

Summer Food Service Program Webinar Transcript Vista / AmeriCorps Session

So to kick us off today, I have the great privilege of introducing Mr. John Kelly. In April of 2009, John Kelly joined the Corporation for National and Community Service as the strategic advisor for faith-based and neighborhood partnerships. He has worked at the neighborhood, state, and national levels with faith communities and faith-based organizations on civic engagement. John comes to the corporation after working at the Democratic National Committee and on the Barack Obama campaign for President, conducting Catholic outreach.

Prior to working in electoral politics, John Kelly served as the co-director of the Emerson National Hunger Fellowship at the Congressional Hunger Center where he spent five years fighting domestic hunger and poverty by directing the Domestic Leadership Development and Service Program. John began his career for working six years in the Archdiocese of Miami, by working in parish-based social justice and campus Ministry at Saint Augustine Catholic Church. Today we welcome John Kelly. Thank you.

Thank you so much, Amber, and it's great to hear a former hunger fellow's voice on the phone. As you all know, the Corporation for National and Community Service is the federal agency created back in the 1993 to oversee national service programs, and last year we engaged five-and-a-half million Americans in volunteer service from disaster to relief to fighting poverty to building playgrounds. But as I'm sure you also know, we have a very long history of supporting programs to combat hunger.

A few of those numbers from just last year are actually really substantial, and if I could just share with you, last year through the AmeriCorps state and national program there were over 1,600 AmeriCorps members and \$13 million that the corporation invested anti-hunger and nutrition efforts. Through VISTA it was \$1.8 million and 99 AmeriCorps VISTA's involved. And in our Senior Corp Program, over 98 percent of RSVP projects reported having volunteers addressing hunger and nutrition, and that was through assisting in preparation and serving of meals, collecting and distributing food, and supporting food production and community gardens and/or serving the homeless.

So as you can tell, we have a long history, and I think this is just the tip of the iceberg of the agency's involvement in anti-hunger efforts. And I'm very excited that later we're going to hear from two friends of mine, Lisa and Joel, and colleagues who have utilized our programs as best-practice models in the fight against hunger. In addition to these major programs here at CNCS, you know we also coordinate the President's call to service, United We Serve, and it was under the United We Serve Initiative that last fall we partnered with USDA on the Feed a Neighbor Initiative, and that was in response to some of the staggering numbers that we were hearing regarding USDA's report on hunger. And so we launched a public awareness campaign and created resources for ways people could serve and get involved in the fight against hunger.

Well one of those ways that we highlighted was getting involved in the Summer Food Program. And as President Obama has said that hunger is an issue that we can solve by coming together. And I think this program in particular is a perfect example of that, of both the need and the opportunity. And I know just as imagining how we know during the school year where kids are and ways to serve them, you can only imagine -- I'll leave it to my colleagues to talk about some of the challenges. But it's so much more difficult to reach kids during the summertime, and so it really calls us to be creative and to come together to solve this issue.

I know that somewhere around 31-million students receive school meals, participate in the school meals program during the school year, around 60 percent of those students are receiving free or reduce-priced lunches, and only 3-million students during the summer are able to access school meals or meals. So the need is great, and I think we have wonderful folks on the phone who can walk us through very practical ways that everyone can get involved. And I thank you all for joining and thank you to USDA for your partnership and, again, thank you to my friends, Lisa and Joel, for joining the call. So with that, I'll turn it back over to Amber and the experts.

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Thank you so much, John. And I want to let everyone know about the format for today. We're going to do a presentation overview of the Summer Food Service Program and then allow Lisa Hamler-Fugitt from the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks, and Joel Burg from the New York City Coalition against Hunger to share their stories. So we welcome our guests, Lisa and Joel. So I'm going to go ahead and get started with the presentation. So again, my name is Amber Herman, and I'm responsible today for sharing with you about the Summer Food Service Program and why we feel it's important to get involved.

The Summer Food Service Program provides free nutritious meals to children in mostly low income areas. Participating children must be 18 years of age or younger. The Summer Food Program operates when school is not in session, which is typically from the end of the school year, in late May or early June, until school resumes, usually late August or September. These dates vary widely across the country.

The Summer Food Service Program is a federally funded, but it is administered by a state agency, generally the Department of Education. Your assistance with the Summer Food Service Program is needed. There are over 18-million children in the country that are eligible for the Summer Program, but only 3 million of them receive meals through the program. The problem with low participation is especially critical in rural areas where transportation issues are often an obstacle. Regardless of your location, there's a good chance that a Summer Food Service Program is needed in a community near you. We are looking for new good sponsoring organizations that will put the program together and help up feed hungry children.

So before we begin, what are the benefits of the program? The program provides nutritious meals to children in need. In many communities, the two meals received by the children may be the only ones they receive each day during summer vacation. The program gives children the nutrition they need to learn, play, and grow. This food energy will help them properly develop and stay healthy and ready for a new school year. The program helps low-income families stretch their food-buying dollars through the summer months. Remember, while the child is in school, lunch, and many times, breakfast, is provided to the child at no charge or very little cost for nine months of the year. And last, the activities and programs for these children helps keep their minds active and engaged and ready to go when the school year begins early in the fall.

