

Best Practices for Conducting Outreach to Expand the Afterschool Meal Program

FEBRUARY 2017

SCOPE | State, County, Local PROGRAM | The Afterschool Meal Program

PRACTICE | Advocates can expand the Afterschool Meal Program and obtain federal reimbursement using proven outreach strategies, including promoting the program, building relationships with afterschool and out-of-school time provider networks, connecting sites to available community resources, and working closely with the state agency.

WHY | For many low-income children, access to the Afterschool Meal Program may be their only chance for a nutritious meal until the next school day, but too many eligible afterschool programs do not know about this federal nutrition program, or overestimate the barriers to accessing it, or are unaware that meals can be served afterschool and on weekends, holidays, and school breaks.

Through effective outreach, advocates can:

- ✓ raise awareness of the Afterschool Meal Program's availability;
- ✓ demonstrate the real need for it in their communities;
- ✓ help identify and provide assistance to potential providers;
- ✓ ensure that children's nutritional needs are met when the regular school day has ended; and
- ✓ get much-needed dollars through the Child and Adult Care Food Program or the National School Lunch Program to struggling afterschool programs.

KEY STEPS | Expanding the Afterschool Meal Program involves a strong commitment to:

Promote the program: Advocates should champion the Afterschool Meal Program at every opportunity possible – in person, over the phone, in writing, through social media, and at meetings and conferences. Through these discussions, advocates can address and dispel misconceptions and increase participation. For example, one common myth is that afterschool meals must be served during dinnertime; however, program rules allow the meal to be served at any point during an afterschool program. Many children receive school lunch at 11:00 or 11:30 and need a nutritious meal by 3:30 or 4:00. [FRAC's Afterschool Meals webpage](#) has resources, templates, and fact sheets with background information about the program and clear instructions about how potential sponsors or providers can begin the application process.

Build relationships with afterschool and out-of-school time networks: To identify both potential sponsors and program providers, advocates should also partner with the state or local affiliate of national groups, such as the Afterschool Alliance, YMCA of the USA, National Recreation and Parks Association, Alliance for a Healthier Generation, and Boys & Girls Clubs. Additionally, connecting with summer meal sites may identify organizations that offer programming year round but need help participating in afterschool meals.

Conducting a gap analysis of areas that meet the threshold for participation in the Afterschool Meal Program (e.g., areas where 50 percent of students are

eligible for for federally funded free and reduced-price meals), but have low program participation rates, can help identify partnerships with groups and schools that provide afterschool enrichment activity located in these areas of high need.

Connect sites to available community resources:

Advocates can connect program newcomers to community members, who are experienced with the program, including local vendors that provide the meals and umbrella sponsors, such as school districts, local park agencies, and food banks that could act as sponsors to more sites. In addition, advocates may be able to connect community-based sites to funding so that sites can purchase much-needed equipment to participate.

Work closely with the state agency (typically the state department of education) in charge of administering the federally funded Afterschool Meal Program: Advocates can work with the state agency to promote trainings, coordinate outreach, and streamline the application process when possible. Both advocates and the state agency could implement a peer mentoring initiative. Advocates also can serve as a liaison between sponsors and state agencies to identify and implement operational improvements, making sure that the *state agencies are responsible* for explaining program policies and requirements.

SPOTLIGHT | Upon realizing that a county Parks and Recreation branch was running afterschool enrichment programming at multiple sites, but was hesitant to participate in the Afterschool Meal Program, Florida Impact took action in early 2015. Florida Impact not only provided technical assistance on the program to Parks and Recreation staff, but also discussed the missed opportunity with the County Commissioner, who then encouraged the sites to start serving meals. Because of this advocacy, seven sites in that county began operating the Afterschool Meal Program in March 2015 and now serve meals to more than 300 children daily.

TIPS | When stakeholders express interest in participating in the Afterschool Meal Program, advocates can:

- connect them immediately to the state agency, or to an experienced sponsor willing to serve additional sites;
- stay in contact with potential sponsors as they complete the application process;
- provide support if they run into program barriers; and
- direct program questions to the state agency.

CHALLENGES | Often the greatest challenges to conducting outreach for the Afterschool Meal Program are resistance to change and lack of knowledge about the need for afterschool meals that exists.

LESSONS |

- Use data about the percentage of children who receive free or reduced-price school meals to inform the community about the existing need for afterschool meals.
- Reiterate that the program also helps a community leverage a sustainable source of federal funding to feed hungry children; afterschool programs can reallocate other money previously spent on food to support program enrichment activities.
- When some afterschool programs have expressed misgivings about serving a full meal because of staff, time, or space constraints, advocates stressed that meals (aka “super snacks”) can be as simple as a sandwich, baby carrots, an apple, and a carton of low-fat milk; and that programs already serving snacks would only have to add two new components to make them meals. In addition, highlighting success stories, especially those that resonate within a community, is the key to encouraging others to help you expand the program statewide.

- Encouraging afterschool snack providers to transition to serving a full meal is a winning strategy to connect children, nutrition, and program engagement.

EXAMPLES |

- **Florida Impact:** To ramp up outreach efforts, Florida Impact provides resources online, engages elected officials, and uses data from their state agency to target areas with low participation. Florida Impact identifies programs that could transition from serving snacks only to full meals, and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites that should serve year-round. Florida Impact successfully worked with the Department of Health to simplify health and safety requirements for meal sites, which reduced barriers and eased operations.
- **Partnership for Children and Youth (California):** Partnership for Children and Youth (PCY) raises awareness about the program's availability by coordinating with key partners in the state's afterschool network and by consistent promotion through verbal, written, and web-based communication. PCY started its outreach efforts by encouraging providers to champion the program and advocate for it in their immediate communities and by sharing success stories to help build the program's legitimacy. PCY first targeted larger school districts, and then added smaller school districts.
- **Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon:** Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (Partners) reach out by hosting and participating in webinars; conducting gap analyses to determine areas of high eligibility with low participation rates, and encouraging community partners to champion the Afterschool Meal Program. It maintains a strong relationship with the Oregon Department of Education, its state agency, acting as a sponsor recruiter for the agency. The state agency, in turn, alerts Partners to potential sponsors so that Partners can support them throughout the application and implementation process, and ongoing operations. Partners has had good results using its existing partnerships to identify potential sponsors and sites, and researching what groups are doing in targeted communities through its gap analyses.

MORE INFORMATION

[*FRAC's Effective Outreach Strategies webpage*](#)

[*The Florida Afterschool Meals Program*](#)¹

[*Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon's outreach and advocacy tools webpage*](#)²

[*California Afterschool Network's outreach and advocacy fact sheet*](#)³

For technical assistance, contact:

Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)
1200 18th Street, NW
Suite 400
Washington, DC 20036
202.986.2200
<http://frac.org/>

For more on ending hunger, read FRAC's [*A Plan of Action to End Hunger in America*](#).

ENDNOTES

¹ Florida Afterschool Meals. (n.d.). *The Florida Afterschool Meals Program webpage*. Available at: <http://www.floridaafterschoolmeals.org/>. Accessed on February 27, 2017.

² Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon. (n.d.). *Afterschool Meal and Snack Program webpage*. Available at: <https://oregonhunger.org/after-school-meal-and-snack>. Accessed on February 27, 2017.

³ California Afterschool Network. (n.d.). *Afterschool Meal Guide*. Available at: http://frac.org/afterschoolmeal_guide/ca_afterschool_meal_program.pdf. Accessed on February 27, 2017.