

**Overcoming Barriers to Participation in the
Summer Food Service Program -
An Identification of Best Practice Solutions**



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National Food Service Management Institute The University of Mississippi

Building the Future Through Child Nutrition

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PURPOSE

The purpose of NFSMI is to improve the operation of Child Nutrition Programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination. The Administrative Offices and Divisions of Technology Transfer and Education and Training are located in Oxford. The Division of Applied Research is located at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

MISSION

The mission of the NFSMI is to provide information and services that promote the continuous improvement of Child Nutrition Programs.

VISION

The vision of the NFSMI is to be the leader in providing education, research, and resources to promote excellence in Child Nutrition Programs.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Headquarters

The University of Mississippi
Phone: 800-321-3054
Fax: 800-321-3061
www.nfsmi.org

**Education and Training Division
Technology Transfer Division**
The University of Mississippi
6 Jeanette Phillips Drive
P.O. Drawer 188
University, MS 38677-0188

Applied Research Division
The University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #10077
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601-266-5773
Fax: 888-262-9631

Acknowledgments

WRITTEN AND DEVELOPED BY

**Elaine Fontenot Molaison, PhD, RD
Researcher**

**Deborah H. Carr, PhD, RD
Director, Applied Research Division**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Charlotte B. Oakley, PhD, RD, FADA**

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**OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN THE SUMMER FOOD
SERVICE PROGRAM - AN IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICE SOLUTIONS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1968, Congress created the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to provide nutritious meals to low-income children when school is not in session. Each SFSP site is operated by an SFSP sponsor. The sponsor is financially responsible for the operation of the program and assures that all protocol associated with the program are followed. In previous years, attempts have been made to increase the number of sponsors enrolled in the program as a means of increasing the number of sites, ultimately increasing the number of children participating in the program.

In an attempt to increase sponsors' participation in the SFSP, Richard Lugar (R-IN) proposed the Lugar Summer Food Pilot. In 2001, this pilot allowed 13 states to operate under a program called the Simplified Summer Food Program, which simplified the financial and administrative paperwork associated with SFSP. In January 2005, six additional states were allowed to participate in the program. A second program, the Seamless Summer Food Waiver, also was created to increase the number of sponsors participating in SFSP. With this program, food service programs in school districts are allowed to run the program as a continuation of the National School Lunch Program, rather than having to recreate accounting methods in the summer.

Although the Simplified Summer Food Program has increased participation by sponsors, the Seamless Summer Food Waiver has had a minimal effect on participation. Even with the

best efforts of sponsors at the local level, less than twenty percent of all eligible children participated in the feeding program in 2004. Additionally, there is no research to date that explores the benefits and barriers to a sponsor's participation in the SFSP. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to evaluate the SFSP sponsor's perception of the benefits and barriers related to operating the program and to assess practices used by sponsors to increase participation by eligible children.

Phase I of the research included 21 telephone interviews (nine state agency directors and twelve SFSP sponsors). Participants in this phase of the research were asked similar questions regarding benefits and barriers to a sponsor's participation and factors influencing the participation by eligible children. Six themes emerged from the telephone interviews: barriers related to a sponsor starting a program, reasons a sponsor might leave or discontinue a program, resources that are beneficial to a sponsor operating a program, benefits to children participating in the program, barriers that would prevent an eligible child from participating in the program, and methods used to increase participation in the program.

Phase II of the research included the development of a questionnaire that was sent to 803 SFSP sponsors in the southeast region. A total of seven primary questions were included in the survey. Under each of the seven questions, questions with likert-type responses were asked of the sponsors. The seven questions were:

- 1) In your opinion, how would a sponsor who has left the program rate the following reasons for not wanting to start another program in the future?
- 2) Rate the following reasons that a sponsor may give for leaving or discontinuing a program.

- 3) With regards to participation, how would you rate each of the following items that might affect participation by eligible children?
- 4) Rate each of the following methods used to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program in your area.
- 5) Rate the importance of each of the following resources that would be beneficial to a sponsor operating a Summer Food Service Program.
- 6) Rate the importance of each of the following benefits of the Summer Food Service Program.
- 7) Rate the importance of each of the following methods to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program in your area.

In addition to these questions, demographic data including grade level primarily served, location, reason participating in SFSP, participation in the Simplified Summer Food Program, number of sites sponsored, and number of meals produced also were included in the survey.

A total of 316 completed surveys were used in the data analysis. Sites primarily served children in upper elementary grades (53.9%). Only 34.3% operated under the Simplified Summer Food Program. The average number of years sponsoring a program was 9.9 years, and sponsors oversaw an average of 14.5 sites and served an average of 904.9 meals.

Providing nutritious meals to children was seen as the most important benefit of the program. Sponsors believed the large volume of paperwork was the primary reason an individual would not want to start a program and the primary reason a sponsor would leave/discontinue a program. The most crucial resource in starting and operating a program was having adequate and appropriate staff to help with meal production. Most respondents strongly agreed that a primary reason for lack of participation by eligible children was insufficient

transportation to the feeding sites. Advertising programs in areas frequented by families of eligible children and having an activity associated with the program were seen as the most beneficial means to increase participation by children.

Differences in benefits and barriers to participation were evaluated based on demographic data. Researchers analyzed the data to look for differences based on the age of the children served, whether or not the sponsors participated in the SFSP, number of years as a sponsor, number of meals served on a daily basis, and the number of weeks the SFSP operates. There were no differences in responses to each of the questions based on any of the demographic data collected.

In order to enhance the number of individuals sponsoring SFSP sites, resources need to be enhanced and made available to support the SFSP sponsors. In addition to providing training to the sponsors in the spring prior to the start of the program, the state serves as a resource during the program to help resolve problems and clarify any issues faced by the sponsor. The main barrier to an individual participating in the SFSP as a sponsor was the large amount of paperwork involved in the program. However, only 34% of our sample operated under the simplified program, which may have influenced this result. If more sponsors operated under the Simplified Summer Food Program it may help to reduce the perceived barrier of overwhelming paperwork.

Transportation was the primary issue related to participation by eligible children. Some of the recommendations that were made to help improve access to the site may help others boost participation, though it appears that good advertising in communities/areas visited by families of eligible children is most often used to increase the number of children participating in the program. Another concern was the ability of a site to sustain its efforts in providing meals.

INTRODUCTION

Children that are hungry are more likely have behavior problems, lower test scores, and higher rates of absenteeism in school (Weedall and Hamilton, 2002). In 1968, Congress created the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) to provide nutritious meals to low-income children when school is not in session, either during the summer or during a school break period of fifteen days or more. The program is intended to meet the needs of children up to eighteen years old and can provide up to two meals a day (Getting Good Nutrition, 2005; Summer Food Service, 2005). The program typically operates under one of four options. An open site is one where at least fifty percent of the children in that area are eligible for free or reduced school meals. Any child living in that area can participate in an open site. Enrolled sites limit participation to only those children that are eligible for free or reduced school meals. Migrant sites offer meals to children of migrant workers, whereas, a camp site is operated as part of an organized program (Now It's Easier, 2005).

Although the program originates at the federal level, funding is distributed by the state to SFSP sponsors who are responsible for conducting the program at the local level (Summer Food Service, 2005). Sponsors are those individuals/groups who are deemed financially responsible for the operation of the program. A sponsor is typically a local school, a government agency, or a non-profit private sponsor (Getting Good Nutrition, 2005). The program is governed by detailed operational rules in order to assure consistency and integrity within the program. It is the responsibility of the sponsor to assure that all protocol associated with the program is followed by the SFSP (Tasse and Ohls, 2003).

