



## ***Summer Food Service Program***



### **What is the Summer Food Service Program?**

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally funded program that was established in 1975. It is designed to provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children in low-income areas during summer months, when many children do not have access to the free-and-reduced meals that are provided to them during the school year. This program is funded by the USDA and in Oklahoma, it is administered by the State Department of Education. The Regional Food Bank serves as a sponsor of this program, overseeing multiple sites across the state.

### **Why is the Summer Food Service Program important?**

Access to nutritious food is crucial to a child's mental and physical development. During the summer months, many low-income children may not know where their next meal is coming from. These children are at a high risk of falling behind their peers during the summer months, a problem known as the "summer slide." The Summer Food Service Program partners with various groups and organizations that provide physical and social activities for children so that they remain sharp & ready to return to school in the fall. Many of our partner sites offer tutoring and literacy programs, physical fitness programs, cultural activities, and arts and crafts. Research has shown that when partnered together, food programs and enrichment programs such as these are more successful.

The Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma has been a Summer Food Service Program sponsor since 2003 and is one of the largest sponsors in the state of Oklahoma. During the summer of 2022, the Regional Food Bank operated at 99 meal sites across central and western Oklahoma, serving around 7,000 children.

## Who Can Become a Site?

Meal service sites may be located in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to: schools, recreation centers, playgrounds, parks, churches, community centers, day camps, residential summer camps, housing projects, migrant centers, and Indian reservations. The only requirement for eligibility is that the site be located in an area where the assigned school has at least 50% or greater of children who are eligible to participate in the free and reduced-priced lunch program. In order for us to check your eligibility, we simply need the physical address of your site. Questions regarding eligibility can be directed to the Food for Kids Data Coordinator: Aline Bristol [abristol@rfbo.org](mailto:abristol@rfbo.org) (405) 604-7102

As a site, your responsibilities include:

- Complete site training with Regional Food Bank
- Arrange for pick-up of food deliveries from nearest RFBO partner; or receive direct deliveries if located in OKC metro area
- Maintain trained staff members or volunteers to supervise and oversee meal services
- Distribute and track meals, following SFSP guidelines provided in training
- Utilize Link2Feed to keep track of daily meal count records and menus
- Maintain proper food safety by storing food appropriately and keeping site clean and sanitary
- Help your sponsor promote the program in the community



## What are the benefits of becoming a site?

- You can serve free, nutritious meals to the kids in your community.
- Providing meals for children helps families in your community stretch their monthly food budget.
- If your organization is already operating a summer program that serves food, utilizing the Summer Food Service Program frees up your funding to add or expand other programs.
- Offering activities such as physical activities, reading or tutoring programs can help keep kids engaged in learning during the summer months, ensuring they return to school in the fall ready to learn.

## How much does it cost?

As a site under the sponsorship of the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma, the food for this program will cost you nothing. We take care of the ordering, preparing and shipping of the food. We only ask that you store it accordingly, serve it according to federal requirements taught during your training, and maintain accurate daily meal services via Link2Feed (internet based software program) so that we are able to receive reimbursement that will cover the cost of purchasing and shipping the food.

## How will we get the food?

The Regional Food Bank will deliver your food to you! If you are located locally in the OKC metro area, you will receive daily or weekly deliveries directly to your site from one of our drivers. For sites located outside of the metro area, you will receive routine deliveries via the Regional Food Bank's rural delivery schedule.



This schedule depends on the route and schedule of existing community partners of the Regional Food Bank, such as Food and Resource Centers or Community Pantries that are located in your area. Please keep in mind, you will have to pick up your deliveries which can include frozen and dry, shelf stable items from a designated location and take them to your site for proper storage. These deliveries typically occur about twice per month dependent on your need and location. Orders will be adjusted according to the number of children your site is serving.

## How will we store the food?

You will need both cold and dry storage available and the amount of space needed will depend on how many children you are planning on serving. If you do not have storage available at your site, please let us know to see if we can help! You may also want to consider building community partnerships. For example, if there is a church or community center in your area that has a commercial kitchen available, that would be a great partnership to have. School cafeterias also make great partners for this part of the program, as they typically have that space available when school is not in session. Some sites have also worked out a deal with their local grocer allotting them space in their cooler/freezer. Every community is different and we are happy to help facilitate these conversations if need be.

## What do the meals consist of?

All of our menus meet the USDA meal standards for all children 18 and under, meaning they get the appropriate amounts of protein, whole grains, milk and fruit/vegetables. All meals are freshly prepared in Hope's Kitchen at the Regional Food Bank. Breakfasts and snacks will consist of various fruits, grains, proteins and milk; lunches/dinners will consist of kid-friendly items, including sandwiches, wraps, and compartmentalized meals in oven/microwave safe trays, such as chicken nuggets or mini corn dogs. This is all dependent on what is available in our kitchen and your storage capabilities on site. Sites can choose either lunch/dinner only, OR, a combination that includes lunch/dinner with breakfast or snack. This is all dependent on what will work best for your site operations.

