

USDA Summer Meals Study

Volume 2. Sponsor and Site Operational Characteristics

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Executive Summary

The USDA Summer Meals Study provides a comprehensive assessment of the two summer meal programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). This report, the second volume in the USDA Summer Meals Study report series, focuses on the **sponsor and site operational characteristics** and **program site and sponsor perspectives on summer meal program participation**.

Background

The summer meal programs provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children ages 18 years and younger who rely on school meals during the school year. These programs serve meals at sites located in low-income areas and at sites in other areas serving a high proportion of low-income children, both in the summer when school is not in session and during long school breaks in communities with year-round school calendars. Children who participate in the summer meal programs receive meals free of charge, regardless of household income.¹ Meal types include breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack (morning, afternoon, and evening). Sites may receive reimbursement for up to two meals (including snacks) per child per day, with the exception of migrant sites and camps that can receive reimbursement for up to three meals each day.²

The summer meal programs are federally funded and State administered. In both the SFSP and SSO, sponsors are approved by the State to operate one or more summer meal sites. Sites are located in a variety of settings, such as schools, parks, community centers, Boys and Girls clubs, apartment complexes, churches, and migrant centers. Sites can be open or closed-enrolled and can also be camps. Open sites are located in a low-income area where at least half of the children in the defined geographic area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; any child age 18 and under can receive free meals at these sites. Closed-enrolled sites may or may not be located in a low-income area; however, at least half of the children enrolled at the program site (e.g., a parks and recreation

¹ Eligibility is determined based on household income at camps.

² Sites cannot serve a lunch and supper combination.

program, summer enrichment programs) must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and all children who are enrolled receive free meals. Residential or day camps only receive reimbursement for meals served to children who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

Overview of the USDA Summer Meals Study

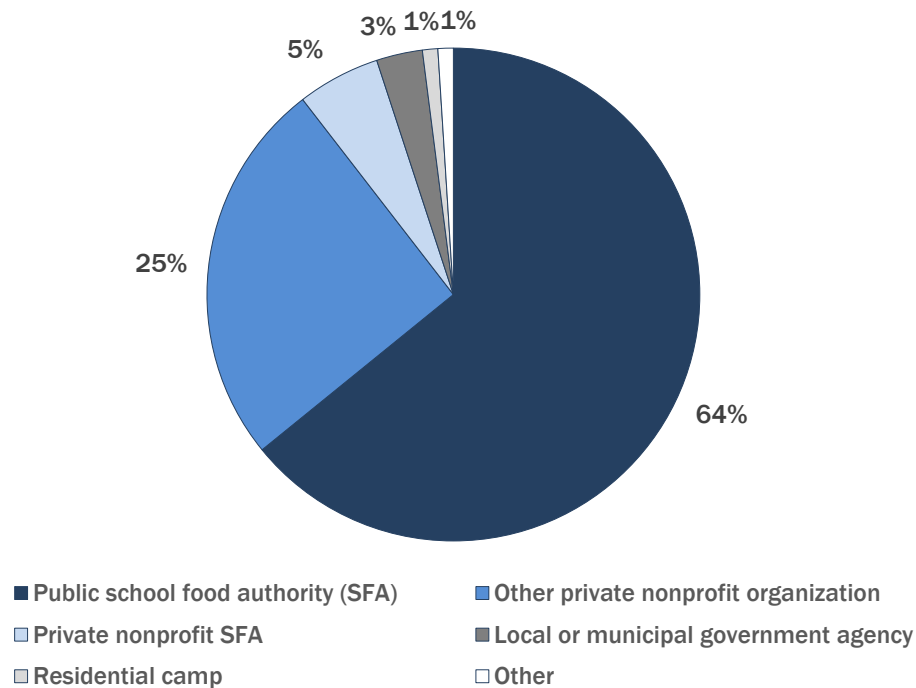
The USDA Summer Meals Study is a nationally representative study of summer meal program sites, program participants, and program nonparticipants. The study employed a mixed-methods design to address the research objectives. Approximately 450 program sponsors and 1,040 sites participated in data collection activities; participation varied by study instrument. Results presented in this report volume are based on data collected from surveys that were administered to program sponsor and site staff. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of sponsor and site staff. Results summarized from the surveys are presented as descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages. Information gathered from in-depth interviews with sponsors and sites is used to provide context to the survey results and to examine barriers and facilitators to program implementation, recommendations for changes to program rules, statute, and guidance, and to gauge satisfaction with the summer meal programs.

Key Findings

Characteristics of Program Sponsors

- **Three-fourths of program sponsors operate the SFSP and not the SSO.** The most frequent reasons for participating in SFSP instead of SSO are that sponsors prefer the SFSP meal patterns (reported by 53% of SFSP sites) and because of higher SFSP reimbursement rates (36%). Fewer than one in five (17.5%) of SFA-sponsored sites had sponsors that ever participated in SSO. Of these, sites sponsored by SFAs reported that they operated the SSO because there is less paperwork (67%), reviews and monitoring are easier (58%), and State agency administrative reviews are easier (36%).
- **Nearly two-thirds (64%) of sponsors are public SFAs.** One-quarter of sponsors are private nonprofit organizations (not including private nonprofit SFAs), while the remainder are other types of organizations, such as local or municipal government agencies or private nonprofit SFAs. Sponsors classified as private nonprofit organizations are most frequently religious organizations.
- **Sponsors are most commonly responsible for 2 to 10 sites (43% of sponsors).** The number of sites overseen by sponsors ranges from 1 to 418.

Figure ES-1. Summer meals program sponsor types



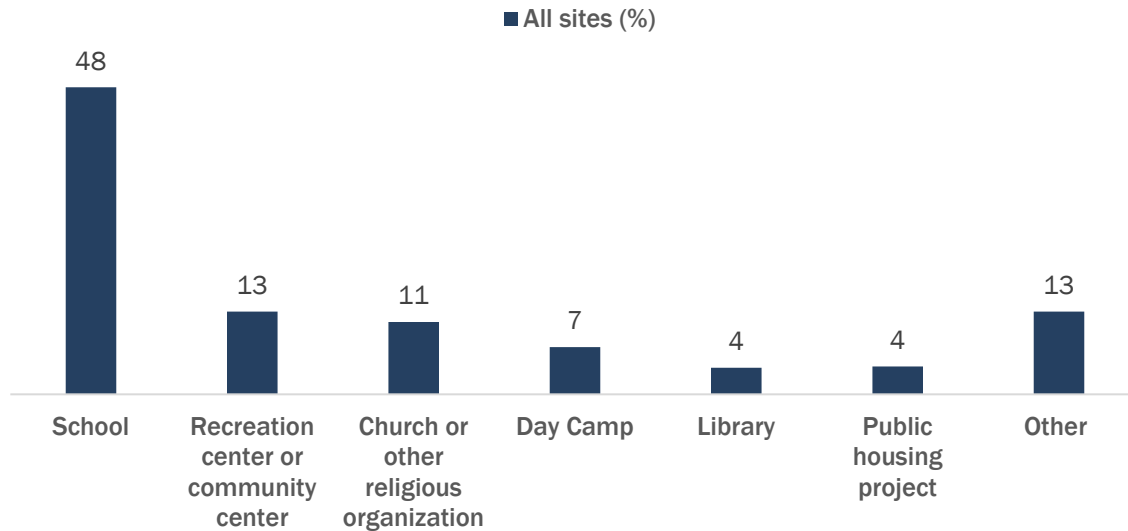
Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sponsors offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 451; weighted n = 7,362.

Program Site Operational Characteristics

- Summer meal sites are most often open to all children who want to attend and are located in urban areas.** About 8 in 10 sites (83%) are open sites, compared with 17 percent of sites that are closed sites. Sites that restrict attendance to enrolled children and/or teens most often describe those who may enroll in their program as children only of a certain age group (38% of sites that require enrollment). Four out every five sites are urban (83%), and the remaining 17% of sites are located in rural areas.
- Schools are the most frequent setting across all sites (48% of all sites) and for sites with an SFA sponsor (65%).** Sites with non-SFA sponsors have more diversity in settings but are most frequently set in recreation or community centers (23% of sites with a non-SFA sponsor) or churches or other religious organizations (17% of sites with a non-SFA sponsor).
- The majority of sites (52%) have been operating summer meal programs between two and five years.** More sites with SFSP sponsors are in their first year of program operation (21%) compared with sites with SSO sponsors (11%).
- About half of sites (53%) have an average daily attendance of 50 children or fewer.** Average daily attendance at summer meal sites ranges from one to 1,000 children.

- **Meal programs typically run from June through August and run for seven weeks.** Few sites (4%) operate for one week or less. Sites operate an average of 5.9 hours daily.

Figure ES-2. Summer meals program site settings



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 945; weighted n = 68,321.

Characteristics of Children Served, Site Activities, and Transportation Offered

- **Children who receive meals from summer meal sites are most often of elementary school age.** On average, sites serve 55 percent of their meals to elementary school age children on a typical day. They serve 21 percent of meals to middle school age children, 14 percent to high school age children, and 10 percent to preschoolers.
- **Almost all sites (95%) provide both free meals and activities to children who attend the site.** Education/instructional activities are the type of activity most often offered to children at summer meal sites, offered by 81 percent of sites, followed by arts and crafts (62% of sites), and supervised free play (55% of sites).
- **Access to meal sites is a considerable challenge to children's participation.** Most sites (89%) report that transportation is needed for children to get to and from the site. However, while children need transportation to attend most sites, just 30 percent of sites provide transportation.

Promotional Activities and Program Expansion

- **Promotional activities typically begin near the end of the school year and include the use of written materials and public media outlets.** Promotional activities used by sponsors differed for sites that were open to all children versus closed sites that

enrolled children. Most sponsors with open sites conducted at least some of the summer meal program outreach themselves, though open sites also do their own outreach. Sponsors do limited, if any, outreach for closed sites, which have their own recruitment efforts and publicity designed to enroll children in their programs' activities.

- **The sponsor and site staff interviewed viewed program expansion differently, with the majority of sponsors indicating they would like to expand, while the majority of site staff said they lacked the capacity to expand.** In discussing barriers to their expansion of meals and hours, sponsors most frequently mentioned programmatic rules and their own resource limitations (e.g., transportation assistance and staff for adult supervision).

Encouraging Program Participation of Sponsors, Sites, and Children

- To encourage sponsor and site participation, the most frequent recommendation was a statutory change to increase the meal reimbursement rates.
- Nearly all program sponsors (98%) said that they were likely to participate in the program next year.
- Changing the program statute to relax the congregate feeding requirement was the most frequently mentioned suggestion from sponsors and sites to increase participation of children in the summer meal programs. Sponsors and sites noted that the congregate feeding requirement was challenging for sites with transportation and/or safety issues and for sites with frequent bad weather.

"Providing meals at schools, churches, community centers, parks, and libraries has ensured that no kid in our community went hungry this summer."

- Program Sponsor

1. Introduction and Background

The USDA Summer Meals Study provides a comprehensive assessment of the two summer meal programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), and the Seamless Summer Option (SSO). This study examines the characteristics of participating and nonparticipating children, including sociodemographic characteristics, household food security status, reasons for participation or nonparticipation, and satisfaction with the meals served to children in the summer of 2018. The USDA Summer Meals Study also describes the operational aspects of the programs at summer meal sites, characteristics of their food service environments, and the nutritional content of the meals served to children.

This report, the second volume in the USDA Summer Meals Study report series, focuses on the operational characteristics of summer meal program sponsors and sites and program sponsor and site perspectives on children’s participation in the summer meal programs. Volume 1 describes the characteristics of summer meal participants and nonparticipants; Volume 3 focuses on the characteristics of food service environments at summer meal program sites; Volume 4 assesses the content and nutritional quality of summer menus; Volume 5 provides additional information about the study methodology; and Volume 6 contains all the study instruments.

Study Objectives

The USDA Summer Meals Study addresses six study objectives focused on participation, food quality, and implementation of the summer meal programs.

1. Identify reasons for participation and satisfaction levels with the summer meal programs;
2. Assess how characteristics differ between participants and nonparticipants;
3. Determine the reasons for nonparticipation;
4. Determine the food service characteristics of the summer meal sites;
5. Describe the characteristics and content of the summer meals; and
6. Assess facilitators and barriers to preparing and serving summer meals.

1.1 School Meal Programs

USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) administers several programs that address food insecurity among families and children, including programs that provide benefits to

In 2018, the school meal programs delivered free and reduced-price lunches to more than 21.9 million children, and free and reduced-price breakfasts to more than 12.5 million children every day (FNS, 2019).

families to purchase food or to organizations that serve meals to children in congregate settings. The largest programs that provide meals directly to children are the school meal programs—the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP). These programs provide meals to children attending schools during the regular academic school year. The SFSP and SSO provide meals to children during the summer months when the NSLP and SBP are not operating.

The school meal programs are part of USDA’s overall effort to improve nutrition and reduce food insecurity among children in low-income households. In 2018, food insecurity—defined as not having consistent, dependable access to adequate food for active, healthy living—affected 13.9 percent of households with children at some time during the year (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019).³ Because families allocate food within the household to shield children from disrupted eating patterns, fewer children experience food insecurity themselves. Research also suggests that some children fear stigma around hunger and actively hide it (Popkin, Scott, and Galvez, 2016). Compared to food secure children, those who experience food insecurity are at risk of numerous negative

Six million children experienced food insecurity in 2018 (Coleman-Jensen et al., 2019).

physical, emotional, and educational outcomes, including higher rates of obesity, more behavioral problems, poorer social skills, and poorer test scores and educational

achievement (Jyoti, Frongillo, and Jones, 2005; Metallinos-Katsaras, Must, and Gorman, 2012; Winicki and Jemison, 2003).

Findings from multiple studies with varying methodologies and data sources consistently show that the school meal programs reduce food insecurity. Specifically, past research shows that food insecurity rises during the summer months, when the NSLP and SBP are not operating. Using data from the Current Population Survey, Nord and Romig (2006) compared household food security during the school year to food security during the summer and found higher rates of household food insecurity when school was out for the summer. Similar analyses using the National Health and Nutrition Examination Study and the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth Cohort confirm these findings (Arteaga and Heflin, 2014; Gundersen, Kreider, and Pepper, 2012). These consistent findings from three large-scale, national studies suggest that the school meal programs play an

³ Program participation and household food security data for 2018 are displayed because this is the year in which study data were collected.

important role in alleviating food insecurity among households with children and highlight the struggle for families to find alternative sources of food for children during the summer.

1.2 Summer Meal Programs

The summer meal programs help children who rely on school meals during the school year access nutrition assistance during the summer months. The SFSP and SSO, authorized under section 13(a) of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act (42 U.S.C. 1761(a)), provide free, nutritious meals and snacks to children ages 18 years and younger.⁴ These programs serve meals at sites located in low-income areas and at sites in other areas serving a high proportion of low-income children, both in the summer when school is not in session and during long school breaks in communities with year-round school calendars. Children who participate in the summer meal programs receive meals free of charge, regardless of household income.⁵ Sponsors may receive reimbursement on behalf of sites for up to two meals (including snacks) per child per day, with the exception of migrant sites and camps that can receive reimbursement for up to three meals each day. Meal types include breakfast, lunch, supper, and snack (morning, afternoon, and evening).