Due to the stringent guidelines associated with the SFSP, a study was conducted to evaluate the efficacy of the program. Using 208 programs, the researchers found that the

program was well run and was effective in achieving the mission of the SFSP of providing food to low income children (Cavin, Ohls, Kisker, and Chapman, 1991). In July 2004, nearly 2.9 million children were served in SFSP on an average day (Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation, 2005). However, recent data indicates that the program is being underutilized by eligible children. In 2000, only 14% of children that are eligible for free and reduced school meals participated in the program (Weedall and Hamilton, 2002). This number of eligible children participating in the program increased to 19% in 2004 (Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation, 2005). Yet, many program sponsors and child nutrition officials at the state and federal levels find these numbers discouraging.

In an attempt to increase participation in the SFSP, Senate Agriculture Committee Chair Richard Lugar (R-IN) proposed a program that would simplify financial and administrative paperwork associated with the SFSP. In January 2001, the Lugar Summer Food Pilot allowed thirteen states (Alaska, Arkansas, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Texas, and Wyoming) and Puerto Rico to operate under a program called the Simplified Summer Food Program. In January 2005, six additional states were allowed to participate in the program (Colorado, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Ohio, and Oregon) (Simplified Summer Food Program, 2005).

As part of the program, sponsors are not required to keep administrative and operating costs as separate accounts. Rather, sponsors are allowed to be reimbursed on a meals times rates method. If a sponsor has any excess funds at the end of the program these funds can be used on allowable SFSP purchases to improve the program (Child Nutrition Fact Sheet, 2005; Simplified Summer Food Program, 2005). It was found that participation in the SFSP by sponsors has increased by 20.8% in the thirteen pilot states and participation in the program by eligible

children increased by 37%. In the non-pilot states, participation by children dropped by 25.3% (Simplified Summer Food Program, 2005).

A second method has been used to improve participation by sponsors, ultimately hoping to improve participation by eligible children. The Seamless Summer Food Waiver was implemented in 2002 to help food service programs in school districts make the transition between the school year and summer easier. Rather than having to recreate accounting methods in the summer, the schools are allowed to run the program as a continuation of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP). Sponsors who operated under the waiver felt that it helped to streamline operations and made the application process for SFSP easier. Although reimbursement rates are slightly lower under the waiver program, many sponsors said that the lower rates were offset by the cost savings of streamlining the operation (Tasse and Ohls, 2003). In June 2004, the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act made the Seamless Summer Food Waiver a permanent option for schools (Now It's Easier, 2005).

On a local level, most sponsors have tried to improve participation by eligible children using a variety of methods. Many programs utilize enrichment and recreational activities as a means of increasing participation. The activity can serve as the primary means for getting the children to the site, and the meal can be offered as part of the activity (Child Nutrition Fact Sheet, 2005; Terry, 1980). Advertising through flyers, brochures, and posters appears to be the primary method to inform parents of eligible children about the program. Often, these flyers can be sent home with the children at the end of the school year or sent with utility bills. Some SFSP sponsors have posted the information in areas frequently visited by families with eligible children. These areas might include food banks, churches, or local governmental agencies that

provide assistance to low-income families (Getting Good Nutrition, 2005; School Nutrition Programs, 2005).

Even with implementation of the Simplified Summer Food Program and the Seamless Summer Food Waiver and the best of intentions from the SFSP sponsors, program participation by children remains limited, at best. Some research was conducted in the area of participation in the NSLP, and it was found that variety of food was one of the most significant factors related to participation in the study (Marples and Spillman, 1995). Yet, it is difficult to infer the same conclusion on participation rates in the SFSP. Therefore, it was the purpose of this research to evaluate SFSP sponsor's perception of the barriers to participation in the program from the point of view of the sponsor and children eligible to participate in the study. In addition, this study aimed to identify the best practices uses by SFSP sponsors to improve participation in the program.

Research Objectives

- To identify barriers, practices, and other issues that prevent eligible children from participating in summer feeding programs
- To determine solutions/best practices to help communities overcome the identified barriers, thus, increasing access to SFSPs
- To provide school districts and local communities with practical best practice solutions to increase participation in SFSPs

METHOD

Research Plan

The purpose of this research was to identify barriers to participation in the Summer Food Service Program by sponsors and eligible children as well as to identify best practices that can be used to increase participation in the program. A concept paper was developed outlining the purpose, research objectives, methodology, project timetable, and outcomes of the study (Appendix A). In order to identify these benefits and barriers related to the SFSP, both state directors and local sponsors were contacted and asked for input. In the first phase of the study, twelve state SFSP directors and nine SFSP sponsors were interviewed by telephone. The qualitative gained from the telephone interviews were then used to develop a research questionnaire consisting of forty-six questions, used to evaluate perceptions of barriers and benefits related to participation in the SFSP. Prior to distribution of the questionnaire, an expert panel of school food service researchers and state directors reviewed the questionnaire for content and clarity. A pilot test was conducted to evaluate the validity of the instrument. The finalized questionnaire was distributed to 803 SFSP sponsors in the southeast region.

Phase I

Telephone Interviews

In the initial part of Phase I, nine state agency child nutrition program directors who oversaw the SFSP were contacted by telephone. These state directors were chosen because of their level of experience and willingness to participate in the research. Directors were from both states that did and did not participate in the Simplified Summer Food Program. These states included: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Oregon. After completing the telephone survey, the state directors were asked if

they had any SFSP sponsors that might be interested in participating in the research. Eighteen sponsors were identified; however, researchers were only able to get a response from nine of the sponsors.

Both state directors and program sponsors were asked the same questions. A copy of the telephone questionnaire is provided in Appendix B and a copy of the Survey Evaluation form is found in Appendix C. Based on the objectives outlined in the concept paper, the questions focused on barriers to participation in the SFSP program from the point of view of the program sponsor and eligible children and/or families. After the phone calls were completed, all of the responses were typed, and the data were evaluated by two separate researchers. Trends in the responses were totaled for each question. At this point, the data was brought to a statistician, who reviewed the data and provided suggestions for development of the final questionnaire. A total of five themes emerged from the qualitative data: barriers related to a sponsor starting a program, reasons a sponsor might leave or discontinue a program, resources that are beneficial to a sponsor operating a program, benefits to children participating in the program, barriers that would prevent an eligible child from participating in the program, and methods used to increase participation in the program. In addition, the state directors and sponsors listed unique techniques that had been used by sponsors to increase participation in the SFSP program.

Phase II

Survey Development

After identifying the major themes, responses related to each of these areas were tabulated. If a response had been mentioned at least six times during the telephone interview, it was included on the initial questionnaire. The first version of the questionnaire included questions that related to each of the six themes identified through the telephone interviews.

Responses to each of the questions were provided using a Likert-type scale that would allow the participants to strongly agree/disagree to the responses or rate the responses as not at all to extremely important. Although not identified as one of the major themes, a question was added to evaluate how strongly the sponsors would agree or disagree on the feasibility of using some of the unique methods identified to increase program participation.

This questionnaire was then reviewed by two NFSMI research scientists for wording and appropriateness of the questions. After revisions were made, the survey was sent to four state directors that served as an expert panel. In addition to answering each of the questions, the expert panel was given the opportunity to provide input on the wording and clarity of the instrument prior to being distributed to SFSP sponsors. Additionally, demographic data were added to the questionnaire to evaluate the grade level primarily served, location of the program, reason for conducting a SFSP program, Simplified Summer Food Program participation, number of years as a sponsor, number of sites sponsored, number of meals served on a daily basis, and the number of weeks the program is operated. An open ended question was developed to allow program sponsors to describe innovative techniques they had used to enhance participation at feeding sites.

During the time that the expert panel was reviewing the instrument, state directors from the nine southeast states (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) were contacted and a list of all SFSP sponsors in their states was requested. Additionally, state sponsors in Louisiana and Oregon were contacted, and a list of twenty-five sponsors from each state was requested for the pilot survey.

