

Making Summer Meals a Breeze

Maine Summer Meals
Best Practices Manual
2012



Acknowledgments

The Maine Hunger Initiative's experience and success with the 2011 Summer Meals Program would not have been possible without dedication from the following:

The Sponsors

Bon Appétit/Saint Joseph's College, Stuart Leckie, Amy Russell, Charlie Morton
East End Kids Katering, Lynn McGrath and Anna Falconieri
Freeport Community Services, Sue Mack and Deb Daggett
Portland Public Schools, Ron Adams and Dawn Pottle
South Portland Schools, Martha Spencer and Manuela Welsch

The Sites

Building Blocks Child Care, Sue Galbraith
Casco Recreation Department, Beth Latsey
City of Hope, Pastor Greg Carter, Sue Schnell
Freeport Community Services, Sue Mack, Deb Daggett
Harrison Recreation Department, Paula Holt
Harrison United Parish Church, Pastor Franklin Anderson
Kaler School, Diane Lang
Landry Village, Michael Hulsey, Jamie Hussey
Morse Street School, Thomas Ambrose, Ginny McMannis, Guidi Gill
Naples Recreation Department, Harvey Price
Sebago Warming Hut, Jim Libby
Thornton Heights United Methodist Church, Lynne Campbell
Village View, Helen Kincaid

Key Partners

Food Research and Action Committee (FRAC)
Healthy Maine Partnerships, Zoe Miller, Jennifer Thibodeau, Tim Fuller
Senator Justin Alford
The Maine Department of Education, Gail Lombardi
United States Department of Agriculture, FNS Northeast Regional Staff

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About the Maine Hunger Initiative

In 2008, in response to a systemic hunger crisis that had grown unabated for decades, Preble Street created the Maine Hunger Initiative (MHI) to address the immediate food needs of Cumberland County and to develop long-term solutions to end hunger.

Preble Street Maine Hunger Initiative (MHI) is a landmark partnership of six statewide organizations—Preble Street, AARP of Maine, Maine Center for Economic Policy, Maine Council of Churches, Maine Equal Justice Partners, and the Muskie School of Public Service. These six partner organizations work together to advocate for solutions to end hunger in Maine. Collaborative efforts include:

- Identifying public policy priorities and supporting anti-hunger legislation
- Organizing testimony by people who experience food insecurity
- Advocating for increased utilization of USDA federal nutrition programs
- Helping to initiate and lead the Campaign for Food Security in Cumberland County
- Participating in the North East Regional Anti-Hunger Network and the National Anti-Hunger and Opportunity Corps

At MHI, we work to:

- Unify and strengthen the efforts of Cumberland County food pantries
- Improve access to the Food Supplement Program and other food resources
- Increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program
- Research and implement best practices with food pantries across the county
- Empower people in poverty to increase public awareness of hunger and create solutions
- Create food sourcing partnerships (e.g., Farm to Pantry Initiative)

Through a food pantry provider survey, MHI has found that approximately 5,000 households in Cumberland County depend on food pantries each month. In 1977, there were two food pantries in Cumberland County. Just 33 years later, there are 50, 25% which have opened in the last five years.

MHI staff spends time at food pantries providing training and technical assistance to providers and offering resources and referrals to clients. Food pantries are currently working hard to feed their neighbors. Expanding utilization of USDA federal nutrition programs ultimately makes for a strong economy. For example every \$5 in Food Supplement benefits generates in \$9 in economic activity (USDA).

In 2010, the Maine Hunger Initiative turned our attention to increasing utilization of the USDA's Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). This manual is a reflection of our research and experience.

Our goal is to create a blueprint for a sustainable system where federal, state, and municipal governments, non-profit and for-profit businesses and private charitable groups can work together so that no child goes without access to a summer meal. We hope that this manual will enable similar work to take root and strengthen in other areas across the state and country.

About this Guide

This guide is intended to complement the USDA guide to the Summer Food Service Program (Summer Meals Program) available in Maine through the Department of Education (DOE). This official guide is an excellent source of information about the rules and fine points of the program and includes information necessary to opening and operating a summer meals site not included in this document. However, as we began to sift through the vast body of USDA and state-created guidance in preparation for opening new sites, we found that much of the information that we, as first-timers, were seeking was difficult to locate.

In response to reports of significant need for summer food support for families the Maine Hunger Initiative began facilitating the opening of 11 new summer meal sites in Cumberland County. The Maine Hunger Initiative has produced this manual to help anyone interested in starting their own Summer Meals Program.

This information in this guide will help you determine if starting a Summer Meals Program is a good option for your community, as well as how to choose a time, location, and food provider, and everything else you'll need to create a successful site. We aim to outline exactly what is necessary to make a Summer Meals Program happen. In doing so, we hope to make it clear that this program is flexible, well-supported, and very doable.

The advice in this guide primarily comes from the experience of the Maine Hunger Initiative in starting and operating 11 new sites in Casco, Freeport, Harrison, Naples, Portland, South Portland, and Sebago. We also conducted interviews with people who have had many years of experience with the Summer Meals Program in Portland, Westbrook, and Brunswick, as well as with the Department of Education.

The Maine Hunger Initiative, a program of Preble Street, is committed to providing low-barrier services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty, and to advocate for solutions to these problems.

