



Planning for Summer Meals: Best Practices for School Based Outreach

For many kids, summertime means food, friends and fun. But, for families who count on school breakfast and lunch, the summer months can be stressful and family food budgets are often stretched to the breaking point.

Currently over **144,000 children** in Connecticut rely on free or reduced meals during the school year. Yet only **26%** of those children receive meals through the Summer Meals programs. Many families simply aren't aware of the opportunity to receive free, nutritious meals all summer long through the USDA funded Summer Meals Programs.

Your school can help to spread the word about summer meals available within its wall and/or community. Schools are generally the most trusted providers of Summer Meals program information among parents. Your school/district's presence in the community is a critical opportunity to let families know of this program that addresses hunger over the summer and ensures children will be ready and nourished for school in the fall.

To help you get started, we have compiled some best practices that other schools have used in spreading the word about this program.

GET PARENTS IN THE KNOW:

- **Pick up the phone:** utilize robo-calls or create a phone message for your "on-hold line".
- Send out flyers with students' end of the year report cards, in their backpacks, or via email blasts.
- Offer to provide info during parent-teacher conferences.
- **Snail mail:** send letter home to parents with brief message that clearly describes the summer meals program (see Appendix 3 for template letter).
- Advertise summer meals on your **school breakfast and lunch menu**.
- **Present an announcement** and/or handout to your **PTA** or other parent groups or school boards.
- **Word of mouth!**: use a PSA during sporting events, upon passing parents in school hallways, etc.

INCREASE STUDENTS' AWARENESS:

- **Designate 'Program Champions':** enlist older students to spread the word by visiting classrooms and personally handing out information to the students.
- **Keep them talking:** have kitchen staff and lunch monitors engage in conversation with students during meal times.
- Make sure that the **school family services counselors** are aware of Summer Meals and that they have the tools to direct families to their nearest summer meal site.

MEDIA OUTLETS TO SPREAD AWARENESS

- Use the **CT Summer Meals button** on school's website, Facebook, and/or Twitter accounts to link directly to www.CTSummerFood.org. If possible, arrange for a pop-up message about Summer Meals on the school district's website. For more details on how to post a "button" on your website, contact End Hunger CT! at gcaron@endhungerct.org.
- Post an ad on your **town's website** or events/**calendar** section
- Send a PSA to your **local TV** or **radio station** (see Appendix 2)
- Follow our templates below to update your **Facebook** and **Twitter** status (see Appendix 4)



REACH OUT TO YOUR COMMUNITY:

- **Post signage:** yard signs, postcards, flyers, business cards, around town (see Appendix 1 for a list of ideas)
- **Get your PTA involved:** recruit local businesses by offering to print their company name on T-shirts to give away to students before they leave for the summer. Make sure you are advertising your site with the times, location, website, phone number, and that the meals are FREE! if 18 years old or younger
- **Recruit sports teams or student clubs:** have them hold signs and/or canvas local businesses (see Appendix 1 for list of sites). Encourage the students to canvas door-to-door and utilize door-hangers if families are not home.
- **Invite the press:** ask your local reporters to do a story and invite them to your first meal service of the summer. If local officials are invited, the press is more likely to show up!
- **Set-Up a Table at your Town Fair:** look for local events and fairs that are largely attended by members of your community and ask volunteers and students from your school to set up an information table.

Contact EHC! for Summer Outreach Materials including postcards, bookmarks, flyers, and more!