Pilot Study

After receiving responses from the four state directors, a pilot questionnaire was developed, using Optiscan. This program allows the responses to be "bubbled in" to allow data to be scanned and directly loaded into a statistical program. Fifty pilot questionnaires were sent out to SFSP sponsors in Louisiana and Oregon. A copy of the pilot study cover letter is found in Appendix D. The decision was made to use states that were not used in the final survey. Ten questionnaires were returned and analyzed for validity. Results of the validity testing are found in Table 1.

Table 1

Cronbach Alpha results for validity of pilot questionnaire

Question Theme	α
Methods used to increase participation in the program	.969
Benefits of the SFSP	.957
Resources that would be beneficial to a sponsor operating a program	.942
Reasons a sponsor might leave or discontinue a program	.915
Unique methods used to increase participation in the program	.913
Reasons a sponsor might not want to start a program in the future	.830
Items that might affect participation by eligible children	.737

Due to the high Cronbach alpha scores, no changes were made to the survey questions, however, some of the sponsors were not able to correctly pencil in the responses that required them to identify a number (e.g. number of years as a sponsor or average number of meals served) or they missed the question that asked if they operated under the Simplified Summer Food Program. Changes were made to the formatting of these questions to improve responses. A copy of the finalized questionnaire is found in Appendix E with the cover letter to the SFSP sponsors found in Appendix F.

Questionnaire Distribution

The final questionnaire was sent to 803 SFSP sponsors in the southeast region. Each packet contained a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope. The cover letter informed the participants of the purpose of the study, asked for their participation, assured them of confidentiality of their responses, and provided researchers' contact information for questions and concerns. No identifying codes were placed on the questionnaires, thus preserving the anonymity of all respondents. Participants were given approximately three weeks to return the completed surveys (Appendix E).

Informed Consent

The protocol for Phase I and Phase II of the study were reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee (HSPRC) of The University of Southern Mississippi.

Data Analysis

Surveys were analyzed using the statistical package SPSS Version 12.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics included means, standard deviations, and frequencies of total responses. T-test was used to evaluate differences in responses based on participation in the Simplified Summer Food Program. Qualitative descriptions of techniques used to increase participation were summarized and tabulated to look for themes within the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews were conducted using the same set of questions for both state agency directors and SFSP sponsors. Participants stated that a lack of understanding of what is involved to run the program was the biggest challenge for starting a SFSP program. Having adequate and appropriate staff and established partnerships in the community were identified as primary resources that could be used to help a sponsor start a program in a district where summer feeding has never been offered. Participants believed the Simplified Summer Food Program would help increase overall participation by eligible children. However, high overhead costs and the amount of paperwork required to run the program were seen as reasons that a sponsor might leave or not choose to start a program. Lack of knowledge about the program and lack of transportation to the feeding sites were seen as the main barriers to participation by eligible children, but most agreed that the program’s primary benefit was providing food to kids that would not otherwise eat. All results of the telephone interviews are summarized in Table 2, with a brief description of the theme identified and the number of times the theme was mentioned as part of the telephone interviews.

Table 2

Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program Directors and State Sponsors

Questions	
1. Based on your experience, what do you think is the biggest challenge for a sponsor in starting a summer food service program?	
Transportation of the children to the sites	3
Paperwork	3
Getting qualified volunteers to help with the program	3
Inadequate number of children to support a site	2
Program already in existence/established	2
Lack of understanding of what is involved to run the program	8

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

*Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program
Directors and State Sponsors*

Wide area of distribution	2
Lack of understanding of the financial component of the program	7
Safety of the children at the sites or getting the children to the sites	1
Inadequate funds to operate the program	1
2. What made you decide to participate in Summer Food Service Program?	
History of operation of the program already in existence	5
Part of our mission statement	2
Meeting needs of children	5
3. Ideally, what resources would a sponsor need to start a program in a district where summer feeding has never been offered?	
Partner with school board or organizations	4
Adequate environment/equipment	2
Help getting meals at the site/producing meals	3
Adequate/appropriate staff	6
Help establishing partnerships in the community/outreach opportunities	6
Transportation for the children to the sites	3
Funding (prior to the start of the program)	4
A background in management/finances and/or training in these areas	6
Adequate understanding of the program and/or help in understanding the program	5
4. Does your state participate in the Simplified Summer Food Program (Also Known As the Seamless Summer Food Waiver)?	
a. If yes...What impact has this program had on school districts' participation in the Summer Food Service Program?	
Decreased the amount of paperwork required	3
Increased the number of sponsors	2
Increased the number of sites	2
Increased overall participation by children in the program	4
Makes it easier for schools to participate (they already have the resources)	1
b. If no...How do you think implementation of this program in your state would affect school districts' participation in the Summer Food Service Program?	
Decrease the amount of paperwork required	2
Will improve participation/reach more children	2
Will increase the number of sites	1
Will not affect participation	2
Waiver would be harder to manage/lose money	2
Don't know how waiver works	3
Would improve the consistency among programs	1

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

*Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program
Directors and State Sponsors*

5. What would you list as the three main reasons a sponsor might leave/discontinue a program?	
Higher overhead costs or lose money	16
Inadequate transportation of the kids to the sites	4
Inadequate number of children to support the site	5
Insufficient staff	7
Large volume of paperwork and time required to manage the program	9
No community support	1
Restrictions on allowable foods	1
Vendor/distribution issues	2
Problems with the physical location of the site/inadequate facility	6
6. What would you list as the three main reasons for not starting a program?	
High costs to start the program	7
Insufficient staff	4
Large volume of paperwork and time required to manage the program	9
Establishing sites	4
Poor understanding of program regulations and requirements	3
Lack of community support	3
Lack of participants	2
Training staff	1
Inadequate equipment/facilities	1
Program restriction	1
Lack of transportation	2
Low rate of reimbursement for meals	2
Short time frame to complete the program	1
State is not on the simplified summer feeding program	1
7. Regarding participation, what do you feel are the main barriers to participation in your program from the point of view of:	
a. The sponsor	
Inadequate funding	3
No activity linked to the feeding program	4
Lack of transportation/inappropriate site location	5
High volume of work required to advertise the program	1
Difficulty attracting teenagers to participate	1
Large volume of paperwork and time required to manage the program	2
There is not a need for a program in a particular area	1
b. The community as a whole	
Lack of knowledge about the program	6
Lack of children near community center	1
Heavier work load on city park personnel	2
Lack of transportation to the sites	3

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

*Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program
Directors and State Sponsors*

Lack of involvement with the local government to establish programs	1
Poor perception of the program by community members	3
Perception that it is the family’s responsibility to feed children in the summer	2
Concerned about the financial impact of the program on a community	2
Concern regarding safety for the children at the site	1
Time limitations to conduct the program	1
Community members would prefer if they could eat the food at home	1
c. Families of eligible children	
Lack of transportation/location of the site	8
Lack of knowledge about the program	8
Inadequate family support for the children	2
Prefer to pick-up food	1
Stigma attached to eating “free” food	4
Safety concerns for children	1
Limited food variety	1
Rigid schedule of timing of meals	2
Lack of activity associated with the program	1
Poor perception of the quality of food being offered	1
d. The children, themselves	
No barriers	5
Want good food (hot meals, no monotony of menu)	6
Not having “summer” school at their school	1
Don’t want to leave their house to attend the program	4
Stigma attached to eating “free” food	6
Inadequate family support	2
Lack of transportation to the site	3
Lack of activity associated with the program	2
Lack of knowledge about the program	2
Would like for sodas to be served	1
8. What do you feel are benefits to children’s participation in Summer Feeding Programs to:	
a. The nation	
Food available to kids that would not otherwise eat	8
Addresses the issue of hunger	1
Teaches good nutrition	2
Aids in learning	3
Aids in growth	1
b. Your state	
Nutritious meals available to kids that would not otherwise eat	4
Addresses the issue of hunger	1
Makes food available to needy communities and families	5

