



FRAC Facts for Libraries: Participating in Summer and Afterschool Meals

Libraries across the U.S. are providing meals alongside their summer, afterschool, and weekend enrichment and programming. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Afterschool Meal Program, offered through the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), provide federal funding to serve meals and snacks to children 18 and younger when school is not in session, including during weekends and holidays. Offering meals and snacks through the federal meal programs not only allows libraries to become key allies in eliminating childhood hunger and promoting healthy foods, but it helps attract children to the libraries' resources and activities.

Benefits for Libraries:

- **Increased Circulation and Reading Program Participation:** Libraries typically cite a significant increase in book circulation and a higher number of participants in literacy programs after implementing a meal and snack program. Staff members who are initially hesitant often see how meals can attract more children – and even teens – to the library and their bookmobiles.
- **More Visits from Adult Patrons:** Providing meal services allows more parents and caretakers to use the library at meal times, thus leading to an increase in new library cards and library book sales.
- **Higher Community and Public Visibility:** Summer and Afterschool Meal Programs creates an opportunity for increased media coverage and to invite local policy leaders to connect with your library. During a time of county budget cuts, adding meal programs demonstrates the value added by the library to the community and its need for money, staffing, and longer hours. Meal service also brings a new marketing avenue for libraries to gain community support.
- **Contributes to Mission-Driven Work:** Meals drive both children and teens to utilize library services and cultivates productive learning minds by ensuring healthy bodies. Serving food aids low-income families without internet access who must do homework, fill out applications, and connect to family members.

Model Program: Valley Center Library (CA)

Serving 40 to 50 meals daily during summer vacation, the Valley Center Library (VCL) is one of the smallest libraries in the San Diego County Library system yet one of the most active in their rural community. Reaching out to local Native American reservations and large migrant farmworker communities, VCL serves a lunch and a snack as a site through Feeding America San Diego, who provides the meals during the library's summer schedule. Staff cite the consistent program and meal times, along with innovative one-time events, keep participation high all summer. After participating in SFSP for the first time, VCL's circulation numbers increased, prompting them to also pursue the Afterschool Meal Program.

Getting Started

1. Contact your state child nutrition agency here for SFSP contacts: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-contacts> and here for CACFP contacts:

FRAC Facts for Anti-Hunger Organizations & Sponsors: Partnering with Libraries to Run Summer and Afterschool Meal Programs

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/cacfp/cacfp-contacts> Libraries can operate SFSP and CACFP as a sponsor, or they can participate in the programs as a site through a sponsor, such as a school, local government agency, or private nonprofit. Many libraries choose to participate as a site because it requires less administrative work for the library. The state agency can provide more information on the programs.

2. Reach out to your local anti-hunger organization or library association to connect with participating libraries. You can also contact the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) for assistance to find connections and identify best practices.
3. Arrange a visit for your key staff and volunteers to a summer/afterschool meals site and set up a call with a library meal site. This can alleviate any staff concerns and builds excitement for meal service.
4. Present to your “Friends of the Library” to earn their support for adding a meals program. Most libraries are supported by “Friends” groups who provide supplemental funding, programs, and resources to enhance the public funding that libraries receive.
5. Communicate any victories or concerns with your sponsor and vendor. Anti-hunger organizations appreciate working with libraries because they provide high-quality programming, attract kids of all ages, and are meticulous about health standards. Your partnering organization’s goal is to help your library build a strong meals program while maintaining a positive and trusted reputation in the community.

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