

Local Government Agencies Can Help End Childhood Summer Hunger

Summer can be a difficult time for families with children, and that can impact the whole community. All too often, summer vacation is when children do not have enough nutritious food to eat. When school lets out in the summer, millions of low-income children lose access to the school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks they receive during the regular school year. Many families with children will struggle to provide enough nutritious food for their children during the summer months. Children that experience hunger in the summer are more likely to suffer from health problems and “summer learning loss” which interfere with academic success.

As a local government agency, you can help feed hungry children in the summer by participating in the Summer Food Program.

The Summer Food Program reimburses local government agencies (as well as schools and private nonprofit organizations) for providing healthy meals and snacks to low-income children during the summer. In many communities, Parks and Recreation departments, city and county health departments, and neighborhood services agencies participate in Summer Food and serve low-income children nutritious meals and snacks. By sponsoring a summer food program, local governments can fill a very important need in your community and allowing smaller sites to provide food to children.

Sponsor the Summer Food Program: Local government agencies can help their community by operating a summer food program, which is also known as sponsoring a program. The sponsor identifies sites such as schools, parks, camps, community centers, or faith-based communities that will distribute the food to children that attend these programs. In return, they can receive Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) funding to reimburse the costs of providing food to the sites. SFSP sponsors can receive the maximum reimbursement rate per meal regardless of their costs and are responsible for less paperwork. Summer food sites such as community centers, parks, or camps provide nutritious meals to children. To qualify as a site, the facility must be located in a low-income neighborhood (at least 50 percent or more of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price meals) or must serve primarily low-income children (at least 50 percent of the children must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals). Summer camps and sites serving primarily migrant children also can participate, but under slightly different rules.

Spread the Word about Summer Food: It is important to make sure that parents are aware of the program and available resources. Flyers, public service announcements (PSA), banners, and kick-off parties are all great ways to spread the word. Getting local officials – like the Mayor, Councilmembers, or the head of your agency – to send out a press release, make a public statement, or attend a summer food event are easy ways to draw attention to the program. Summer outreach materials developed by the Food Research and Action Center are available online at: http://www.frac.org/afterschool/summer_toolkit.htm

Get Started Today! To learn more about how you can get involved in the summer food program and help feed hungry children in your community, contact your state’s Child Nutrition Agency. A directory of agencies is provided online at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>