



Strategies for Increasing Redemption Rates in Summer EBT

The Summer Electronic Benefit Transfer (Summer EBT) Program launched nationally in 2024 after Congress authorized it as a permanent program in 2022. Participation from states, territories, and Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) has been strong: 37 states, the District of Columbia, all U.S. territories, and two ITOs operated Summer EBT in its first two years, with Utah and Alabama joining, and Indiana and Tennessee dropping out in 2025. Now state agencies, advocacy organizations, and other stakeholders can review what has worked, identify gaps, and refine key processes to improve benefit use.

Summer EBT was estimated to serve 21 million children in 2024.¹ Anecdotes from families illustrate how Summer EBT has helped them stretch their household budgets during the summer months while keeping their children fed. As states gain more experience administering the program, they are well-positioned to build on early successes and further strengthen benefit use to increase its overall impact.

Summer EBT is most effective at reducing childhood food insecurity when all eligible children participate in the program and use their full benefit amount (typically \$120 per child) at the grocery store. The [Summer EBT demonstration projects](#) operating between 2011 and 2019 achieved benefit redemption rates as high as 98 percent,^{1,2} comparable to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) redemption rates, which according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) SNAP benefit redemption patterns report series³ has ranged from 94.4 percent to 97 percent. While data on Summer EBT redemption rates is not available on a nationwide level, this benchmark shows what is possible.

Strategies for Increasing Redemption Rates

Federal Regulation

- **Require administering agencies to collect and report data on redemption.** Understanding where redemption rates are low is vital to developing actionable solutions. By requiring states to collect and report their participation and redemption data, stakeholders can identify opportunities to improve redemption and target their outreach efforts.

¹ This redemption rate reflects benefits issued through the SNAP model.

State Agencies

- **Co-load Summer EBT benefits with SNAP benefits when possible.** The Summer EBT pilot program evaluation found that when families received benefits through SNAP, and those benefits were co-loaded onto existing SNAP cards with Summer EBT as the drawdown priority, the average amount of benefits redeemed was 98 percent.⁴ This is higher than the average SNAP redemption rate in FY 2022, the most recent year USDA has released a report of redemption patterns in the program.⁵ Summer EBT is required to be the first drawdown for states utilizing a co-loading method. This simple prioritization strategy allows families to exhaust their Summer EBT benefits first, increasing the overall redemption rate.
- **Communicate with families directly through text or calls to remind them to use their benefits.** A reminder to families to ensure they are utilizing their benefits throughout the summer can be particularly helpful for non-SNAP households that do not utilize EBT cards during the non-summer months. States such as Washington have implemented a system to robotext families when their benefit expungementⁱⁱ date is approaching. They have also included information on the [website of the Department of Social and Health Services](#) so that families know the texts are legitimate.

States can also consider texting families the balances left on their cards during each month. In the analysis of the Summer EBT pilots, it was found that purchases increased after a text was sent with the remaining balance.⁶

- **Create and promote customizable outreach materials that can be utilized by schools and community partners to educate families.** Families must be aware of Summer EBT in order to ensure high benefit redemption. Because schools and community organizations often do not have the time, staffing, or funding to roll out an outreach strategy to educate families about Summer EBT, state agencies can make this easier by creating easy-to-use communications toolkits that partners can use to spread the word about the program. For more ideas, please see FRAC's [Outreach and Advocacy Toolkit](#).
- **Request granular data from your EBT vendor and share that data with community partners.** Data plays a vital role in understanding a program's effectiveness and strategizing for potential program adaptations and improvements.⁷ For Summer EBT, some data is collected and housed within the state agency itself, such as participation levels and the number of applications received and processed. Other data is collected and held by the EBT vendor.ⁱⁱⁱ This data tends to be related to card distribution, pinning (the method in which a card is activated), redemption, and expungement. These data points are highly important for understanding benefit usage patterns across states. States should prioritize obtaining this data from the EBT vendor and be willing and able to share the data with community partners who are looking to help the state agency boost participation.

ⁱⁱ In Summer EBT, expungement refers to the permanent removal of unspent Summer EBT benefits, which occurs 122 days after issuance.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are two primary EBT vendors for states in the country, FIS and Conduent, with a few states opting for smaller vendors.