The summer meal programs are federally funded and State administered. In both the SFSP and SSO, sponsors are approved by the State to operate one or more summer meal sites. Sites are located in a variety of settings, such as schools, parks, community centers, Boys and Girls clubs, apartment complexes, churches, and migrant centers. Sites can be open or have closed enrollment, and they can also be camps. Open sites are located in a low-income area where at least half of the children in the area are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals; any child aged 18 and under can receive free meals. Closed-enrollment sites may or may not be located in a low-income area; however, at least half of the children enrolled at the program site (e.g., a parks and recreation program, summer enrichment programs) must be eligible for free or reduced-price meals, and all children who are enrolled receive free meals. Residential or day camps only receive reimbursement for meals served to children who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.

⁴ Individuals over age 18 who are enrolled in school programs for persons with disabilities may also receive meals.

⁵ Except for children in camps, who must be individually eligible for free or reduced-price meals to receive free summer meals.

In many ways, the SSO program is an extension of the school meal programs, while the SFSP differs in terms of management structure, meal pattern requirements, and reimbursements. First, SFSP program sponsors can include a variety of entities, including school food authorities (SFAs), private nonprofit organizations, and local governments. SSO program sponsors, in contrast, are exclusively SFAs. While all SSO sponsors are SFAs, SSOs can operate in a variety of settings. Second, the SFSP and SSO programs follow different meal patterns, with SSO sites required to follow the meal patterns set forth for the school meal programs. There are key differences between the SFSP and school meal patterns for milk, grains, fruits, and vegetables, and for calories, sodium, and saturated fat (see Table 1-1).

Table 1-1. Differences in the meal patterns used in SFSP and SSO in summer 2018

Meal component	SFSP	SSO
Milk	All varieties allowed	Only low-fat (1% milk fat or less, unflavored) or fat-free (unflavored or flavored) allowed
Grain	Whole grain-rich or enriched products allowed	All grain products must be whole grain-rich (unless the site has a waiver)
Fruits and vegetables	Single requirement for fruit and/or vegetable quantity No weekly quantity requirements for types of vegetables	Requires separate quantities of fruits and vegetables at lunch Weekly quantity requirements for types of vegetables
Calories, sodium, and saturated fat	No limits	Limits

Finally, the federal per meal reimbursement rates differ between the SFSP and SSO; SFSP reimbursement rates for meals are higher (the snack reimbursement rate is the same) (see Table 1-2). With a simplified meal pattern and higher reimbursement rates, many SFA sponsors choose to operate the SFSP over the SSO; however, the SSO offers continuity in operations over the entire year and requires less paperwork, making it easier and more attractive for many schools to serve meals to children during the summer months.

Table 1-2. Federal reimbursement rates for meals served in SFSP and SSO, summer 2018¹

Meal type	SFSP rates for rural and self-prep sites	SFSP rates for all other types of sites	SSO ²
Breakfast	\$2.2325	\$2.1900	\$2.14
Lunch or supper	\$3.9225	\$3.8575	\$3.48
Snack	\$0.9300	\$0.9100	\$0.91

¹ Reimbursement rates are higher in Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico.

² SFSP reimbursement rates also differ for rural or self-prep sites. SSO reimbursement rates are the same as the free reimbursement rates for the NSLP and the SBP. SSO reimbursement rates also differ for SFAs that serve fewer than 60 percent free or reduced-price meals and severe need sites. In addition, for SSO sites, school food authorities certified as meeting the meal pattern and nutrition standard requirements set forth in 7 CFR 210 and 220 are eligible to receive performance-based cash assistance for each reimbursable lunch served (an additional six cents per lunch, adjusted annually).

Participation rates in the summer meal programs are much lower than in the school meal programs, suggesting that the programs may not reach everyone who may need food assistance. In July 2018, an average of 2.7 million children per day received meals through SFSP. An additional 1.0 million children received free and reduced-price lunches in NSLP⁶ that same month, some of which were lunches served through SSO (FNS, 2019). This is far below the school-year free and reduced-price lunch participation level of 21.9 million children per day in 2018 (FNS, 2019).

There are several fundamental differences between the summer meal programs and the school meal programs that likely account for the lower participation levels. First and foremost, USDA offers the school meal programs through schools where attendance is mandatory, thus ensuring access to all children. Provision of summer meals, in contrast, is through a variety of summer programs and delivery sites for which attendance is voluntary. Additionally, virtually every public school and many private schools make the school meal programs available and provide transportation, while the summer meal programs are primarily offered in areas with high concentrations of low-income children and may or may not provide transportation.⁷ Furthermore, summer meal sites may serve different populations or subgroups of children, depending on the programs and activities of the site. Finally, while the school meal programs operate for the entire duration of the school year, summer

⁶ FNS does not collect separate program data for the SSO but reports it as part of NSLP/SBP.

⁷ The Richard B Russell National School Lunch Act (NSLA) allows the use of school or census data to establish area eligibility in the Summer Food Service Program. When determining area eligibility using school data, the proposed meal site must be located in the attendance area of a school where at least 50 percent of the children are eligible for free or reduced price school meals. When using census data to determine eligibility, the proposed site must be located in a Census Block Group (CBG) or Census Tract in which 50 percent or more of the children are eligible for free or reduced price meals.

meal programs are available for varying lengths of time, ranging from less than one week to the entire summer and at specific times during the day.

2. Methods

The USDA Summer Meals Study is a nationally representative study of summer meal program sites and program participants and nonparticipants. The study employed a mixed-methods design to address the research objectives. Surveys were administered to sponsors, site staff, and caregivers of participants and nonparticipants.⁸ In-depth interviews were conducted with a subset of current and former sponsors, site staff, and caregivers of participants and nonparticipants. Table 2-1 illustrates the primary data collection activities supporting each study objective. The results featured in this report volume respond to research questions related to understanding sponsor and site operational characteristics and sponsor and site perspectives on children's participation in the summer meal programs, featured in Study Objective 4: Determine the food service characteristics of the summer meal sites and Study Objective 6: Assess facilitators and barriers to preparing and serving meals.

Study Objectives
The USDA Summer Meals Study addresses six study objectives focused on participation, food quality, and implementation of the summer meal programs. 1. Identify reasons for participation and satisfaction levels with the summer meal programs; 2. Assess how characteristics differ between participants and nonparticipants; 3. Determine the reasons for nonparticipation; 4. Determine the food service characteristics of the summer meal sites; 5. Describe the characteristics and content of the summer meals; and 6. Assess facilitators and barriers to preparing and serving summer meals.

⁸ Site Surveys and Caregiver Surveys were available in Spanish.

Table 2-1. Primary data collection activities supporting the research objectives

Respondent type and data collection method	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4	Objective 5	Objective 6
Caregivers of participants and nonparticipants						
Survey	✓	✓	✓			
In-depth interviews	✓		✓			
Child participants and teen participants and nonparticipants¹						
Survey	✓		✓			
Site staff						
Survey				✓		✓
Menus					✓	
In-depth interviews						✓
Current and former sponsors²						
Survey				✓		✓
In-depth interviews						✓

¹ Child nonparticipants did not complete a survey.

² Former sponsors did not complete a survey.

Provided below is a summary of the sampling methodology for the entire study. Following that is a description of the data sources, response rates, and analyses that underpin the results presented in this report. A more detailed description of the technical details of the study is provided in Volume 5 (Vericker et al., 2020).

2.1 Sampling

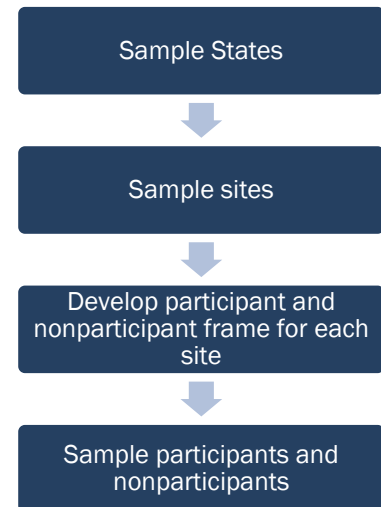
This study implemented a multi-stage sampling procedure to obtain a nationally representative sample of summer meal sites and program participants and nonparticipants.

Figure 2-1 illustrates the sampling approach employed.

First, 24 States were randomly selected using a systematic sampling method after first sorting by FNS region and a measure of size.⁹ Twenty-three States agreed to participate in the study. Figure 2-2 depicts the States that participated in the study.

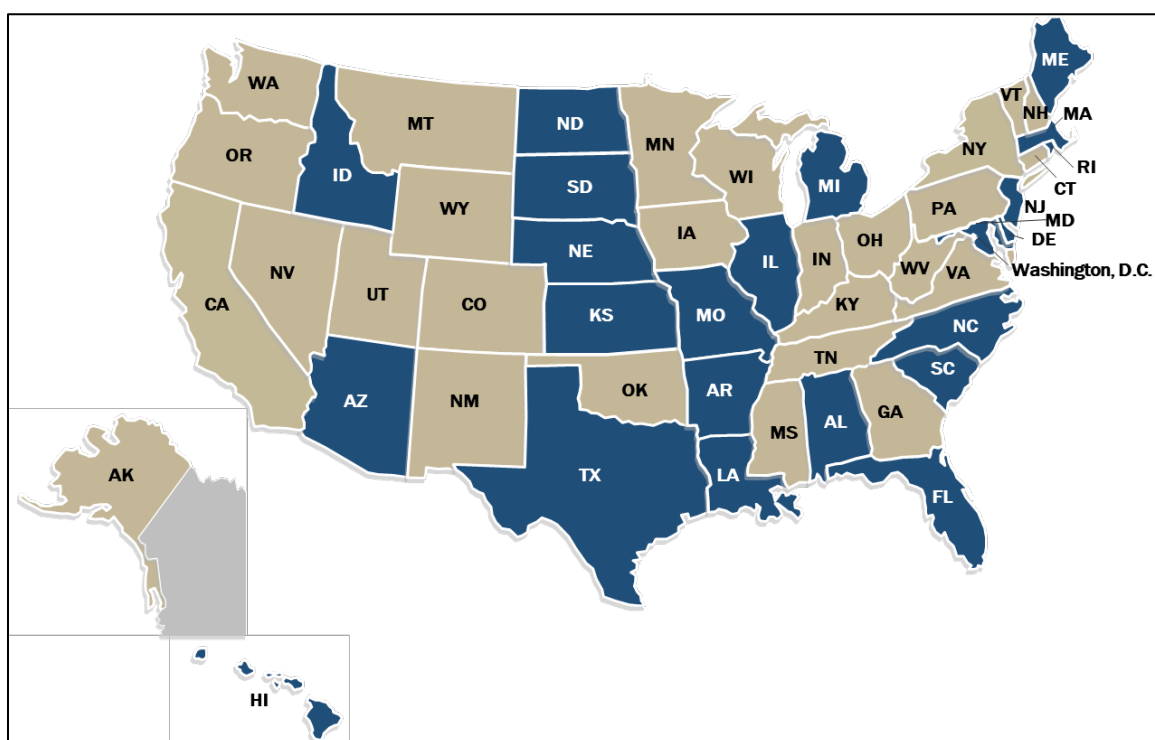
The study States provided lists of summer meal sites planned for operation in 2018. From those lists, 3,349 sites were sampled using a stratified sampling approach. The site sample size was designed to allow for comparisons between several key subgroups of interest (e.g., program type [SFSP/SSO] and SFA status [SFA/non-SFA]).

Figure 2-1. Sampling approach



⁹ The measure of size used in this study was a normalized value for each State that combined the number of summer meal sites in the State with the average daily number of meals served in July 2018.

Figure 2-2. States that participated in the USDA Summer Meals Study



Note: The following States highlighted in blue participated in the study: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, North Carolina, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Jersey, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Texas.

A multipronged approach was used to develop a sample frame of summer meal participants and nonparticipants, as neither FNS nor the States had lists of these groups. The sample frame for participants and nonparticipants is based on defining site catchment areas. The concept is that the catchment area represents the community the site serves and where the participating children live. A 0.75-mile catchment area was drawn around each urban site and a five-mile catchment area was drawn around each rural site.¹⁰ To be eligible for the study, a household living in a catchment area had to have at least one child age 5 through 18. To determine presence of children in the household and summer-meal participation status, screeners were mailed to a sample of addresses in the catchment areas. From the responses to the screener, the sample frames of participants and nonparticipants were built.

¹⁰This study used the U.S. Census Bureau's definition of an urban area. Census defines an urban area as one that has at least 2,500 people. Rural includes all areas that are not included in an urban area.

Sampling Participants. Participants were sampled using two strategies. First, hard copies of the survey were provided to the sites to distribute to caregivers and children directly. This was the most direct way to contact participants. Second, additional participants were identified through the screener process. All caregivers who responded to the screener and said there were children in the household who went to the sampled site were asked to complete a survey. Survey responses were reviewed to ensure that no individuals provided more than one survey response.

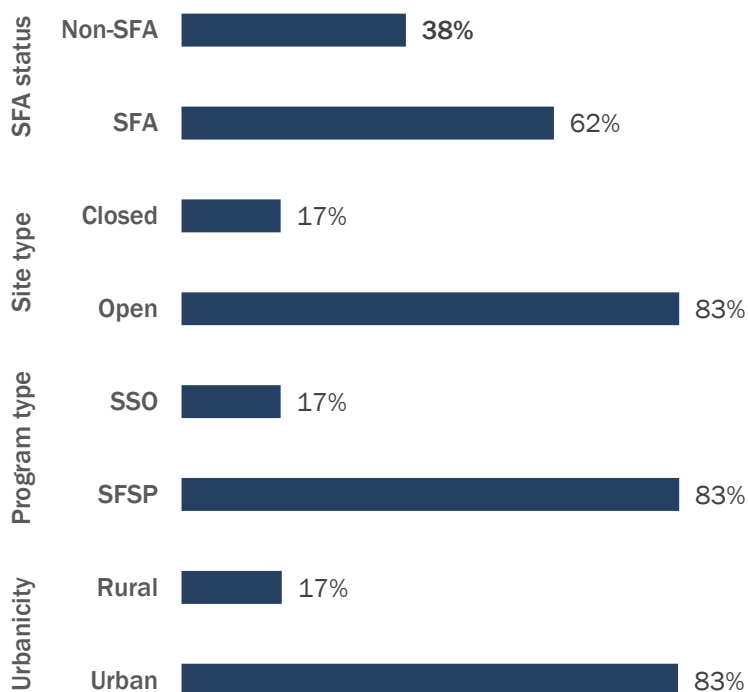
Sampling Nonparticipants. For nonparticipants, the screener was used to create the sample frame. A subsample of households was drawn from those that responded to the screener indicating that they had children but that no one in the household participated in the summer meal programs. This sample of nonparticipants was asked to complete a survey.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Three data collection strategies were used to address study objectives featured in this report: (1) a survey of summer meal site staff (i.e., Site Survey); (2) a survey of program sponsors (i.e., Sponsor Survey); and (3) in-depth telephone interviews with program site staff and current and former program sponsor staff. Data collection activities took place between June and November 2018. The survey instruments and in-depth interviews covered a range of topics including characteristics of sponsoring organizations and sites (e.g., program size, site type, site setting, operation schedule, transportation availability) as well as sponsor and site perspectives on summer meal program participation (e.g., promotional activities, program expansion, reasons for sponsor discontinuation). Study instruments are provided in Volume 6 (Rothstein et al., 2020).

Analyses reported in this report volume are based on a sample size of 950 respondents to the Site Survey, 453 respondents to the Sponsor Survey, 19 in-depth interviews with site staff, 19 in-depth interviews with program sponsors, and 14 in-depth interviews with former program sponsors. The response rates to the Site Survey and Sponsor Survey were 38 percent and 39 percent, respectively.¹¹ Survey respondents were a nationally representative sample of sites in 2018. Characteristics of

Figure 2-3. Characteristics of study sites



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, Summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 950; weighted n = 68,611.
Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

these sites are displayed in Figure 2-3. In-depth interview respondents were selected and recruited from a list of survey respondents who volunteered to be interviewed.¹² In-depth interview respondents were purposively recruited to include those from SFSP and SSO sponsors as well as different types of organizations, including SFAs, private nonprofits, and government agencies. Among the site staff, interviewees were also purposively recruited to include some rural sites, closed-enrollment meal sites, and sites identified in the survey as the primary meal planner.