This philosophy is manifested in our work and throughout this guide. Our preference and emphasis was on creating "open sites" which are open to anyone and serves meals to anyone 18 and under. However, we do recognize that other approaches might be more in line with your organization and have done our best to include multiple ways of running a site.

Hunger in Maine

Food pantries in Maine report an increase in the need to supply families in their community with food during the summer months. Families with children who receive free and reduced meals at school during the year must often stretch budgets and seek additional food assistance during the summer vacation months. For a family with two children who qualify for a school breakfast and lunch, summer can mean the cost of 20 extra meals added to a weekly family budget that is already tight.



The Summer Meals Program is an effective response to childhood and teenage hunger but is currently underutilized.

Thanks to Maine Hunger Initiative's advocacy efforts, the legislature passed LD 860 "An Act to Reduce Student Hunger" in the spring of 2011. A revolutionary step for Maine's schools, the passage of this law calls for school districts to create a plan to offer a free Summer Meals Program in their district. While the legislation does not strictly mandate schools to provide a Summer Meals Program, the passage of LD 860 has brought the issue of childhood hunger to light amongst Maine's legislative and educational communities.

In 2012, the U.S. Department of Agriculture ranked Maine as the 7th hungriest state in the nation. The Maine Children's Alliance 2011 Kid's Count Data Book reports that over 84,000 of Maine's children qualify for free and reduced school lunch. Despite these statistics, only 15% of Maine's qualifying children receive summer meals. In Cumberland County 12,465 hungry children receive free and reduced lunches each day during the school year but only 1,723 meals are served on a daily basis during the summer.

When children live in families facing food insecurity and hunger, their brain architecture is affected. This causes harm to their physical, mental, social and emotional health throughout their lives. "Investing in effective public infrastructure to protect young children's nutritional health promotes family stability, and improves their educational achievement, productivity and future earnings (FRAC).

Childhood hunger is a serious problem in Maine:

- 18.2% (48,733) children under 18 live in poverty
- 23.5% (15,752) children under age 5 in poverty
- 46.1% (84,496) school children eligible for free and reduced lunch
- 27.6% (75,889) children receive Food Supplemental Program benefits

There is clearly a need for free summer meals for kids and teens across Maine. The state of Maine faces unique challenges in reaching the eligible children during the summer months. A major challenge we face is that much of Maine is rural. Transportation can be difficult both for getting food to hungry children and getting children to meal sites. Luckily, there are many options and models for running a Summer Meals Program.

You find information in here to help you determine which model is most feasible for you and what role you can play in implementing the Summer Meal Program in your community.

Hunger in Maine: An overview

- In Maine, 84,496 children receive free and reduced school lunch during the school year
- In Cumberland County, 12,465 children receive free and reduced lunch during the school year
- In Cumberland County only 1,723 children receive a free lunch during the summer months

About the Summer Food Service Program



The Summer Food Service Program began in 1968 as a means of supplying nutritious meals to summer programs in low-income areas. In 1975 Congress, in order to reach the maximum amount of hungry children, expanded the program to serve children in low-income neighborhoods regardless of their enrollment in programming. It is now the largest federal resource offering funds to local communities to provide meals to children in the summer.

The program acts as an extension of the school year's National School Lunch Program that offers free and reduced meals to all eligible school children. The Summer Meals Program does not have eligibility or residency requirements for sites located in neighborhoods and/or school districts where over 50% of the children are eligible for free and reduced meals or below 185% poverty level.

The Summer Meals Program is federally funded by the USDA and has the capacity to serve all eligible children. Last July over 2.8 million children were served free summer meals through the program nationwide, however statistics show that only 1 in 7 children who receive free and reduced lunch during the school year received a free lunch during the summer (FRAC). In other words, 6 out of 7 children who could benefit from the USDA's free Summer Meals Program are not being reached.

How do we solve this problem? This is where YOU come in....

Getting started: Preliminary considerations

What does a summer meal site look like?

A "site" is the physical location where summer meals are served. Meals can either be made on-site and served or brought from another location to be served. This past summer MHI worked with new sites in urban, suburban, and rural Cumberland County. In order to give you a sense of the diversity of summer meals sites, the scope of the program, and the successes and challenges of the first year, throughout this manual we offer you four short case studies of three very different first-year programs.



Above: Naples town beach, a popular swimming hole in the summer becomes a popular summer meal site



Above: South Portland, Landry Village subsidized housing uses their community room as SFSP site

*Look for these site profiles throughout this manual!

Q: "Could my community use a summer meal site?"

A: "Yes!"

The Summer Meals Program is intended to serve kids and teens free nutritious meals during the summer months, when the free and reduced meals that they would otherwise receive at school are not available to them. The areas that benefit most from a meal site are often where over 50% of the children 18 and under are eligible for free and reduced meals. (See section Identifying Prospective Meal Sites)

Your first step is to find out if there are already summer meal sites in your area. To find out where there is a summer meal site in your area dial 2-1-1, go to <http://www.211maine.org> or contact the Maine Department of Education at 624-6843 or visit their website <http://www.maine.gov/education/sfs/sfsp.html>.

