



# Summer Meals Local Government Toolkit

Summer is a critical time for children's academic and physical well-being. Children are at a higher risk for hunger during the summer when they lose access to school meals, threatening their cognitive and physical development. **Summer Meals Programs** can bridge the hunger gap by providing free, nutritious meals to kids where they live, learn, and play when school is not in session.

Municipalities are essential partners in the effort to expand access to each and every child in need. We need your help to make sure that all kids, teens, and families know about summer meals and benefit from the programs this summer.

On average,

**15%**

of kids who receive free or reduced-price lunches get a summer meal.



Brought to you by:



## What are Summer Meals?

They are free meals provided to kids and teens 18 years old and younger during the summer months. Sponsoring organizations receive federal reimbursements to serve these meals and snacks. Summer meals sponsors can be schools, camps, governmental entities, and private non-profit organizations.

In Virginia, the majority of students who receive free or reduced-price lunches during the school year do not receive a summer meal. A large part of the problem is awareness.

**According to a national survey of low-income families, less than 40 percent of families knew where to find a summer meals site.** Your municipal administrators are trusted community members who can help increase program awareness.

This toolkit outlines easy action steps and provides templates to grow awareness, helping to increase the number of children who access summer meals.

# A Call to Action: 4 Steps Local Government Leaders Can Take to End Child Hunger

Raising awareness about summer meals programs in your community will help increase the number of kids who receive the nutrition they need during the summer months. Municipal leaders can play a crucial role in ensuring that children have access to these free, healthy meals.

1. **Learn more about your program.** Get to know your local meal providers and site locations. Ask how you can help spread the word.
2. **Visit a site.** Schedule a Summer Meals site visit to draw community attention and publicize your support. Talk to families and children and find out how you can help enhance their experience.
3. **Promote the text number.** Students and families can text “FOOD” or “COMIDA” to 877-877 and receive a list of meal sites and serving times nearest them. Ensure that your constituents are aware of this service.
  - a. **Utilize existing resources.** Reach out to trusted places where families already receive information - like grocery stores, local Social Services offices, or WIC clinics - to ensure they are advertising the Summer Meals Program. Promote the summer meals hotline and texting number on local government websites and outreach materials.
  - b. **Use social media.** Parents and kids are getting important information through social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram –consider using these platforms to inform your community about Summer Meals. See page 9 for sample posts.

- c. **Work with local businesses.** Partner with the Chamber of Commerce to donate their signage and include a message about summer meals like the following:

**“Free Summer Meals Are Served in Your Community. Text “FOOD” or “COMIDA” to 877-877 to find a site near you.”**

- 4. **Celebrate the program.** Raise awareness and reach more kids and teens by having fun and garnering media attention.
  - a. **Conduct a media interview.** You can use your media platform to increase awareness and visibility of the program in your community. Work with your local print publications and radio/TV stations to spread the word.
  - b. **Issue a proclamation.** Declare *No Kid Hungry* in your community this summer using the template on page 4. Promote the program and frame the issue of child hunger as a top priority of your municipality.
  - c. **Organize an event.** Coordinate with the organizations in your community that provide summer meals to host a community-wide celebration event. This will build momentum for the program, which will help increase the number of kids who access summer meals.



# Template Proclamation

**Note:** Customize this Proclamation to announce your summer meals program. See the [“Community Outreach”](#) section of the No Kid Hungry website for more tips.

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## OFFICIAL PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Summer should be about food, friends, and fun. But when school’s out, that also means families can’t count on their kids eating meals at school, and already tight family food budgets have to be stretched even further; and

WHEREAS, Summer is also a critical time for kids and teens’ academic and physical development. Studies show that kids are at a higher risk for both hunger and obesity during the summer months and lose several months of learning in mathematics and reading; and

WHEREAS, Summer meals programs are more important than ever before as families are facing tough economic times. Summer meals also provide kids and teens a fun, safe place to be with friends and stay active; and

WHEREAS, By increasing awareness about free summer meals through outreach in the community and increasing the number of meal sites or capacity of existing sites in underserved areas and investing in summer programming to attract more kids to meal sites, [MUNICIPALITY] can increase access to summer meals programs; and

WHEREAS, [MUNICIPALITY] is committed to make sure no child goes hungry this summer

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [ELECTED OFFICIALS NAME], [ELECTED OFFICIAL’S TITLE], do hereby proclaim it No Kid Hungry this Summer.