Descriptive statistics such as proportions and means were used to summarize results from the surveys. Differences between sites sponsored by SFAs and those sponsored by non-SFAs were also examined; tables showing differences between SFSP and SSO program types are presented in the

¹¹Nonresponse bias analyses were conducted and no serious nonresponse bias was detected (see Vericker et al., 2020).

¹²Former sponsors were identified as those that appeared in 2017 State summer meals site lists, but not in 2018 State summer meals site lists. Former sponsors were contacted and asked to participate in an in-depth interview.

Appendix. Statistically significant differences between subgroups of interest were assessed using t-tests; results significant at the at the 0.05 confidence level are reported.¹³ Survey weights were applied to analyses to account for survey nonresponse, and standard errors were adjusted to account for the complex survey design.

The in-depth interviews with site staff and program sponsors were recorded and later transcribed. Each of the interview transcripts was imported into NVivo Version 11 Plus qualitative analysis software. A coding structure was developed based on the similarities and differences in responses identified in a review of the full transcripts and key findings summary documents prepared after each interview. Analyses of the coded interviews focused on identifying common responses, experiences and themes associated with the study research questions. A classification system was also entered into the database, allowing for simple descriptive analysis of sponsor and site characteristics, based on answers to selected survey and interview questions.

Table 2-2 shows the characteristics of current sponsors interviewed. The 19 sites interviewed include a broad cross-section of sponsors that use different approaches to deliver the summer meals program.

¹³The Bonferroni correction was used to account for multiple comparisons when comparisons were made between more than two groups.

Table 2-2. In-depth interviews of current sponsors: characteristics by sponsor type

Characteristics	Sponsor type				Total
	SFA (N=6)	SFSP (N=15) Private nonprofit (N=5)	Govt. agency (N=4)	SSO (N=4)	
Number of sites in 2018					
1-2 sites	0	1	0	1	2
3-9 sites	3	3	0	0	6
10 or more sites	3	1	4	3	11
Types of meals served in 2018					
Lunch and snack	1	0	1	0	2
Breakfast and lunch	2	4	2	4	12
Breakfast, lunch, and supper	0	1	0	0	1
Varies by site	3	0	1	0	4
Primary meal planner and vendor use					
Primary meal planner, no vendor	6	3	2	3	14
Primary meal planner, uses vendor	0	0	1	0	1
Not primary meal planner, uses vendor	0	2	1	1	4
Affiliation of sites to sponsor					
All affiliated	3	2	1	4	10
None affiliated	0	1	1	0	2
Some affiliated	3	2	2	0	7

Table 2-3 displays the characteristics sites represented by the 19 current site staff who were interviewed.

Table 2-3. In-depth interviews of current site staff: characteristics by site organization type

Characteristics	Organization type			Total
	SFA (n=9)	Private nonprofit (n=6)	Govt. agency (n=4)	
Urbanicity				
Urban	7	5	4	16
Rural	2	1	0	3
Types of meals served in 2018				
Lunch only	4	3	0	7
Breakfast and lunch	5	3	4	12
Site type				
Open	8	5	1	14
Closed	1	1	3	5
Primary meal planner				
Yes	3	1	0	4
No	7	5	4	15
Activities offered at site				
Yes	7	4	4	12
No	2	2	0	4

Table 2-4 displays the characteristics of sponsors representing the 14 former sponsor staff that were interviewed.

Table 2-4. In-depth interviews of former sponsors: characteristics by sponsor type

Characteristics	Sponsor type		Total
	SFSP (n=11)	SSO (n=3)	
Number of sites in 2017			
Small (1-2 sites)	3	1	4
Medium (3-9 sites)	5	2	7
Large (10+ sites)	3	0	3
Types of meals served in 2017			
Lunch	3	0	3
Breakfast and lunch	6	3	9
Breakfast, lunch, and supper	2	0	2
Number of years as a sponsor prior to 2018			
1-3 years	6	1	7
More than 3 years	5	2	7

Table 2-5 displays the number of Sponsor Survey and Site Survey respondents who provided open-ended survey responses about the summer meals program. These numbers represent the open-ended survey comments that addressed the study research questions or provided either praise or recommendations for the summer meal program.

Table 2-5. Number of Sponsor Survey and Site Survey respondents who provided open-ended survey responses about the summer meals program¹

Respondent type	Program type		Total
	SFSP (n=240)	SSO (n=49)	
Sponsors	110	32	142
Site staff	130	17	147

¹ These numbers represent the open-ended survey comments that addressed the study research questions or provided either praise or recommendations for the summer meal program. There were an additional 81 open-ended survey comments (27 sponsors and 54 site staff) that provided general descriptive information about the characteristics of the respondents' programs or sites, cited reasons for not being able to provide certain data for the survey (e.g., child demographics), or expressed appreciation for the survey itself but did not comment on the program. These 82 comments were excluded from this table and the analysis of key qualitative findings.

3. Sponsor and Site Operational Characteristics

As the summer meal programs are operated locally, the attributes of the sponsors and their sites, as well as how they conduct daily operations, are not readily apparent. Yet these attributes are often important factors that are associated with program efficiency and effectiveness. The descriptive characteristics of the sponsors, sites, and population served presented in this chapter are based on data collected from surveys of sponsors and site staff and from in-depth interviews with a small sample of program sponsors and site staff in the summer and fall of 2018.

3.1 Characteristics of Program Sponsors

Although there is substantial diversity in program structures, the majority of summer meal program sponsors operate the SFSP and are public SFAs. Most sponsors are responsible for between 1 and 10 sites. Average daily attendance of children varies considerably, with almost one-third of program sponsors (31.4%) overseeing sites that serve 100 or fewer children a day, while another 19.3 percent of sponsors oversee sites that serve an average daily attendance of 1,000 children or more.

3.1.1 Summer Meal Program Types: SFSP and SSO

Three-quarters of summer meal program sponsors operate the SFSP, while 25 percent operate SSO (data not shown). Sponsors that are SFAs operating the NSLP/SBP can choose to participate in either the SFSP or SSO. However, fewer than one in five (17.5%) SFA-sponsored sites had sponsors that ever participated in SSO (data not shown). Sponsors that participate in the SSO are attracted to the program because it has fewer administrative requirements. Of SFA sponsors that choose to participate in SSO, about two-thirds do so because there is less

Sponsor and site perspectives: SFSP and SSO

Thirteen SFA sponsors provided information on their program preferences in interviews (8) and survey write-in comments (5). Of these, seven strongly prefer SFSP and six strongly prefer SSO. Those who prefer SFSP to SSO cited the following reasons for their preference: SFSP supports community involvement at diverse types of sites, potentially reaching more kids; the program has a higher reimbursement; and they prefer the SFSP meal pattern. (At least two respondents cited each of these reasons.) Those who prefer SSO to SFSP cited less paperwork and easier monitoring of sites, which are the same reasons as the two most frequent survey responses shown in Table 3-1.

Sources: In-depth interviews with 19 current summer meal program sponsors and open-ended survey respondent comments from the Sponsor Survey.

paperwork associated with this option (see Table 3-1).¹⁴ Sponsors also choose to participate in SSO because of easier reviews or monitoring of sites (58%) and easier administrative reviews by the State agency (36%). Over one in five SSO sponsors (23%) indicate that they have other reasons for participating in SSO. These other reasons include having had a negative experience with an administrative review when operating under SFSP; the increased reimbursement of SFSP does not offset the cost of the increased number of staff needed; dispersing food to multiple sites is easier under SSO; managing staff is easier under SSO; and SSO allows the sponsor to generate summer employment for school lunch staff.

Table 3-1. Why sites' SFA sponsors do or do not participate in SSO

Participation in SSO	SFA sites (%)
Reasons for participation, among participants	
Less paperwork	67.0
Easier reviews or monitoring of sites	57.6
Easier administrative reviews by the State agency	36.1
Other	22.8
Sample size, unweighted	188
Sample size, weighted	10,222
Reasons for nonparticipation, among nonparticipants	
Prefer SFSP meal patterns	52.5
Lower SSO reimbursement rates	35.5
Did not know SSO was an option	11.1
Less expensive to run other programs	6.4
Not enough internal funding	4.3
Other	16.5
Number of sites (unweighted)	384
Number of sites (weighted)	27,364

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Respondents checked all that apply.

The most frequent reason for not participating in SSO is that sponsors prefer the SFSP meal patterns (reported by 53% of SFSP sites). More than one-third of SFA sponsors that operate the SFSP (36%) indicated that the lower SSO reimbursement rates encouraged their choice of the SFSP. Some sponsors (11%) did not know that SSO was an option for them. Some of the “other” reasons that sponsors did not participate in SSO included nonparticipation in NSLP, less paperwork, and staffing issues.

¹⁴Results displayed in Table 3-2 are weighted to be representative of summer meal sites.

“We started with SSO and then moved to a mix. I felt like with SFSP there was a little bit more of a push for community site involvement and really reaching the kids in our community, as opposed to just almost being a caterer with SSO.”

– Program Sponsor

“I would say the greatest benefit [of the SFSP] is definitely the higher reimbursement. To serve more sites in the community, you need the SFSP reimbursement.”

– Program Sponsor

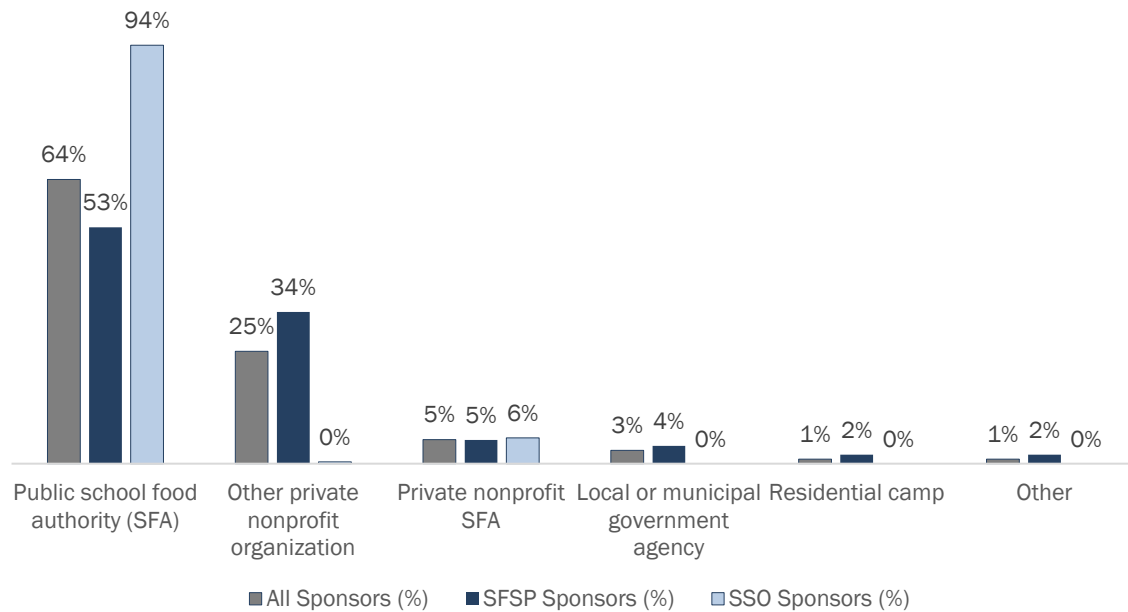
“The SSO is very similar in all areas to the National School Lunch Program procedures. It seems that our staff feel more confident and comfortable [with SSO].”

– Program Sponsor

3.1.2 Sponsor Types

Many types of organizations can sponsor sites for summer meal programs, but the majority of sponsors (64%) are public SFAs (see Figure 3-1). Sponsors associated with SSO sites are always SFAs, and most are public SFAs (94% of SSO sponsors), with the remainder being private, nonprofit SFAs. SFSP sponsors can also be public and private SFAs (58% of all SFSP sponsors), but they can be other organization types as well, such as other private nonprofit organizations (34% of SFSP sponsors), local or municipal governments (4% of SFSP sponsors), and residential camps (2% of SFSP sponsors). Sponsors classified as private nonprofit organizations are most frequently religious organizations (33%) (see Table 3-2).

Figure 3-1. Sponsors by organization type



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sponsors offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 451; weighted n = 7,362.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between SFSP sponsors and SSO sponsors are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for the following categories: "Public school food authority (SFA)", "Other private nonprofit organization," "Local or municipal government agency," "Residential camps," and "Other."

Table 3-2. Sponsors that are private nonprofit organizations by type of private nonprofit

Private nonprofit type	All sponsors (%)
Religious organization	33.0
Boys and Girls Club	18.8
Food bank	12.5
YMCA or YWCA	10.6
Sponsor of the Child and Adult Care Food Program	5.9
Other	21.6
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	82
Number of sponsors (weighted)	1,780

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

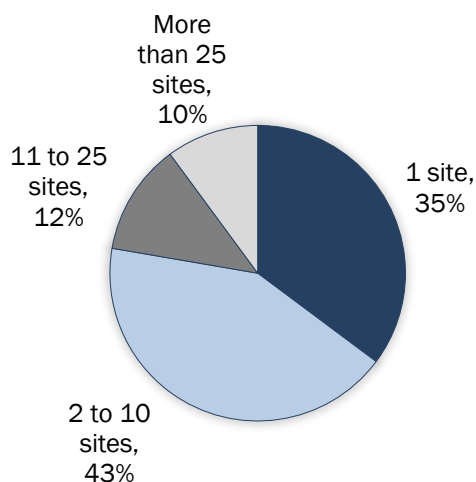
Note: Respondents checked all that apply. The "Other" category included a variety of responses; examples include food bank state association, university, human services agency, nonprofit umbrella agency, community literacy program, partnership with local private and public schools, community action agency, community-based organization, and migrant education organization.

Program Size

Sponsor program size is examined in terms of the number of sites under each sponsor and the average daily attendance of children attending summer meal sites operated by each sponsor. The number of sites overseen by sponsors ranges from 1 to 418. (Data not shown.) On average, sponsoring organizations are responsible for 11 sites, with the median number of sites being 2. Most commonly, sponsors are responsible for 2 to 10 sites (43% of sponsors) (see Figure 3-2). Over one-third of sponsors (35%) are responsible for just one site, while 10 percent of sponsors oversee more than 25 sites. The average number of sites per sponsor differs significantly between the types of summer meal programs, with SFSP sponsoring organizations typically having higher numbers of associated sites than sponsors overseeing SSO sites. On average, sponsoring organizations that oversee SFSP sites sponsor 12 sites; those that operate SSO sponsor seven sites. (Data not shown.)

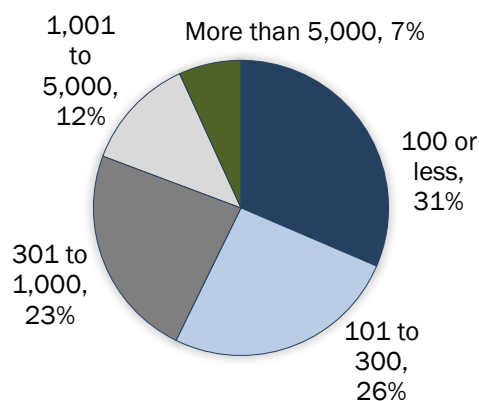
The average number of children served each day by sponsoring organizations varies widely, ranging from 8 children to 136,091 children. Sponsors reported that on average they serve meals and/or snacks to 1,739 children per day across all the sites they sponsor, with the median number of children served daily being 199. (Data not shown.) More than half of all sponsors (57%) serve 300 or fewer children each day (see Figure 3-3). Thirty-one percent of sponsors serve 100 or fewer children per day. Seven percent of sponsors serve meals to more than 5,000 children each day. There are no significant differences between SSO and SFSP sponsors in the number of children served per day (data not shown).