If there is already a site in your neighborhood:

- a) Contact the sponsor/site coordinator see how you can become involved
- b) Find out what part of town the site is located in and if there is a need for a second site

Even if your community already has a site, don't stop there. It is very possible that it could be a huge plus to have more than one site.

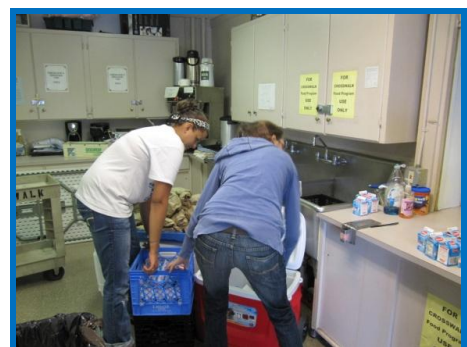
If there is not a site in your area and you feel that your community could benefit from one, we urge you to get involved in starting one! This guide might be full of information, but in our experience operating a summer meals site is simpler than it seems on paper, especially when you utilize the resources that are available to you. We urge you to look into what organizations in the community might already be doing work that you can build off of, rather than starting a summer meals site from scratch. Be creative! Perhaps a daycare is already providing meals for their children, the town's swimming lessons coincide with lunchtime, or a local church wants to be more involved in hunger issues. (See section Key Players and Responsibilities)

Key players in the Summer Meals Program

There are many different roles in the world of summer meals! Below you will find a list of key players who together fulfill the important tasks of recordkeeping and administration, volunteer recruitment and coordination, meal preparation, meal service, community outreach/publicizing, and advocacy.

What role should you play? Use these questions to help you assess what is the most appropriate role for you or your organization in the planning a Summer Meals Program.

Sponsor: The sponsor is ultimately responsible for carrying out the Summer Meals Program. Sponsors are responsible for creating a budget, ordering the food, creating menus, meal preparation and distribution and volunteer



recruitment and training. The sponsor's responsibilities can also be split between organizations, for example one organization can handle all of the administrative tasks, volunteer recruitment and training, while the contracting organization (a local food vendor) can handle meal preparation and distribution. The sponsor must be a registered 501(c)3. Sponsors are also responsible for conducting site reviews and making sure the sites are running according to USDA guidelines. All meals served through the Summer Meals Program must be nutritious and meet the national USDA standards, which include at least 1 serving of milk, 2 servings of fruits and vegetables, 1 serving of grain, and 1 serving of protein.

Could you or your organization be a sponsor?

- a) Is your organization a registered 501(c)3, or can you partner with one?
- b) Do you have a fully-functioning kitchen?
- c) Do you have food service capabilities? Are you able to order food from an industrial food vendor and put together a menu? If not do you have the ability to make arrangements with a local school or food vendor to purchase meals from them?
- d) Do you have experience working within a budget?
- e) Do you have the staff to prepare the food and the capacity to recruit and train volunteers to carry out the program at different sites?
- f) Do you have a vehicle and/or staff/volunteers to deliver prepared meals to sites?
- g) Can you maintain clear records and provide the necessary reports to the Maine Department of Education?

Site supervisor: Handles some volunteer management as well as site logistics (keys, trash removal, cold storage space, meal counts, etc.)

Could you be a site supervisor?

- a) Do you work or volunteer at a place where many kids congregate during the summer?
- b) Are you familiar with the community in which the site is located?
- c) Do you have refrigeration on-site and a place to store food?
- d) Are you open to assisting the sponsor with volunteer training and management?
- e) Are you confident in your ability to plan site logistics and programming?

Volunteers or staff support: Trained by sponsoring organization about USDA summer meals protocol and site-specific logistics as well as sponsor-specific

guidelines. Responsibilities include serving meals at lunch sites, facilitating educational, fun activities during meal time.

Could you be a volunteer/volunteer coordinator/volunteer group?

- a) Are you a part of a group or organization that is looking for volunteer or community service opportunities?
- b) Are you an individual with extra time on your hands during the summer months?

Other supporting roles: Could you be...

A partnering agency?

- a) Do you have connections with local agencies and entities?
- b) Are you interested in facilitating the opening of new summer meal sites or strengthening current sites?
- c) Do you have staff time to maintain your support efforts throughout the summer?

A partner in community outreach?

- a) Are you involved with a group that has a connection to parents and children?
- b) Do you enjoy sharing information with community members?
- c) Can you publicize the summer meals program in your community?

An advocate for hunger issues?

- a) Do you have a passion for reducing hunger but don't have the time or the resources to start or expand upon a Summer Meals Program?
- b) Educate yourself and advocate for hunger issues in Maine! Read through this manual and check out our appendix to get started.

The first-year experience

Do not get discouraged if you serve fewer kids than you anticipated, if you need to recruit more volunteers, or you decide to change the way you do things halfway through the summer. The first summer is a process of spreading the word, ironing out logistics, and building trust within the community. Many families are understandably skeptical of the program, waiting to find "the catch" behind the free meal. It is not uncommon for first-year sites to see daily participations rates in the single digits.

During the second summer once you are more established you can create a focused plan to address the challenges from the previous summer. This is when you can focus more on building up your programming and community outreach and continue increasing the site's accessibility and scale.

By the third summer, many families have made these meals part of their routine and you can expect to see larger numbers of meals served.