## Can we make deliveries or send food home with kids?

Currently, the answer to this is unfortunately no. But it is possible that this requirement will change in the near future. For now, current regulations require “congregate feeding” which means children must eat all of their meal(s) on site. If you have a donation or a local supporter who wants to provide a snack to send home with the kids at the end of the day (note: those additional snacks would not be claimed under the Summer Feeding program, but would be provided independently), that is allowed. Some sites have purchased and handed out fresh fruit door-to-door as a way to let families with kids know about the program and where it will be held.

## Who can we serve?

This program is available to all children 18 and under. No identification is required, nor do we ask for names or income verification. Program site eligibility is based on census data, so if the assigned school to the location qualifies at 50% or greater low income eligibility, that area qualifies to serve all children. One of the requirements of the program is that sites do not discriminate against any child and serve all children who come to that site equally. This can be a great opportunity to be all-inclusive so as to fight the stigma that this program is only for kids who “need” it. It can be fun and healthy for any kid who wants to be a part of it.



## How many kids can we serve?

This program can be as big or as modest as you want it to be, relatively speaking. Refer to your county Low Income Report sheet or go to <http://ok.gov/sde/child-nutrition-documents>, and select “2022 Low Income Report”, find your school, and refer to the number (not the percentage) of children who are receiving free and reduced meals. This will give you an idea of the number of children who could really benefit from this program. This doesn’t mean you will serve 100% of these children, it will just give you some context for the need in your area. We don’t want to target only these children and create a stigma, we want to build a sustainable, inclusive program that will benefit all children.

Current requirements for partnership: Must serve a minimum of 3 days per week with the goal/expectation of serving 10 kids per day.



## Best Practices

- Local coalition-building (can be formal or informal) - the more people who pitch in, the easier and more fun it is for everyone!
- Work with parents, teachers and schools to raise awareness and support before summer starts!
- Remember WHY-you are helping not only the kids but also their families and the entire community!
- Tap into local groups and organizations for support: Social services clubs like Kiwanis and Rotary clubs, college extension services, Health Departments, tribal nations, 4H, FFA, FCCLA, FCA, youth groups, churches, Youth and Family Services, local businesses, chamber of commerce, local law enforcement, local heroes, other successful summer food programs; it is a great opportunity for older kids and young adults to serve their communities and can be really helpful for college and scholarship applications.
- Work with local media and businesses to advertise the program-ask us if you need help with promotional materials.
- Transportation can be “donated” by a local school, church or other organization if they have the capabilities; know where your kids are already gathering and make it accessible for them.
- Do not hesitate to call and ask questions! We are always more than happy to help, whether it is technical support, advice for recruiting volunteers, ideas for activities or anything else. We are here to help you serve your community!

## Tips from other successful Summer Feeding sites:

- “Don’t be afraid to reach out to the Food Bank staff with questions. They are very helpful.”
- “Get the word out and be prepared.”
- “Ask questions. Don’t feel like you are all by yourself. Enjoy the children and make it fun!”
- “Utilize your local resources such as churches to help get the manpower you need. You also need a good person to coordinate the whole process each day” (this site utilized their school cafeteria manager to help run the program).
- “Advertising and promoting the program is very important in getting kids to attend.”
- “Plan as much as you can but be flexible. Do this program to help those children in your community who need it the most!”
- “Find/establish a central location and offer meaningful activities”
- “My advice would be to make sure you don’t request more food than you actually need. Stick to the number of kids who attend and actually eat regularly. The kids will not want to eat some days, don’t try to force them. If they are hungry they will eat. Also, try and call in if you know you will have way too many leftovers by the end of the week.”
- “Plan ahead and think of partnerships. You can reach more children in small communities much easier when sharing responsibility.”

## How do I get started?

1.) **Build partnerships in the community.** You don't have to form a whole coalition, just find a few stakeholders (concerned parents, teachers, church leaders, health department staff, etc.) who also care about feeding hungry kids. Remember it is not just one person's responsibility to make sure the kids in the community have access to healthy food during the summer. They are our kids. Let's feed them together!

2.) **Get the word out.** Let people know what you want to do and why you want to do it. Send out informational materials about the program through local schools (check with school administration first!) to both let parents and school staff know the program will be available. This is also a great way to make it more inclusive in the community.

3.) **Location, location, location.** You know your community better than we do, so you will probably know (or can find out fairly easily) where most of the kids live in your town. Are they walking distance from a church or other community center? Is there a community pool/splash pad or park where a lot of kids hang out during the summer? If the kids are not in walking distance, is there a group or organization who would be willing or able to help with transportation?

4.) **Food storage and preparation.** Once you determine where you will be serving, you can determine what you will be serving: breakfast, lunch/dinner and snack. You will need a place to store these meals, such as a church with a large kitchen or a school cafeteria if you do not have them on site (this is where those community partnerships come in handy!).



If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the Food for Kids Support Coordinator: Bethany McGarryt at (405) 600-3151 or [bmcgarry@rfbo.org](mailto:bmcgarry@rfbo.org) at any time.

**Applications for Summer Programs are due by April 15th of each year. If you are interested in being a site, please let Bethany know so that you can get the link to the online application.**

**If you are interested in participating in the Summer Food Service Program or you want more information, please contact the Food for Kids team at the Regional Food Bank of Oklahoma:**

### **Bethany McGarry**

Food for Kids Support Coordinator  
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### **Aline Bristol**

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