



IMPACT AREA:
HEALTH

COMMUNITY TABLES

A **CITIES OF SERVICE** BLUEPRINT

Community Tables is an impact volunteering initiative and service strategy through which the mayor's or city chief executive office engages citizen volunteers to help ensure that all children from low-income communities have access to healthy meals and snacks during the summer.

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BACKGROUND

For kids, summer should be a season of fun with friends and family. But for families who rely on school meals, the summer break presents uncertainty about where and when children can have consistent, healthy meals. Programs exist to alleviate this need, like the Summer Food Service Program (“SFSP”), a federally funded child nutrition program designed to provide free meals and snacks (“summer meals”) to all school-aged youth 18 and under during the summer months, when free and reduced-price school lunch meals are not available.¹

However, for a variety of reasons – lack of awareness about the program, inability to get children to meal sites during the times they are open, embarrassment, or other reservations about accepting free meals – only a fraction of those who are eligible for summer meals receive them. In fact, only one in seven (or 14%) of the children who eat a free or reduced-price school lunch during the academic year also participates in the SFSP.²

HOW TO FEED YOUTH IN NEED — YEAR-ROUND

Community Tables helps cities to address these problems:

- Just one in seven (14%) children who benefit from free or reduced-price school lunches during the academic year also participates in the Summer Food Service Program.
- Many eligible communities have no summer food sites, and most communities do not have enough.

City chief executives are uniquely situated to raise awareness about hunger and summer meals access, and to catalyze and build collaborative partnerships with local stakeholders to provide solutions.

¹ The SFSP is one of two nutrition programs that the federal government operates during the summer, the other being the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), which is implemented in schools that offer summer school.

² Food Research and Action Center, *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2014*.





ABOUT COMMUNITY TABLES

Community Tables is an impact volunteering initiative that can help mayors and other city leaders provide more children with access to healthy food during the summer school break. City chief executives are uniquely situated to raise awareness about hunger and summer meals access, and to catalyze and build collaborative partnerships with local stakeholders to provide solutions. Using *Community Tables* as a guide, they can focus the energy and goodwill of citizen volunteers who in turn can provide critical support to lead agencies by canvassing and performing outreach, helping to prepare and serve meals, and providing enrichment activities for children — so that more youth benefit from an important government resource.

WHAT IS THE SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM?

- **The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally-funded, state-administered program to provide healthy meals through sponsors to children and teens in low-income areas at no charge when school is not in session.**
- The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)'s Food and Nutrition Service oversees the SFSP and provides guidelines and regulations about the operations for the state, sponsor, and site levels, and reimburses sponsors through state agencies.
- The typical state agency responsible for the SFSP is the state's Department of Education. In addition to processing reimbursement payments from the USDA, the state agency approves, monitors, and provides training for local SFSP sponsors.
- The SFSP sponsor is often a school district, but can be other units of government or private nonprofit organizations. Sponsors establish sites and train and supervise site staff. During the summer, sponsors arrange for the preparation and delivery of meals, and monitor meal sites for compliance with federal guidelines and regulations.
- Meal service sites may be a variety of settings. Sites are required to keep records of meals served and adhere to food safety regulations. In some areas, meals are delivered via buses or food trucks.
- For additional information, see the Executing the Plan, Mobile Meals, and Additional Resources sections.



REQUIRED STEPS FOR SUCCESS

- 1 Mayor's office identifies a **full-time *Community Tables* coordinator** who is charged with planning the initiative, identifying resources to support the initiative, working closely with partners, troubleshooting if challenges arise, and collecting metrics and reporting on overall impact. The *Community Tables* coordinator can be a full-time staff member, an AmeriCorps member, or a full-time volunteer.
- 2 Mayor's office **convenes and engages key stakeholders**, including, as appropriate: city agency leads; representatives from the regional office of the USDA and the state agency responsible for SFSP; SFSP sponsors and sites; the school district(s); local anti-hunger groups; food banks and others working on food security; faith groups; neighborhood associations; youth-serving organizations, including after-school and out-of-school time programs; and groups focused on volunteer engagement.