Figure 3-2. Number of sites per sponsor



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the fs. Unweighted n = 453; weighted n = 7,380.
Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Figure 3-3. Average number of children receiving meals and/or snacks each day



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 453; weighted n = 7,380.
Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

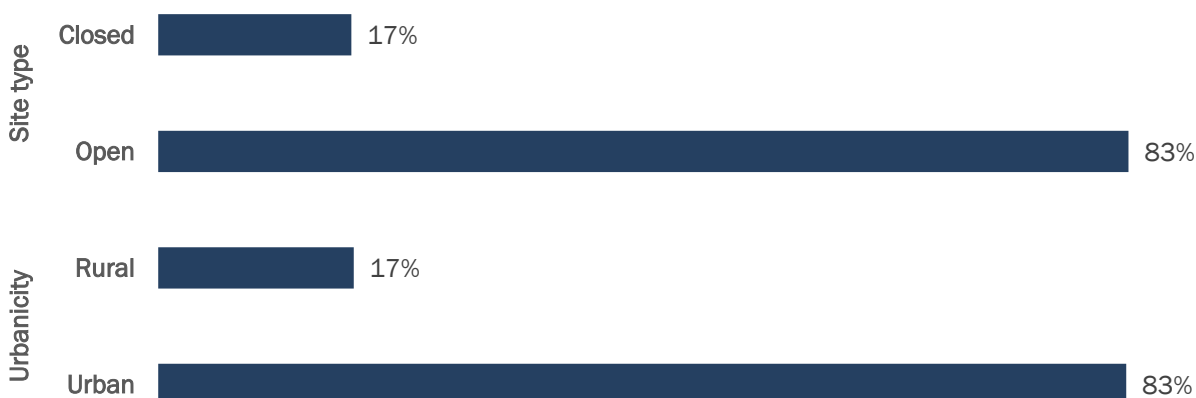
3.2 Program Site Operational Characteristics

Schools are the most common setting across all sites. Meal sites tend to be located in urban areas and are most often open to all children who want to attend. The majority of sites have been operating summer meal programs for five years or fewer. Meal programs typically run from June through August and operate for seven weeks.

3.2.1 Site Setting, Type, Size, and Other Site Features

Summer meal sites are most often open to all children who want to attend and are located in urban areas. About 8 in 10 programs (83%) operate open sites, compared to 17 percent that operate closed sites (see Figure 3-4). Most sites (83%) operate in urban areas versus rural areas. Most sites (62%) also provide children meals or snacks at times other than during the summer (data not shown). These sites are more likely to have SFA sponsors, but 48 percent of sites with non-SFA sponsors also serve meals or snacks during the school year.

Figure 3-4. Characteristics of program sites

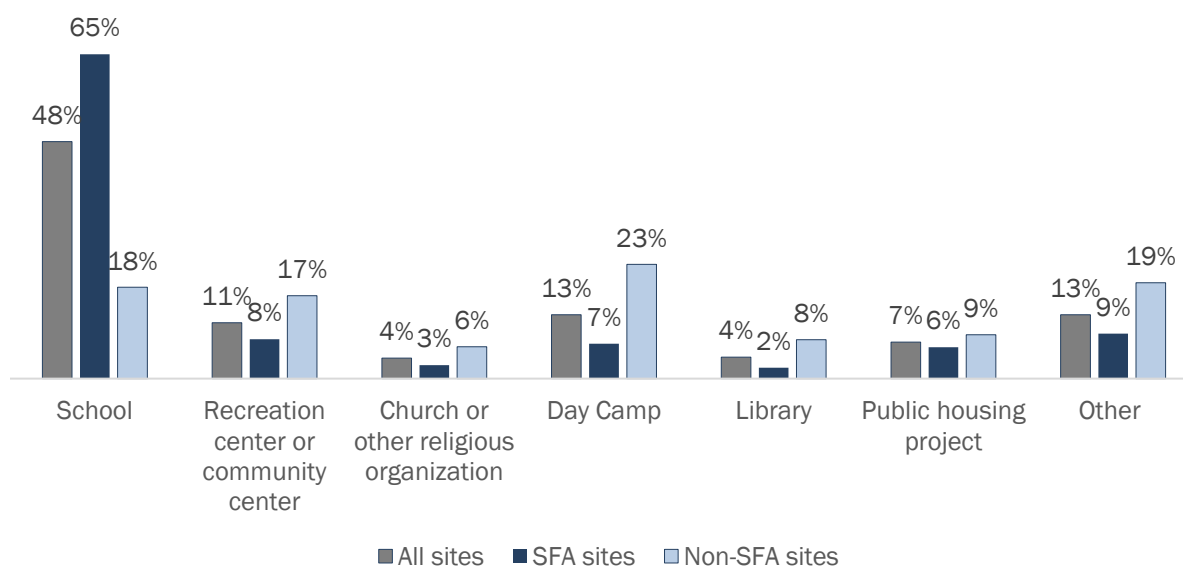


Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 950; weighted n = 68,611.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Meal sites can operate in many different types of settings, but schools are the most frequent setting (48% of all sites) (see Figure 3-5). Sites with non-SFA sponsors have more diversity in setting but are most frequently set in recreation or community centers (23%).

Figure 3-5. Site settings

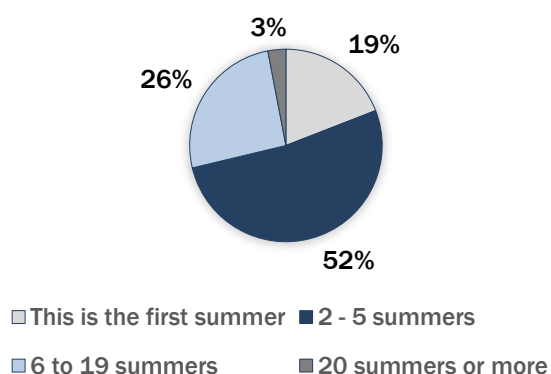


Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 945; weighted n = 68,321.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for the following categories: “School,” “Church or other religious organization,” “Library,” Recreation center or community center,” “Public housing project,” and “Other.” Examples of other sites include mobile feeding/food trucks, playgrounds/parks, homeless shelters, migrant sites, food banks, residential camps, and government buildings.

The differences in site settings between sites sponsored by an SFA and sites with non-SFA sponsors are significant for all setting types except day camps. There are also some significant differences based on other site characteristics as well. For instance, rural sites are significantly more likely to be located in schools than urban sites are (67% versus 45%), and significantly less likely to be located in a community or recreation center (4% versus 15%). Compared to SFSP sites, SSO sites are more likely to be located in schools (81% versus 41%), and less likely to be operating in churches or other religious organizations, recreation or community centers, and public housing projects.

Figure 3-6. Number of summers the site operated a summer meal program



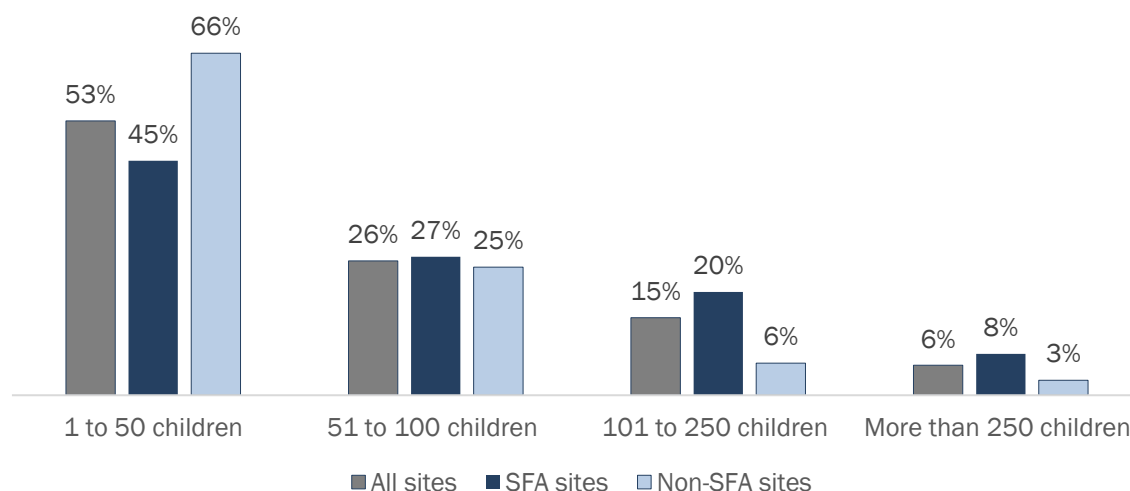
Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 794; weighted n = 58,421.
Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

The majority of sites (52%) have been operating summer meal programs between two and five years (see Figure 3-6). For about one in five sites (19%), 2018 was the first summer the site operated. A small percentage of sites (3%) has been operating summer meal programs for 20 or more summers. On average, sites have operated their summer meal programs for five summers, with the median number of summers in operation equal to three (data not shown). A higher percentage (21%) of SFSP sites were in their first year of operation compared with SSO sites (11%).

Average daily attendance at summer meal sites ranges from 1 to 1,000 children.¹⁵ The majority of sites (53%) have an average daily attendance of 50 children or fewer (see Figure 3-7). Sites with non-SFA sponsors are significantly more likely to have an average daily attendance of 50 children or fewer than SFA-sponsored sites (66% and 45%, respectively).

¹⁵The average number of children served each day was missing for 18 survey responses; these values were imputed. Imputation was carried out using Westat's proprietary imputation software, AutoImpute. It uses regression modeling with other auxiliary variables available for imputation to define imputation cells; hot-deck imputation is used to fill the missing values by randomly selected donor values.

Figure 3-7. Site average daily attendance



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 932; weighted n = 67,299.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for the following categories: “1 to 50,” “101 to 250,” and “More than 250.” The average number of children served each day was missing for 18 survey responses; these values were imputed. Imputation was carried out using Westat’s proprietary imputation software, AutoImpute. It uses regression modeling with other auxiliary variables available for imputation to define imputation cells; hot-deck imputation is used to fill the missing values by randomly selected donor values.

Overall, in more than 7 in 10 sites, all children and teens in the surrounding area can attend the site (see Table 3-3). Nearly 90 percent (88%) of open sites report that all children in the area surrounding the site can attend, compared with 20 percent of closed sites (data not shown).¹⁶ This percentage is significantly higher for SFA-sponsored sites than for non-SFA sites (81% and 71%, respectively). In 20 percent of sites, only children and/or teens who enroll can attend the summer meal program. Requiring enrollment to attend the site occurs more frequently with non-SFA sites (26%) than with SFA sites (17%).

¹⁶It is possible that open sites that report limits on program attendance may do so based on site capacity or safety concerns. Closed sites that report their programs are open to all children in the area would still be required to ensure that at least half of the children at the site are from households with incomes at or below 185 percent of poverty in order to receive program reimbursement.

Table 3-3. Who can attend the summer meal program site

Who can attend the summer meal program site	All sites (%)	SFA sites (%)	Non-SFA sites (%)
All children and teens	77.4	81.3*	71.0
Only children and/or teens who are enrolled in the program	20.0	16.5*	25.7
Other	2.6	2.2	3.3
Number of sites (unweighted)	941	617	324
Number of sites (weighted)	68,057	42,387	25,670

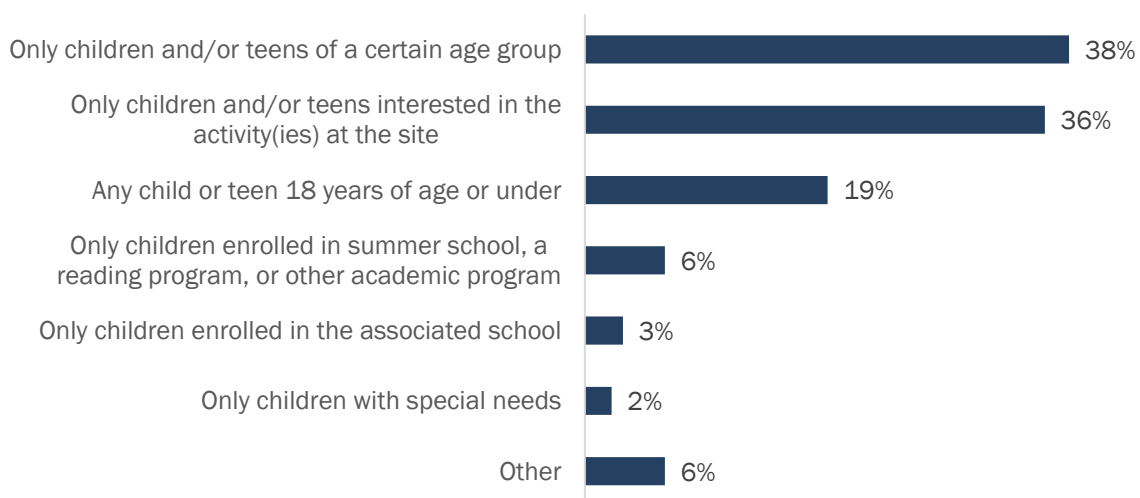
Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Other includes sites that reported all children and those who are enrolled in the program could attend their sites, sites that do not enroll children but restrict attendance to certain age groups, and sites that serve adults as well as children.

*Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Sites that report that they restrict attendance to enrolled children and/or teens most often describe those who may enroll in their program as only children of a certain age group (38% of sites that require enrollment) (see Figure 3-8). Besides restricting enrollment by age, sites also limit enrollment to children interested in the site's activities (36% of sites that require enrollment). Some sites that report that they require enrollment (19%) appear to be requiring enrollment for administrative purposes because these sites allow any child or teen 18 years or younger to enroll.