Keys to success

1

Accessible and appealing site location - A well-chosen site location makes it easy for children and teens to get to lunch (and want to come)!

2

Creative partnering and community involvement - The more people who are invested in making a site successful, the better! Round up your partners - open up your summer meal planning meetings to the community.

3

Dedicated staff or volunteers - A lot goes into managing meal sites, from training volunteers, doing outreach, filling out paperwork, and providing programming. You want to find people who are passionate about the program and are willing to go above and beyond to make this program a great experience for kids.

4

Programming and fun activities - Children are more likely to come to a site where they will have a good time in addition to receiving a good meal. Creating a fun environment can be as simple as having board games and art supplies available or playing a game of basketball or four square.

Freeport Community Services: First-time sponsor and site

Background: Freeport Community Services (FCS) has a long history of serving Freeport and the surrounding communities of Pownal and Durham, including running a food pantry, clothing closet, and offering community meals. Equipped with a commercial kitchen, dedicated volunteers, and a strong belief in serving those in need FCS decided to become a SFSP sponsor and site. The teen center, located in the basement, was chosen to be the primary meal site. After conversations and planning meetings it was decided to include Village View, a low-income housing complex within walking distance, as an additional site. FCS decided to start out by serving three meals a week in order to build a strong foundation with the intent of going up to five meals a week in year two. They also chose to prepare predominately hot meals prepared by FCS volunteers and Project ABLE workers.

Successes: The menu was different every week and featured everything from homemade macaroni and cheese to pumpkin muffins. Even though making these meals from scratch required great effort, FCS has devoted volunteers who were happy to put in the extra tender loving care needed to prepare these meals. As the summer progressed FCS started thinking about expanding their operation, FCS decided to "pilot" two more sites at the end of the summer. Because of the distance FCS prepared and delivered cold meals at another nearby housing complex and to a local elementary school. While this expansion happened late in the summer, the sites created a partnership that will continue into next summer.

Challenges: The best way to learn where your site should be located is by trial and error. For FCS the site in downtown Freeport at their teen center never attracted significant numbers whereas the site at the Village View housing grew slowly and served an average of ten children per day. While Freeport's food was high-quality and responsive to the children's preferences, figuring out what kids liked to eat - and in what portions - was a summer-long process that required a lot of communication. It also meant having to figure out the best way to package and deliver the meals.

Steps in the process

In this section we work through the first round of questions that you'll need to answer before registering your site.

WHO?

Finding a sponsor

In summer-meals lingo, the 'sponsor' is the person or organization that administers the program and is responsible for organizing the meals. Traditional sponsors include school lunch departments and companies that provide lunch for local colleges or nursing homes. Other organizations without food service experience have chosen to be sponsors and have prepared and served meals and have done so quite successfully.

If you are considering becoming a sponsor and would like to provide your own meals but are not currently a food service program you'll need to make sure that your kitchen space meets the state requirements, that you have staff to prepare and distribute the meals and that you are comfortable ordering large amounts of food and putting together menus that meet nutritional guidelines. If you don't feel that you have the capacity to produce the meals, you may consider vending out this responsibility to an established food vendor.

Keep in mind that in addition to organizing the meals, the sponsor is responsible for administrative duties which will include training, paperwork, and reporting.

A statewide list of sponsors for 2011 can be found here:

https://portal.maine.gov/sfsr/sfsrdev.sponsor_county_report.select_date

We urge you to contact sponsors in your area to see whether they could sponsor a new site or to provide guidance to you as a new sponsor.

WHERE?

Identifying prospective meal sites

Location, location, location!! A good location is the first major key to success. There are two big things to consider when choosing the best place for a site. First, do kids and teens already come here for another reason or is it easy to get to? Second, can it qualify as an "open" site? "Open" sites are open to anyone (18 and under) and have no eligibility requirements.

If the location does not qualify as an “open” site you will need to enroll children in the program and can only receive reimbursement for qualifying children.

To be an “open” site you must meet certain criteria. There are two primary ways to qualify as an “open” site:

1) Utilize school free and reduced meals data

- If 50% or more of the students attending a school qualify for free and reduced meals then you may have an open site at that school or within the neighborhoods served by this school.
- To access this information use the Maine Department of Education’s Free and Reduced Lunch Report:

https://portal.maine.gov/sfsr/sfsrdev.ed534.ed534_parameters

2) Utilize census tract data

- If 50% or more of the households in a census block are at or below 185% of the federal poverty level, then your site can qualify as an open site.
- To access this information use the FRAC Summer Meals Mapper:

<http://216.55.182.132/FairData/SummerFood/map.asp?command=scope&map=0>

If your community has identified a targeted area that could benefit from the Summer Meals Program, but does not fall within qualifying school or census tract data, you may be able to use local data to qualify a meal site. Contact the Dept of Education to discuss how you can further explore this option.

Once you've found a qualifying area, it's time to identify the perfect site. We have worked with successful sites at town beaches or parks, schools, in community rooms of recreation centers or housing complexes, and at faith-based organizations.

WHEN?