The Summer Food Service Program provides two meals per child per day. Any combination of two meals may be served, except for lunch and supper. Normally a program will provide a lunch when the children are finished with their activities and a breakfast when the children arrive in the morning. A snack may be served but it does not count as a meal. There is an exception to the two-meal rule. Camps, as well as sites that serve children of migrant workers, may serve up to three meals per child per day. And all meals must meet USDA standards to be eligible for reimbursement.

A typical lunch may consist of a meat and cheese sandwich, carrot sticks, an apple, and a carton of milk. The Summer Program begins when a community works with a state agency. State agencies are responsible for all administrative requirements of the program. To participate in the Summer Food Service Program, each sponsoring organization must sign an agreement with the state. The agreement sets forth the responsibilities of the state and the sponsor. The state is also responsible for providing training and technical assistance to all sponsors. States want sponsors to succeed so they will work with you every step of the way to assist you whether you are a new or experienced sponsor. State agencies are also responsible for monitoring the operations of participating sponsor organizations.

So you might be asking yourself, "What exactly does a sponsor do?" Well sponsoring organizations are the bread and butter of the Summer Program and are responsible for a wide range of functions. First, they accept financial and administrative responsibility for the program; and second, they manage a food service. This means the sponsor must have food preparation facilities or the capacity to oversee a food service management contract. Sponsors also train and

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monitor sites and site personal, arrange for meals at each site, oversee the operations at each feeding site, assure all paperwork is completed accurately and in a timely manner, and most importantly, submit claims to reimbursement.

Several types of organizations can be sponsors of the Summer Food Service Program. These include such groups as community and faith-based organizations, private non-profit organizations, local governments, school systems, colleges and universities participating in the National Youth Sports Program, migrant centers, and Indian Reservations. There is also a wide variety of feeding sites. The truth is, you can provide a Summer Food Service Program anywhere that there are children gathering and congregating more a meal.

Basically there are two types of feeding sites. The first is an open site. These sites serve meals free to all children 18 years of age or younger. The second type is an enrolled site. These sites require the children's family to complete an enrollment form and a household income application. In order for a site to be eligible for the program, it must meet one of two criteria. For an open site, the location where meals will be served must be located in a school attendance area where 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced-priced meals. The 50-percent criteria is based upon school data or census data. Your school agency can provide substantial technical assistance in making these determinations.

For an enrolled site families must submit a household income application for each child enrolled in the program. If 50 percent of the applications demonstrate eligibility for free or reduced-priced meals, then the site may serve three meals to all children. These criteria, we know, sound a lit confusing. But your state agency will help you through the process and help you make these determinations.

There are two exceptions to the basic site eligibility rule. Residential and non-residential summer camps may serve up to three meals per child per day; however only meals served to children who meet the free or reduced-priced meals criteria based upon household income applications -- whoever doesn't have their phone on mute, if you could mute your phone that would be great. The second exception is this food feeding sites that primarily serve children of migrant workers. In order for the site to be determined eligible, the location must be certified by a migrant organization, then the site may serve up to three meals per child per day to all children.

USDA reimbursement may be used to defray the operating and administrative costs of conducting the Summer Food Service Program. Typically operating costs include the cost of the food, food supplies such as paper bags and napkin, and the cost of labor to prepare the meals. Administrative costs might include costs associated with paperwork, training staff, monitoring a site, and all the other administrative functions we discussed earlier. Additional reimbursement is also provided to sponsors that operate sites in rural areas or prepare their own meals, which is sometimes referred to as self-prep.

So what can you do to help? Well you can become a sponsor of the program. That's the most important thing and the thing we're most in need of at the moment. If you aren't ready to take on such a responsibility, you can supervise a feeding site or you could over see an activity program at a feeding site. Many folks spend their summers looking for interesting and innovative activities for their children. We've even have zoo representatives bring animals to feeding site for show and tell. We can guarantee you they had a lot of meals eaten that day while the kids enjoyed watching the programming. If you have meal preparation facilities, you could be a meal vendor. As a vendor you would enter into a contract with a sponsor to provide meals for all of the sites.

Here are just a few organizations you may want to contact to obtain community information or form partnerships with. These are not the usual suspects. We recognize that, so bear with me. First, the mayors, office, they'll likely know community organizations you can partner with, and it doesn't hurt to have the mayor stop by one of your feeding sites. County extension agents are usually dedicated to the issues related to children and will know other community organizations

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you can work with. Boys and Girls Club and the Salvation Army are places where feeding sites currently exist and are often successful in unique partnership. The police and fire department are willing to help. Local organizations like the Rotary Club can provide transportation or funding. And local libraries often have summer reading programs and a building that is suitable for serving meals. So contact these organizations plus others in your community and think of your unlikely partners.

