

Sponsor Retention

Keeping successful sponsors is just as important as, or sometimes even more important than, locating and signing new ones. State agencies should focus on outreach efforts aimed at sponsor recruitment, but retaining experienced sponsors to operate the program is vital to maintaining strong, sustainable summer meals programs.

Did You Know? A national Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) study issued in April 2003 found that about 8 percent of sponsors did not return to the SFSP the following summer. Reasons ranged from local personnel issues to financial problems. For more information, click here - <http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/feedinglow.pdf>.

Training

Effective training is the foundation of a successful sponsor. State agencies must train sponsors in all necessary areas of Program administration. Ensuring that sponsors fully understand their responsibilities is essential to their success. Here are some innovative approaches:

- **Targeted Training**
To better meet the specific training needs of sponsors, State agencies can solicit feedback from sponsors at the end of each summer. Additionally, reviewing findings and observations made during sponsor and site reviews in the previous summer can help identify areas in which sponsors would benefit from focused training.
- **Online Training**
State agencies can offer sponsors training through an online training module. Sponsors have been very receptive to this alternative to classroom-style training, because they no longer have to spend the money and extra time traveling to receive training. This is particularly useful in larger and rural States where traveling to training could be very costly for a potential sponsor.
- **Training Themes**
Keeping sponsors engaged is critical to delivering effective training. Hold a series of themed training sessions across the State to get sponsors excited to begin their outreach. For example, a theme, such as a Hawaiian Luau, can help get everyone thinking about summer. Themes can be carried through with decorations, refreshments, training games, and even attendee clothing and/or accessories.
- **Administrative Review Forms**
To help prepare returning sponsors for the coming summer, the State agency can



provide the administrative review forms prior to their program's operation. Providing these forms, along with a PowerPoint presentation, complements formal training and helps sponsors clearly understand expectations. When reviews take place during the summer, sponsors are more likely to meet program requirements.

Technical Assistance

Providing technical assistance to new and existing sponsors offers additional support to help ensure their success in the program. Here is an some example:

- **Mentoring by Field Monitors**

The best way to correct problems at the sponsor level is to prevent them in the first year. A State agency can operate a mentor-monitoring program, where each new sponsor is assigned a mentor from the State agency's monitoring staff. Mentors assist new sponsors the first week of operation, check paperwork and recordkeeping requirements, troubleshoot during site reviews, and help prepare the sponsor for their administrative review. Mentors also can be assigned for returning sponsors with new staff, and with larger sponsors, should specific problems arise. State agency staff also can provide one-on-one assistance in preparing budgets with new sponsors.

Communication

Open lines of communication between the State agency, sponsors, and sites can lead to successful summer meals operations, as well as establish strong working relationships. Here are ideas that may help establish effective communication:

- **Customer Service Mindset**

Viewing sponsors as your "client" can be an effective way to ensure the needs of the sponsor are met both at the initial stages of approval in the spring and throughout the summer. State agencies should ensure their office is prepared to respond to sponsor inquiries and provide technical assistance as needed.

- **Exit Interviews or Debriefing:** When a sponsor leaves or decides to not return to the program the following year, it is important for the State agency to understand why. After a State understands the problem, it can develop strategies to correct the issue through enhanced training or the development of tools designed to prevent reoccurrence of the original setback. Some State agencies employ the use of a survey form to extract better information from the exiting sponsor.

- **Meeting with Decision Makers:** Communication can also take the form of program promotion. Ask high-ranking, well-known members of the community to meet and discuss the merits of administering summer meals to local school officials. For



example, have influence speakers highlight the number of unserved children in the area and the potential reimbursement amounts that could be a revenue source for the school district should they administer summer meals. By meeting with decision makers, such as the school superintendent or other high ranking officials within the school system, a careful and well-planned presentation concerning need and potential lost funding may lead to more school participating in summer meals.

Outreach

By providing outreach assistance and support, States can recruit new sponsors and help existing sponsors expand their programs. Here are a few innovative and successful outreach strategies:

- **Giving a “Call Out”**

Many school districts have “call-out” phone systems, which leave automated messages at students’ homes to inform parents and guardians of various issues. Have school districts send “call-outs” to all of the households in their districts to publicize summer meals before school lets out and throughout the summer.

- **Publicity through other State agencies**

State agencies can coordinate with the State Medicaid, Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and other agencies to publicize summer meals. Place ‘summer meals stuffers’ in beneficiaries’ mailings. A ‘summer meals stuffer’ should provide basic information about summer meals, and contact information to the National Hunger Hotline and State Agency.

- **Ready-to-use outreach materials for Sponsors**

In addition to training materials, the State agency can develop ready-to-use outreach materials for sponsors such as a brochure to help recruit new sites. Similar to the USDA brochures, State developed resources can provide basic information as well as State-specific contact information for interested sponsors or sites.

USDA Resources

Proactive Planning

Plan ahead for your sponsor retention activities so that your partners are ready to assist. Maintaining year-long communication with sponsors ensures they remain on track with their planning. For more information, visit:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-ProactivePlanning.pdf>



Summer Meals Toolkit

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Keep up-to-date with changes to the Program, and update your training materials accordingly. For more information, visit:

<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-PolicyResources.pdf>

Partner Organizations Resources

Food Research and Action Center – State Agency Summer Nutrition Retention Strategies

This helpful guide provides tips for State agencies and includes a sample survey to be sent to sponsors. http://frac.org/pdf/sfsp_state_agency_sponsor_retention_plans.pdf

Promising Practices

Colorado No Kid Hungry 2012 Summer Meals Evaluation

This evaluation determined what strategies and tactics are most effective to increase participation in the summer meals program, as well as what processes and management systems lead to the best outcomes. The evaluation's recommendations include focusing on site and sponsor retention. See the [evaluation summary](#) for more details.

Review these ideas and adopt the strategies that seem reasonable to you and compatible with your program. Sponsors and the general public should contact the appropriate State agency for additional guidance. State agencies should contact their FNS Regional Office for additional guidance.

List of FNS Regional Offices: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fns-regional-offices>

List of State Agencies: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/Contacts/StateDirectory.htm>



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