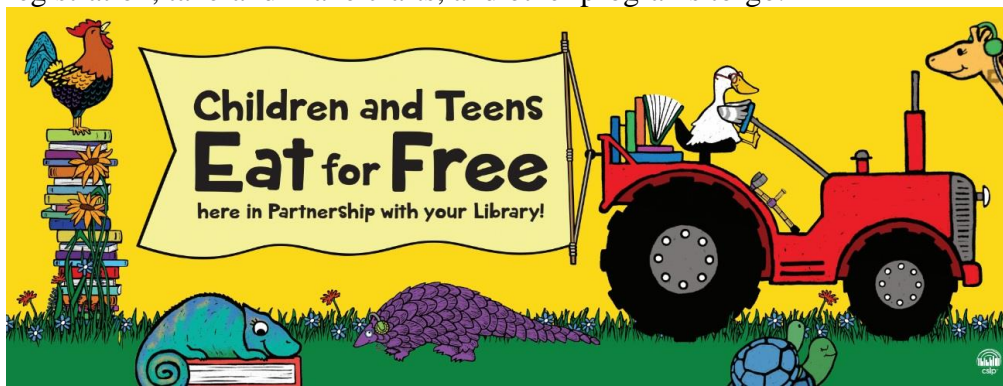


2021 Summer Food Service Program: What Libraries Need to Know

By Janet Ingraham Dwyer, Library Consultant, State Library of Ohio & Chair, CSLP Child & Community Well-Being Committee

Hundreds of libraries around the USA participate in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), a USDA-funded program that provides free meals and snacks to children ages 0-18 in communities with high levels of need.

Libraries and SFSP are a great fit! The library is a trusted, accessible community center known for free services, available to everyone, without any stigma of “handout.” Libraries are also justly famous for drop-in enrichment programming, which increases the attractiveness and use of SFSP sites. Libraries enhance meal distribution with Summer Library Program registration, take-and-make crafts, and other programs to-go.



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SFSP is also good for the library. Besides the obvious benefits of addressing hunger and supporting vulnerable youth, participation benefits libraries through:

- Access to new user groups.
- Visibility of the library as an important stakeholder in community well-being and positive child outcomes.
- Opportunities for new partnerships.
- Increased participation in summer programming.

Ordinarily, there are rather strict (but do-able) rules about meal distribution, and sites must be in locations where at least 50% of area children are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals. However, during the pandemic, several waivers are in effect and have recently been extended through September 30:

- Meals may be served in many locations that were not previously eligible.
- Meals may be taken home or delivered, instead of eaten on-site.
- Parents or guardians may pick up meals without children present.
- Multiple days' worth of meals may be picked up at once.

As a SFSP site, you do not have to prepare or pay for meals. You can work with a sponsoring organization that coordinates food service, and the USDA covers the expenses. If your location is eligible, all children who show up are eligible, regardless of family income, and you don't have to take attendance.

Check with your state administering agency to determine if your location is eligible under the temporary waivers and to learn how to become a site. MANY communities across the USA are eligible to distribute meals this summer. Food insecurity has worsened during the pandemic. This is a great time for your library to become a SFSP site and address food insecurity in your community. With the current waivers, participation can be easier than ever.

See the CSLP's Libraries and Summer Food guide for detailed, library-oriented guidance on being a SFSP site, supporting nearby sites, or simply spreading the word about free meals for kids and teens.

WHY LIBRARIES AND SUMMER MEALS?

Libraries are free and open to all, welcome children and teens, offer engaging programs, and typically have a community meeting room or space where food may be served.

BENEFITS TO THE LIBRARY:

- Access to new groups, especially underserved and marginalized populations. 
- Increased visibility of the library as a community asset.
- Opportunities for new partnerships. 
- Support for summer library program through increased attendance. 

WHAT'S NEEDED?*

- Staff and/or volunteers.
- Designated room or space, inside or outside.
- A sponsor.

*There are also eligibility guidelines for the USDA Summer Food Service Program. See the USDA and CSLP links for details.

GETTING STARTED

- Establish room or space to use.
- Determine what days and hours to serve and which meals to serve.
- Find a sponsor. 
- Complete training and any paperwork.

HELPFUL LINKS

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program>

<https://www.csllpreads.org/libraries-and-summer-food/>



Download this talking points flyer from the CSLP Libraries and Summer Food guide