Choosing meal times and options

The Summer Food Service Program includes breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks. Each site can receive reimbursement for up to two meals a day. You can receive reimbursement for a meal and a snack each day (with 2 hours between meal times), you can receive reimbursement for breakfast and lunch or dinner, you cannot receive reimbursement for lunch and dinner together as a pair. While lunch is the most commonly served meal, it may not be the meal that makes the most sense for

your target area. Think about what resources are available in your area and the needs of those that you may be serving. Many sponsors say that it is most economical to serve breakfast and lunch. If timed correctly, these meal pairs provide children with the maximum amount of nutrition to help them stay full and nourished throughout the day.

Another option is to serve meals only a few days a week. Especially for first-time sponsors, this option could be a good way to 'test the waters' to figure out logistics, finances, see how well attended a site might be, and get feedback about meal quality and menu choices before diving in to making meals five days a week. The drawback to this approach is that when meals are not served every day it is difficult for a families to keep track of what days meals are served.

So that children have access to a free meal year round sponsors should offer meals as close as possible to the start and end dates of the school year.

Naples Town Beach: Bringing lunch to where the kids are

Background: Naples has a highly attended Parks and Recreation program, a large space, and kitchen facility that is located directly across the street from the town beach. The town beach is a natural congregating place for Naples residents during the summer. Meals were delivered for the children attending the recreation program and for the children at the beach. The two food pantries that operate in Naples were great sources for volunteer support.

Successes: On any given summer weekday the Naples site at the town beach was serving approximately 50 lunches to local children, and the rec. site served 35. The success of the Naples summer lunch site in its first year can be mainly attributed to the prime location of the site. Being placed directly where children flock during the summer was crucial. Lunch became an added benefit for beachgoers, and the mix of summer residents and year-round residents helped to break down any stigmas associated with utilizing the free lunch program. Articles in local newspapers and word of mouth about the program helped to spread the word. Soon families and daycares started coming just for lunch on days when they were not planning a trip to the beach for sun or swimming.

Challenges: Early on, it was decided to operate the rec. program and the town beach as two separate sites. Communication between the town beach volunteers and the rec. staff was often a challenge. Leftover meals would get mixed up in the refrigerator which affected the meal count. To solve this problem separate places were designated in the refrigerator and a dry erase board was put up so that volunteers could write notes and track meal counts. Lessons learned in their first summer will surely be put to good use next summer to make the program even more successful and streamlined.

Summer meals delivery models

Maine's rural communities are underserved by the Summer Meals Program. Outlined below are four different models for how a sponsor and site(s) can work together. While the distance between sites in rural areas can sometimes be a challenge, it should not be seen as a barrier to providing meals.



Choosing the best model for you

1

The multiple-site delivery model: A sponsor prepares lunches for multiple sites and then delivers meals to the different sites. While gas money is expensive, this model can be economical in the long run if the sponsor is receiving reimbursement for a large number of meals. This model is also beneficial to the sponsor because it allows for more site oversight and daily contact with the site and volunteers.

2

The multiple-site pick-up model: This model is most often used when sponsors are working with local day camps and other children's programs or sites that have site supervisors or volunteers who are willing to pick up the meals. This can work well for a sponsor whose sites are located near each other? For sponsors with sites that are spread out, it may work well for the sponsor to deliver to one or more centrally located site and for others to pick up their meals at these other locations.

3

The on-site sponsor model: This model is most efficient for sites that have a working kitchen and programming for kids. The site staff makes the lunches and serves them on-site. The sponsor is not limited to serving strictly her location; rather she can deliver to additional sites as well (see models 1 and 2).

4

The mobile site model: For extremely rural areas where there is no centrally-located site that children can access, a mobile program may be most appropriate. Lunches are made by the sponsor and are sent with either sponsor employees or volunteers in a vehicle that makes timed stops at designated "site" locations where children live or play. In an area where houses are miles apart, a mobile summer meals vehicle might stop for a brief period of time at sites along a given route.

NOTE: *If transportation of meals is a barrier for both the sponsor and the site, contact your local Agencies on Aging, Meals on Wheels, or other volunteer organizations to see if there is already a meal transportation service that you can link up with to get the meals to the sites. Get creative! Is there a volunteer that is willing to transport meals in their own car?*

Can we AFFORD to do this? Financing your program

Summer meals have several inherent expenditures, including:

- Food
- Containers
- Labor
- Transportation (gas)
- Printing (for menus, flyers, volunteer training packets)*
- Additional program supplies

Per meal reimbursement rates (changes annually)	
Breakfast	\$1.90
Lunch or Supper	\$3.33
Snack	\$0.80

*The cost of advertising and community outreach is more intensive in the first few years of a site's operation.

The most obvious source of financial support comes from USDA federal SFSP reimbursement. The reimbursement goes towards food, program supplies, administrative costs, and transportations costs. For many providers, these reimbursements are enough to cover costs. Others find other sources of funding, such as grants or donations, to help cover the costs. There are also several ways to reduce program costs. For example-it is most cost-effective to choose sites like recreation camps that already have paid staff to serve the meals and/or oversee the site volunteers.