## Working with the Media

This section has tips and resources for effectively bringing attention to the Summer Meals Program in your community through the media. Your communications and press teams can work to ensure that the Summer Meals Program is highlighted and receives coverage in your community. Your office already has connections with local media and can be successful in connecting meal sponsors and sites to media outlets.

**A targeted media list can make all the difference.** Create a list of media outlets and contacts that have partnered with you in the past and consider conducting research to find out who's reporting on childhood hunger and how they are covering it.

**Invite the media to attend with an advisory.** If hosting an event or attending a summer meals site, email a media advisory one week beforehand to drum up interest.

**Call, email, call, email.** Email all reporters before and after the event to encourage them to cover your story, and then follow up with a quick phone call.

**No event, no problem.** You can send out a press release (see page 6) announcing that summer meals are starting or explaining the impact of the program. Email your press release to media with a short engaging introduction, then make follow up calls.

You can also consider encouraging your partners to provide local and community newspapers op-eds and letters to the editor about the Summer Meals Program

**Keep your follow-up calls short and engaging.** Be sure to:

- Explain why you are approaching this journalist or blogger. Show that you know what they have covered and why this story works for them.
- Put a personal face on the story. Reach out to organizations in your community who have connections on the ground to Summer Meals participants. Compelling family stories or vetted spokespeople can increase the likelihood of media coverage.

**Never send attachments.** Always copy and paste news advisories and press releases into the body of an email.

# Template Press Release

**Note:** Customize this press release to announce the start of your summer meals program. If you are hosting an event, send out either directly before or after the event and send to a broad list of media contacts (TV, radio, print and online outlets). See “Working with the Media” section of the Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit for more tips and downloads.

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[ORGANIZATION LOGOS HERE]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
[DATE]

CONTACT: [NAME]  
PHONE: xxx-xxx-xxxx

## [Influencer] and [Organization] Tour [or Kick Off] Summer Meals Site

X Kids in [MUNICIPALITY] Experience Summer Hunger

[City/County/Town, State] -- For many kids, summer vacation comes with a thrill of anticipation. Weeks stretch ahead filled with dreams of bike rides, swimming pools, family vacations and long, lazy days hanging out with friends. For millions of kids in America, however, it's a much different story. For kids living in low-income families struggling to put food on the table, summer's bright promise has been replaced with worry, anxiety and the threat of hunger.

[Influencer] and the [Organization] joined children at the [Location Site] today to see firsthand the impact summer meal programs have [OR to kick off the summer meals program] for kids struggling with hunger. National summer meals programs, like the United States Department of Agriculture's Summer Food Service Program, were created forty years ago to help students get nourishment when school is out of session. Under the current program, federally reimbursed meals are available to kids at sites around the country, including schools, faith-based programs and community centers. This program is lifeline for kids in need.

Unfortunately, barriers like extreme weather, transportation challenges and excessive red tape, block many kids from getting the meals they need.

Together, No Kid Hungry and [Location Site] are working to overcome these barriers, and encouraging effective, efficient policies that ensure all kids are getting the healthy food they need.

“In Virginia, only 15% percent of children who receive a free or reduced-price lunch during the school year participated in free summer meal programs,” [Influencer] said. “We can and must do

more to increase participation in these programs and connect more kids with the healthy food they need every day.”

[Organization] partners with the national No Kid Hungry campaign to raise awareness about summer meals program in the area, as well as increase the number of sites available to hungry kids.