Appendix 1: Locations for Flyers

- Grocery stores (put flyer in grocery bags)
- Libraries
- Laundromats
- Near Summer Meals sites locations (telephone poles, park billboards and signs if applicable)
- Community centers, YMCA, etc.
- Churches & community groups
- Neighborhood associations
- Movie theaters (on screen ads)
- Parks & Recreation
- Video arcades
- Children's museums
- Local gyms
- After-school & child care programs
- Health care offices (ie: Pediatricians')
- Food banks/pantries (put flyer in grocery bags)
- SNAP/TANF/WIC offices & mailings
- Housing authorities
- Domestic violence shelters
- Red cross babysitter trainings
- Immigrant agencies
- Thrift shops
- Intersections/street corners with active foot traffic



Appendix 2: Template Summer Meals Radio PSA Script

Note: Following are 30-second and 60-second template radio public service announcement (PSA) scripts that you can customize and either share with radio stations to read or record. See "[Creating and Placing Radio PSAs](#)" section of the Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit for more tips.

.....

30-Second Script

General Script:

Summer should be a stress-free time full of **food, friends and fun**. Free summer meals can help! Any child or teen age 18 and under can get free healthy meals at safe locations across the area. Many meals sites also offer learning and recreational activities so your kids can stay active and spend time with friends. Free summer meals can also help families save money. Go to www.CTSummerMeals.org or call 2-1-1 to learn more or text "CTMeals" to 877-877 to find a site near you. Summer meals programs are funded by the USDA. A message from [SPONSORS].

Athlete Script:

Hi, I'm [NAME]. Take it from me, I know how important it is to eat healthy foods so you can perform at your best all year long. That's why I want you to know that Connecticut kids and teens can get FREE meals during the summer at hundreds of sites across the state. Many meals sites offer recreational activities so your kids can stay active and spend time with friends. Go to www.CTSummerMeals.org or call 2-1-1 to learn more or text "CTMeals" to 877-877 to find a site near you. The Free Summer Meals Program is funded and overseen by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Summer meals programs are funded by the USDA. A message from [SPONSORS].

60-Second Script

General Script:

Summer should be a stress-free time full of **food, friends and fun**. But when school's out, that also means that families can't count on their kids eating meals at school, and already tight family food budgets have to be stretched even further. Free summer meals can help! With FREE summer meals, any child or teen 18 and under can get free healthy meals at safe locations just like during the school year. No application is needed. Just go to www.CTSummerMeals.org or call 2-1-1 to learn more or text "CTMeals" to 877-877 to find a site near you. The Free Summer Meals Programs not only saves you money, but you know your kids are getting the healthy meals they need every day in a safe, supervised place. And besides, it's an opportunity for them to be spend time with friends. Just go to www.CTSummerMeals.org or call 2-1-1 to learn more or text "CTMeals" to 877-877 to find a site near you. Summer meals programs are funded by the USDA. A message from [SPONSORS].



Appendix 3: Template Letter to Parents

Note: *Customize this Letter to Parents to announce your summer meals program through local schools. See the “[Outreach Tactics](#)” section of the Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit for more tips.*

.....

[DATE]

Dear Parents or Guardians,

For many kids, summertime means food, friends and fun. For families who count on school meals , however, the summer months can be stressful and family food budgets have to be stretched even further. Free summer meals, funded by the USDA, are available to kids and teens ages 18 and younger at summer meals sites across [CITY/TOWN], CT.

Many summer meals sites offer fun learning and recreational activities so kids and teens can eat a healthy meal while staying active and being with friends. Sites are also registered with the USDA and are held at safe local places like schools, churches and community centers.

Free Summer Meal Program Details:

- Meals are **FREE to children and teens ages 18 and younger** who come to a summer meals site
- Free summer meals will help families **save money** and stretch their already tight food budgets
- Food served **is healthy and follows federal nutrition guidelines**
- Summer meals sites are at fun, safe places for kids and teens to be active and visit with friends
- No application or proof of income needed. You can just bring your child to a summer meals site in your community
- [IF YOUR COMMUNITY OFFERS MOBILE MEALS OR TRANSPORTATION TO SITES, INCLUDE HERE]

If you or someone you know is interested, go to www.CTSummerMeals.org or call 2-1-1 to find a site and learn more or text “CTMeals” to 877-877 to find a site near you.

