



*Catch a free meal!*  
this summer kids 18 and under eat free

# THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM SPONSOR GUIDE



Sponsored in part by Second Harvest Heartland



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The Summer Food Service Program Sponsor Guide has been developed by Second Harvest Heartland in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) Food and Nutrition Service to help sponsors with program logistics such as providing meals for sites, claiming reimbursement and promoting the Summer Food Service Program.

For more information, please contact the MDE Food and Nutrition Service office at: 651.582.8526 (local) 800.366.8922 (toll free) or [mde.fna@state.mn.us](mailto:mde.fna@state.mn.us).

# Section 1: Administration and Planning

## Summer Food Service Program overview

For many high-need children in Minnesota, summer vacation does not mean “fun in the sun,” but rather increased risk of hunger and developmental decline. Each year, hundreds of thousands of children across the state receive free or reduced-price meals at school. However, when school is out for the summer, these children are at risk of hunger. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) can help. **The Summer Food Service Program was created to ensure that all high-need children 18 and under could continue to receive free, nutritious meals during the summer in order to return to school ready to learn.** Not only does this program benefit children by providing them with complete, wholesome meals all summer long, but it also helps parents stretch their food dollars; it helps food service workers by providing them with summer employment; and it helps communities by providing a safe place for children to go to be with other children and supportive adults.

## Program administration

The SFSP is federally funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is administered by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) at the state level and by sponsors at the local level. Sponsors can be school districts, local government agencies, camps or private, non-profit organizations. Sponsors provide free meals to children at designated meal sites and are responsible for all financial and administrative aspects of the program. Some of these responsibilities include hiring, training and supervising program staff, monitoring sites, arranging for meals to be prepared and delivered to sites and submitting reimbursement claims to MDE. The MDE approves sponsor applications, conducts sponsor training sessions, monitors SFSP operations and processes program payments.



# Summer Food Service Program Overview

## Sites

An SFSP site is the physical location where program meals are served and consumed. Sites may be located in a variety of settings, including schools, recreation centers, playgrounds, parks, churches, community centers, day camps, residential summer camps, housing projects and migrant centers. The most effective sites are those that provide recreational or enrichment activities in addition to the meals.

### **Sites are generally classified as either open or enrolled:**

- **Open/area eligible** sites provide free meals to all children who attend the site. These sites must either draw their attendance from a school in which 50% of the students are eligible for free or reduced price school meals or be located in an area where at least half of the children live in a household whose income is at or below 185% of the federal poverty level.
- **Closed/enrolled** sites provide free meals to children enrolled in an activity program. At least 50% of the program's participants must be eligible for free or reduced price school meals. Unlike open sites in which all children are allowed to attend the site, enrolled sites limit program participation to those children enrolled in the program.

## Meals

A sponsor may prepare meals, purchase meals through an agreement with an area school, or contract for meals with a food vendor. Meals can be hot, cold, or a combination of both. The majority of sponsors elect to serve lunch and one other meal service, such as breakfast or snack. All meals served must meet the USDA's SFSP meal pattern requirements. Meal pattern requirements can be found by visiting the USDA or MDE website.

## Reimbursement

SFSP sponsors receive federal reimbursements from the Minnesota Department of Education for the meals they serve to program participants. In order to receive reimbursement, sponsors must meet all nutritional, programmatic, and administrative requirements established by the USDA.

# Suggested Pre-Service Sponsor Timeline

## January - February

- Hold a planning meeting with school food services, community agencies, along with church and local leaders to identify areas of need, suitable meal sites and existing programming.
- Contact Second Harvest Heartland or MDE for assistance.

## February - March

- Contact previous year's SFSP sites to confirm participation for this summer.
- Attend an SFSP kickoff information event.
- Identify potential SFSP sites by reviewing school eligibility/census data.