Tips for financial success

- Get food for the summer meals program donated
- Have a local business/agency cover printing costs for outreach materials
- Recruit volunteers to make the meals
- Recruit volunteers to transport/deliver meals
- Encourage communication between sponsors and sites to reduce left over meals and overall waste
- Use reusable containers for packaging
- Apply for grants available through Share Our Strength and other local organizations
- Another way to reduce waste is to serve foods that kids want to eat

Once you know who will prepare your meals, where and when they will be served, and how your budget will work, you are ready to fill out the first round of paperwork. Go to USDA's 2012 Site Supervisor's Guide for details on this process: <http://www.summerfood.usda.gov/library/HandBooks/SiteSupervsGuide.pdf>

Next steps

The topics in the following sections do not need to be addressed prior to registering. However, getting a jump start will help make the whole process less stressful, and ultimately a better experience for everyone involved. Volunteer recruitment, meal site outreach and programming are essential components in reaching as many children and teens as possible. Remember, dynamic and well-organized sites are fun for the volunteers and the kids!

On-site operations

All summer meal sites are run differently, but most utilize a combination of staff and volunteers. It is possible for meal sites to be run entirely by volunteers as long as there is adequate oversight and training provided by the sponsor. It is important for each site to have a "site supervisor", a person who has been thoroughly trained by the sponsor and is responsible for the operation of the meal service at the site. This role may be filled by a staff member or a volunteer. For example this could be a recreation director, property manager, food program staff, or a dedicated volunteer. This person will likely be very involved in volunteer recruitment, training and management. Other site personnel, either paid staff or volunteers, will be responsible for meal service and clean up, as well as program outreach and organizing site activities.

Volunteer recruitment

Volunteer recruitment can be a time consuming process, so getting a head start is always a good idea. Start recruiting in April and May, or at least two months before the program start date. Try to be creative in who you are asking to get involved; you might be surprised by who will step up to make this program happen. The more the community is invested in this program, the more successful it will be.

There are several great venues to find volunteers; these are just a few:

- College students
- Community groups like the Lions and Rotary Clubs
- Community Policing volunteers

- Faith-based organizations
- High school students - many students are required to complete volunteer hours...remember meals served to teens are reimbursable too!
- Local businesses
- Local food pantries
- Online media: Idealist.org and VolunteerMaine.org
- Parent Teacher Associations (PTA)

It is common for volunteers to commit to one or two days a week. Having a list of back-up volunteers can be helpful to allow for flexibility in scheduling. It is important that at least one volunteer scheduled each day has been trained by the sponsor in rules and procedures of the program and how to fill out the meal count sheet. Meal sites function best with at least two volunteers are present to serve meals and supervise participants. Having additional volunteers is a good idea when programming is offered (see section How do we attract kids: Programming).

Volunteer training and management

The sponsor is responsible for providing training sessions for all volunteers. Ideally, this training will take place at least one month before the start date.

This training should include:

- Purpose of the program
- How site eligibility is determined
- Rules and regulations
- Meal delivery and/or pick-up schedules
- Meal service
- Meal count sheets and other record keeping
- What to do with leftovers
- Who to contact with questions
- Federal Civil Rights requirement (non-discrimination statement)

The site supervisor plays an important role in volunteer management. It is helpful to create a volunteer schedule at the beginning of the program to ensure for adequate coverage throughout the summer. Providing each volunteer with this schedule will help eliminate scheduling confusion and miscommunication. Volunteers should contact the site supervisor about schedule changes and conflicts. The site supervisor should provide on-site oversight and have regular communication with the sponsor.

Community outreach: Let people know

In addition to on-site logistics, one of your greatest efforts will likely be spreading the word about your meal site(s). You can provide the space and food, but without kids there the program will not accomplish its goal. An "outreach plan" is easy to create and will help you prioritize and target outreach strategies.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Who needs to know about this program in order for it to be successful?
- Where and how can I reach my target audience?
- Who can help me do this?
- What do I need to tell families and children to encourage them to participate?
- What barriers or concerns may prevent children and families from participating?
- How can I respond to these concerns?

Once you have answered these questions, you are prepared to implement your outreach plan. You can design flyers, write emails, and prepare presentations tailored to your audience.

Distributing outreach materials through the schools is the most efficient way to let children and families know about the program and where the sites will be. The school system is legally required to assist with outreach for this program, and is usually more than willing to do so. Just be sure to give them adequate notice so that they can complete the necessary steps to have these materials approved, printed in their school newsletter or sent home in children's backpacks/totes.

School outreach ideas!

- Send home weekly flyers as many times as possible
- Use schools' automated call systems to reach every family in the district
- Promote the program at all-school assemblies
- Print information about the program on school lunch menus
- Have an authorized school staff members contact families receiving free-and-reduced lunch directly via mail or phone
- Have information available about area meal sites at end-of-the-year carnivals, dinners, or celebrations
- Don't forget about the older students! Include information in announcements or in homeroom
- Partner with the PTA to spread the word, secure money for programming, and recruit volunteers for the summer months

Outreach partnerships

Creating partnerships can help with advertising. Think about places in your community where children and families might already gather or access services, such as the recreation department, local Boy and Girl Scout troops, faith-based organizations, and day care centers. Make sure that the General Assistance office, DHHS (Department Health and Human Services), food pantries, WIC office (federal food entitlement program for Women, Infants and Children) the housing authority and other social service agencies are aware of the program. Partnerships don't need to stop once school is out.