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

*Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program
Directors and State Sponsors*

Gives the kids something to do	1
Teaches good nutrition	1
c. The community	
Establishes community partnerships	5
Helps families with food budget	1
Improves economy	1
Helps to bring the community together for a common goal	8
Provides a nutritious meal to the children	5
Improves the nutritional status of children within a community	4
Provides employment opportunities	2
Provides fellowship among the children	1
Helps to develop academic skills	2
Provides a positive environment for the children	4
Provides volunteer opportunities	2
Help to expand/support existing food service operations	1
d. A school district	
Controlled environment for kids	1
Promotes good will and serves as a resource to the community	7
Addresses the issue of hunger	3
Advertises school	1
Provides employment opportunities for staff	11
Helps with food service costs	5
Helps with academics/grades	1
Emphasizes that nutrition is related to learning	1
Provides a nutritious meal to children in that school district	2
Reduces downtime of equipment	2
e. A family	
Know where their kids are to keep them out of trouble/ease of mind	3
Helps meet food budget	6
Develops family relationships	1
Provides a nutritious meal	14
Somewhere for the kids to go during the summer	4
Learn about nutrition & food preparation	2
f. The children	
Social interaction	5
Somewhere for the kids to go during the summer/activity	1
Learn about nutrition/encourages good health	2
Provides safe place to eat/decreases food insecurity	2
Provides a nutritious meal	8

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

*Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program
Directors and State Sponsors*

9. How do you encourage participation to increase the numbers of children served within your school district?	
Rely on school programs and clubs	3
Encourages sites to recruit	1
Web site	1
Advertise on Public Transit Buses	1
Have activities associated with the program	4
Serve snack with meal	1
Media advertisement (TV, newspaper, flyers)	13
Word of mouth	2
Advertisement in areas frequented by people eligible for the program	6
Raffles with prizes	1
Make the sites more convenient/increase the number of sites	2
Having hot food for the meals	1
Use volunteers to operate the program	1
Utilize community groups (outreach)	7
Use grants to start/expand programs	1
Awards for participation at the state level	1
10. What groups do you typically serve during the Summer Food Service Program?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Boys and Girls clubs; 1st – 6th/7th grade ▪ 6 to 12 years old ▪ The Boys and the Girls Club; elementary and school age children ▪ 1 – 18 years old ▪ The Boys and the Girls Club; 4th – 8th/9th grade ▪ 1 – 10/12 years old ▪ 6 – 18 years old ▪ Elementary and junior high ▪ 4 – 12 years old ▪ 5 – 10 years old ▪ Elementary; 6 – 14 years old ▪ 10-16 years old 	
11. In your opinion, what are some of the most innovative ideas/techniques that sponsors have used to increase participation in the program?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ County middle school kitchen – central kitchen and then distribute to sites ▪ School board kitchen – makes it easier because they know the guidelines and are equipped for delivery ▪ Produced in a central kitchen served in schools and parks and community centers ▪ One central location - high school for prep and distribute to sites ▪ 2 sites on 2 different campus' school cafeteria; everything is done on site ▪ Central high school kitchen prepares and distributes to park sites ▪ Central kitchen prepares and distributes over 1200 sandwiches and fresh fruit 	

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program Directors and State Sponsors

- Prepare food in 18 of the school cafeterias; satellite to churches and youth camps and the YMCA
- 3 school kitchens prepare food
- 155 locations
- 59 sites – food bank prepares at their commercial kitchen and rents 4 school kitchens
- School cafeteria
- Utilizing volunteers to teach classes as an incentive for the children to come to the program (karate, basketball tournaments, swimming, etc)
- A food bank is a sponsor in one of the larger counties in the state and works with many facilities to provide sites throughout the community.
- They completely rely on volunteers to run the programs. This helps to increase participation by involving the community and reduces the cost to the sponsor.
- Cooperative Extension—activities to increase participation, have sites in hotels that house the homeless
- Kick off event to get the sponsors excited about the program with an educational field trip
- Using calendars with key dates identified to help the sponsors remember important dates
- Advertise on billboards
- Using the police and fire departments as visitors to the kids
- Nutrition parade
- Fair day with boots and items donated
- Art contests related to nutrition—computers, bikes, school supplies donated as prizes
- A reading program where a bus filled with books stopped at a site and the children were allowed to check out a book while eating
- Working with the boys and girls club to have contests, recreational activities
- Prizes for best attendance or bringing a friend to the site
- Worked in conjunction with all food stamp retailers (Publix, CVS, Winn Dixie, etc.) to put flyers in shopping bags (bilingual)
- Use of cooperative extension to have field trips to coordinate with the meals (activity and meals go hand in hand)
- The Boys and the Girls Club moved into a rural area and built a site; directors went door-to-door in community and the numbers steadily increased
- Providing activities
- Localized site advertising (1st week of operation someone stands on the corner with a sign); working with hunger advocacy groups and food banks
- Annual poster contest with prizes (fitness related: jump ropes, skateboards, etc.) – displayed at children’s library and judged by public officials
- Took pictures of kids and displayed on bulletin board; kids got to take pictures home at end of week
- Staff skit: dressed as foods (bananas, oranges, milk) and went to each site; Made homemade ice creams; had prizes donated (bicycles)
- Activities at the site that are outside of the norm (ex. Teaching the Arts)

(table continues)

Table 2 continued

Telephone Interview Question Responses for State Agency Child Nutrition Program Directors and State Sponsors

- Raffles; type of food – “Restaurant Quality”, hot food; host “McDonalds Tuesday” – McDonalds donates breakfast
 - Offering nutrition education activities; improving menu; physical activity prizes (balls, jump ropes); goodies
 - Do the same thing every year so schools know of service; use teachers as a vehicle
 - Sponsored field trips
 - Get different youth coordinators to have activities at site to get kids to sites. Partners with schools so kids are here. Next year, if Grant comes through, we will offer a mobile site for towns up the river: A bus will stop in the towns and kids will eat on bus.
-

12. Do you have any additional comments regarding barriers to participating in the Summer Food Service Program?

- None of the methods have really boosted the program
 - Raffles; type of food – “Restaurant Quality”, hot food; host “McDonalds Tuesday” – McDonalds donates breakfast
 - Offering nutrition education activities; improving menu; physical activity prizes (balls, jump ropes); goodies
 - Do the same thing every year so schools know of service; use teachers as a vehicle
 - Sponsored field trips
 - Good program; would like some flexibility of rules and regulations (ex. Hours of service; less forms and paperwork)
 - Program is really needed!
 - Great program; hard to switch from school lunch to summer feeding; time-consuming but don’t want waiver because wouldn’t make enough money.
 - Would like to see smaller towns be able to take advantage; lots of needy kids.
 - We have wonderful state coordinators! Paper work is challenging.
 - We tweak school menu to make food different, not the same as during school year; make it more child-friendly
 - When I first started, I would work with a vendor to get pre-prepared, cold foods; now we do hot foods – we buy it, cook it, pack and distribute; we save lots of money because we buy in bulk
-

Questionnaire

Demographics

Eight hundred and three SFSP sponsors were mailed a questionnaire. A total of 316 were returned and used in analysis, for a response rate of 39%. Respondents primarily served children in upper elementary grades (53.9%) and had decided to participate in the program because they wanted to help meet the nutritional needs of the children (55.8%). Only 34.3% of the sponsors were operating under the Simplified Summer Feeding Program. The average number of years sponsors reported operating a program was 9.9 years (\pm 8.4) and oversaw an average of 14.5 sites (\pm 26.5). All other program sponsor characteristics are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Demographic Characteristics of SFSP Sponsors