What we have here are some of the keys to a successful summer programs. Over the years, we have found that these five ingredients make a great program. The first is to have creative activities for kids and teens. We have found that a meal is often not enough to draw children to a site; however add one or two meals to your recreational program and you've got a winning combination. Partnerships are becoming more important, especially as funding for children's programs continues to decrease. There may already be an established program in your community that could serve a breakfast when children arrive and a lunch before they leave.

Next, involve parents whenever you can. Parents often know the community and the neighborhood children very well and are your best resource for information and willing to roll up their sleeves to help. Be resourceful and innovative, looking for opportunities, especially the unlikely ones. For example, in rural Nebraska, a sponsor was having difficulty finding a meal vendor. They approached a local hospital that was not only interested in having healthier children but also needed very little technical assistance when it came to knowing how to serve nutritious meals. They partnered the local hospital with the nonprofit, and sure enough, you had happy fed children that summer.

Above all, you need to find a local champion, especially in rural areas. This is someone who will go the extra mile to get the job done. This person needs to know and understand that starting a program may be a little bit difficult but his or her hard work will pay off in the end. Local champions are creative, innovative, and self-starters, and you will be hearing from two of them in a moment.

So now you're thinking, "How do I get started?" Well the answer is easy. You start by contacting your state agency. Your state agency will provide you with an application, training on the required paperwork, and will help you get started from the very beginning. If you're interested in knowing who your state contact is, you can look up on the Webinar tool bar. On the right-hand side there's three pieces of paper that look shuffled together. If you click on that icon, you will be able to see a list for state contacts, and you can download it to your computer.

So that's all for our presentation today, but I want to provide an opportunity now for two fantastic local champions to share their story. We're going to start with Lisa Hamler-Fugitt. She serves as the executive director of the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks, which is Ohio's largest charitable food assistant network. The association represents 12 Feeding America Food Banks who distributed over 113-million pounds of food and grocery item last year to over 3,000 member agencies, including food pantries, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and other charitable food assistance organizations.

Lisa Hamler-Fugitt is also part of the Ohio Benefits Bank, which is a web-based counselor-assisted program that provides free community-based services that simplifies the process of applying for work support programs such as SNAP, EITC, and the Child Nutrition Program. In addition, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks administers Ohio SNAP Outreach Plan and is the largest state sponsor of state and national service programs, including VISTA AmeriCorps. Lisa has researched, written, and secured over \$200 million in grants from local, state, and national government sources, private foundations, and religious denominations that have been used to support various social welfare initiatives and anti-hunger programs. As an organizer, she has worked to mobilize individuals and organizations around statewide campaigns and regional grassroots coalition. Lisa is truly a champion of the Summer Food Service Program and of serving children in need in Ohio, and we give her the floor.

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Good afternoon, Amber and participants. And again, I'd like to thank you for inviting us to participate today. I am joined by my colleague, Dustin Speakman, who is the director of our National Service Program. I want to say also a special thank you to the United States Department of Agriculture at FNS, as well as the Corporation on National Community Service at the state and federal level. Without their partnership and the support of thousands of faith-based and community-based organizations who serve as sponsors, we could not do the work that we do, so I'd like to just say thank you for this opportunity, and we'd like to briefly go over the scope of the project that relates to our multifaceted and holistic focus in the engagement of resources from the corporation and national and community service towards community engagement. We can go to the next slide. Next slide.

The association runs a number of different initiatives, one being our SHARECorps Program, which is an AmeriCorps VISTA Initiative, which was launched as a modest program in 2006, with only 12 member slots that we have now been able to expand that currently support from 75 members across the state. These members work at community and faith-based levels, providing counselor assistance through our Ohio Benefit Bank, which is an Internet-based application assistance program that allows low and moderate income people to learn about incomplete applications for a broad array of work support programs, helping communities bring over \$200 million back into those communities for work support. They have worked diligently to recruit over 5,500 different community volunteers that have provided over 16,000 hours of service in the area of anti-hunger and anti-poverty. As well as the in-kind services, they have also brought desperately needed financial resources in the way of securing over \$300 million in cash -- \$300,000 in cash grants and in-kind donations.

Our second program that we have launched is our HarvestCorps, and again, these are branded programs of the AmeriCorps state initiative, which we launched in September of 2009. We now have 30 members that are assigned to serve one-year terms at our food banks that are doing food stamp, as well as benefit bank outreach. The results in the first three months have been nothing short of phenomenal. As the resources of our AmeriCorps and VISTA members that are available to us, again, through the wonderful sponsorship of the National and State offices have truly become the backbone and the foot soldiers of the work that desperately needs to be done in the area of anti-hunger and anti-poverty initiatives. The association of AmeriCorps VISTA programs related to the Summer Food Service Program are framed in expanding and building on strong public partnerships, deploying the human resources that are so desperately needed, which to support the Summer Food Service Program.