KEY STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES

Once the Mayor's office has convened the appropriate stakeholders, they are to:

- ✓ Create a shared understanding of **1)** the prior year's metrics, including the number of summer meals served and sites in operation; **2)** what's working with the current program; **3)** where there might be challenges and/or barriers to families participating; and **4)** what needs to happen for *Community Tables* initiative to flourish;
- ✓ Develop the plan for expanding participation in SFSP, including strategies for leveraging volunteers;
- ✓ Clearly define partner roles and expectations, including responsibility for volunteer recruitment, training, and management;
- ✓ Enlist and secure support from appropriate city agencies; and
- ✓ Help to design and gather impact metrics.



3

Mayor uses **bully pulpit** to raise awareness of child hunger and promote *Community Tables*. A targeted marketing strategy is created to raise awareness about the initiative.

4

Volunteers support *Community Tables* by:

- raising awareness and providing outreach to families;
- offering essential operational support to program sponsors and sites;
- facilitating or elevating on-site enrichment activities for children; and
- helping to track metrics and collect impact data.

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The mayor's office **tracks and reports** on required program metrics, such as the number of summer meals served, the percent increase in meals served and sites operating compared with previous summers. (Please refer to the Executing the Plan section for information about required metrics.)





EXECUTING THE PLAN

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A DEVELOP THE INITIATIVE

1

Convene Stakeholders — At least six months before the summer begins, bring together key community stakeholders. More than one meeting is usually needed. The goals of these meetings are to:

- Review the city's existing summer meals program: identify what each partner is doing, where and why there are gaps in service, and what other stakeholders should be included in the initiative;
- Brainstorm strategies for increasing the number of children who benefit from the program; and
- Identify all the ways that citizen volunteers can help support and grow the *Community Tables* initiative (see the Engaging Volunteers section for examples).

SEATS AT THE TABLE: CONVENING KEY COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Key stakeholders might include representatives from: the regional office of the USDA and the state agency administering the SFSP; the school district; the public housing authority; the city's Departments of Health, Social Services, and Parks and Recreation; summer day camp programs; the public libraries; faith groups; urban farming groups; food banks; anti-hunger organizations; organizations that sponsor after-school and out-of-school time programs; neighborhood associations; local businesses; and organizations that recruit and manage volunteers.

If there is a relevant pre-existing stakeholder collaborative in your city, they also should be at the table (for example, Philadelphia convenes stakeholders through the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger and Baltimore coordinates efforts through the Baltimore Partnership to End Childhood Hunger).

See also the USDA's *Summer Meals Toolkit: Partnering Organizations*:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-meals-toolkit>





2

Design with Purpose — With information gleaned from these meetings, design your city's *Community Tables* plan:

- **Strategize outreach appropriate to target communities.** Best practices include sending information home in children's backpacks at the end of the school year, handing out customized flyers publicizing locations of service sites, and promoting the program through trusted community partners and champions.
- **Develop low-cost, volunteer-based sports, enrichment activities, arts, reading, and other fun, at sites** — as well as actively seek potential new sites where existing programming can be combined with *Community Tables*. Making the summer meal site a safe, convenient and fun, enriching place helps to attract and reach more children and families.
- **Make SFSP sites convenient and accessible/increase the number of sites.** City agencies such as Departments of Parks and Recreation or Housing are well-suited to sponsor summer meal programs and to host meal sites at their local facilities, recreation and community centers, and other public housing areas. Other appropriate sites are local churches, libraries, day camps, and schools. Volunteers can help to identify potential new site locations and work with organizations so that they can become sites.

FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNERS

- Local nonprofits and other after-school providers can host *Community Tables*, providing summer meals as well as activities for young people before and/or after meals.
- Community-based organizations can also secure additional funding in support of the initiative in partnership with the city.
- Corporate sponsors and private donors may also be enlisted to support *Community Tables* with funds and/or in-kind donations. For example, large food service providers, restaurant franchises, health-focused foundations, and supermarket chains may be leveraged for resources.