Figure 3-8. Children who may enroll in a site's program, among sites that require enrollment



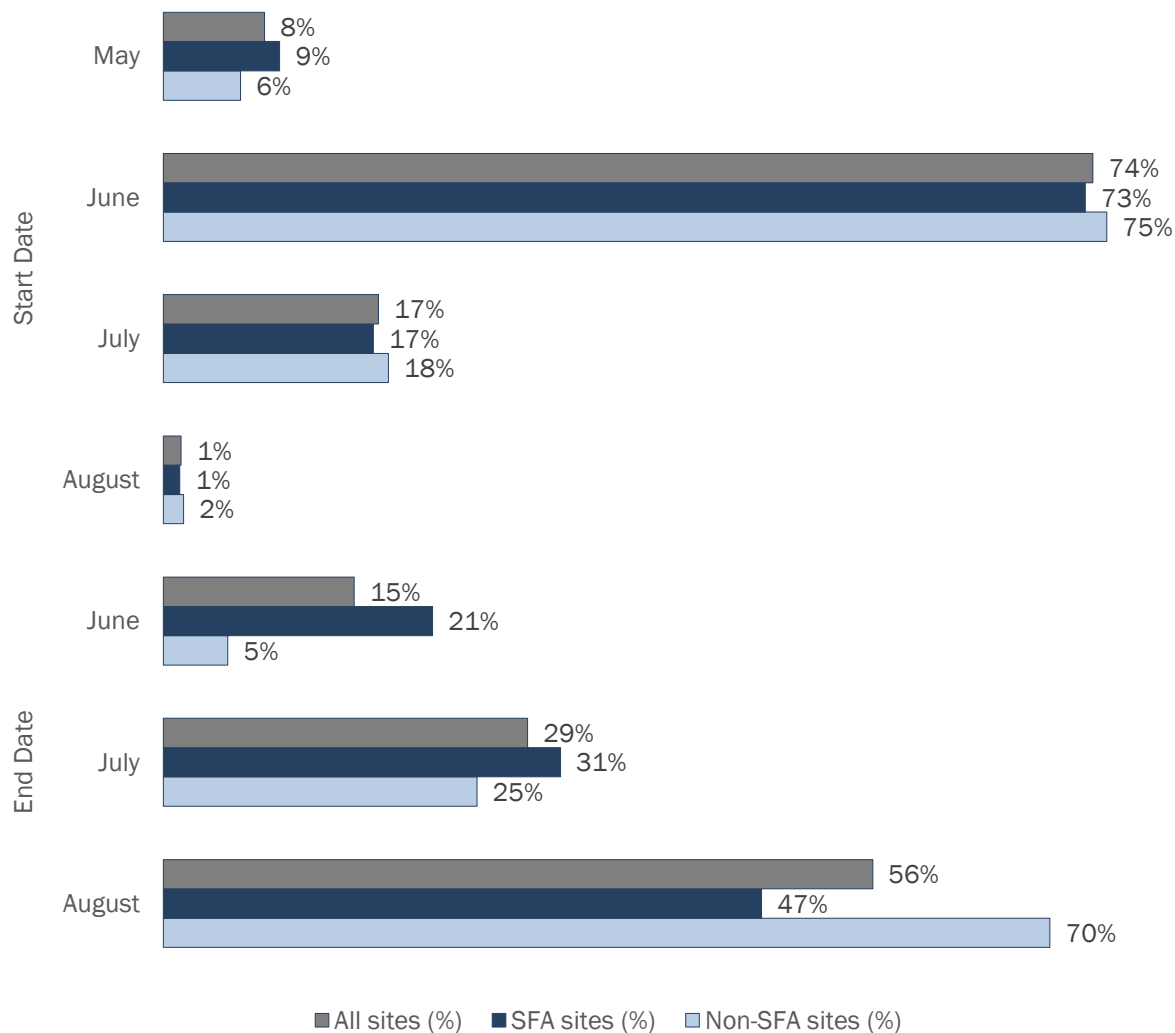
Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 241; weighted n = 13,600.

Notes: Respondents selected all that apply.

3.2.2 Operating Schedules

Meal programs typically run from June through August. About three-quarters of meal program sites (74%) start in June and 56 percent end in August (see Figure 3-9). SFA-sponsored sites are more likely than non-SFA sites to end meal service in June (21% and 5%, respectively), while non-SFA sites are more likely to end meal service in August than SFA sites (70% and 47%, respectively).

Figure 3-9. Start and end of meal service by month



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Start month unweighted n = 895, weighted n = 64,383; End month unweighted n = 909, weighted n = 65,139. Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. One site had a September end date.

*Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for the following categories: "June end dates" and "August end dates."

On average, sites operate summer meal service for seven weeks, with sites sponsored by SFAs in operation for a significantly shorter time than non-SFA sites (6 weeks and 8 weeks, respectively) (see Table 3-4). SFA-sponsored sites were less than half as likely to operate for more than eight weeks as non-SFA sites (20% of SFA sites compared with 46% of non-SFA sites). Sites operate an average of 4.5 days per week, which did not differ significantly by sponsor type.

Table 3-4. Site operating schedules: Number of weeks in operation and number of days in operation in a typical week

Number of weeks in operation	All sites	SFA sites	Non-SFA sites
Percentage of weeks			
1 week	4.2	4.3	4.2
2 weeks	3.1	4.3*	1.1
3 weeks	6.0	9.2*	0.7
4 weeks	12.0	15.3*	6.7
5 to 8 weeks	45.1	47.1	41.7
More than 8 weeks	29.6	19.8*	45.6
Average number of weeks	6.9	6.3*	7.8
Median number of weeks	6.8	6.0*	7.8
Number of sites (unweighted)	939	616	323
Number of sites (weighted)	67,898	42,300	25,598
Number of days in operation in a typical week	All sites (%)	SFA sites (%)	Non-SFA sites (%)
Fewer than 5 days a week	33.8	39.0*	25.2
5 days a week	65.1	60.8*	72.3
6 days a week	0.8	0.2*	1.8
7 days a week	0.3	0.0*	0.7
Average number of days	4.5	4.5	4.6
Median number of days	4.2	4.2	4.3
Number of sites (unweighted)	947	621	326
Number of sites (weighted)	68,442	42,634	25,807

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

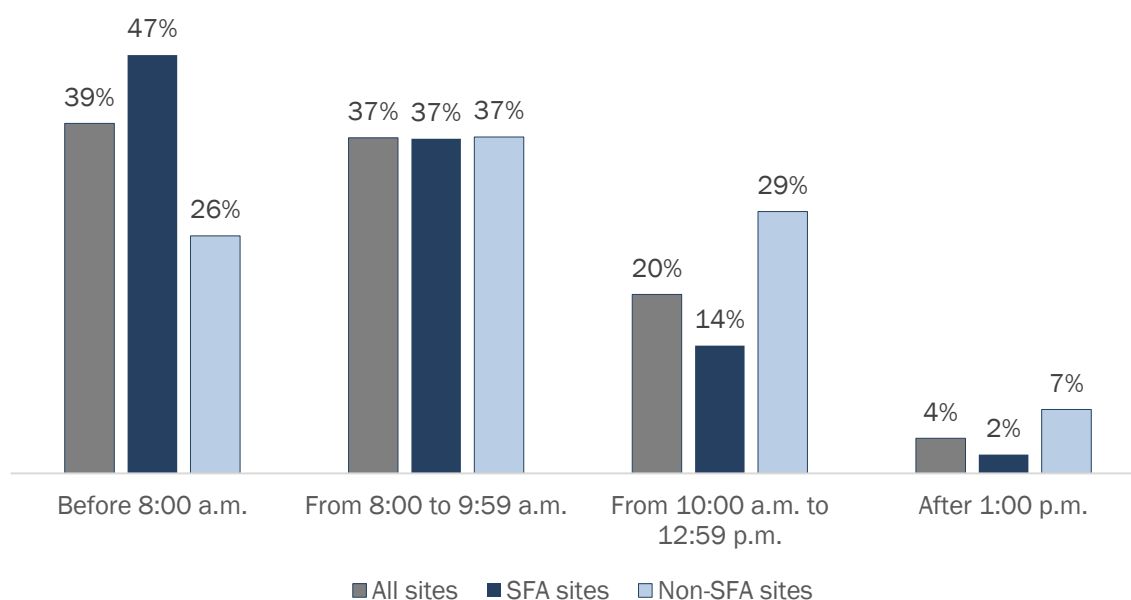
Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Sites can start their daily operations at any time throughout the day, but for 39 percent of all sites children arrive on site before 8:00 a.m. (see Figure 3-10). For a larger percentage of non-SFA sites than SFA sites (29% and 14%, respectively), children arrive on site at or after 10:00 a.m. Few sites, four percent overall, have start times of 1:00 p.m. or later. Open sites are significantly more likely to have start times at or after 10:00am than closed sites (27% compared to 9%). The later start times

for open sites are in line with the fact that open sites are significantly more likely than closed sites to serve only one meal or snack (27% vs. 15%), which is most likely to be lunch. (Data not shown.)

Figure 3-10. Site operating schedules: Normal daily start times

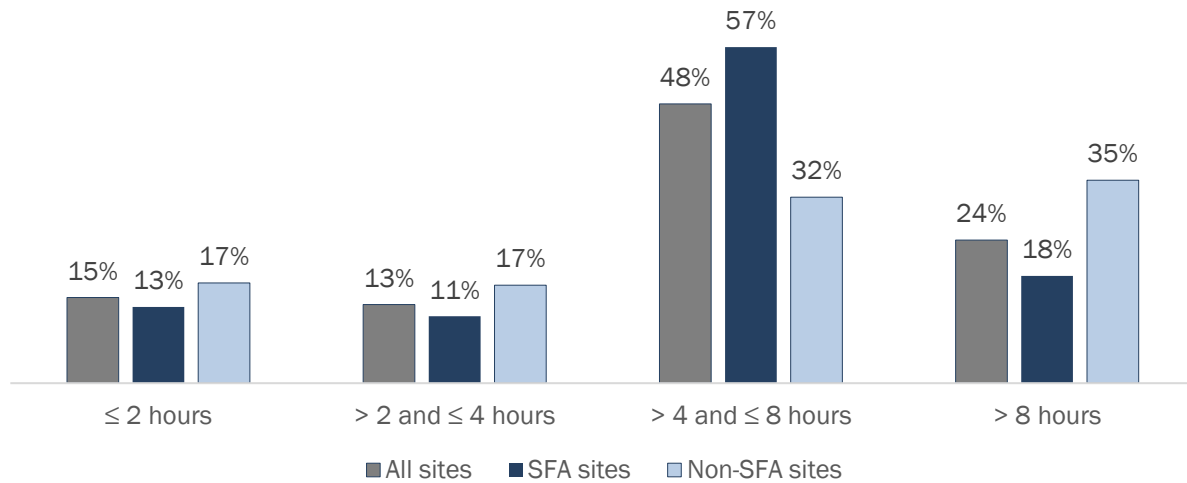


Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 929; weighted n = 67,279.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for the following categories: “Before 8:00 a.m.,” “From 10:00 a.m. to 12:59 p.m.,” and “After 1:00 p.m.”

More than half (57%) of sites operate between four and eight hours (see Figure 3-11). Sites operate an average of 5.9 hours daily (median 5.3) (data not shown). Sites sponsored by SFAs are more likely to be open longer hours than non-SFA sites, with 75 percent of SFA sites operating more than 4 hours compared to 67 percent of non-SFA sites.

Figure 3-11. Site operating schedules: Number of operating hours



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 916; weighted n = 66,673.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests for the following categories: "> 4 and ≤ 8 hours" and "> 8 hours."

3.3 Characteristics of Children Served, Site Activities, and Transportation Offered

Children who receive meals from summer meal sites are most often of elementary school age.

Almost all sites provide both free meals and activities to children who attend the site. While most sites report that transportation is needed for children to get to and from the site, less than one-third provide transportation.

3.3.1 Characteristics of Children Served

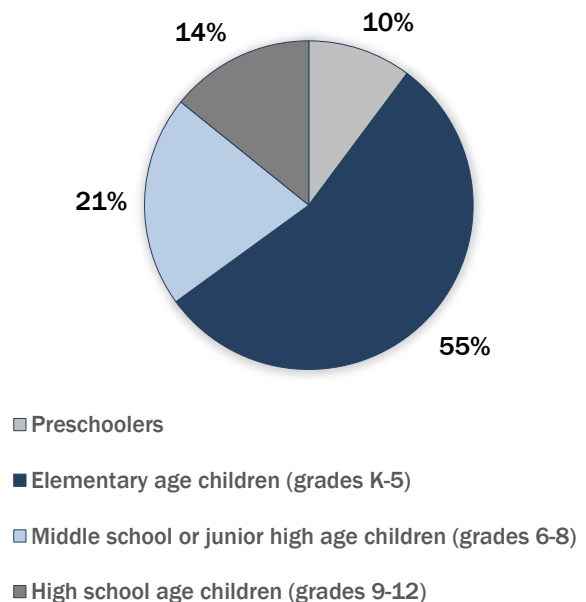
Children who receive meals from summer meal sites are most often of elementary school age. On average, sites serve 55 percent of their meals to elementary school age children on a typical day (see Figure 3-12). They serve 21 percent of meals to middle school age children, 14 percent to high school age children, and 10 percent to preschoolers.

On a typical day, sites serve about equal numbers of boys and girls. Almost all sites serve both boys and girls, with just 0.8 percent of sites serving girls only and 0.7 percent of sites serving boys only. (Data not shown.)

Summer meal programs serve a racially and ethnically diverse set of children. Table 3-5 shows the average and median percentage of meals served to children by race/ethnicity. Sites

serve, on average, about 40 percent of their meals to African American children. Non-SFA sites are more likely to serve African American children than SFA-sponsored sites (52% vs. 32%), while SFA-sponsored sites are more likely to serve Hispanic and White children.

Figure 3-12. Characteristics of children served – Average percentage of meals served by age group



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 909; weighted n = 65,315.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table 3-5. Characteristics of children served: average percentage of meals served by race/ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	All sites (%)	SFA sites (%)	Non-SFA sites (%)
Black or African American			
Average	39.9	32.2*	52.2
Median	29.6	23.9*	49.9
Hispanic or Latino			
Average	26.2	28.9*	21.9
Median	14.4	18.5*	9.3
White			
Average	28.5	33.8*	19.8
Median	17.7	24.5*	8.0
Other			
Average	5.5	5.1	6.1
Median	0.0	0.0	0.0
Number of sites (unweighted)	909	591	318
Number of sites (weighted)	65,259	40,318	24,941

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

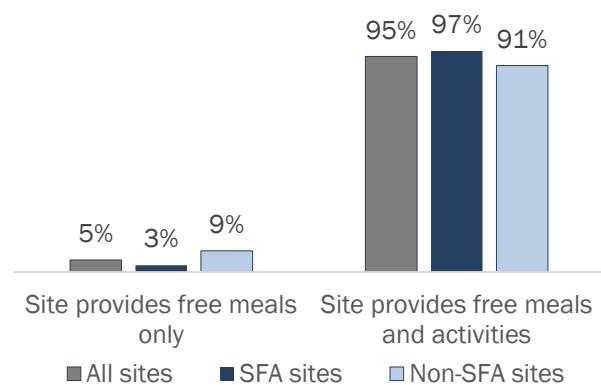
Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

3.3.2 Site Activities

Almost all sites (95%) provide both free meals and activities to children who attend the site (see Figure 3-13). There is a small percentage of sites, however, that only provide free meals and these sites are more likely to be non-SFA sites (9%) than SFA-sponsored sites (3%).

Figure 3-13. Providing free meals only compared with providing meals and activities



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Sample limited to sites that use USDA Foods. Unweighted n=942; weighted n=67,918.

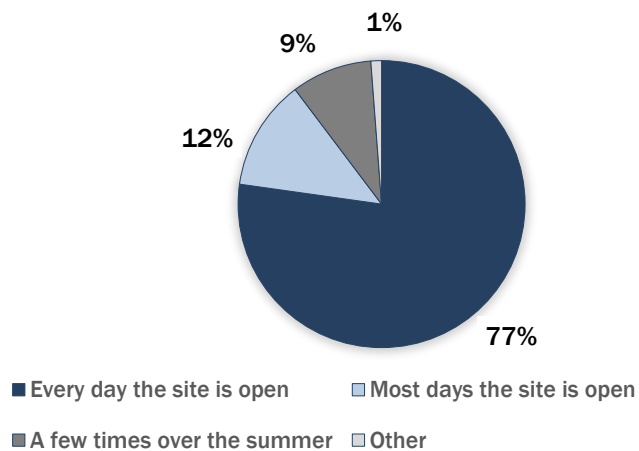
Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

“We offer activities to engage the kids in physical activities and offer them more than a meal. We have things like balls, jump ropes, bubbles, and coloring books. We also partner with a number of organizations to bring in more formal programming. [Participating children] got visits from [NAME] Museum of Art, and they led more formal types of crafts and activities for the kids.”