Last year the association partnered with the Ohio Department of Education, which is the state sponsor of the Summer Food Service Program, and helped us to identify 12 high-need summer Food Service Program sites. With the support of the corporation, we were allotted 56 summer associates who took their oath of service by Congresswoman Mary Jo Kilroy, who herself was one of the original VISTA members. And after that oath, our members were assigned to some 12 summer Food Service Program sites across the state. They hit the ground running, and you can see too, the left-hand side of this screen are participating site sponsors, again, a good representation of the groups who are operating either as sponsors or sites of the programs.

Through the resources of the Corporation we were able to help increase participation of some 5,000 new children into the program. Our members help serve over 100,000 meals, and they developed, as well as facilitated activities that not only engaged the use but also brought their family members in, and that was one of the items that Amber pointed out in her slide, that it's so critical to strong programs is a strong parental engagement component.

Building our on public/private partnership and deploying the work, we also wanted to have a clear understanding what our Summer Food Service Program sponsors and sites needed, and we have conducted a survey that found that some 46.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they were urban programs; one in three indicated that they were representing a rural area; and

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almost 10 percent reported that they were a suburban service area. Certainly in Ohio, as we're seeing a deepening recession and continuing job losses, a special focus on our suburban areas who have been in many cases insulated in prior recessions who are now really feeling the bite of growing poverty and hunger.

What we found are the majority of the respondents indicated that increased community awareness would be the most effective in increasing their participation, followed very closely by the one that we all know, which is the need for transportation to and from sites, as well as increased reimbursement rates for the program. Nearly 43 percent indicated that an increase would allow them to support the administration and operation of the program, as well as increasing the nutritional quality of the food provided. Unbelievable, three out of four of the respondents that strongly agreed that the utilization of AmeriCorps and VISTA Summer associates would enhance their site efforts and increase participation. And 70 percent indicated that they would be applying or for AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates.

As we roll out and are gearing up for the summer of 2010 and expansion, we have been blessed again this year to be partnering with our state agency. We have issued a request for proposals for placement of our summer associates. We will be awarding 75 slots through this process. We have an ambitious target this year of reaching some 7,500 children and to serve some 150,000 meals over last year.

We too know that our summer associates not only will be actively engaged in helping to distribute, prepare meals, and provide compliance and monitoring, which is so important to the summer food service program, but their creativity in bringing in activities to the program are just as important, including extending our learning opportunities through summer learning experiences, physical fitness activities, as well as nutrition assistance. We are looking at curriculums around having the kids involved in the development of cook books, as well as what we're calling "nutrition treasure hunts."

The association, again, will be providing outreach to families who may accompany their children to summer food service sites. We will be outreaching the broad array of services that are available through the Benefit Bank, again, reaching people where they work, look, pray, and pray. Our summer associates will be also a part of our recruitment, our pre-service training, and end-of service recognition. We also will be launching a statewide public service announcement campaign, the promotion. Promotion, again, is very, very important, and as we look at how do we help get the word out. We get the resources to the communities through the utilization of the Corporation and National Community Services AmeriCorps VISTA Programs, but that alone will not work.

Again, public information campaigns and PSAs, providing -- all of our sites are provided with what we call media tool kits that can be easily adapted to their local areas, including templates for media releases, letters to the editor, newsletter articles and templates, as well as church bulletins and door hangers that are then distributed door to door in low-income communities. Our food banks have all Summer Food Service Program sites and sponsors listed on their websites. We're utilizing 2-1-1 and information referral listings as well to help get the word out, as well as flyers at local food pantries, soup kitchen, and homeless shelters.

Recruitment: How do we recruit our members? Posting on Craig's List is one great way to do it; certainly word of mouth through other alumni and the AmeriCorps recruitment system through E-grants is heavily visited. We go to college employment and community service fairs. We are sending out notices through our local and statewide list serves. Again, training is also very important, ensuring that we have strong members who understand not only the programs, what the scope and focus are, but to give them the tools necessary to carry out their service and be strong promoters and champions of the Summer Food Service Programs. Our training and orientation are day-long supervisors -- are day-long trainings for all supervisors, which are mandatory, multi-day pre-service orientations for our members, and to keep the camaraderie, we

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are doing monthly calls, as well as weekly updates and regular site visits with our associates and capping the year, to thank for their service and to allow them to do reflection, celebration, and recognition.

I also wanted to say that in the branding of our programs, we have also really been pleased with a major partnership that we have received with Wal-Mart who are allowing us to purchase uniforms for all of our members as well. So at this point, I'd like to turn it over to Amber, and thank you for your time.

Thank you so much, Lisa, and we're just really excited about what's happening in Ohio and how you're meeting the need of feeding children by also creating learning and growing opportunities for young people who want to serve their communities. And by creating a holistic program here of recruitment, as well as training and recognition is a great way to keep volunteers excited about the program, so thank you.

