

Getting Started

There is no “one” right path but here are some tips for getting a summer meal program started at your library:

1. See where summer meal sites are in your community.

USDA’s Capacity Builder will show where summer meals sites were last summer so you can see where library branches are in relation to other summer meal sites (if there were any). This tool can also help you determine if your site is eligible based on census block data. *Even if there are summer meal sites nearby, your library may still be eligible to become a meal site.*

www.fns.usda.gov/capacitybuilder

2. Determine if your library is eligible to serve summer meals.

Summer meals can be served at **sites** where at least 50% of children within that *school attendance area* are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Census or school data may be used to make this determination. If your branch is in a pocket that is not eligible, it may be possible to secure eligibility through a weighted average of adjacent census block groups. In addition to the USDA Capacity Builder, you can also contact your local school district food services director. If your school district has an online resident school finder, you can also try:

[Branch address to find assigned school > Ed-data.org > Find free and reduced-price data](#)

3. Connect with a meal provider.

The meal provider is called the **sponsor**. The sponsor is the financial and administrative operator of the program in addition to providing meals to your site. School districts often make the best starting point for possible partnership. Their experience operating the USDA **National School Lunch Program (NSLP)** can allow for a seamless transition through the **Seamless Summer Feeding Option (SSFO)**. If that’s not possible, you may find a nonprofit organization that operates the **Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**. Both programs serve the same purpose. Your provider will help you understand the next steps and details including confirmation of your library as a site with the **California Department of Education (CDE)**, how the program will operate at your site and important training dates.

Lunchatthelibrary.org/first_steps

10 Questions for Meal Providers

An introductory meeting with your meal provider can help your planning efforts by addressing general start-up topics such as timing, logistics and need for volunteers. It's a good idea going into this meeting to have a sense of how many children your library typically sees on an average summer day as a starting point for meal service.

- 1. What will the general procedures look like for my site?***
- 2. Will you send a staff person to serve meals or will library staff/volunteers serve meals?***
- 3. When will service start and when will it end?***
- 4. What kind of storage for leftovers will I need – and do you allow a “share table”?***
- 5. When will you host a training for summer meal site staff and who should attend?***
- 6. Will meals be hot, cold or both?***
- 7. Will you provide cleaning supplies or should the library provide them?***
- 8. What should we expect as far as site visits from you or the health department?***
- 9. Can parents/caregivers purchase meals?***
- 10. How can we work together on outreach?***

[Lunchatthelibrary.org/first steps / finding and working with a meal sponsor](https://lunchatthelibrary.org/first-steps/)

[Fns.usda.gov/sfsp/handbooks](https://fns.usda.gov/sfsp/handbooks)