“We know the impact summer hunger can have on children and families. When school meals disappear, kids experience anxiety and uncertainty and family budgets are stretched even further,” [Organization] said. “The summer meals program provides a critical resource to these children, but far too many kids are missing out on the chance to have a healthy meal every day.”

IF APPLICABLE -- "The [CORPORATION/FOUNDATION] supports the work of No Kid Hungry because we know that when kids have access to the food their minds and bodies need to grow strong, they feel better, learn more and grow up stronger," said [CORPORATE/FOUNDATION SPOKESPERSON].

[ADD A SHORT SENTENCE OR TWO ABOUT FUNDING OR WORK THE CORPORATE PARTNER/FOUNDATION PROVIDED.] “Our goal? Making sure more kids in the United States getting the healthy food they need in the summertime.”

#### Background Information on Summer Meals Program:

- Meals are FREE to children and teens ages 18 and younger who come to a summer meals site
- Food served follows USDA nutrition guidelines and is paid for by the USDA
- Summer meals sites are at schools, churches, community centers and other places that are safe for kids and teens
- Parents don't need to apply to the program to get a free summer meal for their kids. They can just bring their child to a summer meals site in their community.
- Families can text FOOD to 877-877 or call 866-3HUNGRY to find a summer meals site in their neighborhood.
- [IF YOUR COMMUNITY OFFERS MOBILE MEALS OR TRANSPORTATION TO SITES, INCLUDE HERE]

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About [ORGANIZATION]  
[ADD BRIEF BLURB]

#### About Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Campaign

No child should go hungry in America, but 1 in 6 kids will face hunger this year. Using proven, practical solutions, No Kid Hungry is ending childhood hunger today by ensuring that kids start the day with a nutritious breakfast and families learn the skills they need to shop and cook on a budget. When we all work together, we can make sure kids get the healthy food they need. No Kid Hungry is a campaign of national anti-hunger organization Share Our Strength. Join us at [NoKidHungry.org](http://NoKidHungry.org).

## Template FAQs about Summer Meals

*Customize these FAQs about summer meals to announce your summer meals program. Use this information on your website and in materials to provide more information about these programs. See the “[Outreach Tactics](#)” section of the Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit for more tips.*

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**What is the Summer Meals Program?** The program (also known as the Summer Food Service Program, or SFSP) is designed to provide healthy meals to kids and teens 18 years old and under in the summer months when school is not in session. Schools, camps, governmental entities, and private non-profit organizations can be sponsors. The Summer Meals Program is funded to the United States Department of Agriculture and administered by the Virginia Department of Education

**What are the requirements for my child or teen to receive a meal? Do I have to fill out an application form?** There is no application necessary to receive a meal and you do not have to show proof of income or identification. Kids and teens 18 years old and younger can just show up at an open summer meal site during the site’s hours of operation to receive a meal.

**Is there a cost?** No. All summer meals offered through the USDA’s programs are COMPLIMENTARY for all kids and teens ages 18 and younger.

**How do I find a meal site in my community?** Summer meals sites are located at safe, supervised places like churches, schools and community centers. Starting in June, text **FOOD** to **877-877** or call **1-866-3HUNGRY** to find a site and learn more information.

**What kind of food is served at these sites?** Summer Meals are healthy and meet USDA nutrition guidelines. An example lunch consists of a turkey sandwich on wheat bread, milk, an apple, and a salad.

**Do summer meal sites offer activities?** Many sites offer fun learning and recreational activities in a safe, supervised environment. Call or visit the feeding site to learn more.

**There is no site in my area. What can I do to be sure that one is available for the children in my area next summer?** If there are no summer meals sites in your community, we can HELP. Contact Sarah Steely, No Kid Hungry Virginia Program Manager, at [sarah.steely@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:sarah.steely@doe.virginia.gov) or (570) 854-5023.

**What else can I do to help?** You can share information about free summer meals with your friends, neighbors, family members, and local youth services organizations.



