals to be taken home or delivered directly to children.

In the Summer of 2024, dozens of states, U.S. territories, and Tribes have opted into the Summer EBT program, a game-changer for ending child hunger. This summer, it's expected to help the families of nearly 21 million kids stretch their grocery budget and provide nutritious meals at home while kids are out of school. [The full list of participating states is available here.](#)

Summer Meals Resources

- [Summer Meals Fact Sheet](#)
- [USDA Summer EBT Outreach Toolkit](#)
- [Non-Congregate Summer Meals](#)

Ways to Engage

One of the major barriers to children participating in Summer Meals is the knowledge of the program's existence. By shedding light on the importance of summer nutrition, mayors can raise awareness about the Summer Meals programs in their communities. There are several strategic ways that Mayors can help raise awareness:

1) Issue a Summer Meals Proclamation

Use this [Summer Meals proclamation template](#) to declare the availability and importance of Summer Meals in your community. By magnifying the importance of ending summer hunger, your community will increase awareness of Summer EBT, amplify the availability of Summer Meals in your community, and reinforce ending childhood hunger as a priority for your administration. *Be sure to amplify the message by promoting the proclamation through local media and social media!*

2) Pave the Way for Summer Meals Sites in Your Community

In many towns and cities, summer meals sponsors must be granted access to public facilities like community centers and parks. Make this approval process seamless so meal sites can open up quickly where children gather, learn, and play.

3) Promote the No Kid Hungry Summer Meals Texting Hotline and Meal Finder

Text "FOOD" or "COMIDA" to 304-304 or visit [here](#) (English) or [here](#) (Spanish) to find their nearest meal site. Check out No Kid Hungry's [Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#) to download sample graphics, flyers, and social media language for easy outreach and promotion. Leverage existing communications channels, including your city's website, 311 or 211 call centers, and newsletters, and include a reminder after city press conferences or community meetings.



Visit a Summer Meals Site!

Experience the program in action by visiting a Summer Meals site while also leveraging media interest to raise awareness in your community. During a site visit, you can:

- Engage with children, parents, and families. *Try taking a turn serving meals!*
- Listen and learn about the experiences of Summer Meals providers.
- Invite and host reporters to publish a story about Summer Meals. *Be sure to share ways how children can access meals in their neighborhoods!*
- Build relationships with community members.

Kick it up a notch!

Consider sponsoring a Summer Meals kick-off or spike-event. These high energy events are a great way to increase awareness and boost participation. Kick-off events are best held in June and spike events are mid-summer to help reinvigorate participation in Summer Meals.

For questions, contact:

Aaron Goldstein, Senior Manager, Local Government Relations at agoldstein@strength.org