Characteristic	Frequency^a	%
Grade primarily served at feeding sites		
Upper Elementary (4-6)	144	53.9
Lower Elementary (K-3)	65	24.3
Middle School (7-8)	30	11.2
High School (9-12)	28	10.5
State in which SFSP sites are located		
Kentucky	68	22.1
Florida	57	18.5
Mississippi	44	14.3
Georgia	34	11.0
North Carolina	31	10.1
Alabama	28	9.1
Tennessee	24	7.8
South Carolina	22	7.1
Reason for participating in SFSP		
It helps meet the nutritional needs of the children	169	55.8
The program was already in existence	107	35.3
Other	27	8.9
Currently operating under the Simplified Summer Food Program		
No	180	65.7
Yes	94	34.3

(table continues)

Table 3 continued

Demographic Characteristics of SFSP Sponsors

Characteristic	Mean	SD
Average number of meals served on a daily basis	904.9	1637.8
Number of sites overseen as a SFSP sponsor	14.5	26.5
Number of summers as a SFSP sponsor	9.9	8.4
Number of weeks SFSP operates during the summer	7.4	4.3

^a Total *n* varies based on responses for each question

Benefits and Barriers Related to Participation in the Summer Food Service Program

Means and standard deviations as well as frequencies were used to describe the level of agreement or importance for each of the responses listed under each main question. Providing nutritious meals to children who would not otherwise have access to food during the summer was rated as the most important benefit of SFSP ($4.87 \pm .45$). Study participants indicated several barriers to operating and managing a SFSP. Under the question which asked how would a sponsor who has left the program rate the following reasons for not wanting to start another program in the future, respondents most strongly agreed that there is too much paperwork involved in starting a SFSP (3.67 ± 1.39). Respondents also rated this reason as the primary cause for a sponsor leaving or discontinuing a program (3.68 ± 1.36). Although the majority of the participants did not agree that the cost of starting a SFSP was too high (70%), more than 70% felt that having funding prior to the start of the program was very important or extremely important. Having adequate facilities (2.12 ± 1.2) and a sponsor with food service experience (2.16 ± 1.29) were not seen as major barriers in starting or continuing a SFSP.

The most important resources for a sponsor operating a summer program were having adequate and appropriate staff to help with meal production ($4.53 \pm .81$) and having an adequate facility for preparation of the meals ($4.51 \pm .89$). Forty-seven percent believed that training manuals and/or workshop in management and finances related to the operation of the program

would be extremely beneficial. Utilizing volunteers in the community to run the program (rather than having to pay staff) was not seen as important, even though one of the state directors believed this was the only way that she could operate the program within her state.

When asked about the barriers that might affect participation by eligible children, most respondents strongly agreed that eligible children do not have transportation to the feeding sites (3.63 ± 1.44). Similarly, 38.9% agreed or strongly agreed that this was a reason a sponsor might not want to start a program or a reason for leaving/discontinuing a program (63.1%). Although mentioned several times during the telephone interviews, 66.8% of sponsors did not agree that participation was hindered by the perceived stigma attached to receiving free meals or taking handouts. It was agreed that partnering with community groups (such as The Boys and the Girls Club and the Family Y) to sponsor activities at the feeding sites was one of the most beneficial ways to promote participation in the SFSP (4.06 ± 1.23). Lastly, advertising programs in areas frequented by families of eligible children ($4.49 \pm .83$) and having an activity associated with the program ($4.36 \pm .91$) were seen as most important methods to increase participation. No significant differences in mean scores for each question were found between those sponsors that participated in the Simplified Summer Food Program and those that did not. Results related to each of the questions are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Responses to Each Question

Question	Mean^a	SD
1. In your opinion, how would a sponsor who has left the program rate the following reasons for not wanting to start another program in the future?		
a. There is too much paperwork involved in starting a SFSP	3.67	1.39
b. They did not understand what was involved in starting a program	3.37	1.36
c. They did not understand the financial component of SFSP	3.35	1.30
d. It takes too much time to manage a SFSP	3.34	1.28
e. Transportation of children to the sites was difficult	2.98	1.50
f. There was an inadequate number of children to support the site	2.85	1.55
g. The cost of starting a SFSP is too high	2.78	1.31
2. Rate the following reasons that a sponsor may give for leaving or discontinuing a program:		
a. Too much paperwork is involved in operating a program	3.68	1.36
b. The overhead costs of running a program are too high	3.27	1.37
c. Transportation of the children to the sites was inadequate	3.13	1.41
d. There was an inadequate number of children to support the site	2.95	1.52
e. Community support was limited	2.66	1.27
f. The staff required to operate a SFSP was inadequate/insufficient	2.65	1.31
g. There were too many restrictions on allowable foods	2.55	1.25
h. There were vendor/distribution issues	2.32	1.25
i. There were problems with the physical location of the site	2.29	1.21
j. The sponsor did not have adequate experience preparing meals	2.16	1.29
k. The sites were housed in inadequate facilities	2.12	1.20
3. With regards to participation, how would you rate each of the following items that might affect participation by eligible children?		
a. Eligible children do not have transportation to the feeding sites	3.63	1.44
b. Children would prefer to have hot food on a daily basis	3.07	1.36
c. Community members/families do not know about the program	3.00	1.43
d. Children tend to get bored with the menu	2.93	1.34
e. There is a perceived stigma to receiving free meals	2.80	1.36
4. Rate each of the following methods used to increase participation in the SFSP in your area:		
a. Utilizing volunteers to teach enrichment classes	3.80	1.28
b. Having a feeding site near a homeless shelter	3.43	1.33
c. Getting local merchants to give prizes as incentives for attendance	3.61	1.42
d. Having food vendors/restaurants donate food	2.93	1.49
e. Partnering with community groups to sponsor activities	4.06	1.23

(table continued)

Table 4 continued

Means and Standard Deviations of Responses to Each Question

5. Rate the importance of each of the following resources that would be beneficial to a sponsor operating a SFSP:		
a.	Having adequate/appropriate staff to help with meal production	4.53 .81
b.	Having an adequate facility for preparation of the meals	4.51 .89
c.	Having training manuals/workshops related to program operation	4.17 .98
d.	Having pre-established partnerships in the community	4.16 .97
e.	Having funding prior to the start of the program	4.09 1.20
f.	Having a central kitchen for food production	3.78 1.34
g.	Utilizing volunteers to run the program	3.25 1.39
6. Rate the importance of each of the following benefits of the SFSP:		
a.	Nutritious food for children who would not have food in summer	4.87 .45
b.	Provides social interaction/positive environment for the children	4.41 .88
c.	Helps families in meeting their food budgets	4.25 1.01
d.	Allows sponsoring agencies to be seen as a community resource	4.20 1.02
e.	Brings the community together with a goal of feeding children	4.19 1.04
f.	Provides employment opportunities	3.96 1.21
7. Rate the importance of each of the following methods to increase your participation in the SFSP in your area:		
a.	Advertising the program in areas frequented by families	4.49 .83
b.	Having an activity associated with the program	4.36 .91
c.	Utilizing media to advertise the program (TV, newspapers, flyers)	4.28 1.00
d.	Utilizing community groups to provide activities for the children	4.26 .96
e.	Having hot meals available for the children	3.97 1.24

^a 1=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree; 1=Not at All Important, 5=Extremely Important

Methods Used to Increase Participation of Eligible Children

One hundred and thirty-nine participants described ways they attempt to improve participation at the feeding sites. Six main themes emerged as ways that sponsors are trying to encourage participation by eligible children. The primary recommendation was to provide activities around meal times. Some suggested activities included: physical education, guest speakers, reading (utilizing the services of a book mobile), TV and movies, games, field trips, Bible classes, and arts and crafts. Providing prizes also was frequently mentioned. One sponsor indicated that prizes were given to those children who participated in at least 85% of the days served. The second most common technique to increase participation was to advertise at grocery

stores and churches, send kids home with flyers on the last day of school, putting up flyers in Laundromats, and the newspaper.