## Stay Connected through Social Media

*Use your municipality's social media platforms to communicate about summer meals and connect with meal sponsors and site in your community.*

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The Virginia Department of Education, Office of School Nutrition Programs is committed to your success! Share your stories, successes, and events with us on social media. Visit our website at for up-to-date information, best practice resources, grants, blogs, and more!



[Facebook](#) · [Twitter](#) · [Instagram](#)

**VDOE\_SNP**






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Share the following phrases and facts on you municipal website and various social media platforms.

- Did you know that families who participate in the National School Lunch Program can benefit from free meals for children during the summer months? Join us for lunch this #summer or to text FOOD to 877-877 to find #summermeals in your community!
- The @USDA Summer Meals Programs provides meals to children 18 years and younger when school is out! Come eat with us at [location] on [date, time]. #SummerFoodRocks
- Text 'FOOD' to 877-877 to find food, friends and fun near you!
- On average, only 15% of kids who depend on school meals during the school year receive #summermeals. Let's change that this summer!
- Summer is the hungriest time of the year for millions of kids. Parents & kids can find free #summermeals in their neighborhood by texting FOOD to 877-877.
- Food, fun and friends – all for free! We provide nutritious meals to children all summer long.
- Join us for another day of #healthy meals today at [location, time]!

Below is a list of partner organizations. “Follow” and “like” these organizations to build a stronger social network and online community of summer feeding advocates.

			
<b>Virginia Department of Education</b>	<a href="#">VDOE_SNP</a>	<a href="#">VDOE_SNP</a>	<a href="#">VDOESNP</a>
<b>No Kid Hungry Virginia</b>	<a href="#">NoKidHungryVA</a>	<a href="#">NoKidHungryVA</a>	<a href="#">No Kid Hungry Virginia</a>
<b>Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth</b>	<a href="#">VHFY</a>		<a href="#">Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth</a>
<b>No Kid Hungry</b>	<a href="#">NoKidHungry</a>	<a href="#">NoKidHungry</a>	<a href="#">NoKidHungry</a>
<b>United States Department of Agriculture</b>	<a href="#">USDANutrition</a>	<a href="#">USDAGov</a>	<a href="#">USDA</a>
<b>Action for Healthy Kids</b>	<a href="#">ActionForHealthy Kids</a>	<a href="#">Act4HealthyKids</a>	<a href="#">Action for Healthy Kids</a>
<b>The Alliance for a Healthier Generation</b>	<a href="#">HealthierGen</a>	<a href="#">HealthierGeneration</a>	<a href="#">The Alliance for a Healthier Generation</a>
<b>Food Research and Action Center</b>	<a href="#">FRACTweets</a>		<a href="#">FoodResearchand ActionCenter</a>
<b>Library of Virginia</b>	<a href="#">LibraryofVA</a>	<a href="#">LibraryofVA</a>	<a href="#">LibraryofVA</a>

Consider incorporating these official summer meals hashtags into your posts.

- **#SummerFoodRocks**
- **#SummerMealsVA**
- **#WellReadWellFed**
- **#SummerNutrition**

## Additional Resources

There are many resources available to help identify existing summer meals sites and potential areas of expansion in your community.

- [VDOE Summer Meals Website](#). Learn more about the Summer Meals program and contact the Office of School Nutrition Programs with questions.
- [Share Our Strength Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit](#). Contains instructions and templates to help you spread the word about summer meals in your division and community.
- [USDA Capacity Builder](#). Visualize data, such as underserved areas, and identify locations for new summer meals sites. Determines if census tracts in your area are eligible for the Summer Meals Program and other federal nutrition programs.
- [USDA Summer Meals Toolkit](#). Provides creative ideas and resources to make Summer Meal planning easy, raise awareness, overcome barriers, and serve nutritious food that is appealing to children.

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**For more information, additional marketing materials, and to obtain a list of summer meals sites specific to your community, reach out to:**

*Sarah Steely*  
No Kid Hungry Virginia Program Manager  
[sarah.steely@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:sarah.steely@doe.virginia.gov)  
(570) 854-5023