Making Summer Meals

MOBILE

How to start your own mobile meal program
WHY MOBILE?

HOW IT WORKS
This program serves kids and young adults in low-income households throughout the summer.
• Delivers food to kids who are unable to reach brick and mortar meal sites
• Serve multiple locations in just a few hours
• Overcomes stigma through a fun, engaging, and unique service format

SUMMER HUNGER IN THE US
Approximately 22 million kids receive free or reduced-cost meals through the National School Lunch Program.

In the summer, only 15% of eligible kids in the U.S. utilize the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)

A FEW REASONS WHY
1. Inconvenient Meal Times
Most sites only serve lunch till 1:30, but kids often sleep in past noon.

2. Stigma
Kids are afraid of being judged, and programs that are advertised as free food makes stigma worse.

3. Transportation and safety issues
Without safe transportation, many kids simply can’t get to meal sites.

4. Poor Food Choices
Kids rarely get to choose their food options, and the food quality isn’t always great.
**IDENTIFY YOUR ASSETS**

First things first: consider the key elements of a mobile meal program. These programs take a significant amount of resources and infrastructure so it’s best if you already have some of these major pieces in place:

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<tr>
<th>VEHICLE</th>
<th>FOOD SUPPLIER</th>
<th>INFRASTRUCTURE</th>
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<td>Whether it’s a food truck or a van, consider how your meals can meet kids where they are.</td>
<td>Think fast, casual, healthy. The less assembly, the better.</td>
<td>Consider insurance, staff, and operations support</td>
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What assets does your organization already have? What assets could your community contribute? Partner with a business or another organization that already has a mobile meal program.

**COMPLEMENT, DON’T COMPETE**

Community partners are crucial for so many reasons: they can offer outreach, promotion, location selection and more. Mobile meals are most sustainable when they’re developed *with* the community, not for the community.

**Consider:**
- What programs already provide this service?
- How will your program fill the gaps for those existing services?
- How can you build partnerships with organizations with similar missions?
- In what ways can the community have ownership in this program?

**Tip:** Keep community dynamics in mind. How can your program empower the community? How can partners help ensure the program positively impacts the community?

**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

Mobile meal sites allow you to go where brick & mortar meal sites can’t. Your community partners can help you identify the best places to set up for the day.

**Places to consider:**
- Apartment complexes
- Small businesses
- Parks and recreation centers

**Parking:** Research the laws in your city to make sure you have the right permits.

**Tip:** Check the schedule! Make sure your meal service doesn’t conflict with existing programs.
THINK LIKE A BUSINESS

COSTS
Making a budget? Here are a few costs you may not have considered:

STARTUP COSTS
• Vehicle
• Promotional Materials
• Equipment
• Permits and Licenses

OVERHEAD COSTS
• Labor
• Insurance
• Marketing
• Gas
• Vehicle maintenance
• Food and Supplies

DISTRIBUTION
A mobile food program is more than delivering sandwiches out of the back of a truck. Consider:
• Where will the food come from?
• How will you transport food to the vehicle?
• Where will you store food?

FUNDING
How will you fund this? Think beyond grants and donations. Consider:
• What data and metrics would be helpful to evaluate your success?
• How can you maximize your program’s assets into a revenue stream that can support the program?

Example: Rent out the vehicle to local businesses to cover operational costs

PROMOTE LIKE A PRO

How will people in the neighborhood hear about your program? Two helpful ways:

Recruit community members for outreach. Provide residents with tools and training to help spread the word.

Maximize partners’ networks. Ask partners to share Facebook events and posts

Good-looking marketing materials go a long way. Well-designed fliers and posters add legitimacy and can attract a diverse range of customers.
PROVIDE AN EXPERIENCE, NOT A HANDOUT

Consider your customer:
What is most exciting for kids? How can you transform your program into a fun experience kids want to visit again and again?
Here are a few ways to add fun, flair and creativity to your mobile meal program:

MENU
Think fresh, healthy, and fast—something easy to distribute
• Grab ‘n’ go items: sandwiches, fresh fruit
• Beverages (bottled water, chocolate milk)
• Ice
Tip: Serve food “buffet-style” so kids can choose their own foods.

PACKAGING
• Colorful labels
• Fun bags and boxes

DECOR
• Banners
• Balloons
• Staff t-shirts
• Menu boards
• Sandwich boards
• Car magnets

AMBIANCE
• Upbeat music
• T-shirts for staff
• Tables and seating
• Tablecloths
• Pop-up tent

ADDITIONAL SUPPLIES
• Sound system or wireless speakers
• Cooler
• Rope, zipties, tape
• Trash cans
• Trash bags

Tip: Create a fun environment, but keep it simple: the easier it is to set up and tear down, the more locations you can visit in one day.
BACKGROUND: PILOTING THE MOBILE MODEL

This guide was created based on a 2016 pilot program called “Unpack’d.” Freestore Foodbank launched “Unpack’d,” a mobile meal program, in Cincinnati, Ohio in summer 2016 through a partnership with Design Impact and Sprout Insight. Unpack’d was inspired and vetted by kids, parents, and frontline workers who utilize summer meal programs. This pilot was funded by a 3-year grant from Feeding America and ConAgra Foods Foundation to identify kids’ barriers to summer meal participation and develop program models to fill the summer feeding gap. In addition to testing “Unpack’d” over three days, the team also conducted multiple evaluations and feedback sessions to measure the pilot’s success.

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- Cincinnati Cooks
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- Oyler School
- Valerie Perez
- Sprout Insight

UNPACK’D PILOT DETAILS
- Launched in two neighborhoods
- Promoted through word-of-mouth, social media
- Served over 200 meals in three days