Some sponsors believed that providing hot, high quality foods that the children enjoy was a good way to increase participation. It also was recommended that it would be safer and more reliable to bring the food to the kids rather than to bring the kids to the food utilizing vans and buses. To increase participation, many of the sponsors partner with other community programs, such as the YMCA, summer camps, National Youth Sports Program, day care centers, independent baby sitters, The Boys and the Girls Club, Bible camps, and home day cares. Parental involvement was also mentioned as a way to get more children to participate.

Other more innovative methods were suggested as ways to improve participation. One sponsor reported that she fed the parents of the children and did not count them as part of the program. Another sponsor used a school bus to pick up local children at day care or from babysitters in homes. The driver of a Bookmobile took packed lunches in coolers to children who could not get transportation to the feeding site. Academic enrichment in Reading and Math was provided by another sponsor as a way to improve participation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Limitations to the Research Study

Three main factors are considered limitations to this study. First, the survey was only given to SFSP sponsors, not to the children and/or families participating in the study. Therefore, the factors affecting participation by the children listed in this study are from the point of view of the sponsor. Second, this research was conducted with SFSP sponsors located in the southeast region; therefore, the results are not generalizable to the whole nation. Last, there were a large number of questions included on the survey. Because of this, it is difficult to find statistical differences between those that did and did not participate in the Simplified Summer Feeding Program.

Research Study Conclusion

The main barrier to an individual participating in the SFSP as a sponsor is the large amount of paperwork involved in the program. In 2000, the USDA published regulations to reduce the paperwork burden using the Seamless Summer Food Waiver and in 2001 the Simplified Summer Food Program was initiated (Bost, 2001; Simplified Summer Food Program, 2005). However, only 34% of our sample operated under the simplified program, and this may have influenced this conclusion. If more sponsors operated under the Simplified Summer Food Program it may help to reduce the perceived barrier of too much paperwork.

Transportation was the primary issue related to participation by eligible children, as well as the ability of a site to sustain its efforts in providing meals. Although grants are now available to programs to transport the children to sites, the money may not be adequate to get all eligible children to the feeding site. This may be why some of the sponsors used creative methods such as book mobiles to get the food to the eligible children.

The sponsors believed the main benefit of the program is to feed children who do not have adequate resources for nutritious food - More than half of the sponsors in the study said they decided to participate in the program to help feed the children in their area. These findings are encouraging in that the aim of the program is consistent with the goal that was established in 1968.

In order to increase the number of individuals sponsoring SFSP sites, resources need to be enhanced and be made available to support the SFSP sponsors. In 1980, S. G. Terry found that providing additional resources and training to SFSP sponsors was key to improving participation and enhancing management of the program. In addition to providing training to the sponsors in the spring prior to the start of the program, the state served as a resource to help resolve problems and clarify any issues faced by the sponsor.

The ways to increase participation mentioned by the sponsors are similar to the recommendations made by other researchers and the USDA. It appears that good advertising in communities/areas visited by families of eligible children is most often used to increase the number of children participating in the program. Since transportation of the children to the feeding sites was a major issue for sponsors, some of the recommendations that were made to help improve access to the site and may, consequently, boost participation.

Education & Training Implications

- SFSP sponsors need education and training in a variety of areas in order to improve their abilities as a sponsor and enhance participation in the program. The Simplified Summer Food Program and the Seamless Summer Food Waiver were developed to decrease paperwork and increase participation. The first step in training would be to inform sponsors of these options, especially those sponsors that operate as part of a school food service program, since the waiver was developed to accommodate this group. This recommendation agrees recommendations by Albee et al., (2002), that the option to decrease paperwork is a way to expand the availability of SFSP.
- Many of the sponsors reported that they would like start-up money prior to implementing the program in their area. Although this option is not available at this time, there are other avenues that the sponsor may explore to receive funding. Helping sponsors find these resources may help boost the number of sites available to children. In addition, it may encourage sponsors to carry out the program throughout the summer.
- Adequate production staff and facilities were seen as necessary resources for sponsors of SFSP. Sponsors may not have the time or the appropriate means to find an adequate facility for food production or train staff. Here is an area where state agencies may be able to help the sponsors. A suggestion given by Terry (1980) includes training of site personnel on food specifications, meal preparation techniques, and nutrition education. In addition, holding weekly meetings during the summer can assist in handling problems and answering questions.

- Training and/or manuals for the financial component of the SFSP need to be developed.

Terry (1980) also suggests that all sponsors be required to attend a mandatory training session where site eligibility, staffing, budgeting, and financial accountability are discussed.

In addition, any topic pertaining to the management of the program should be discussed during the main meetings. Separate meetings should be held for those sponsors that operate more non-traditional sites such as residential camps or catered meals. Additional instruction should be provided during the summer to assure compliance with all issues.

- Most importantly, ways to enhance community connections and create activities to draw the children into the program need to be developed. Perhaps sponsors may be rewarded for generating unique, effective ways to increase local community participation.

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APPENDIX A

Research Concept Paper

**National Food Service Management Institute
Applied Research Division
Project Concept GY05
Concept Paper #3
Modified 2/15/05**

Supports NFSMI Strategic Issue 3 – School Breakfast, Summer Feeding Food Service Program, After Snack Program, and CACFP are not available to many children for reasons that are not clearly understood, but are believed to involve inadequate administrative and community support.

Project Title

Identification of best practice solutions that can be used by school districts to overcome barriers to participation in Summer Food Service Programs (SFSP)

Target Audience

School officials, Summer Feeding Sponsors, Community Leaders

Deliverables

- Technical Report (Deliverable 1)
- Web-based document of best practice related to increasing participation in SFSPs (Deliverable 2)
- Abstract/Poster session at the SNA annual conference (Deliverable 3)
- Manuscript, prior to submission to peer reviewed journal (Deliverable 4)

Project Summary

This research study will assist organizations sponsoring Summer Feeding Programs in overcoming barriers to participation.

Project Coordinator

Elaine Molaison

I. Background Information/Statement of Problem/Study Purpose

The SFSP provides nutritious meals to children eighteen and younger in mostly low-income areas during the time schools are closed for summer vacation. The SFSP helps low-income families stretch their food-buying dollar while providing children with the food they need to learn, play, and grow. There are over 16 million children in the country that are eligible for the summer program, but only 2 million of them receive meals through the SFSP. In an effort to increase access to SFSPs, the Applied Research Division of the National Food Service Management Institute will conduct a study to identify barriers and practices that prevent children from participating and develop resources to help local communities overcome the identified barriers and practices

II. Research Goals and Objectives

1. To identify barriers, practices, and other issues that prevent eligible children from participating in summer feeding programs.
2. To determine solutions/best practices to help communities overcome the identified barriers, thus increasing access to SFSPs.
3. To provide school districts and local communities with practical best practice solutions to increase participation in SFSPs.
4. To identify the reasons sponsors give for leaving the program. To identify why sponsors may choose not to participate in the program at a later time.

III. Project Description: Research Methodology

- Conduct a literature review of current information related to barriers, practices, and perceptions related to children participating in a summer feeding program.
- Conduct a telephone survey of Child Nutrition Program state agency directors from the eight states located in the USDA Southeast Region to determine their perceptions of significant issues related to implementation of the SFSP.
- Work with state agency directors in the USDA Southeast Region to identify participants for a focus group discussion to identify key variables that influence the decision to participate in the SFSP.
- Develop a quantitative survey instrument, based on outcomes of focus group discussion, to (a) identify barriers to participation in the SFSP, and (b) identify solutions and best practices to overcome barriers.
- Survey SFSP school district sponsors.
- Analyze data using descriptive statistics and case study development of best practices.
- Develop a web-based document, “School District Solutions to Improving Access to Summer Feeding Program”
- Disseminate research findings through a poster session and presentation at the SNA Annual Conference.