MOBILE MEALS

A **major barrier** to participation in summer meals is lack of proximity or transportation to sites. Through Mobile Meals, sponsors take packaged meals to apartment complexes, parks, and other locations where children spend their summer days. Mobile programs may be particularly effective in rural or suburban communities, where distance or limited public transportation complicate access to sites.

Related: *Share Our Strength's Mobile Meals Playbook*, <http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/summer-meals/mobile-meals-playbook>.

- ***Incorporate Community Tables into an existing summer youth program where possible.*** Many city leaders have launched “Super Summer” initiatives to provide young people with summer learning, reading and recreational programming, as well as supply nutritious meals. Integrating summer meals into larger or other initiatives increases participation rates, and makes cities’ outreach and offering more effective.
- ***Decide and plan roles for community volunteers*** to support *Community Tables*; designate who will manage the various volunteer strategies.
- ***Develop a budget*** to cover materials and supplies.

RELATED RESOURCES

- **Share Our Strength’s “No Kid Hungry” Center for Best Practices**
— See “Outreach” for toolkits, timelines, sample fliers, and more.
- **“How to Become a Sponsor” (USDA on roles and feeding sites)**
— <http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/how-become-sponsor>





B RAISE AWARENESS

- **Make it a Mayoral Announcement** — The mayor and other local officials should use their bully pulpits to raise awareness of child hunger and promote the initiative. They can preside over a kick-off event that raises awareness about the program and brings key stakeholders and families together, and frame *Community Tables* as a top priority for the city before a large audience of community leaders and media. In addition, place op-eds, emphasize the need for summer meals in public speeches and at other events, and promote *Community Tables* on the city's website, and through interagency and community newsletters and social media.
- **Create a Targeted Campaign** — A targeted marketing strategy should be created to publicize the *Community Tables* initiative. In addition to the mayor's or city executive's launch and announcement, cities can coordinate advertising the program on utility bills, via outbound, recorded calls and PSAs, through the city's 311 information line and other agency "hold" announcements where functionality exists, and the United Way's 211 information line and other compatible nonprofit channels.
- **Tell Teachers & Spread in Schools** — Teachers and school administrators are trusted partners in getting the word out to families about resources like SFSP. It is critical to develop a communication plan for schools: plan to reach out to schools with detailed information on summer meals at least three weeks before the school year ends so that they can relay the message and remind students and families, as well. Coordinate with the school district(s) to avoid calendar conflicts or competing notifications regarding exam schedules or other end of academic year activities.

MAXIMIZING MATERIALS

- ✓ The most effective outreach materials include **very specific information** about the program and promote it as a **fun and enriching** summer opportunity, rather than as a food program for needy kids.
- ✓ Translate outreach materials into **appropriate languages** for the target neighborhoods.





ACTIVATE VOLUNTEERS³



VOLUNTEERS = PART OF THE SOLUTION

Community Tables volunteers can play key roles and help cities to:

- Increase participation rates
- Circulate critical information ahead of time, and promote overall awareness of Summer Food Service Programs
- Support site staff and programming

Community Tables volunteers will fulfill a variety of different functions to support and help increase participation in SFSP, including:

- **Canvassing and outreach** — General lack of information is the primary barrier to participation in SFSP, and one of the most basic to overcome. *Families need to know where to go in order to benefit from the program.* Starting about a month before school ends and continuing throughout the summer, volunteers can help spread the word by:
 - delivering outreach materials to schools;
 - canvassing in targeted low-income neighborhoods;
 - tabling at community events; and
 - responding to phone calls at an SFSP hotline, if there is a call center in the city.
- **Site support** — In most cities, SFSP sites are volunteer-driven and supported. If the site is fortunate to have a paid staff person, volunteers can help by transporting or serving the food, setting up, or cleaning up after meals. Volunteers can be critical extra eyes and helping hands who ensure that children receive their meals in a safe manner and that sites operate as efficiently as possible.

³ See also "Recognizing and Thanking Volunteers," page 14.