Outreach in the community

Word-of-mouth: Easily the most effective strategy, but the most difficult to "organize." Talk about the program! Ask volunteers and parents to spread the word

Flyering: Post flyers in public places, especially those frequented by low-income residents, such as laundromats or housing developments

Public Service Announcements (PSA): It's easy, quick, and free to get a bulletin on a local public access channel or an announcement on a local radio station

Announcements in newsletters: Ask local faith-based and community organizations to advertise the summer meal program in their bulletins

Banners and signs: Mark your site with a banner, sandwich board, or other signs helps passersby identify your site, especially if it is indoors

Newspapers: An article in the local paper spotlighting the sponsor and sites is free advertising that reaches a wider geographic area

Door-to-door: Conduct door-to-door canvassing of the surrounding area; this is a great way to alert local families to the program

Booths or speakers at local events: Events like town festivals, end-of-school award ceremonies, and community sports tournaments are perfect places to advertise the program

Websites: Post information about the program on school and municipal websites

Social Media: If you have a tech-savvy volunteer who is willing to create a Facebook or Twitter account for your meal site, this can be another easy and free way spread the word. Be sure to keep confidentiality in mind and make sure to obtain permission before identifying anyone publicly

How do we attract kids? Programming

While many children feel the loss of school meals, a free meal may not be enough to draw them to a meal site during the summer. An extra incentive may make it more worth their while. Some children may feel embarrassed about coming just for a free meal; another fun, free event gives them another reason to attend. The more your site offers, the more it will interest a broad group of children.

Creating a welcoming environment is a simple and important first step. For example, if the site is to be hosted at an elementary school, on nice days consider serving the meal at or near the playground. Kids might be more apt to stop by if they see other children congregating for an outdoor playtime and a picnic rather than travel indoors to eat. If a meal is to be indoors, think about whether posters or brightly-colored tablecloths might make the space more welcoming.

Another easy way to attract children and teens is to offer incentives. Some sites do this by using an attendance chart throughout the summer and soliciting donations for prizes for children who have attended the most meals. Some sites acquire free passes to the local pool and give them to any children who come on days over 85°; discounted movie tickets could fill the same need of offering a cool space on a hot day. Other sites reward children who come on rainy days. A similar incentive designed to increase participation is to give a prize to anyone who brings a friend.



Here are a few ideas to help you integrate activities into your program:

- Organize a one-time event. This can be great way to raise awareness about your site, especially if done early in the summer.
- Partner with pre-existing programs: e.g., ask a local museum if they're able to come and do a mini-workshop.
- Utilize board games, puzzles, coloring books, arts and crafts.
- Organize sports tournaments, games, or skits.
- Plan to have different types of programming happen on the same day each week, such as Monday storytime, Tuesday four-square, or Wednesday crafts.

This may sound overwhelming, but it doesn't have to be. You don't need to plan a summer full of non-stop activities. Any amount of programming will help draw children. Try your best to incorporate some easy and cheap ideas at your meal site.

Kaler Elementary: Second year sponsor adds a new site

Background: Kaler Elementary is located in South Portland, surrounded by a residential neighborhood. The sponsor, South Portland Food Service department, staffed the site with a paid food services employee. At the beginning of the summer, extended school year programming was being offered at the school and the site served nearly 40 children a day.

Successes: The lunches were prepared by the South Portland Food Department and served in the elementary school cafeteria; the logistics of running this site were quite simple. The South Portland Food Service staff worked very well with community volunteers. Additionally, the principal was very enthusiastic about the summer lunch program. Because the leadership came from the school, this site ran well from the start.

Challenges: At the beginning of the summer the Kaler site served many children because of they were enrolled in extended school year programs. However, after these programs ended the turn-out from the neighborhood was low. Other reasons for low neighborhood attendance can be attributed to the fact that children needed to cross a busy street to get to the school and that little outreach was done in the surrounding neighborhood. Going door-to-door in the neighborhood produced a bump in participation, as did the organizing of a four-square tournament and a library reading hour.

Keeping going: Operating the meal site

Your site is registered, your menus are set, your volunteers are trained, your advertising is humming away, and your programming is taking shape. It's June, and you're about to get started. This section is about double-checking to see that your site is ready for the first day, navigating the necessary paperwork, and small tips and tricks sites have used to make their meals more successful.



How do we make sure our site is ready to go?

Even with all of this planning, many first-year site organizers are nervous about how the first day will go. After months of planning and build-up, this anxiety is completely understandable. To help alleviate some of this we have two suggestions:

- Do a dry-run of a meal at your site. Go to wherever the meals are going to be served and walk through an imagined meal, from drop-off to clean-up.
- Envision how kids will move throughout the site.
- Look around the room or park -- are there any potential "hazards" to be aware of? Doing this might make you realize that there's no large trash bin at the site, or that it might be a good idea to have a "Line Starts Here" sign.

First Day Reminder: There is no way that a rough first day (or week) will doom your program. If you run out of food on the first day, you can apologize with a smile and increase the amount of meals ordered for the next day or if possible call the sponsor for a second delivery. If (as is more likely) you have lots of meals left over after the first day, you can save the fruit and other non-perishable snacks as "extras" to be used throughout the week.

You will be able to make adjustments all summer, so don't worry too much about any small problems on your first day.