IV. Timelines

March 2005	Literature review
	IRB approval
April 2005	Contact state agencies
May 2005	Conduct Focus Group Meeting
May 2005	Inform EIAC
May 2005	Develop a mail survey
June 2005	Conduct mail survey
July 2005	Data Analysis
August - September 2005	Technical Report
September 2005	Web-based document
March 2006	Abstract/Poster Session – SNA
March 2006	Manuscript

V. Evaluation

The web-based document for SFSP sponsors will be evaluated as part of an ongoing evaluation process for NFSMI materials. The peer reviewed research poster and presentation will be evaluated as part of the SNA evaluation process.

APPENDIX B

Telephone Questionnaire

Telephone Interview Questions State Agency Child Nutrition Program Directors

Introduction

Introduction of self and reading of the oral presentation.

Transition

As I ask you the following questions, I want you to answer each of them as completely as possible. Although you are not a direct sponsor of a Summer Food Service Program, I will ask you some questions where you will have to answer the questions based on experiences working with the program sponsors. At the end of the questions, I welcome any additional comments that you may have regarding barriers and best practices related to the Summer Food Service Program. Are you ready to begin?

Questions

1. Based on your experience, what do you think is the biggest challenge for a school district sponsor in starting a summer food service program?
2. Ideally, what resources would a sponsor need to start a program in a district where summer feeding has never been offered?
3. Does your state participate in the Simplified Summer Food Program (also known as the Seamless Summer Food Waiver)?
 - a. If yes...What impact has this program had on school districts' participation in the Summer Food Service Program?
 - b. If no...How do you think implementation of this program in your state would affect school districts' participation in the Summer Food Service Program?
4. What would you list as the three main reasons sponsors give for leaving/discontinuing a program?
5. What would you list as the three main reasons sponsors give for not starting a program?
6. Regarding those participating within a school district, what do you feel are the main barriers to participation in an area where a program exists from the point of view of:
 - a. The sponsor
 - b. The community as a whole
 - c. Families of eligible children
 - d. The children, themselves

Now on to the positive side of the Summer Food Service Program...

7. What do you feel are benefits to children's participation in the program to
 - a. The nation
 - b. Your state
 - c. The community
 - d. A school district
 - e. Your food service program
 - f. A family

8. In school districts that do participate in the Summer Food Service Program, how do sponsors encourage participation in an effort to increase the numbers of children served?
9. In your opinion, what are some of the most innovative ideas/techniques that sponsors have used to increase participation in the program?
10. Can you identify specific sponsors within your state that have outstanding programs that would be willing to talk to me about their program?
11. Do you have any additional comments you would like to provide regarding barriers to participation or best practices related to the Summer Food Service Program?

Thank you for your time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or additional comments.

Telephone Interview Questions

School District Sponsors of the Summer Food Service Program

Introduction

Introduction of self and reading of the oral presentation.

Transition

As I ask you the following questions, I want you to answer each of them as completely as possible. At the end of the questions, I welcome any additional comments that you may have regarding barriers and best practices related to the federally funded Summer Food Service Program. Are you ready to begin?

Questions

1. Based on your experience, what was the biggest challenge you faced in starting a summer food service program?
2. What made you decide to participate in a Summer Food Service Program?
3. Ideally, what resources would a sponsor need to start a program in a school district where summer feeding has never been offered?
4. Do you participate in the Simplified Summer Food Program (also known as the Seamless Summer Food Waiver)?
 - a. If yes...What impact has this program had on participation in your Summer Feeding Programs?
 - b. If no...How do you think implementation of this program in your state would affect your participation in the Summer Food Service Program?
5. What would you list as the three main reasons you might leave/discontinue a program?
6. What would you list as the three main reasons for not starting a program?
7. Regarding participation, what do you feel are the main barriers to participation in your program from the point of view of:
 - a. The community as a whole
 - b. Families of eligible children
 - c. The children, themselves

Now on to the positive side of a Summer Food Service Program...

8. What do you feel are the benefits of children participating in Summer Feeding Programs to
 - a. The community
 - b. A school district
 - c. A family
 - d. The children
9. How do you encourage participation to increase the numbers of children served within your school district?
10. What groups do you typically serve during the Summer Food Service Program?
11. What location do you use to serve the food for the program?
12. In your opinion, what are some of the most innovative ideas/techniques that you have used to increase participation in the program?

13. Do you have any additional comments you would like to provide regarding barriers to participation or best practices related to the Summer Food Service Program?

Thank you for your time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or additional comments.

APPENDIX C

Survey Evaluation Form

Identification of Best Practice Solutions that Can Be Used to Overcome Barriers to Participation in Summer Food Service Programs

Survey Evaluation Form

Thank you for volunteering your time to assist us in the development of this survey. We want to be sure that the cover letters and survey are clear and easy to respond to before beginning our research project. Please assist us by answering the following questions. Revisions will be made based on your suggestions.

Cover Letter	YES	NO	Recommendations for Improvement
Did the cover letter clearly indicate what the purpose of the research is? If not, suggest improvement.			
Did the cover letter clearly indicate what is expected of the sponsor? If not, suggest improvement.			
Survey	YES	NO	Recommendations for Improvement
Were the directions for completing each part of the survey clear? If not, suggest improvement.			
Were the statements written clearly? If not, suggest improvement.			
Was the terminology appropriate for sponsors of SFSP? If not, suggest improvement.			
Were there statements in the survey that you would exclude from the questionnaire? If yes, indicate the statement(s) that you would exclude.			
Were there any other statements that you would include in the survey? If yes, indicate the statement(s) that you would include.			
Were the response categories understandable? If not, suggest improvements.			

How long did it take you to complete the questionnaire? _____ Minutes
 In the space below or on the back, please indicate any additional suggestions for improvement of the questionnaire. *Thank you for your assistance!*

APPENDIX D

Pilot Study Cover Letter

Date

Dear School Professional:

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), Applied Research Division, is conducting a research study that assesses best practices that can be used to overcome barriers to participation in the Summer Food Service Program. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this pilot study. We appreciate your assistance in reviewing the questionnaire and cover letters that have been developed for this project.

The questionnaire was developed from the results of the telephone interviews with state directors and program sponsors of Summer Food Service Programs. To assist with this pilot study, please read and answer all of the questions on the enclosed questionnaire. In addition, use the enclosed evaluation form to record your comments, suggestions, or revisions for the questionnaire statements, response categories, and cover letters as well as the time you spent completing the questionnaire. Please focus on the instructions and content of the survey. Please return the completed questionnaire and evaluation form in the enclosed self-addressed postage-paid envelope by *Friday, August 5, 2005*.

Due to the anonymous nature of the study, there are no identifying codes that link your responses to you. We solicit open and honest answers. We also ask that you respond based on your professional position and experiences. This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee at The University of Southern Mississippi, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, (601) 266-6820.

Your response is important to the success of this study. We appreciate your efforts in completing and reviewing the questionnaire and letters. If you have questions, do not hesitate to contact us by Email at Deborah.Carr@usm.edu or Elaine.Molaison@usm.edu by telephone at 1-800-321-3054.

Sincerely,

Deborah H. Carr, PhD, RD
Director, Applied Research

Elaine Fontenot Molaison, PhD, RD
Researcher

Enclosure

APPENDIX E

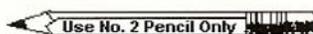
Finalized Questionnaire



NATIONAL FOOD SERVICE MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

Identification of Best Practice Solutions that Can Be Used to Overcome Barriers to Participation in Summer Food Service Programs

Please read each statement carefully before responding and select your response from the choices provided. To complete the survey, completely fill in the circle of the number that best describes your answer.



