

September/October: Evaluating Last Summer

As a sponsor...

As a current sponsor of either summer nutrition program, it is important to evaluate your operations each year and determine which practices were the most effective and should be continued next summer. Be sure to consider an evaluation component as you plan your program. It is easier to capture some information along the way. Factors to consider include site locations and the number of sites you sponsored, as well as the effectiveness of your outreach to promote each site. Try to include all interest groups in your evaluation process, including children, parents, staff, and the community-at-large.

Sponsoring Sites – Begin your evaluation of the previous summer by asking yourself about your capacity to operate the number of sites you sponsored effectively. Consider your management of the monitoring requirements, the quality of the sites in terms of food and programming offered to the children attending each site, and whether the sites were appropriately utilized by surrounding communities.

- **How many children participated per site?** Review your participation data from each site you sponsored. Was the participation consistent over the course of the summer? Were there specific factors that impacted participation levels at each site, such as weather impacting outdoor sites or safety of surrounding area for kids to travel to a site?
- **How many meals were served?** Review your meal counts for each site you sponsored. Were enough meals served per site to break even? What type of meal service did you offer? Were you serving breakfast and lunch, lunch and a snack, etc.? Did the times you offered the meals fit with the schedules of the children and families attending your sites?
- **Were some sites underutilized?** Consider the capacity of each of your sites and whether or not each site could have served more children. If there were sites that were underutilized, consider what may have caused this underutilization and if there is a way to address those factors. Some potential factors to think about include:
 - Is there a lack of a sidewalk/crosswalk preventing students from easily accessing the site, or an obstacle in the way such as a highway?
 - Has attendance been tied to an existing program at the site which no longer runs, or is not every day?
 - Would a different vendor or menu options generate higher participation rates?
- **Why type of programming was offered at each site?** Assess any activities and programs you offered the children while they attended your sites. Did you offer any physical or educational activities or partner with groups to provide activities? Did you have any ongoing activities, such as weekly themes or sports tournaments the children could participate in day after day? Did you offer nutrition education?
- **How was the quality of the meals that I served?** Consider any feedback you received throughout the summer from parents and children. Did the children enjoy the meals? Were the parents content with the nutritional quality? Did you negotiate with your vendor to improve the quality of your meals throughout the summer months?

Conducting Outreach – The next step is to evaluate your outreach efforts. You should determine which strategies worked best, which can be improved upon, and which were least effective. Consider all outreach strategies you may have previously used, including community canvassing, type of outreach materials, targeted areas where your outreach was conducted, and who assisted you with your outreach.

- **What efforts were successful?** Determine which strategies that you used were most effective. Consider any feedback you received over the summer months from parents about how they found out about your sites. Survey your partners to assess their impressions of which strategies resulted in the greatest impact.
- **Who did I partner with?** Consider all partners who may have assisted you with your outreach, such as schools, churches, community groups, local businesses, corporate partners, and any groups represented by the volunteers you enlisted. Which partners were the most helpful? Which partners would you want more engaged in your outreach efforts? Plan on including these partners early in your upcoming plans for outreach.

Cost Analysis – One of the biggest factors in determining whether a sponsor will continue to operate a summer nutrition program is the financials. Some sponsors can manage to continue their sponsorship year after year without breaking even because of access to additional funding beyond the federal reimbursement. However, it is important to consider your financials when determining your previous and future participation in the program. Effective financial management of your program will help to improve the quality of the food and activities you can offer and determine whether the number of sites meets your organization's capacity. Compare your overall costs to the total reimbursement you received. Additionally, calculate the number of children you would have to serve next summer to offset all of your costs, if you did not break even this past summer, and decide whether this is a realistic number of children that you can reach and manage within your sponsorship.

Overall Experience – When concluding your evaluation of last summer, think about your overall experience with the program. Were there specific challenges you faced in working with the state agency or in managing your sites? Can these challenges be overcome for next summer? Was it an enjoyable experience? Was your purpose and goal for sponsoring a Summer Nutrition Program fulfilled?

While sponsoring the Summer Nutrition Programs can be challenging, many of the issues faced can be addressed by developing a stronger relationship with your state agency and getting assistance from your local advocacy groups. The important role that the summer meals play in reducing hunger, improving nutrition, and supporting working families often can encourage sponsors to overcome any previous barriers faced and to continue sponsoring the program.

If you are already working with partners in the community, convene those partners to discuss how the summer went so you can get their feedback and begin planning for next summer.

As a supporter...

As a supporter of the Summer Nutrition Programs, consider the roles you played this past summer and how you can provide even more assistance to and encouragement for returning and new sponsors next summer. Consider how the programs served the communities you work with and if any gaps in service remain. Participation data can be collected from the sponsor(s) in your community/state or from your state child nutrition agency.

Sponsor and Site Participation – Assess how the sponsors and sites served their targeted areas. Think about the overall impact the sponsors and sites provided and what improvements you may be able to suggest for next summer.

- **How many sponsors and sites participated last year?** Review the participation data on the number of sponsors in your area and how many sites each sponsor managed last summer. Determine whether some of the participating sponsors would consider adding additional sites to their sponsorship next year. Were there any sites approved but not executed for the summer? What were their reasons to not participate? Did any drop out of the program during the summer? Also, be aware of sponsors who may not have considered the summer a success and are less likely to return next summer. Plan on more hands-on technical assistance early on with these sponsors to ensure that they return to the program.

Gap Analysis – Many communities in your area may be eligible but are not being served by sponsors and sites.

- **Were there gaps in our community?** Compare area eligibility data with program participation data from last year. Prioritize areas to be targeted for outreach and sponsor recruitment for next summer. Determine where the children of these communities may be congregating and what type of potential sponsors may be available in their area.

Child Participation– Reviewing the number of children participating in the Summer Nutrition Programs this past summer allows you to start setting goals for next summer. Review any trends on participation over the past few years and consider what may have caused them.

- **How many children were reached with the summer nutrition programs?** Reviewing participation data can help you determine how many children you would like to reach with the Summer Nutrition Programs next summer, but also where your outreach could be targeted. What type of information on the children participating can you pull from your sponsors and sites? Did the sites serve mostly younger children? Were there types of sites more popular for teens to attend? Examining how the Summer Nutrition Programs served different types of children can help you plan for what types of sites might serve the community best and what strategies used to market those sites proved most effective.
- **How do these numbers compare to the number of children eating free and reduced-price meals during the school year?** Comparing the free and reduced-price data from the local schools to your participation data in the Summer Nutrition Programs can help you determine which communities could be targeted for outreach next summer and help you make the case to schools and city officials about the need for summer meals in your area. Ask your school or Parent Teacher Association to survey families in eligible areas

to determine who attended nearby sites and how they heard about the sites, if they were satisfied by the meals and programming offered at the sites, or if they were not aware of the program, what the best method for communicating the location of next year's sites to them would be.