Sincerely,

[NAME]



Appendix 4: Template Facebook and Twitter posts

Note: *Customize this Facebook and Twitter posts to announce your summer meals program. See the “[Outreach Tactics](#)” section of the Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit for more tips.*

.....

Facebook Posts:

Free food, friends and fun! Kids and teens can get FREE meals all summer long at sites across the community. Text [CTMeals] to 877-877 to find a site near you or to learn more, call 2-1-1 or visit: www.CTSummerMeals.org.

School’s out but food, friends and fun are still in! Kids and teens who eat meals at school can also get FREE healthy meals during the summer in a fun, safe place. Text [CTMeals] to 877-877 to find a site near you or to learn more, call 2-1-1 or visit: www.CTSummerMeals.org.

FREE food, friends and fun! Many sites in the community offer fun learning and recreational activities so kids and teens can eat a healthy, free meal while staying active and spending time with friends. Text [CTMeals] to 877-877 to find a site near you or to learn more, call 2-1-1 or visit: www.CTSummerMeals.org.

Kids and teens can stay active and eat right this summer! FREE meals that follow USDA nutrition guidelines are served at summer meal sites in the community that also offer fun learning and recreational activities. Meals are FREE to children and teens ages 18 and younger. Text [CTMeals] to 877-877 to find a site near you or to learn more, call 2-1-1 or visit: www.CTSummerMeals.org.

FREE summer meals are no hassle! Parents don’t need to apply to get a free summer meal for their kids and teens. They can simply bring their child to a safe summer meals site in their community and their kids can enjoy it without the hassle of having to fill out an application. Free summer meals will also help families save money. Text [CTMeals] to 877-877 to find a site near you or to learn more, call 2-1-1 or visit: www.CTSummerMeals.org.

Twitter (140 characters or less):

@USDA funds #Free #SummerMeals 4 kids & teens! Find a site near you by calling 2-1-1 or visit www.CTSummerMeals.org

#Free #SummerMeals help make sure kids & teens get food they need 2 stay healthy in the summer. Details: www.CTSummerMeals.org

Studies show that kids are @ a higher risk 4 both hunger and obesity during the summer months. Support #Free #SummerMeals. www.CTSummerMeals.org.

Many #free #SummerMeals sites offer educational/recreational activities 4 kids of all ages. 4 more info, visit www.CTSummerMeals.org.



Appendix 5: Template FAQs about Summer Meals

Note: *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 programs. See the “[Outreach Tactics](#)” section of the Sodexo Foundation Summer Meals Outreach Toolkit for more tips.*

.....

When school is out for the summer, meals will still be in session. Learn how to get free summer meals.

Summer Meals: Food, Friends and Fun **Frequently Asked Questions**

What are summer meals programs? Summer meals programs are a federal child nutrition programs funded by the USDA and designed to provide kids and teens ages 18 and under healthy meals during the months of June, July, and August when school is out.

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. Kids and teens ages 18 and younger can just show up at a summer meal site during the site’s hours of operation.

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

How do I find a Summer Meal site in my community? Summer meals sites are in the community at safe, supervised places like churches, schools and community centers. Go to www.CTSummerMeals.org, call 2-1-1 to find a site and learn more, or text “CTMeals” to 877-877 to find a site near you.

What kind of food is served at these sites? The meals served are healthy and meet federal nutrition guidelines. A typical lunch, for example, may include a turkey sandwich on wheat bread, milk, an apple and a salad. Here is a sample menu [INCLUDE LINK].

Do summer meal sites offer activities? Many sites offer fun learning and recreational activities in a safe, supervised environment. To find out the type of activities offered, call the site. For more summer programming options, visit www.CTSummerMeals.org or call 2-1-1.

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 XXXX at: XXXX or email info@x.org.

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

Who funds free summer meals? Summer meals programs are funded by the USDA through the Summer Food Service Program and the National School Lunch Program and are administered by the CT State Department of Education.

Have other questions? Please contact End Hunger CT! at: gcaron@endhungerct.org.