## March - May

- If in need of an additional source of funding, apply to Second Harvest Heartland's SFSP grant (due May 1).
- Arrange for the purchase of meals or if you are a self-prep site, arrange for facilities, equipment and food purchases.
- Notify the health department of your intention to operate a food service program and provide them with a list of sites that you plan to serve.
- Estimate potential program reimbursement and develop budget and staffing plans for the program.
- Request SFSP promotional materials from Second Harvest Heartland.

## April - May

- Submit SFSP application to MDE. Attach all documents requested.
- Attend MDE's SFSP sponsor training.
- Announce availability of program and nondiscrimination policy in local media.
- Hire administrative staff, site monitor(s) and site supervisor(s).
- Establish monitoring schedule and emergency procedures.
- Coordinate SFSP training for your site monitor(s), supervisor(s) and volunteers.

## May - June

- Request USDA nondiscrimination posters from MDE.
- Distribute outreach materials to partner organizations, local schools, youth programs and directly to children or their families.
- Hold SFSP training for site monitor(s), supervisor(s) and volunteers.
- Visit all site(s) before programs begin.

## June - September

- Send MDE all site updates, including changes in meal times, site locations and field trips.

# Providing Meals for Your Sites

## Self preparation vs. vended meals

As an SFSP sponsor, you have the option of preparing your own meals for the program or contracting with a vendor to prepare the meals for you. If you don't have the expertise or the facilities to prepare the meals, you may purchase meals from a vendor instead. Meals that you prepare yourself receive a slightly higher rate of reimbursement. If you do decide to prepare your own meals, please note that your kitchen must be in compliance with local sanitation codes before you begin preparing summer meals.

## School food services

If you decide that you would rather purchase the SFSP meals for your sites, then you have several options. First, contact an area school food service department to see if they would be willing to provide the meals for you. School food service directors are well suited to vend summer meals because the regulations and meal patterns required by the SFSP are very similar to that of the School Meals Programs. If your district's school food service department is unable to provide meals for you, contact food service directories in nearby school districts, as they may be willing to provide this service.

## Potential non-school vendors

If you decide to purchase meals but are unable to find a food service department to produce the meals for you, then you will need to hire a vendor. There are several types of vendors that can provide meals for your summer sites. In choosing a vendor, remember that it is important that vendors have current health licensing and follow the strictest standards for food handling and sanitation. Consider the following options for purchasing your SFSP meals:

- Large Food Service Companies
- Senior Feeding Programs
- Community Kitchens
- Hospitals
- Local Caterers
- Local Delicatessens and Restaurants



## SFSP Reimbursement and Cost Accounting



**All sponsors participating in the Summer Food Service Program must adhere to the following cost accounting procedures:**

### **Reimbursement**

Every year, the USDA establishes rates for all breakfast, lunch/suppers, and supplements served through the SFSP. Each sponsor's reimbursement is based on a simple calculation of multiplying the meals served by the reimbursement rate. If sponsors finds that their reimbursement exceeds the cost of operating the program, they are encouraged to use the additional funds to improve the quality of meals served or to apply the additional funds to the following year's program operation.

### **Operating vs. administrative costs**

SFSP reimbursement may be used to cover both operating and administrative costs. Though sponsors should apply the SFSP funds to cover all operating costs first, there is some flexibility in how the money can be spent. Sponsors must maintain all records of costs for documentation and review purposes.

## SFSP Reimbursement and Cost Accounting

**Operating costs** refer to those activities and items required to prepare, obtain, deliver, serve, supervise, and clean up meals. Operating costs may include:

- Labor costs for preparing, transporting, or serving food
- Non-food supplies such as paper products, trash bags and sanitizers
- Utilities

**Administrative costs** are those expenses incurred by the sponsor for activities related to program planning and oversight. Administrative costs may include:

- Salaries for administrative, monitoring, or support staff
- Rental of office equipment and office space
- Travel or insurance costs





## Section 2: Best Practices

### Cost considerations

There are a variety of factors involved in the SFSP that can impact your bottom line. Below you will find potential pitfalls and ways to avoid them:

**Problem: It's difficult to predict the number of meals needed at each open site.**

**Solution:** Maintain good communication with your site supervisors to determine participation patterns. Consider how these factors may impact site attendance and adjust your meal production accordingly:

- Weather: Extremely hot or rainy days will affect sites differently depending on whether they are indoors vs. outdoors, have access to water, and provide shade or shelter.
- Time of the month/day of the week: Is attendance higher at the end of the month? At the beginning of the week? Look for patterns and plan accordingly.
- Field trips: Make sure that the sponsor knows if the kids will be at a different location. Sponsor must notify state agency in advance of field trips in order to claim the meals.

**Problem: Kids waste a lot of food!**

**Solution:** Survey the kids to see what they do and don't like about the food offered. You won't please all of the kids all of the time, but you can address issues with how food is prepared, stored, or transported. Crushed, half frozen, or visually unappealing foods can be fixed. Consider, with health department approval, providing a 'sharing table' for wrapped leftover food items.

**Problem: It costs a lot of money to feed a small number of kids.**

**Solution:** Follow the strategies outlined in the Maximizing Participation and Advertising and Outreach sections of this guide to increase summer meal participation!

## Section 2: Best Practices

**Focus on the following strategies to maximize participation and ensure that your programs operate efficiently:**

**Increase the number of sites that you serve.**

- Determine eligibility and then contact the local Parks and Recreation Department, housing developments, area youth programs, faith-based organizations and summer school programs to see if they want to receive free summer meals for their existing summer activities.

**Expand the length of your program.**

- Don't wait until July to start your program! Start serving sites in June as soon as school is out and continue until the first day of school in August or September.

**Increase the number of meals served at each site.**

- The current regulation allows for two meals to be served at each site. (Note: Lunch and supper is the only meal combination that cannot be served at the same site.) If you are only serving lunch, consider serving breakfast or an afternoon snack as well.
- Pay attention to when children attend each site. If a site offers activities early in the day, then consider serving breakfast in addition to lunch. If a site offers activities towards the end of the day, try serving an afternoon snack and a supper.

**Improve food quality at the sites.**

- Serve culturally appropriate foods that are appealing to the children in your communities.
- Hot meals, a varied menu and meal presentation (avoid flattened sandwiches & soggy bread) can make a big difference in children's appetites.

**Consider the layout of the site.**

- Serve meals at locations that already attract kids during the summer (parks, pools, spray parks, etc.). Be sure each site has shade for hot days and rain cover for bad weather.
- Children are more likely to attend if they can walk to the site.

## SFSP Kickoffs

Kickoff events are a great way to put the spotlight on your summer food programs. For community members that are unaware of the SFSP, a kickoff is a great introduction. For kids who participate every year, the kickoff is a time to celebrate the return of summer!

### **Where to host it:**

If you are holding one big kickoff event for the whole community, choose an accessible place such as a park, town square, or community center.

### **Whom to invite:**

People who will draw kids to the site and the local media to your event such as:

- Sports Celebrities • Entertainers • Local Celebrities • Radio Personalities • K9 Police Units • Nutrition Educators • Governor • Mayor

### **What to do:**

Consider the following to keep kids entertained with activities at meal sites:

- Talent Show • Music (DJ) • Games • Barbecue • Moonbounce • Martial Arts Demonstrations • Sports Activities • Movies • Dance Performances

### **How to get people there:**

Make sure that people know about your event and site by advertising in these places:

- Newspapers • Radio Stations • Public Transportation • Schools • Flyers • Community Bulletin Boards • City Website • Youth Centers • Public Service Announcements • Local or Cable Access TV

## Incentives

Incentives, such as small prizes or awards that kids receive for attending a meal site, are a great way to draw kids to your sites and keep them coming back for more!