Next, we're going to talk with another fantastic champion of the Summer Food Service Program who has leveraged the AmeriCorps Program. Joel Burg, since 2001, has served as the executive director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, which represents the more than \$1,200 non-profit soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City and more than 1.3 million low-income New Yorkers who are forced to use them. Prior to his work with the coalition, Joel served for eight years in the Clinton administration in various senior executive service positions at USDA related to public affairs and food security. From 1989 to 1993, he served as a policy analyst for the progressive policy institute and a domestic policy staff member for the then elect, Bill Clinton's transition team. Joel has published widely on the topic of hunger, national and community service, and grassroots community partnerships including a recent white paper on food jobs for the Progressive Policy Institute.

A native of Rockland County, New York, and a graduate of Columbia, Joel now resides in Brooklyn. He's a past winner of the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture's Honor award for superior service, and the Congressional Hunger Center's Mickey Leland National Hunger Fighter Award. Joel, welcome.

Thank you so much, Amber, and thank you, everyone, for being on this call. I too want to profoundly thank any friends and colleagues at the United States Department of Agriculture. It's one thing to have programs and sort of just leave them on the shelf and say, "Well whoever gets them gets them," and that's sort of everyone's problem if they don't get them. It's another thing to have people, public servants in the department reaching out like the department's doing and the administration is now doing to say it's not good enough for us just to have the programs, to have the authorities, to have the funding, if kids aren't using the programs, they're not working well enough. So thank you to the department.

I also want to express great, great thanks to the Corporation for National Community Service, the federal agency that funds our VISTA Program and our AmeriCorps National Service Program. AmeriCorps is an incredible program that promotes community and opportunity and responsibility while accomplishing concrete things in communities all across America. I'm so grateful that this administration and congress in a bipartisan way dramatically expanded the program.

So for everyone listening, if you were ever thinking of applying for the program, now is the perfect time to do it. There was a massive expansion in legislation this year, and congress has provided the authorizations for it, so there is going to be a 10,000-person increase in AmeriCorps participation this year, going from about 75,000 members to 85,000 members nationwide. So it's always good to get on the ground floor of an expansion.

And before I talk a little bit about AmeriCorps and VISTA participants, just let me reiterate the importance of what everyone has said about the summer meals, given the very high proportion of kids who get school lunch who don't get summer meals. I'm sure many of you on any given day

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have bemoaned that in your opinion the federal Government wasn't spending as much money on feeding hungry children as you would like. But with this program, because it's entitlement program, where the government is required to spend more money when you enroll more children, you have as much power as the President of the United States and the congress of the United States to spend more federal funds on low-income children because every time you help bring another hungry family or a low-income family to bring their kids to a summer meal site, you've helped increase spending on this program for a vital national purpose.

So with that, I don't want to duplicate what other people have said already about AmeriCorps and VISTA, but we sort of throw these terms around, so I just want to be, you know, clear. VISTA is a part of AmeriCorps, but for the purposes of this presentation, I'm describing AmeriCorps members and VISTAs differently just to make it a little easier. AmeriCorps members are typically focused on immediate direct service. VISTAs are focused on long-term capacity building. So if you put this in a food bank or food pantry context, an AmeriCorps member could be serving the soup or packing a pantry bag. VISTA probably spends a great amount of their time doing that, but rather they should be recruiting volunteers to pack those pantry bags or raising funds to do that.

In the context of summer meals, an AmeriCorps member might actually give out the summer meals, might actually serve them, while a VISTA might actually plan a broader outreach activity for the community. There are a lot of gray areas between those two distinctions, so certainly, AmeriCorps members can and should do capacity-building work and volunteer recruitment work, and as part of implementing their broader capacity-building work plan, occasionally VISTAs do some direct service, but by and large, those are the biggest distinctions.

Now you apply to different places. The Corporation for National Community Service actually as a state office in each state. It's a federal office in each state, usually in the state capitol, but I don't think always, but is responsible for taking applications for the VISTAs Program. If you are applying for an AmeriCorps Program, you apply to your state commission on national and community service, sometimes they're called the "State Commission on National Service" or "Community Service" or "Volunteerism." They report directly to the governor. If for any reason you are applying for a multi-state AmeriCorps project, you would apply directly to the Corporation for National Service. Indicated in this handy-dandy slide here, you can go to AMERICORPS.GOV and find all the information you would need about how to apply. Next slide please.

By the way, I'm a New Yorker. Occasionally I speak quickly. But I understand there may be people from other parts of the country on this call, so I want you to know I've slowed down on my usual talking here.

Just a few points about what makes a high-quality project. First second, third, and fourth are high quality work plans and objectives in accordance with program rules. People serving in AmeriCorps and VISTA are making small, small, small community stipends far, far less money than they would earn in the private marketplace, so in exchange for them making this incredible commitment to their country and their community, we all, as project managers -- and we do have a VISTA project and an AmeriCorps project at the New York City coalition against hunger -- have to make sure they're doing useful vital work on a daily basis.