- **Enhance with enrichment** — Activities are extremely useful for drawing children to sites and giving them something to return to day after day. Volunteers can organize or facilitate safe play and team sports, arts and crafts, computer skills training via age-appropriate games, as well as lead summer reading sessions or tutoring, field trips, and myriad other recreational or educational opportunities.
- **Accountability and impact** — Collecting data and site metrics is critical to reporting and knowing what's working and where mid-course corrections may be helpful. Volunteers can be easily trained to collect real-time impact metrics, such as those detailed on page 13.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS: THE RIGHT NUMBER AND NATURE

Work with community partners to recruit volunteers based on the scope of volunteer activities that best support your city's *Community Tables*. Neighborhood associations, faith-based groups, youth and adult service organizations, local colleges, and corporations can be great sources of wonderful, eager volunteers. All volunteers, regardless of source, should receive background checks prior to contact with children, in line with local and state laws and regulations.





D CALIBRATE AND ILLUSTRATE IMPACT

Collecting substantive data is essential to assess and demonstrate the impact of *Community Tables* in your city.

GETTING GOOD DATA

- **Measures of success for *Community Tables* may include** an increase in the number of beneficiaries, meals, and sites served.
- **Program partners are key** to metrics collection. Taking the time to collect and compile data at the site level supports overall implementation and reporting.

The following outcome metrics are required:

- overall number of summer meals served
- % change in number of summer meals served over the previous summer
- number of SFSP sites
- % change in number of SFSP sites over the previous summer
- number of volunteers supporting the program
- % change in the number of volunteers over the previous summer
- number of total volunteer hours

Optional metrics:

- number of children from low-income families participating in the program
- % change in number of children participating in the program over the previous summer
- number of children participating in the program at least three times a week
- requests for information about summer meals





RECOGNIZING AND THANKING VOLUNTEERS

There are many ways to recognize volunteers who contribute to making *Community Tables* a success.

- Always be welcoming and energized during training and throughout the course of the volunteer project.
- Send volunteers thank-you notes.
- Solicit feedback from volunteers on ways to improve implementation and as appropriate, incorporate their suggestions for activities or enhancements.
- Once the metrics have been finalized, share the impact with the volunteers.
- Create and share progress reports to help volunteers understand how their efforts contributed to the initiative's overall and long-term success.
- Get permission to include volunteers in future newsletters and thank them and/or their organizations on social media.
- Host an event with the mayor to recognize and celebrate everyone's hard work.
- Leverage tickets to summer sporting and cultural events as a special thank you for key volunteers.





ADDITIONAL PARTNERS IN SERVICE

National Service Resources — National service participants such as AmeriCorps VISTA members can help cities improve participation in summer meals. They can help increase the number of SFSP sites and participation rates at existing sites by helping to establish partnerships and conducting outreach, assisting with operations, recruiting new sponsors and sites, leading/providing activities, and recruiting volunteers. National service participants can infuse new energy into the program, raising awareness within target communities and creating positive environments for children.

AMERICORPS AND VISTA SUMMER ASSOCIATES

A collaboration of the USDA, the Corporation for National & Community Service, and the New York City Coalition Against Hunger will dedicate 70 AmeriCorps VISTA members and 176 VISTA Summer Associates to work specifically on strengthening the SFSP program in dozens of states. More information is available via <http://nyccah.org/AmeriCorpsService>.





CITY SUCCESS STORY: SUMMER MEALS IN PHILADELPHIA

 In 2011, Mayor Michael A. Nutter created “Fun Safe Philly Summer” (FSPS) to provide Philadelphia youth with summer programming and opportunities to stay active throughout the school holiday.

To kick off Fun Safe Philly Summer, the city hosts a field day for young people with events such as kickball, tug of war, and dodgeball, in addition to providing free healthy snacks. Throughout the summer, FSPS hosts “pop-up” events with community partners and sponsors that include a pool party, ice skating, skateboarding demonstrations, a pump and jump (bike park) event, and an end-of-summer teen dance party.