### Tips for success:

- Ask vendors and businesses to provide small incentives and bigger prizes. Remember, incentives do not need to be expensive in order to appeal to kids. Set aside a certain number of incentives for each week or month or use larger “grand prizes” for the end of the summer.

### Great incentives for kids:

- Movie theater tickets
- Sporting goods equipment
- Local restaurant coupons for free or discounted meal/beverage
- Donated books or magazines from book store or library
- Local gym day passes

### Consider the following activities to create excitement around your summer program:

- **Theme days:** Have the kids make hats and costumes as an arts and crafts project at your summer site and then award prizes to contest winners.
- **Raffle:** Each day a child takes a meal, eats it, and then cleans up, he gets a raffle ticket. Multiple names can be drawn for recreation and educational items, such as jump ropes, yo-yos and books.
- **Incentive store:** Kids earn tickets by attending the site or demonstrating positive behavior. At the end of the week/month/summer, kids use the tickets to “purchase” prizes.
- **Rainy day rewards:** Reward kids who come when others don’t.
- **Track participation:** Use a map or poster on the wall; be creative. Those who reach a certain destination by a set date, through frequent participation, get a reward.
- **Birthday gifts**

## Partnering with Businesses

Take advantage of the assistance that local businesses and organizations can provide. Engaging community partners will help them get positive press while supporting your program.

- Contact the Chamber of Commerce to ask for a list of businesses that are active in the community, or approach local businesses with which you are already familiar. Ask these businesses for donations and volunteers.
- Send them a thank you note stating their contribution and send a copy to the mayor's office, school committee, and/or city counselors to extend the recognition and motivate them to donate again. Consider asking for these donations from your local businesses and organizations.
- All donations must be accounted for and recognized to meet tax and accounting standards.



# Section Three: Advertising and Outreach

Letting people in your community know about SFSP is key to its success. Ask groups that offer summer programming to include information about the SFSP in any advertising that they do. Be creative and don't underestimate the power of a simple advertisement! All statements and outreach materials describing the SFSP should clearly state that the program is funded through the MDE with federal dollars from USDA.



## Advertising ideas and posting locations

- Ask local businesses to sponsor the printing of banners, lawn signs, or T-shirts, and offer to add their logo.
- Put banners or lawn signs at each site so that parents and children can easily identify meal sites as they walk by.
- Advertise the SFSP on buses and trains in your area.
- Insert program and site information in the water bill, utility bill, or community mailing in May/June.
- Ask your local schools or school district to send information about your serving times and site locations home with students before school ends.

## Section Three: Advertising and Outreach

### Posting locations

Distribute information about your Summer Food Service Program at the following locations:

- Schools
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- Libraries
- Health Centers
- Parks & Rec Departments
- Churches
- Housing Authorities
- YMCA/YWCA
- WIC and DTA Offices
- Supermarkets
- Convenience Stores
- Laundromats
- Food Pantries
- Soup Kitchens
- Local Newspapers
- City Websites
- Community Centers

### Free advertising: Press and other media

- Send in pictures of kids at SFSP sites to local papers and ask local reporters to do a story on summer feeding.
- City/town websites will often list your sites for free.
- Local cable and radio stations may provide free public service announcement (PSA) time for non-profit organizations.

Contact MDE or Second Harvest Heartland to obtain the following outreach materials:

- SFSP Multilingual Posters/Flyers
- SFSP Newspaper Ad Templates
- Tear Off Flyers
- Door Hangers





## second harvest **HEARTLAND**

Second Harvest Heartland has created an interactive online map for the entire state of Minnesota that pinpoints SFSP meal site locations and provides meal times and dates. To find SFSP sites in your community, please visit [2harvest.org/summerfood](http://2harvest.org/summerfood).

Second Harvest Heartland has also created a text message and phone service that potential participants, parents, or caregivers can contact in order to find out more about the SFSP or to find information on locations close to them. The number for Second Harvest Heartland's text message and phone service is: 612.516.3663.

**For more information on SFSP, contact:**

**Second Harvest Heartland**

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