The next top priority is making sure you really have a high-quality team. This should not ever be seen as sort of a warmed over jobs program that people come into the program because they don't have anything else to do. I think it's critical that in our marketing and our recruitment we send the message this is a high priority tough program. As they used to say about the Peace Corps, the toughest job you're ever going to love, and the people in the program are committed to it. Understand this isn't a job, this is a national service opportunity, and if you're going to get, let's say, 15 people for a program, you should interview, in my judgment, dozens of people at least.

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For our 15-person VISTA program, we are in contact with over 150 people, and that allows us to really have an all-star team of people.

In addition, there are sites where you can place folks, but not every person on the planet is equally good as a supervisor unless you have your own staff on all these other sites like many of us in the hunger world, you know, food banks, and umbrella anti-hunger organizations, we're dependent on the smaller community-based food pantries, soup kitchens, community centers, youth groups to be the actual sites for summer meals. They may be amazing at summer meals, but they also have to be pretty darn good at managing human beings and understanding all the AmeriCorps and VISTA rules, and that's why we have strict competitions for our sites as well.

It's great to recruit good people. It's vital to have good sites. But seeing is believing and seeing is understanding. You have to meet frequently with the sites and do site visits yourself or whoever on your team is responsible for this.

Lisa was indicating these are incredible programs that do vital work for your community and vital fighting hunger, but they do require significant efforts on your part to make sure they're well supervised, and they do take a fair amount of staff time to make sure that happens. Excuse me. Even though you recruit a diverse team of participants who are great, many folks will still be -- this is sort of their first real job in college or out of college. Not everyone has the same understanding about what a workplace means, and so you do need to supervise these programs. Excuse me.

Continuously build team meaning and foster group problem solving, what that means is you have to give these folks a sense in the program that they're part of something bigger than themselves. If they merely think, again, they're in a warmed-over jobs program, if they're merely put in someone's coat closet and you see them once every three weeks and say, "Just go do because you're dedicated," that is not going to have the impact as bringing people together, having them work with other members, expressing the bigger picture of what they're accomplishing. Excuse me. Next slide, please.

Just more overlay on how we can use these folks to expand summer food service participation. Basically three ways. You can increase the number of sites that state and local governments are sponsoring. You can help other non-profits sponsor or host sites or your own nonprofit or host or host sites, or you can get more kids to existing sites. So to make that really simple, you can either create more sites, either through government or the non-profit sector, or make sure the existing sites have more children. Pretty simple, but there you have it. Next slide, please.

Identifying geographic gaps: I think, you know, we all in this time of scarce resources want to be very careful that we don't have one site across the street from another site, and that's why you really need to have good lists of where the planned sites are. We used Geotag collected dataset to map and identify areas, and then we show the state and local governments the gaps. Next slide, please.

So this is an example. I don't know how clearly it comes up on your screen. This is a map we used using GIS technology where we showed the blue areas -- I'm sorry -- the light blue areas are places where there are summer meal sites already or the year we did this in the New York City about two years ago, if you don't recognize, this is a five fine boroughs of my home city of New York. The red areas are places that are eligible by federal law and yet did not have sites. So we left out, obviously, the places that already had sites, the census tracts, and if many of you know, census tract is essentially a neighborhood. So we left out our follow-up targeting for new sites, we left out the places that already had sites, and we obviously left out the white areas that some of those are non-inhabited areas or parks. Some of those are just slightly above the income cut off or some are a few wealthy areas in New York, and targeted very carefully and very precisely on the areas that were eligible for summer meals but not getting them. And we had AmeriCorps members help with this data input and tabulation. Next slide, please.

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Second, increase the number of non-profit groups involved. You've got to start way before the summer, so the timing of this call is very appropriate. We've had workshops for folks on how to participate, and then we've distributed manuals on how to do it. And AmeriCorps members and VISTAs have helped with that as well. And really trying to convince more community organizations, particularly in those areas where we identify there are gaps to participate. Next slide, please.

We conduct workshops. The USDA regional offices have been incredibly supportive of this work and send someone from each of our workshops, and then we have people from the state and city government entities that manage these programs. We give a pep talk, as I did at the start of this talk, about how many more kids can participate and how much the need is. We differentiate between sponsoring and hosting sites. Now that may not be possible everywhere. And what I mean by New York City, you've heard a lot on this call what it means to sponsor a site, and there's a lot of responsibility for that.

In New York City, our Department of Education, our, basically, school board says any organization in the city that is a legitimate site that wants to host a site, it means that the Department of Education will bring food to that site. There's a lot less paperwork, a lot less legal responsibility. You're not responsible for creating the meals, just serving them. You don't get the money you'd get for being a sponsor, but you also have a lot less hassle, and a lot of smaller agencies opt to do that. We provide the details on the application process. We provide assistance in completing and submitting the application, and we follow up, follow up-absolutely critical. Most of these agencies are very small and need an awful lot of help. They cannot do it on their own. Next slide, please.