In 2012, the Mayor’s Office recruited an AmeriCorps VISTA member to serve as the FSPS Coordinator. While the initiative is managed by the Mayor’s Office of Policy Planning and Coordination, the FSPS Coordinator provides day-to-day implementation and coordination of all strategies. The Mayor’s Office, in partnership with the Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger, has also recruited AmeriCorps VISTA Summer Associates to perform direct outreach and increase awareness of the summer meals program in targeted high-need neighborhoods. In summer 2014, the VISTAs mobilized 76 community volunteers to distribute 7,197 summer meals door-hangers, palm-sized information cards, and posters over 12 outreach days, and distributed resources to 158 community partners.

THE FOCUS IN PHILADELPHIA

The City established three objectives to guide the success of Fun Safe Philly Summer:

- 1 **Promote** free and low-cost summer programming for youth
- 2 **Increase** the use of the USDA-funded free summer meals program by Philadelphia youth
- 3 **Connect** older youth to summer employment and volunteer opportunities





As a result of FSPS's work with citywide partners, more than 4 million meals were served to Philadelphia youth during the summer of 2014, up 46% from its inaugural year in 2011. These meals are distributed at recreation centers, day camps, libraries, churches, community centers, and at Play Streets, which are closed to traffic each day. Play Streets, sponsored by Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, make up 900 of the 1,400 official meal sites in Philadelphia and are supervised by local residents throughout the summer who provide young people safe locations to play, eat, and grow. These individuals offer free summer meals funded by the USDA as well as free outdoor games and activities throughout the week.

REAL RESULTS

More than **4 million meals were served** to Philadelphia youth during the summer of 2014, **up 46% from its inaugural year** in 2011.

Mayor Nutter supports the FSPS initiative by hosting a kick-off press event; writing an op/ed; hosting a summer job fair for teens; promoting the FSPS website on the banner page of www.phila.gov all summer long; leading a mid-summer meals and reading tour for younger youth; and reporting out to the press and community partners on the accomplishments of FSPS at the completion of each summer. In addition, the Mayor meets with summer meals partners—including local stakeholders and advocates, commonwealth representatives, and the USDA—during the annual mid-summer meeting to emphasize his commitment to the Philadelphia summer meals program.



PHILADELPHIA





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Hunger Hotlines:

- The National Hunger Hotline at 1-866-3-HUNGRY or 1-877-8-HAMBRE will help people find meal sites in their communities.

Center for Best Practices:

- Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices is an invaluable source for basic information, specific tool kits, case studies, evaluation data, and outreach materials.
<http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/free-summer-meals-kids>

USDA Food and Nutrition Service Program Overview:

- A comprehensive site providing information about all things related to SFSP, with an emphasis on finding, sponsoring, and managing Summer Meals sites.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/summer-food-service-program-sfsp>

School Outreach:

- For specific information on school outreach, see the USDA's guidance.
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cnd/SMT-SchoolOutreach.pdf>

Volunteer Engagement:

- For ideas about engaging volunteers, see the New York City Coalition Against Hunger's "Beyond the Food Drive, Ending Hunger Through Citizen Service." https://nyccah.org/files/BeyondtheFoodDrive_FullHandbook.pdf.

Report on Hunger and Undernutrition:

- Food Research and Action Center's "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2014."
http://frac.org/pdf/2014_summer_nutrition_report.pdf.





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Cities of Service thanks the following organizations for their expertise and support:

- City of Philadelphia
- New York City Coalition Against Hunger



Cities of Service supports mayors and city chief executives to activate impact volunteering initiatives —city-led, citizen-powered programs that target specific needs and achieve measurable outcomes. Our coalition is comprised of more than 200 cities in the US and UK, representing more than 50 million people in 43 states, and more than 10 million in the UK. By prioritizing impact, creating capacity, and instilling a model that can be replicated, our approach works across multiple issues. Cities use proven tools and methods to engage community members in addressing multiple issues, from revitalizing neighborhoods to supporting youth and education. Residents are recast as co-producers of solutions and work side by side with municipal government to create real and lasting change.

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