– Program Staff

When summer meal sites offer activities to children, they most often offer activities every day (77% of sites) or most days (12% of sites) the site is open (see Figure 3-14). Nine percent of sites report that they provide activities only a few times over the summer. Another one percent of sites indicate a different frequency of offering activities; for instance, they may provide an activity such as a coloring sheet or free books once a week or provide summer school activities to those enrolled, but offer no activities for other children who attend the site for free meals.

Figure 3-14. Frequency of activities offered to children at summer meal sites, among sites that offer activities



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Menu Planning Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 827; weighted n = 59,395.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

More than three-fourths of sites offer more than one activity, with 35 percent offering between two and four activities, and 43 percent offering five or more activities (see Table 3-6). SFA sites tend to offer fewer activities than non-SFA sites, with 65 percent of non-SFA sites offering five or more activities compared to just 30 percent of SFA sites. Closed sites are more likely to provide a wide range of activities. Sixty-seven percent of closed sites report offering five or more activities compared to 38 percent of open sites. (Data not shown.)

Table 3-6. Number of activities offered

Number of activities	All sites (%)	SFA sites (%)	Non-SFA sites (%)
1 activity	22.2	30.9*	8.5
2 to 4 activities	34.5	39.3*	26.9
5 or more activities	43.3	29.8*	64.5
Number of sites (unweighted)	764	490	274
Number of sites (weighted)	54,513	33,337	21,176

Data Source: Site Survey question B3. Includes sites offering activities only.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

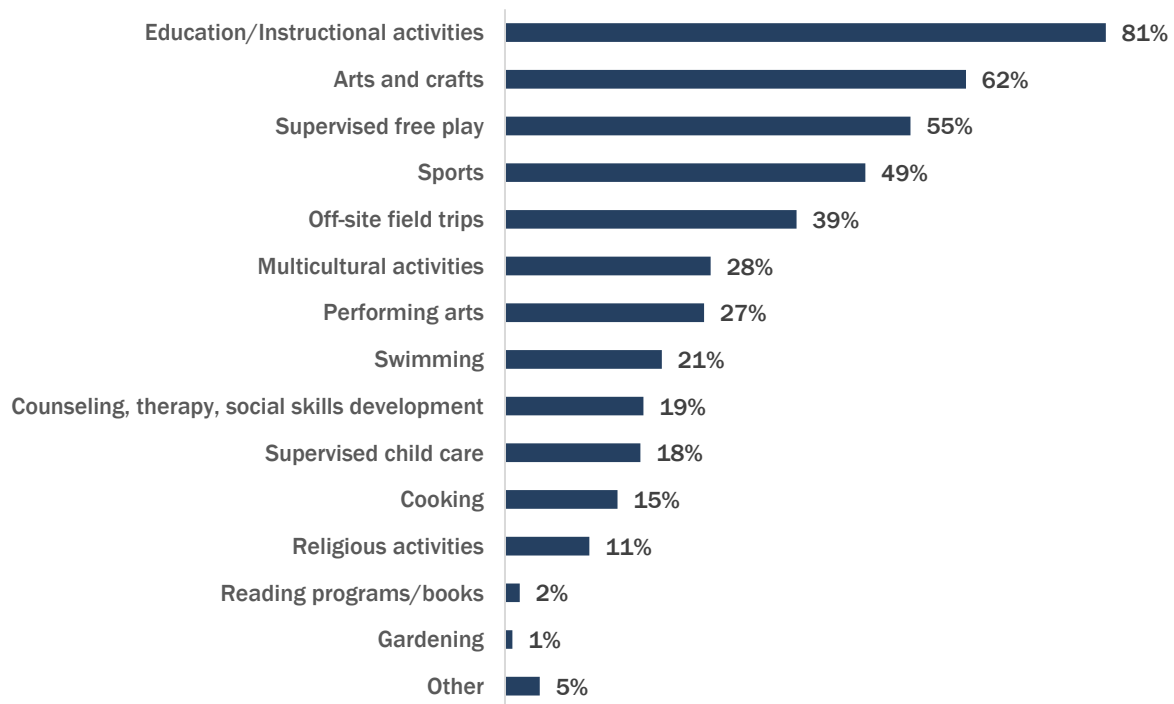
Education/instructional activities are the most common activities offered to children at summer meal sites, offered by 81 percent of sites, followed by arts and crafts (62% of sites), supervised free play (55% of sites), and sports (49% of sites) (see Figure 3-15). Non-SFA sites tend to provide a greater variety of activities than SFA-sponsored sites. A significantly higher percentage of non-SFA sites report that they provide each type of activity shown in Figure 3-15 with the exception of education/instructional activities and reading programs/books. (Data not shown.)

Sponsor and site perspectives: site activities

During interviews, 12 of 38 sponsor and site staff said that availability of educational, arts and crafts, or recreational activities is the greatest factor promoting children's attendance, and that lack of activities is a deterrent to consistent program participation. Several sponsors and site staff whose programs are open sites reported increased meal program participation when the sites offered activities. Conversely, one SFA sponsor noted a decline in participation after they discontinued activities at their sites due to lack of funding.

Sources: In-depth interviews with 19 current summer meal program sponsors and 19 summer meal site staff.

Figure 3-15. Types of activities offered to children at summer meal sites



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Unweighted n = 764; weighted n = 54,513.
 Notes: Respondents checked all that apply.

“Our summer meal participation has declined over the years due in part to the district’s lack of money to provide activities for kids that are not part of an enrolled program going on at the district.”

– Program Sponsor

“I think we have seen a slight shift in more partners that really are providing those structured enrichment activities because I think when we look at participation at the site level, engaging youth throughout the day is really important, and we see higher participation at sites that are offering structured enrichment programs.”

– Program Sponsor

3.3.3 Transportation Availability

Access to meal sites is an important issue for children's participation. Most sites (89%) report that children need transportation to get to and from the site. However, while children need transportation to attend most sites, only 30 percent of sites provide this service (see Table 3-7). SFA-sponsored sites are more likely to provide transportation than non-SFA-sponsored sites. Non-SFA sites are twice as likely as SFA sites to report that transportation is not needed to attend their sites (16% compared with 8%), which may be a function of the greater use of sites such as mobile food trucks, public housing or apartment sites, and parks and playgrounds by non-SFA sponsored sites. When children live near the site, they do not need transportation to attend. When sites report that children do not need transportation to attend the site, it is most often because children live near the site (84% of those sites that say children do not need transportation to attend). (Data not shown.)

Sponsor and site perspectives: transportation

Children's ability to get to and from sites and the availability of transportation assistance where needed were highlighted as key determinants of child participation in summer meal programs by sponsor and site staff in 12 of 38 in-depth interviews and eight survey write-in comments. Those sponsors and sites that have vehicles to transport children credit this as the major factor facilitating child attendance.

Sources: In-depth interviews with 19 current summer meal program sponsors, 19 summer meal site staff, and open-ended survey respondent comments from the Site Survey.

Table 3-7. Provision of transportation

Sites provide transportation	All sites (%)	SFA sites (%)	Non-SFA sites (%)
Yes	29.9	36.9*	18.6
No, not provided	59.3	55.4*	65.6
No, not needed	10.8	7.7*	15.8
Number of sites (unweighted)	935	611	324
Number of sites (weighted)	67,529	41,853	25,676

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

*Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

When sites provide transportation, 86 percent provide it free to all children or provide a voucher for public transportation (see Table 3-8). About 1 in 10 sites (11%) includes the cost of transportation in a fee the program charges for overall programming at the site.¹⁷ Only one percent of sites offering

¹⁷ The fee is not for meal service, which is free.

transportation provide transportation for a separate fee. While the majority of both SFA- and non-SFA-sponsored sites that provide transportation do it for free, SFA-sponsored sites are more likely to provide free transportation than non-SFA sites (89% and 71%, respectively). Similarly, non-SFA sites are more likely than SFA sites to include the cost of transportation in the program fee (24% compared with 7%, respectively).

Table 3-8. Site transportation characteristics, among sites offering transportation

Transportation characteristics	All sites (%)	Sponsor type	
		SFA sites (%)	Non-SFA sites (%)
Cost to participants			
Free	84.6	88.8*	70.8
Provided for a separate fee	2.9	3.2	2.0
Included in the program fee	11.2	7.4*	23.6
Provided through a voucher for public transportation	1.3	0.6*	3.6
Number of sites (unweighted)	294	230	64
Number of sites (weighted)	19,327	14,854	4,472
Type of participants who are provided transportation			
All children who go to the site	46.2	47.1	43.4
Children who live some distance away from the site	16.7	20.3*	5.8
Those who request it	22.3	17.5	37.3
Children enrolled in a program on site	12.3	13.0	10.1
Other	2.4	2.1	3.4
Number of sites (unweighted)	288	224	64
Number of sites (weighted)	19,222	14,522	4,700
How transportation is provided			
Shuttle buses or vans	60.8	47.1*	81.9
School buses	22.8	35.6*	2.8
Public transportation	18.9	23.8	11.2
Volunteers drive children in their own vehicles	7.9	5.8	11.1
Other	3.1	1.8	5.2
Number of sites (unweighted)	155	103	52
Number of sites (weighted)	9,891	6,020	3,871

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences between SFA sites and non-SFA sites are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Almost half of sites that provide transportation (46%) provide it to all children who go to the site. However, sites may also restrict to whom they provide transportation, providing it only to children who live some distance from the site (17%), those who request it (22%), or those who enroll in a program at the site (12%).

Sites that provide transportation most often use shuttle buses or vans to transport children (61% of sites). This is true for both SFA and non-SFA sites, although SFA sites also often use school buses (23%), which are rarely used by non-SFA sites (3%). For nearly one in five sites (19%), children go to and from the site using public transportation.

“We also had two school buses this summer that went out into the community to different site locations to offer summer meals to children that we know could otherwise not find transportation to a school summer meal site.”

– Program Sponsor

“One year, the most successful, independent open site we ever had was this little bitty church in a storefront.... They would run their little church van, and they would take a collection to pay for the gas and they would run around the neighborhood. Now none of these people lived that far apart—it is all in the city center—but it was not safe for the kids to walk and they were trusted in their neighborhood.”

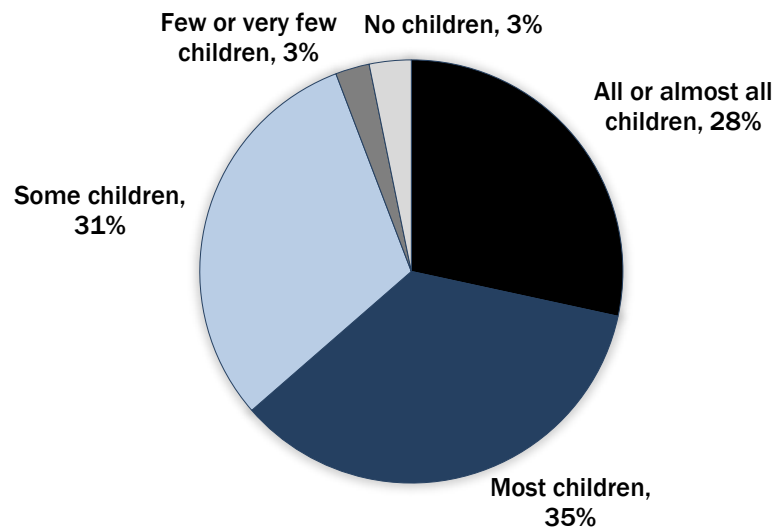
– Program Sponsor

“[We have] very low participation. Buses do not run during the summer and students do not have a way to come in and participate.”

– Program Staff

On a typical day, for 63 percent of sites that provide transportation, all or most children use the site-provided transportation to get to and from the site (see Figure 3-16). And, in 31 percent of these sites, some children use the transportation provided. In only six percent of these sites, few or no children use the transportation provided.

Figure 3-16. Children's use of site-provided transportation on a typical day (not including field trips)



Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs. Sample limited to sites that provide transportation. Unweighted n = 297; weighted n = 19,872.

Notes: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

4. Sponsor and Site Perspectives on Summer Meal Program Participation

“Providing meals at schools, churches, community centers, parks, and libraries has ensured that no kid in our community went hungry this summer.”

– Program Sponsor

Participation among children with the highest nutritional risk is central to the success of the summer meal programs.

This chapter examines the promotional activities for outreach to children and

parents; sponsor and site thoughts regarding program expansion; ideas for improving program participation of children, sites, and sponsors; and the reasons why sponsors decide to discontinue program participation. Results presented in this chapter are based primarily on data from the in-depth interviews with a subset of site staff and current and former program sponsors in the summer and fall of 2018, along with data and open-ended comments from surveys of sponsors and sites.

4.1 Promotional Activities

Promotional activities are an important component of successful implementation of a program. Program sponsors are more directly involved with promotional activities for open sites, whereas closed sites tended to have their own recruitment efforts in place. Common promotional activities include the use of written materials and public media outlets, with several sponsors and sites using social media. Outreach efforts generally begin at the end of the school year, though some sponsors and sites begin outreach earlier. State agencies are sometimes a source of assistance for sponsors and sites, though several interview respondents requested more support.

4.1.1 Types of Promotional Activities

Promotional activities used by sponsors differed for sites that were open to all children versus closed sites that enrolled children. Most sponsors with open sites indicated in interviews that they conducted at least some of the summer

“Any time you have something like [free summer meals], you promote it the most that you can. I tried to promote it in every single way that I could think of to get these kids here because they should not be hungry, not in 2018.”

–Program Site

meal program outreach themselves, though open sites also do their own outreach. Sponsors do limited, if any, outreach for closed sites, which have their own recruitment efforts and publicity designed to enroll children in their programs' activities.¹⁸ All sponsors working with open sites and all but one of the open sites interviewed reported using a combination of methods and locations to get the word out about the summer meal program. Below is a summary of the specific methods and timing of summer meal program outreach, as reported by the 15 sponsors and 14 site staff with open sites during in-depth telephone interviews.

- **Written materials**

Written materials were the most frequently used outreach method, with 13 of the 15 sponsors and 12 of the 14 site staff with open sites reporting using flyers, informational cards, and/or door hangers with information about the availability of the free summer meals. Sponsors and sites distributed these written materials to the children at school or on school buses and to their homes through the mail or email. The majority also said that they distributed posters and provided stacks of flyers for distribution at community sites such as churches, food banks and other hunger relief agencies, community service organizations, public libraries, grocery stores, fast food restaurants, and other local businesses.

"We just advertise every way we can. We send flyers home on the school buses and the bus drivers have to pass [them] out. We put in on our website. After the first of May, we put it in the newspaper. It is also by word of mouth, directly talking to them as well."
– Program Sponsor

- **Public media outlets**

Public media outlets were the second most frequent outreach method reported by interviewed sponsors, although site staff rarely mentioned this outreach method. Fourteen of the 15 interviewed sponsors with open sites described placing stories or advertising in the media. Of this group, 12 secured news articles or placed community event announcements in local newspapers and shopping guides, and seven reported having public service announcements (PSAs), news stories, or interviews about the program on local television and/or radio stations. Given the cost and resources needed for this kind of outreach, it is not surprising that only three of the open sites reported conducting

¹⁸ Closed sites were not asked about promotional activities in interviews.

newspaper, television or radio outreach themselves, though sponsoring organizations may have provided this kind of advertising for these sites.

- **Social media**

The next most frequently reported outreach method, reported by 9 interviewed sponsors and 7 interviewed sites, was social media, with Facebook pages and posts being the most frequently cited. Eight sponsors and four sites noted that their organization’s website hosts a page with information about the location and times of summer meal programs. One sponsor explained that in their State this includes an interactive element developed by the State agency allowing parents to find the closest site to their home address. Additionally, six sponsors and six sites reported using large outdoor signage (sometimes provided by the State agency) including lawn signs, banners or marquees at locations that would be highly visible to the target populations.