Third step, outreach to communities. Yes, in underserved neighborhoods we want to create more sites, but you already saw from our map there are hundreds of existing sites in New York City, so we use traditional grassroots outreach. If I dare use the term community organizing, I would use that term as well. We hold media events, we create interactive maps, we integrate that with government (800) line or call-in lines, and so we get the word out. Next slide.

And this is an example. The other map we showed, showed you where the gaps were, and that was not for the public. This map was what we had on our website, and we thank the group, HUNGERMAPS.ORG, and by the way, you contact them for free. They will help you develop maps in your community if you have a good Excel Spreadsheet. So this is a map of central Brooklyn, not far from my home, and every dot is a summer meal site, because a lot of people think more visually than they do in other ways about this. And that is essentially how we get the word out and how we get more kids eating summer meals. It's not easy but it is absolutely vital work, so I congratulate you on what you're doing and look forward to the questions.

Fantastic. Thank you so much, Joel, for sharing with us. So now we're going to move into the question-and-answer session. We have Lisa and Joel on the phone to be able to provide their expertise, but also, you can ask questions through the Q & A portion at the top of your Webinar tool. You can also click *1 on your phone.

So operator, are there any questions on the phone?

Not as of yet, no, ma'am.

Okay. Well let's start with questions here. Let's see. And we also have with us the FNS policy expert, Miss Kathryn Quillen, who will be able to answer questions. So this question might be for you. It says, "What are the USDA requirements for kitchens that prepare and serve food? Is this a state issue? I've had no luck finding what's required to pass inspection."

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Hi. This is Kathryn. Uh-huh. Even past going a state issue, that's a local issue, and so we urge you to get in touch with your Health Department, whoever would oversee or approve those local facilities.

Excellent. Thank you. The next question is, "We are a not-for-profit community organization but do not yet have a 501C3, although we have been incorporated for two years. We had our summer center open but at the time currently don't serve any of the children there. Can we still participate, even though we're not yet a 501C3." Kathryn, I think you might know the answer to this?

For that I would recommend that you get in touch with your state agency and work very closely with them. Our summer rules as far as the documentation is a little bit different than it would be in our other programs. We do not specify what kind of exemption is needed through the IRS, and that's where you state agency and the IRS will guide you on what specifically you will need for your organization.

Oh, this is Joel Burg. Can I actually say one thing about the previous question I think it would be helpful to clarify. In the vast majority of jurisdictions, including here in New York City, if you actually prepare the foods on site, then you need to be approved by the City Department of Health, but in most cases, in my experience, if you're merely redistributed food that was prepared on another site, that other site, that other kitchen, that other caterer, whoever, they have to be in compliance with all local Health Department rule. But as far as I know, in most places, redistributing food someone else handed out, you may have some requirements about keeping it at a certain temperature, et cetera, generally, those regulations are a lot less onerous.

Thank you. I really appreciate that.

Operator, is there anyone on the phone.

Yes. We do have our first question from Daneen Perdy [PH]. Your line is open.

Hi. I also typed mine in. VISTA volunteers are typically year-long volunteers, so what happens -- what do they do when the summer feeding programs aren't happening?

I'll let Joel and Lisa share from their experience.

Well there is a VISTA Summer Associates Program where you can get VISTAs just for the summer, and also in AmeriCorps, you can build in special summer slots, and so we have used VISTA summer people and AmeriCorps summer people, specifically jobs for summer foods outreach, as well as some other summer specific activities; for instance, helping people use food stamps at farmers markets or community gardening.

That being said, is for a VISTA, if you had a real year plan for planning next year's summer meals, you could actually create a legitimate work plan for a whole year. That may be difficult because its hard even if we're focused on summer meals, you know, mine months in advance, the rest of the city or county may not. And so often you can include this as one of the activities in their work plan, so the rest of the year they could be working on outreach, you know, after school snacks, in the child and adult care feeding program, after school snacks or suppers. They could be working on SNAP, food stamps, outreach. They could be working on other things related to the food bank or pantry and kitchen. So the short -- long answer is, either you have them just summer slots working just on this. If you have a very, very well defined, you know, work plan, I would think no more than one person could really be planning this year-long, or you could build in summer food outreach as part of a number of concrete things in their work plan.

This is Dustin Speakman here with Jason -- or with Lisa. I also want to say Joel did a fantastic job of explaining the difference between AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps VISTA, but there is -- he

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just touched on this -- there is the summer VISTA Program, and that was the topic of our presentation. And VISTA Summer associates can engage in direct service. The reason for that is it's generally a ten-week program, and so working on long-term sustainability and capacity development issue isn't really feasible for a ten-week program. So in Ohio, we engage summer associate VISTAs strictly for direct service.

Great. Thank you.