Community Partners

- **Request state data to target low participation areas.** If a state agency obtains granular data from the EBT vendor and shares that data, community partners can use the information to conduct targeted outreach. The Arizona Food Bank Network utilized data from the state to map zip codes where a high number of Summer EBT cards were not pinned, allowing them to focus their outreach efforts on these areas.
- **Increase outreach to spread awareness.** Not all state agencies have prioritized outreach to increase participation and knowledge of Summer EBT. As community partners look to support state agencies and connect more eligible families to the program, focusing on outreach and education can help to fill the gaps. For example, Hunger Solutions New York has partnered with both the state agency as well as other community partners to host [webinars](#), create [outreach materials](#), and host working groups that pull in schools across the state.

Many community organizations are direct service providers, meaning that they work directly with families that may be qualified for Summer EBT. These groups can help inform families about the program as well as remind families to utilize their benefits after they receive them.

See It in Action: The Arizona Food Bank Network

The Arizona Food Bank Network approached data access as an advocacy strategy grounded in partnership, trust, and shared outcomes. Through consistent weekly meetings with the Arizona Department of Economic Security beginning in summer 2024, the Network positioned itself as a collaborative problem-solver focused on improving program impact rather than increasing administrative burden. In early 2025, the Network strategically raised the need for targeted data to support benefit utilization ahead of expungement deadlines, explicitly connecting the request to improved family outcomes. By clearly defining the purpose, scope, and intended use of the data, the Network was able to quickly secure timely zip code-level expungement information, reinforcing the value of transparent, relationship-driven advocacy with state agencies.

Once obtained, the data was intentionally used to guide targeted advocacy and outreach rather than broad, resource-intensive statewide efforts. The Network identified high-expungement zip codes as priority “hot spots” and paired the zip code data with other data around hunger such as increase in free or reduced-price meal eligibility and insights from trusted school nutrition staff. This advocacy approach centered community-based institutions — particularly schools — as messengers families already trust. Targeted social media campaigns, direct engagement with school districts, and the proactive distribution of culturally relevant outreach tools positioned the Network as both an advocate and a technical support partner. By preparing communities ahead of Sun Bucks 2025 implementation, this strategy not only increased awareness and benefit usage but also strengthened trust, local capacity, and long-term engagement with the program.

Conclusion

Summer EBT has demonstrated strong promise as a tool to reduce child hunger during the summer months, with early implementation showing high program uptake and positive family experiences. Evidence from prior demonstration projects and anecdotal evidence from inaugural years of permanent operations underscores that high redemption rates are achievable, particularly when program design prioritizes ease of use, clear communication, and timely access to benefits. As the program continues, states are well-positioned to move beyond rollout and toward enhancement, using data and lived experience to strengthen benefit utilization.

Increasing redemption rates requires coordinated action at the federal, state, and community levels. Together, these strategies can help ensure that Summer EBT reaches its full potential, maximizing the impact of federal investments, improving food security for millions of children, and supporting families when school meals are unavailable. Focusing on redemption as a key indicator of success helps ensure that access to Summer EBT benefits results in meaningful, consistent nutrition support for children over the summer.

Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (January 2024). *Nearly 21 million children expected to receive new grocery benefit this summer*. <https://www.usda.gov/about-usda/news/press-releases/2024/01/10/nearly-21-million-children-expected-receive-new-grocery-benefit-summer>

² Abt Global. *The SNAP hybrid model can increase Summer EBT benefit use*.

<https://www.abtglobal.com/insights/perspectives/the-snap-hybrid-model-can-increase-summer-ebt-benefit-use>

³ Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2022). *SNAP benefit redemption patterns*.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/benefit-redemption-patterns/2022>

⁴ Abt Global. *The SNAP hybrid model can increase Summer EBT benefit use*. <https://www.abtglobal.com/insights/perspectives/the-snap-hybrid-model-can-increase-summer-ebt-benefit-use>

⁵ Food and Nutrition Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2022). *SNAP benefit redemption patterns*.

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/research/snap/benefit-redemption-patterns/2022>

⁶ Abt Global. *From pilot to policy: Five things to know about Summer EBT*.

<https://www.abtglobal.com/insights/perspectives/from-pilot-to-policy-five-things-to-know-about-summer-ebt>

⁷ Brookings Institution. *Rethinking the critical role of data to improve teaching and learning*.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rethinking-the-critical-role-of-data-to-improve-teaching-and-learning/>