“We also have a pretty good Facebook presence, and so we start advertising right away. Once the program is in session, we are constantly putting up little things for parents just to remind them that their children can come and get free meals.” – Program Site

- **Grassroots**

Four sponsors and two sites described what they considered a grassroots approach to outreach that involved developing partnerships with local community organizations (e.g., hunger relief organizations, churches, and public libraries). These sponsors said that the community partners have closer ties in the community and can reach the families they work with through various channels, including word-of-mouth referrals, flyers, social media outreach, and posts on their own webpage with information on the names, locations, and times of summer meal sites in the area.

“We also started a hunger council with partnerships with the community organizations and created a map where community members could go online and search and see where their nearest summer program location is, and what times they are open.” – Program Sponsor

“A lot of what happens for us with advertising comes from word of mouth... having someone say, “Yes, it’s okay for your children. Your children are going to be safe and taken care of participating in this program.” We rely pretty heavily on community champions to sort of spread the word and vouch for us as a trusted resource for the community.” – Program Site

4.1.2 When Promotional Activities Occur

The study asked about outreach relative to the end of the school year and the start of summer meal programming. The majority of sponsor staff with open sites (11 of 15) and open site staff (8 of 14) said that they conducted their first big outreach effort very near the end of the school year, usually within the last few weeks. Among this group, most said they conducted additional rounds of outreach when the program began and throughout the summer to bolster participation or to advertise the opening of new sites. Staff from a few sponsors and sites (4 and 3, respectively) said they start outreach earlier in the school year and then conduct another round of outreach directly to the families right at the end of the school year. Two site staff whose programs started in the middle of the summer said they conducted outreach close to the start of their program.

“[If] you put [posters] up too soon, people start to ignore them. So we try to put them up 10 days to 2 weeks beforehand. We do the door-to-door [delivery of flyers] the weekend before we start.” – Program Site

*“It’s always an interesting balance of being too early and/or too late—especially with families—because people are busy and don’t always hold on to the information.”
– Program Site*

4.1.3 Support from State Agencies

While a few of the sponsors indicated that their State agencies provide them support in conducting outreach, 6 of the 19 interviewed sponsors said they lack sufficient funding, expertise, or community-engagement for outreach, and four of the survey write-in comments asked for more support from the State agency or USDA for summer meal program outreach, including advertising in the media.

“[We] would like more information on how to get the word out to more students to increase our participation numbers at our various sites.” – Program Sponsor

“This is such a fantastic program. We find that, even though we do much publicity, there could be more awareness of this meal program via television commercials or radio advertisements from the State/government agencies involved.” – Program Sponsor

4.1.4 Recommendations for Improving Outreach to Challenging Populations

A small number of sponsors and site staff offered specific recommendations for improving outreach to meet the challenge of low participation. They suggested the following:

- Communicate directly with parents;
- Develop different outreach strategies for different target groups, including for older children and for rural and remote areas;
- To encourage children to attend high school youth sites, consider having youth ambassadors who can educate their peers about the program; and
- Engage community members in outreach, including diverse groups such as non-English-speaking individuals.

4.2 Program Expansion

The sponsor and site staff interviewed viewed program expansion differently, with the majority of sponsors indicating they would like to expand, while the majority of site staff saying they lacked the capacity to expand. Seventeen sponsors (11 of 19 in interviews and 6 in open-ended survey responses) said they would like to serve more children in their communities who need food assistance during the summer. Sponsors indicated they would like to expand their participation by increasing the number of sites they sponsor, serving more children at each site, expanding the number of meal service days, and/or continuing meal service closer to the start of the school year. The majority of those sponsors who said they would like to expand their program also said that they would like to be able to provide and receive federal reimbursement for three meals or two meals and a snack each day.

In discussing barriers to their expansion of meals and hours, sponsors most frequently mentioned programmatic rules and their own resource limitations (e.g., transportation assistance and staff for adult supervision). The most commonly mentioned barrier to increasing the number of meal services provided were the summer meal program (SFSP or SSO) rules, which by statute only allow sponsor reimbursement for two meals (including snacks) if a program is not a camp or a migrant site.

When asked if they were interested in and able to expand their program meal service or days in operation, the large majority of interviewed site staff (from open sites) said that, regardless of their potential interest, they or their sponsor did not have the capacity. Since the majority of site staff respondents run their summer meal program along with other activities, the most common reason for not being able to expand was that their meal service must match the operational hours and days of other activities offered at the site (e.g., summer school or recreational activities). Supervisors from mobile sites and community organizations also commonly cited limited resources for program staffing (paid or volunteer) as a common barrier.

Those site staff that did indicate they would like to expand their program (a small number of interviewed site staff and six site staff who provided open-ended survey comments) said they would like to expand by serving more meals and snacks, continuing meal service until the school year begins, or serving meals on the weekend.

There was an interest on the part of many sponsor and site interviewees in expanding the number of children served by their program, even though they realized there are barriers preventing this. The three most frequently reported factors that sponsors and site staff perceive as barriers to increasing child participation at open sites included:

- **Remote Locations.** 20 sponsor and site staff (12 in interviews and 8 in survey comments) said that in rural areas, sites can be far from where the children live, and in non-rural areas, it may not be safe for the children to walk to the site, yet there is no public or private transportation to bring the children to the sites;
- **Lack of Activities.** 16 sponsor and site staff (12 in interviews and 4 in survey comments) cited the lack of on-site activities for children to engage in outside of the meal time as a barrier to increasing participation; and
- **Limited Shelter.** 13 sponsor and site staff (12 in interviews and 1 in survey comments) noted that their outdoor sites' lack of shelter from summer rains and extreme heat deterred parents from sending their children to these sites.

In addition, five site staff (four in interviews and one in survey comments) mentioned safety concerns at their site, including child bullying, an unsafe environment, and/or lack of adequate adult supervision. Mentioned in survey comments was the provision of cold meals when children prefer hot meals. In that regard, one program noted that they are trying to increase their participation by providing hot meals more often. Finally, two interviewed sponsor staff noted that the difficulty in finding community partners willing to take on the program also hindered program expansion.

“Many children live here but do not attend because of a bullying issue that has been going on for years.” – Program Site

*“This year we have reached out to another site to open, but have not had much success in achieving this. I am saddened by this, as I know there are children in this mobile home park who are not able to have transportation to the summer meal site at the school.”
– Program Sponsor*

“We are trying to change the meals served to encourage more children to eat the meals. Currently cold cuts are served and sometimes the kids would prefer a hot meal. Trying to have at least one hot meal per week at all sites. One site has nearly 300 kids—this will be difficult. Most sites are smaller so will try to have more hot meals to encourage participation.” – Program Sponsor

4.3 Encouraging Program Participation of Sponsors, Sites, and Children

While sponsors and sites provided many positive comments about the program and its benefits, they also recognize the program has challenges that hinder the participation of sponsors, sites, and children. During the 38 interviews and in 36 open-ended survey comments, many current sponsor and site staff provided suggestions for changes to the program regulations and statutes that they believe would improve program service, increase participation, and/or ease administrative burdens for program staff. All of these suggestions have implications for improving program participation.

4.3.1 Improving Sponsor and Site Participation

Program sponsors and site staff offered the following suggestions to increase site and sponsor participation:

- **Simplify and/or reduce the program paperwork requirements and shift the focus of the review process from enforcement to program improvement** (8 respondents).

“I think the paperwork and documentation rules have become almost burdensome for the organizations that are involved now—the scrutiny and the technique—the technicality of it. I know that there has to be accountability and a proper way of doing it, but I think that there should be more modern ways of training so there would be more emphasis on prevention than policing.” – Program Sponsor

“We would serve more children, but when your numbers go up you have to go online and get into [State system] and change all the numbers. Like you went from 50 at a site to 75 and then if you forgot to do it then there’s a red flag when you go to submit your claim that you underestimated. You can’t claim more than what you estimated, but with open

sites it's hard to estimate so there's an incentive to not serve more children. USDA should look at this meal estimation documentation process for open sites." – Program Sponsor

"There's a lot of paperwork that has to be done beforehand and set up in the computer system. If I only had one or two sites it'd be a piece of cake, but 11 sites, staffing, salaries, education, paperwork, count sheets, whose signature is on this? Did they count it right? We have to go out and do a preoperational site visit and then we have to do an evaluation visit the very first week. Within four weeks, we do another evaluation on them. We are run ragged. It has to be made easier so it's worth running this program for all types of sponsors where it's not just a school-based program." – Program Sponsor

- **Change the program statute to increase meal reimbursement rates.** (6 respondents).

"The number of children can change dramatically from day to day, making it hard to predict how many meals to prepare. With this in consideration, the reimbursement rate is too low. While food costs have increased, the reimbursement [rate] has not." – Program Staff

"It's challenging to find vendors to participate in the program due to the reimbursement rates. Food cost increases yearly and sometimes two or three times a year and the reimbursement rates do not support these changes." – Program Sponsor

- **Change the program statute to allow reimbursement for meals that were planned but not served in cases of severe rain similar to that for extreme heat days** to assist outdoor sites that cannot operate or have severely reduced participation (2 respondents).

"One of the biggest challenges that I'm sure every sponsor is facing is weather. That is the biggest challenge. It rains a lot here and, if it's raining, our park sites actually have to close for the day because they're outside. If the USDA could come up with some type of procedure or rule saying that, yes, if it is a rain day and it is actually raining out, we can reimburse you for those meals." – Program Sponsor

"There should be a policy on rainy days as there is for heat. Open sites are harsh. Twenty kids one day and nine the next. We are only reimbursed for the meals served, even if we need to prepare a reasonable number." – Program Sponsor

4.3.2 Improving Child Participation

Program sponsors and sites who participated in in-depth interviews had the following suggestions for increasing the participation of children in the summer meal programs:

- **Change program statute to lift the congregate feeding requirement for programs where children cannot stay on-site to eat due to transportation or safety issues, or lift it only for outdoor sites on bad weather days** (12 respondents).

“Some parents just did not feel comfortable with the younger children being around older kids. If there was that availability of sending food home and they knew who the kids were they were sending it with, and too, that they could be feeding more kids—everybody wants to do more, it seems like, in our neighborhoods they need it, but the rules don’t always allow us to do that.” – Program Site

“Yeah, congregate [feeding] can be a challenge, especially in some of the parts of our region that are experiencing high rates of violence. Kids wanting to stay outside in a park, sitting on the stairs to eat, or even walking down to their library can be a challenge. The congregate feeding, having that as a requirement, can be prohibitive for those kids to access meals.” – Program Sponsor

“If we are having a driving rain, or if it’s 120 degrees heat index, the kids have to wait outside in the rain or in that incredible heat, as do the adults that brought them, which is even more of a problem if they walked. We need the flexibility to let the kids take the lunch home on those days.” – Program Site

- **Change program statute to allow parents to receive meals with their children** (5 respondents). One of these respondents suggested that instead of lifting the requirement, USDA consider providing waivers to sponsors to experiment to find effective ways to implement this expansion and ensure that it is serving those with the greatest need.

“I think it feels awkward to [only] feed the kids when you can see the parents standing there, and they’re hungry. It’s really awkward. It’s pretty obvious that they’re hungry too. I think it would improve participation a little bit if they maybe could experiment with innovative ways of doing that that don’t overwhelm the program, but actually help expand the program.” – Program Site

“Because it’s so sad to have them [parents] sit watching their children eat and they’re picking off their plate. To me that’s sad. I understand the limits of the program. If you’re going to impact hunger you want to do it in a way that makes people feel better, not feel bad. That parent can’t feel good that he’s taking his child’s food.” – Program Sponsor

- **Change program statute to expand reimbursement to three meals (including snacks) per day.** This would be comparable to the combination of USDA meal programs that are available to low-income children through school meals and CACFP during the school year (5 respondents).

“In the summer at some of our community sites with day-long activities that have children until late in the day because parents work, we would like to offer two meals and a snack. We think we can do it because during the school year we prepare and offer breakfast, lunch, afterschool snacks, and dinner.” –Program Sponsor

“This site offers structured activities from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., and during that time we provide breakfast in the morning and lunch in the afternoon. Since the children remain until 6 p.m., there is a 5-hour span without a meal service. Another meal would be beneficial.” –Program Site

- **Require sponsors to provide daily options for children with common dietary restrictions** (e.g., no-pork options and vegetarian) (4 respondents).

“We have a majority of Muslim families in our complex and they cannot eat pork or pork products. Every Tuesday on this summer’s menu were ham sandwiches. We need to have more than one option for these children.” – Program Site

“Every summer we have a handful of vegetarian students at the program, but there are no vegetarian options available from the Summer Food Service Program.” Program Site

- **Change program statute to allow for a different model of summer meal delivery or increased food benefits to families with school-age children living in low-income rural areas** where children do not have access to daily programs, or establish sites where they can easily congregate or in areas of extreme poverty where congregate feeding has not been successful. (4 respondents).

“As much as I understand the food safety piece of it, because we have a food pantry, my biggest issue is how, in these rural areas, we can make adjustments to the on-site meal requirements and find different ways to reach more children who need it.” – Program Sponsor

“The summer meals program rules need to be revised to make it easier to serve children in rural areas and/or where children are geographically so far apart that you cannot serve them all meals at remote sites. Our children do not have access to daily programs or sites where they can easily congregate. ...Either increase food benefits for these families in the summer or allow summer feeding programs to drop shelf-stable meals off at home sites.” – Program Sponsor

“We have pockets of extreme poverty where door-to-door feeding is much more effective at reaching large numbers of needy children. Congregate feeding sites in these areas have been attempted, but have failed to reach the number of students reached door to door. Congregate feeding in these areas was also not cost effective due to the low numbers served. Please reevaluate door-to-door feeding.” – Program Sponsor

4.4 Reasons for Sponsor Discontinuation

The sponsor survey and interviews with former sponsors investigated reasons for sponsor discontinuation. Very few sponsor survey respondents (less than 2%) indicated that they would probably or definitely not participate in the summer meal program next year (see Table 4-1). The sponsors that reported they definitely would not participate in the program next year did not explain

their decision to discontinue program operations. The six sponsors who responded that they probably would not participate in the summer meal program next year did supply explanations why they might leave the program, and each one had a different reason. Their explanations for considering dropping their participation in the program included: excess costs above reimbursement received; poor relationship with the State administering agency; low participation; difficulty meeting program requirements; decreased local need for sponsors; and staff shortages.

Interviews with 14 sponsors (12 non-SFA and 2 SFA) who discontinued their summer meal program participation in 2018 revealed challenges with maintaining program operations and negative program experiences that resulted in their discontinuation of program sponsorship. The primary reasons these former sponsors gave for why they did not sponsor a summer meal program were negative experiences with the administrative aspects of the program (6 sponsors) and an inability to maintain program operations (5 sponsors). Two sponsors mentioned they secured access to another funding source to provide summer meals at their sites, and one mentioned the site lost eligibility due to fewer free and reduced-price students in the area.

When inability to maintain program operations was the primary reason sponsors gave for discontinuing program sponsorship, they faced a variety of issues. Two former sponsors reported that staff shortages or recent turnover in staffing did not allow them to maintain program operations. One former sponsor indicated that they had had bad experience with their vendor and could not find a reliable quality vendor in their rural area to continue program operations. Another

Table 4-1. Plans to participate in the summer meal program next year

Plans to participate next year	All sponsors (%)
Definitely will	75.0
Probably will	23.1
Probably won't	1.0
Definitely won't	0.9
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	441
Number of sponsors (weighted)	7,124

Source: USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

said they would not likely be able to participate in the near future because they had lost the building where they prepared meals. Finally, a former sponsor that administers a residential summer school enrichment program explained that the organization would not be participating because the program would be having many field trips so the summer meal program would not be appropriate for them.