Very good. We've got another question here that would probably be appropriate for Lisa and Joel to speak to. It says, "Have you used existing AmeriCorps VISTA members and then sought sponsorship or used existing sites to support or start a summer food service program. Our non-profit has a network of rural area members and begins service in January. Would the next step to be getting involved in or sponsoring utilizing these members to work with our state contact or work with the corporation?"

Lisa?

I want to say on that, both bringing resources of AmeriCorps VISTA or summer associates to sites are very important. As you know, the Summer Food Service Program reimbursements are often not as adequate as they need to be to provide the program, so in sponsor development they can certainly be deployed in the work that needs to be done as far as the development of the programs. But then as the support of the sites, I think, are very, very important. Oftentimes what we find with the Summer Food Service Program that people say, "I don't have the capacity. We don't have the resources at which to operate the program," and they think very much through the lens of the sponsorship, and Joel touched on this.

It is so important that as we reach out to our not-for-profit and faith-based organizations that they really understand that there are other alternatives and that networking of potential sites to existing sponsors are really important. And, again, looking at just the AmeriCorps VISTA members, these are, again, the professional resources that are just critical to either the program sponsors or the program sites. And I also want to say that the program sponsors or sites have -- in our program there's no cost to them to host our members, our VISTA member. And again, that is just really, really important, being able to build the capacity to expand our outreach to more hungry children.

This is Joel. You know, obviously in New York City we don't have too many rural areas, but in my previous life at USDA I was involved in AmeriCorps, and we helped sponsor a project in Vermont where we were doing a fair amount of work in rural areas, and AmeriCorps members were very effective in that work. I know it's been mentioned, but I will reemphasize. You know, the most effective summer meal sites are not standalone food sites. They are combined with either educational programs or recreational programs or sports programs. In Vermont we had very successful sites at pools. So you want some place that kids are going to anyway, and you can effectively use AmeriCorps members to build the capacity of the sponsoring organizations so they are a little less freaked out doing this paperwork and other outreach work.

I think we've got time for just one more question from the phone and then we'll wrap up.

Thank you. Sandra Falbin [PH], your line is open. Okay. Thank you very much. This has been very interesting. I run a food pantry, a USDA food pantry in Green County Virginia, so that's 17,000 population, and we're operating under a church 501C3, and we have been for 15 years. Does that qualify us as a faith-based us or will that disqualify us?

This is Amber from the USDA Center for Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships. The Summer Food Service Program is not a faith-based group -- it's not a secular or a faith program. It's just a government program.

Okay.

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And to receive your reimbursements, you can run the Summer Food Service Program at a vacation Bible school, a summer camp in the park. That doesn't really matter that much either.

Okay. That was my other question then. Last year we did one community program. It wasn't a non-denominational VBS program in our largest low-income area. This summer we want to add three trailer parks to that. That will cover most of the area where food-stamp people live. So this all, then, does fit into this program?

Yes, absolutely. And the important part is not so much the activities that are happening before or after breakfast or lunch, as much as making sure that that meal meets the nutrition standards, as well as ensuring that you're -- I'm sorry, I lost my train of thought -- that meets the nutrition standards and that you followed the proper paperwork and that the kids are eligible. And so recognizing whether or not it's going to be an open or enrolled site matters much more than really just affiliation of the non-profits that are applying. So we work with all religious denomination who are committed to serving children in the summer, and that includes the education Bible school programs.

That's wonderful.

And if I may say, it is an absolute myth that the Federal Government somehow restricts religious practices of agencies that get government funding for these programs. The vast majority of soup kitchens and food pantries my organization works with are faith-based. They're feeding using USDA programs and sanctuaries and church basements. Not once in the few decades I've been working on this have I ever been made aware of any single time that the Federal Government has ever asked someone to take down a crucifix or a cross or a Magen David or some other religious symbol. So I know people hear those rumors, and sometimes they take on a life of their own. But I just want to be clear, those fears are actually nonexistent.

Okay. But we do have to be careful about what we say about religion, don't we?

I'd be happy to talk to you more in-depth about this afterwards. If you'll put your contact information in the question-and-answer spot.

Okay.

We'll get in touch with you offline. But for the most part, Joel is correct. As long as your services are open to anyone, regardless if they believe what you believe, then groups can receive government funding, and that it's not being used for explicitly religious services; therefore, you can receive, again, government resources. So you have to keep accounting separate and some other things to ensure that that distinction is made. But we recognize and appreciate the work of faith-based leaders to provide children food in the summertime and recognize they are our greatest ally in reaching out and making this all happy.

So I want to just wrap up here, again thank John, Lisa, and Joel for their insight, as well as to remind everyone that you can download the PowerPoints, which were up on the upper left-hand -- excuse me, upper right-hand side of the Webinar tool where those pieces of paper are shuffled together. If you click that icon you can also download your state contacts. I noticed there were some questions about Guam and D. C. We will touch base with you offline to get you contact information that is relevant. But thank you so very much for everyone to take their time with us this afternoon, and have a wonderful day.