

Summer Meals: Addressing childhood hunger and building community

California cities working to create and sustain healthy, vibrant communities are confronted by the stark reality that many children in their community are going hungry for prolonged periods of time. This challenge is more acute during the summer months when school is out and students lose access to the school lunch program. City leaders across California and the nation are stepping up to address this challenge to help ensure children in their communities have access to meals when they are out of school. This focus has provided a unique opportunity for meaningful collaboration between agencies and jurisdictions.

USDA summer meal programs enable cities, schools, counties and community-based organizations to serve free, healthy meals to children ages 18 and under in low-income neighborhoods. The fully reimbursed meals nourish children in need, provide communities with an infusion of federal resources and bring opportunities to build and strengthen community partnerships.



Benefits:

- **Support healthy kids:** Summer meals help combat hunger and obesity—conditions that can negatively impact children’s physical, emotional, social, and academic development.
- **Boost summer learning and academic achievement:** Summer meals can boost efforts to address summer learning loss and keep kids moving forward on a positive health and developmental trajectory.
- **Stimulate meaningful partnerships:** Summer meals facilitate effective collaboration with schools, county agencies, community-based agencies, business, and between city agencies.
- **Support financial sustainability:** Federal reimbursements can offset summer learning program costs, support high quality school meals (and jobs), catalyze agency resource sharing, and lessen the additional financial burden on lower income families when school is out.
- **Build a sense of community:** City and county public libraries across the state are partnering with school districts and other agencies to offer summer meals and literacy/enrichment programs. Agencies ranging from police and fire to public health and public works provide programming while youth volunteers manage the program. This is an example of how addressing *one* critical need is creating additional opportunities to address critical community issues.

What City Leaders Can Do Now:

- Assess the out-of-school time needs of families, along with the need and availability of summer meals in your community.
- Assess the extent to which your libraries, park and recreation, or other facilities can become summer meal sites.
- Promote the availability of summer meal programs to the community.
- Host a convening of city, school and community leaders to identify strategies to address childhood hunger and establish a workgroup to plan and help implement these strategies.
- Partner with community organizations that serve summer and afterschool meals.
- Sponsor an Afterschool or Summer Meal Program.
- Host, or participate in, a community kick-off event to help raise awareness and increase participation.



Resources:

USDA Summer Food Service
summerfood.usda.gov

National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families--Healthy Communities
<http://www.nlc.org/find-city-solutions/institute-for-youth-education-and-families/healthy-communities/afterschool-and-summer-meal-programs>

California Food Policy Advocates *School's Out...Who Ate?* Nutrition report (*County and provider data*)
<http://cfpa.net/sowa-2015>

Lunch at the Library (Resources for libraries to serve summer meals)
LunchAtTheLibrary.org