Tips and tricks for menu planning



Here are some assorted tricks sponsors, site supervisors, and volunteers have found to help make their meals a success:

- Create a set menu for each day of the week and stick to it
- Include Ranch dressing or Hummus for dipping
- Send a loaf of bread, peanut butter, and jelly so that staff and volunteers have backup sandwiches (if someone doesn't like what was sent or in case they run out of meals)
- Consider food allergies and request appropriate foods as needed

How do we get reimbursed? Paperwork and recordkeeping!

Once your site is registered, there are three types of paperwork to be filled out: the daily meal count sheet, site monitor visit forms, and sponsor reimbursement forms. A brief overview is provided for you here.

The Daily Meal Count Sheet

The daily meal count sheet is how the staff and volunteers who are serving the meal keep track of how many meals are available, how many are served and to whom, and how many are left over. **The sponsor will use these sheets to submit for reimbursements and get paid, so it is important that staff and volunteers know how to fill them out accurately.** Some sites laminate and post sample sheets to guide volunteers through the process.



Here are a few suggested modifications to the daily meal count sheet form:

- Black-out the entire section for non-program adult meals, as sponsors are not reimbursed for these meals
- The sponsor should write in the number of meals delivered and the date
- Add a space to record the amount of leftovers/past date meals that need to be thrown out
- Add a space for comments or notes?

The Site Monitor Visit Forms

There are four site monitor visit forms to be filled out throughout the summer: the Pre-Operational Visit Worksheet, the First Week Visit Form, the Site Review Form, and the Ethnic/Racial Category Data Form. Please refer to the USDA Guide to the Summer Food Service Program for more information.

Sponsor Reimbursement Forms

The sponsor is responsible for reporting to the State Department of Education in order to receive reimbursement. The Maine Department of Education wants you to get paid for the meals served and wants this to be as simple and seamless as possible.

Building on success: Making your program sustainable

It's now August, and your meal site is winding down. You've made it through the hot days and the rainy days, the mid-summer participation dip, and various minor miscommunications and logistical difficulties. Congratulations! You've managed to feed hungry children delicious, healthy meals throughout the summer! This section is about a few end-of-summer steps you can take to recognize the efforts staff and volunteers and prepare yourself for next summer, when you'll be a cool, calm, collected summer meals veteran.

Appreciation

You, your staff, volunteers, and your community partners have all worked hard this summer with wonderful results.



To acknowledge this we recommend:

- Have a potluck or a barbeque to celebrate your successes
- Write thank-you cards to staff, volunteers, and partners
- Send out a summer overview to people or groups who helped get this program off the ground but were less involved in the day-to-day operations
- Doing something extra special for the kids during the last two weeks e.g., organize a pizza party or provide a small reward for good attendance

Celebrating success makes people realize that their efforts have contributed to something worthwhile and this makes everyone feel valued. Having a positive end to your season will create a strong foundation for next summer's meal program.

End of summer evaluation

As you wrap up your summer, it's a good idea to consolidate the lessons learned and think about what changes might improve the site for the next summer.



Here are several ways to accomplish this:

- Survey the volunteers and staff who were on the ground
- Survey children and parents - what they liked/didn't/how they heard about the site, how they heard about the program (this will help you evaluate the effectiveness of your outreach)
- Hold a key players "end of the season" meeting
- Create a one-page summary for next year - include everyone's contact info (sponsor, site supervisor, community partners, volunteers, etc.) along with a few ideas for site growth and improvement

Appendix A – Summer Meals Timeline

Summer Meals Timeline	
November/ December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if and how the Summer Meals Program currently serves your community • Start thinking about what role you would play in the Summer Meals program • Talk with community members about good locations for sites • Inquire with potential partners about their interest • Get in touch with experienced sponsors about the program • Speak with your organization's leadership about their capacity to be involved with the program (is this something that is financially and logistically feasible?)
January/ February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose a new sponsor or connect with an established sponsor • Organize/attend a planning meeting with existing and potential sponsors and sites • Determine who your sponsor will be • Choose meal site locations and decide leadership
March/ April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine site eligibility with school and census data • If appropriate site coordinators should inform the town of locations of summer meal sites • Begin to consider options for dates, meal times, menus, etc. • Sponsor conducts site visits • Gather/develop training materials • Develop and distribute volunteer recruitment materials
May/ June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that your facilities and equipment meet standards to produce meals or arrange for the purchase of meals • Decide how you will transport the food to the sites • Prepare a budget • Work with the State Department of Education to register yourself as a sponsor and your sites • Develop an outreach plan • Think through what sort of programming your site will offer, and, if necessary, contact outside organizations to conduct programming at your site? • Attend a mandatory training run by the Maine DOE • Recruit volunteers and hire staff • Advertise to children in schools

<p>May/June (cont.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use your existing partnerships to help with outreach and build new ones • Solidify large-scale programming and partnerships • Rehearse a meal at your site, especially if you will be delivering meals, to make sure that all logistics are covered • Train volunteers • Ensure that you have purchased all of the necessary supplies • Continue outreach and promotion efforts (press release, PSA, signage, kick-off events, etc)
<p>July/August</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm delivery dates/routes • Continue to conduct community outreach, promoting the meal to kids and their families • Collect and record information on meal count sheets • Submit for reimbursement • Complete site monitoring
<p>September/ October</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue growth in programming • Work on streamlining your system • Evaluate the success of your program and what you can do differently next summer