Correct Mark: ●
Incorrect Marks: (X) (◐) (◑)

Please indicate to what extent you "Strongly Disagree" or "Strongly Agree" with each of the following statements

	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree
1. In your opinion, how would a sponsor who has left the program rate the following reasons for not wanting to start another program in the future			
■ a. They did not understand what was involved in operating a Summer Food Service Program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ b. They did not understand the financial component of a Summer Food Service Program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ c. The cost of starting a Summer Food Service Program is too high	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ d. There is too much paperwork involved in starting a Summer Food Service Program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ e. It takes too much time to manage a Summer Food Service Program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ f. Transportation of the children to the sites was difficult	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ g. There were an inadequate number of children to support a feeding site	(1)	(2)	(5)
2. Rate the following reasons that a sponsor may give for leaving or discontinuing a program			
■ a. The overhead costs of running a program are too high	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ b. Transportation of the children to the sites was inadequate	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ c. There were an inadequate number of children to support the site	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ d. The food service staff required to operate a program was inadequate or insufficient	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ e. Too much paperwork is involved in operating a program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ f. Community support was limited	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ g. There were too many restrictions on allowable foods	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ h. There were vendor/distribution issues	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ i. There were problems with the physical location of the site	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ j. The sites were housed in inadequate facilities	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ k. The sponsor did not have adequate experience in preparing meals	(1)	(2)	(5)
3. With regards to participation, how would you rate each of the following items that might affect participation by eligible children			
■ a. Members of the community and families do not know about the program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ b. Eligible children do not have transportation to the feeding sites	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ c. There is a perceived stigma attached to receiving free meals or taking handouts	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ d. Children would prefer to have hot meals served on a daily basis	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ e. Children tend to get bored with the menu	(1)	(2)	(5)
4. Rate each of the following methods used to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program in your area			
■ a. Utilizing volunteers to teach enrichment classes (karate, basketball, swimming, art, etc) as an incentive for children to participate	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ b. Having a feeding site near a homeless shelter to meet the needs of the children in that area	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ c. Getting local merchants to donate "prizes" (school supplies, bikes, computers, etc.) for activities and attendance in the program	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ d. Having local food vendors/restaurants donate food to have hot/restaurant quality food	(1)	(2)	(5)
■ e. Partnering with community groups (such as Boys & Girls Club, The Family Y) to sponsor activities at the feeding sites	(1)	(2)	(5)

Please rate the importance of the following statements from "Not at all" to "Extremely" Important

5. Rate the importance of each of the following resources that would be beneficial to a sponsor operating a Summer Food Service Program	Not at all Important					Extremely Important
a. Having funding prior to the start of the program	1	2	3	4	5	■
b. Having an adequate facility for preparation of the meals	1	2	3	4	5	■
c. Having adequate and appropriate staff to help with meal production	1	2	3	4	5	■
d. Having pre-established partnerships in the community or outreach opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	■
e. Having training manuals and/or workshops in management and finances related to operation of the program	1	2	3	4	5	■
f. Utilizing volunteers in the community to run the program (rather than having to pay staff)	1	2	3	4	5	■
g. Having a central kitchen where food could be prepared and then distributed to sites	1	2	3	4	5	■

6. Rate the importance of each of the following benefits of the Summer Food Service Program	Not at all Important					Extremely Important
a. Nutritious food is available to children who would not otherwise have access to food during the summer	1	2	3	4	5	■
b. Helps bring the community together for a common goal of feeding the children	1	2	3	4	5	■
c. Provides social interaction and a positive environment for the children	1	2	3	4	5	■
d. Allows sponsoring agencies to be seen as a resource to the community	1	2	3	4	5	■
e. Provides employment opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	■
f. Helps families in meeting their food budgets	1	2	3	4	5	■

7. Rate the importance of each of the following methods to increase participation in the Summer Food Service Program in your area	Not at all Important					Extremely Important
a. Using media to advertise the program (TV, newspapers, & flyers)	1	2	3	4	5	■
b. Utilizing community groups to provide activities for the children	1	2	3	4	5	■
c. Advertising the program in areas frequented by families of eligible children	1	2	3	4	5	■
d. Having an activity associated with the program	1	2	3	4	5	■
e. Having hot meals available for the children	1	2	3	4	5	■

In your opinion, what are some of the most innovative ideas or techniques that you have used to increase participation at your feeding sites?

This section seeks to learn more about you and your feeding sites. Please completely fill in the circle of the number associated with the best answer.

1. What grade level do you primarily serve at your feeding sites? MARK ONLY ONE.

1 Lower elementary (K-3)
 2 Upper elementary (4-6)
 3 Middle school (7-8)
 4 High school (9-12)
 ■

2. In which state do you work?

1 Alabama 3 Georgia 5 Mississippi 7 South Carolina
 2 Florida 4 Kentucky 6 North Carolina 8 Tennessee
 ■

3. What made you decide to participate in the Summer Food Service Program? MARK ONLY ONE.

1 The program was already in existence
 2 It helps to meet the nutrition needs of the children
 3 Other _____
 ■

4. Do you currently operate under the "Simplified Summer Food Program" (aka "Seamless Summer Food Program")?

Yes No
 ■

How many Summers long have you been a sponsor of a Summer Food Service Program (including the current summer)? Example: 02 for 2 Summers	How many sites do you currently oversee? Example: enter 2 as 002 or 15 as 015	On average, how many meals do you serve on a daily basis (include all sites in this estimate)? Example: enter 200 as 0200 or 15 as 0015	How many weeks does your Summer Food Service Program Operate during the summer? Example: 02 for 2 weeks
0 0 1 1 2 2 3 3 4 4 5 5 6 6 7 7 8 8 9 9	0 0 0 1 1 1 2 2 2 3 3 3 4 4 4 5 5 5 6 6 6 7 7 7 8 8 8 9 9 9	0 0 0 0 1 1 1 1 2 2 2 2 3 3 3 3 4 4 4 4 5 5 5 5 6 6 6 6 7 7 7 7 8 8 8 8 9 9 9 9	0 0 1 1 2 2 3 3 4 4 5 5 6 6 7 7 8 8 9 9

APPENDIX F

Summer Food Service Program Sponsors Cover Letter

Date

Dear Summer Food Service Program Sponsor

The National Food Service Management Institute (NFSMI), Applied Research Division, is conducting a research study to assess best practices that can be used to overcome participation barriers in the Summer Food Service Program. We realize this is a busy time of year; however, your participation is vital to this study's success.

Program sponsors, like you, participated in the development of the survey questionnaire, as NFSMI realizes that our research efforts are made better by involving those at the local level. The results of this study will assist USDA, state agencies, and NFSMI in identifying barriers related to participation and solutions to overcome these barriers.

In this packet, you will find a survey questionnaire and a large self-addressed postage-paid envelope. The questionnaire is to be completed by you, and should take no longer than 10 minutes of your time. Please return the completed survey questionnaire in the envelope provided on or before ***Monday, August 29, 2005***.

Due to the anonymous nature of the study, there are no identifying codes that link your responses to you. We solicit open and honest answers. We also ask that you respond based on your professional position and experiences with the Summer Food Service Program.

We appreciate you taking time from your busy schedule to complete the questionnaire. Without your assistance, this study will not be successful! We are counting on your support to complete and return the survey by the request date of ***Monday, August 29, 2005***. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to contact us by Email at Elaine.Molaison@usm.edu or Deborah.Carr@usm.edu or by telephone at 1-800-321-3054.

Sincerely,

Elaine Fontenot Molaison, PhD, RD
Researcher

Deborah H. Carr, PhD, RD
Director, Applied Research

Enclosure

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee at The University of Southern Mississippi, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research subject should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, (601) 266-6820.



National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi
P. O. Drawer 188
University, MS 38677-0188
www.nfsmi.org

Item number R-91-05 (GY05)