Two former sponsors said they left the program because they found other funding to continue providing summer meals at their sites. One of these former sponsors, a nonprofit providing summer school and support for high school students to help them graduate and get into college, noted that there was extra money in their fiscal year budget that needed to be spent first and they used it for summer meals. The respondent did not know if those funds would be available again, implying they might return to the program if these funds were not available next year. The other former sponsor was a library, which raised community donations and engaged the community in obtaining food at a lower cost. Although the respondent liked the program's meal standards and menu ideas, they could not keep up with the summer meal program's meal count and food prep documentation requirements and so went to their community to raise private donations. Private donations provided more flexibility, but the respondent was unsure about the sustainability of the funding.

Former sponsors for whom negative program experiences outweighed the positive aspects of program participation generally reported more than one challenge or negative experience with the program. Challenges and concerns expressed by at least two of the former sponsor respondents who ended their program participation due to negative experiences with program administration included: complex and costly initial application and enrollment process (3 former sponsors); burdensome program paperwork (3 former sponsors); less support from the State administering agency than needed (4 former sponsors); a perceived shift by the State agency toward larger sponsors (3 former sponsors); and food waste related to program meal requirements (2 former sponsors).

"These programs are really needed. I think a lot of the people in the State agency have lost touch on why these programs are needed and what the impact that the sponsors have within the community. I understand they have their rules as far as integrity, and as far as some of the other things that they have to make sure are correct, such as receipts and all of that kind of thing. But I think if they want to reach the children there have to be better ways to support and engage community-based organizations as sponsors and help them to run quality programs. There's a level of empathy that's missing."

– Former Sponsor

Former sponsors offered the following recommendations to support sponsor participation and improve program operations:

- Move to electronic submission of required reports.
- Simplify the application forms and process for enrolling sites.
- Change program statute to increase funding to sponsors to reimburse more of the costs of food and program administration.
- Hold State agencies accountable for providing quality training and support because without this, the sponsors are at risk of errors.
- Create supports in program rules and technical assistance to promote and maintain participation of community-based organizations as sponsors. For example, several sponsors suggested that the program's timelines for site enrollment and reviews, the review process itself, accounting/bookkeeping, and minimum cash on hand requirements be made flexible for small nonprofits that do not fit the traditional organizational model of summer meals program sponsors (i.e., SFAs and large food banks).
- Change the program statute to allow exemptions from the congregate feeding requirement; allow food to be taken home as an option.
- Have monitors work as a team with sponsors to make sure the program runs well.

While these former sponsors chose to discontinue their sponsorship of summer meal sites, most of them (12 of 14) also had positive things to say about the program. A large majority praised the program for the benefits it provides to children and their communities by giving organizations the opportunity to serve healthy meals to children who are at risk of hunger and food insecurity when school is out. Former sponsors also noted other benefits of program participation (each expressed by two former sponsors), including reducing the cost of running summer programs, which allows more children to be served; providing employment during the summer for school food service staff; and modeling healthy eating and supplying useful nutrition guidance to sponsoring organizations.

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Appendix A

Supplemental Tables

Appendix A

Supplemental Tables

The supplemental tables in this Appendix provide all the descriptive characteristics presented in the report for all sites and compare sites by program type (SFSP and SSO) and by sponsor type (SFA and non-SFA). These comparisons are made to address the study objectives.

Table A-1. Why sites' SFA sponsors do or do not participate in SSO, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Participation in SSO	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Sites have ever participated in SSO ^a					
Yes	17.5	17.5	-	17.5	-
No	82.5	82.5	-	82.5	-
Number of sites (unweighted)	336	336	-	336	-
Number of sites (weighted)	24,180	24,180	-	24,180	-
Reasons for nonparticipation in 2018 ^a					
Prefer SFSP meal patterns	52.5	52.5	-	52.5	-
Lower SSO reimbursement rates	35.5	35.5	-	35.5	-
Did not know SSO was an option	11.1	11.1	-	11.1	-
Less expensive to run other programs	6.4	6.4	-	6.4	-
Not enough internal funding	4.3	4.3	-	4.3	-
Other	16.5	16.5	-	16.5	-
Number of sites (unweighted)	384	384	-	384	-
Number of sites (weighted)	27,364	27,364	-	27,364	-
Reasons for participation ^b					
Less paperwork	67.0	-	67.0	67.0	-
Easier reviews or monitoring of sites	57.6	-	57.6	57.6	-
Easier administrative reviews by the State agency	36.1	-	36.1	36.1	-
Other	22.8	-	22.8	22.8	-
Number of sites (unweighted)	188	-	188	188	-
Number of sites (weighted)	10,222	-	10,222	10,222	-

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

^a Answered for SFSP sites operated by SFAs only.

^b Answered for 2018 SSO sites.

Table A-2. Sponsor organization type, by summer meal program type

Organization type	Percentage of sponsors		
	All sponsors	Program type	
		SFSP	SSO
Sponsor type			
Public school food authority (SFA)	63.7	53.4*	93.8
Other private nonprofit organization	25.2	33.7*	0.4
Private nonprofit SFA	5.4	5.3	5.8
Local or municipal government agency	3.0	4.1*	0.0
Residential camp	1.5	2.0*	0.0
County government agency	0.7	0.9*	0.0
State government agency	0.1	0.2	0.0
National Youth Sports Program	0.0	0.0	0.0
Other	0.4	0.5	0.0
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	451	342	106
Number of sponsors (weighted)	7,362	5,492	1,846
Private nonprofit type			
Religious organization	33.0	33.1*	0.0
Boys and Girls Club	18.8	18.4*	100.0
Food bank	12.5	12.6	0.0
YMCA	10.6	10.6*	0.0
Sponsor of the Child and Adult Care Food Program	5.9	5.9*	0.0
Other	21.6	21.7*	0.0
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	82	81	1
Number of sponsors (weighted)	1,780	1,772	8

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sponsors that sponsor sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-3. Number of sites sponsored and children served, by summer meal program type

Sites sponsored and children served	Percentage of sponsors		
	All sponsors	Program type	
		SFSP	SSO
Number of sites sponsored			
1	35.2	32.9	42.7
2 - 10	42.5	42.8	41.5
11 - 25	12.2	13.2	9.1
More than 25	10.1	11.1	6.7
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	453	344	106
Number of sponsors (weighted)	7,380	5,509	1,846
Number of children receiving meals and/or snacks per day			
100 or less	31.4	28.6	40.3
101 – 300	25.8	27.2	22.0
301 – 1,000	23.5	24.3	20.3
1,001 - 5,000	12.5	12.1	13.2
More than 5,000	6.8	7.7	4.3
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	453	344	106
Number of sponsors (weighted)	7,380	5,509	1,846

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sponsors that sponsor sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-4. Plans to participate in summer meal program next year, by summer meal program type

Plans to sponsor sites next year	Percentage of sponsors		
	All sponsors	Program type	
		SFSP	SSO
Definitely will	75.0	75.0	75.5
Probably will	23.1	22.5	24.5
Probably won't	1.0	1.3	0.0
Definitely won't	0.9	1.2	0.0
Number of sponsors (unweighted)	441	337	101
Number of sponsors (weighted)	7,124	5,401	1,698

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Sponsor Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sponsors that sponsor sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Table A-5. Site setting, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Setting type	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
School	47.5	40.8*	81.4	65.2*	18.3
Recreation center or community center	12.8	14.5*	4.0	6.7*	22.9
Church or other religious organization	11.2	12.7*	3.5	7.9*	16.6
Day camp	7.3	7.9	4.0	6.3	8.8
Public housing project	4.3	5.1*	0.3	2.2*	7.8
Library	4.1	4.5	2.0	2.7*	6.4
Other ^a	12.8	14.4*	4.9	9.0*	19.2
Number of sites (unweighted)	945	742	203	620	325
Number of sites (weighted)	68,321	57,031	11,290	42,578	25,743

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

^a Examples of other sites include mobile feeding/food trucks, homeless shelters, migrant sites, food banks, and government buildings.

Table A-6. Number of summers the site operated a summer meal program, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Number of summers the site operated a summer meal program	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Percentage of sites					
This is the first summer	19.5	20.9*	11.1	20.8	17.3
2 to 5 summers	51.9	50.8	58.2	50.3	54.6
6 to 19 summers	25.6	25.3	27.4	25.6	25.7
20 summers or more	3.0	2.9	3.3	3.4	2.4
Average number of summers in operation	5.2	5.1	5.3	5.3	5.0
Median number of summers in operation	3.1	3.0	3.4	3.2	2.9
Number of sites (unweighted)	794	638	156	510	284
Number of sites (weighted)	58,421	49,514	8,907	36,035	22,386

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-7. Number of children and teens attending each day, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Average number of children/teens in attendance each day	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
1 to 50	53.1	55.7*	40.1	45.4*	66.2
51 to 100	26.0	25.8	27.1	26.8	24.8
101 to 250	15.0	13.5*	22.6	20.3*	6.2
More than 250	5.8	4.9*	10.2	7.6*	2.9
Number of sites (unweighted)	932	733	199	613	319
Number of sites (weighted)	67,299	56,177	11,122	42,231	25,068

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-8. Program attendance, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Who can attend the summer meal program	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
All sites					
All children and teens	77.4	76.8	80.5	81.3*	71.0
Only children and/or teens who are enrolled in the program	20.0	20.7	16.3	16.5*	25.7
Other	2.3	2.5	3.2	2.3	3.3
Number of sites (unweighted)	941	739	202	617	324
Number of sites (weighted)	68,057	56,819	11,238	42,387	25,670
Among sites that enrolled children in a program					
Any child or teen 18 years of age or under	19.1	19.4	17.2	13.5	25.1
Only children and/or teens of a certain age group	38.1	39.3	30.4	31.4	45.1
Only children and/or teens interested in the activity(ies) at the site	36.2	37.2	29.8	44.3	27.6
Only children and/or teens enrolled in summer school, a reading program, or other academic program	6.3	4.7	16.2	7.9	4.6
Only children and/or teens with special needs	2.1	2.2	1.8	3.6	0.5
Only children and/or teens enrolled in the associated school	3.0	2.2	8.0	4.1	1.7
Other	6.3	7.2*	0.0	5.6	7.0
Number of sites (unweighted)	241	209	32	124	117
Number of sites (weighted)	13,600	11,771	1,829	6,996	6,605

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Other includes sites that reported all children and those who are enrolled in the program could attend their sites, sites that do not enroll children but restrict attendance to certain age groups, and sites that serve adults as well as children.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-9. Percentage of meals served: Characteristics of children served, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Characteristics of children served In a typical day	Percentage of meals served				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Age group					
Preschoolers	10.2	10.9*	6.6	9.0*	12.2
Elementary age children (grades K-5)	54.8	53.9	59.6	56.1	52.7
Middle school or junior high age children (grades 6-8)	20.8	21.1	19.4	19.8	22.5
High school age children (grades 9-12)	14.2	14.1	14.4	15.1	12.6
Number of sites (unweighted)	909	709	200	598	311
Number of sites (weighted)	65,315	54,181	11,135	40,836	24,479
Gender					
Girls	50.9	51.3	49.3	49.7*	52.9
Boys	49.1	48.7	50.7	50.3*	47.1
Number of sites (unweighted)	910	711	199	597	313
Number of sites (weighted)	65,524	54,416	11,108	40,975	24,549
Race/ethnicity					
Black or African American	39.9	41.1*	33.5	32.2*	52.2
Hispanic or Latino	26.2	24.4*	35.2	28.9*	21.9
White	28.5	28.9	26.5	33.8*	19.8
Other	5.5	5.6	4.9	5.1	6.1
Number of sites (unweighted)	909	712	197	591	318
Number of sites (weighted)	65,259	54,301	10,957	40,318	24,941

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-10. Start and end of meal service by month, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Meal service start and end months	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Start date					
May	8.0	7.1*	12.7	9.2	6.1
June	73.5	72.0*	81.5	72.9	74.6
July	17.0	19.4*	4.9	16.6	17.8
August	1.4	1.5	0.9	1.3	1.6
Number of sites (unweighted)	895	702	193	586	309
Number of sites (weighted)	64,383	54,009	10,374	39,729	24,654
End date					
June	15.1	11.4*	34.6	21.3*	5.1
July	28.8	27.3	36.9	31.4	24.8
August	56.1	61.3*	28.6	47.3*	70.1
Number of sites (unweighted)	909	713	196	594	315
Number of sites (weighted)	65,139	54,667	10,472	40,092	25,047

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. One site had a September end date.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-11. Site operating schedule, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Site operating schedule	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Weeks in operation					
Percentage of sites					
1 week	4.2	4.4	3.4	4.3	4.2
2 weeks	3.1	2.5	6.1	4.3*	1.1
3 weeks	6.0	3.5*	18.4	9.2*	0.7
4 weeks	12.0	10.9*	18.0	15.3*	6.7
5 to 8 weeks	45.1	46.3	39.0	47.1	41.7
More than 8 weeks	29.6	32.5*	15.1	19.8*	45.6
Average number of weeks in operation	6.9	7.1*	5.7	6.3*	7.8
Median number of weeks in operation	6.8	7.0*	5.1	6.0*	7.8
Number of sites (unweighted)	939	736	203	616	323
Number of sites (weighted)	67,898	56,587	11,310	42,300	25,598
Number of days in operation in a typical week					
Percentage of sites					
Fewer than 5 days a week	33.8	31.7*	44.2	39.0*	25.2
5 days a week (Mon. - Fri.) only	64.7	66.7*	54.9	60.6*	71.6
5 days a week (any days)	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.2	0.7
6 days a week	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.2*	1.8
7 days a week	0.3	0.3*	0.0	0.0*	0.7
Average number of days	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.6
Median number of days	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.3
Number of sites (unweighted)	947	744	203	621	326
Number of sites (weighted)	68,442	57,131	11,310	42,634	25,807
For sites operating less than 5 days a week					
Percentage operating on:					
Monday	83.7	80.2*	96.6	91.5*	64.0
Tuesday	85.4	82.2*	96.9	91.1*	71.0
Wednesday	89.4	87.6*	95.8	92.1	82.4
Thursday	86.9	84.6*	95.5	89.5	80.3
Friday	8.7	11.0*	0.4	2.0*	25.8
Saturday	1.7	2.2	0.0	0.0	6.1
Sunday	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average number of days	3.6	3.5*	3.9	3.7*	3.3
Median number of days	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.1
Number of sites (unweighted)	320	242	78	247	73
Number of sites (weighted)	23,120	18,117	5,004	16,623	6,497

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-12. Normal daily starting time, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Normal daily starting time	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Children arrive before 8:00 a.m.	38.9	35.9*	54.1	46.5*	26.4
Children arrive from 8:00 a.m. to 9:59 a.m.	37.3	37.1	38.0	37.2	37.4
Children arrive from 10:00 a.m. to 12:59 p.m.	19.9	22.4*	6.9	14.2*	29.1
Children arrive after 1:00 p.m.	3.9	4.5*	1.0	2.1*	7.1
Number of sites (unweighted)	929	729	200	609	320
Number of sites (weighted)	67,279	56,172	11,107	41,877	25,402

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-13. Daily operating schedules, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Daily schedules	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Sites with morning start times ^a					
Percentage of sites	90.8	89.5*	97.5	93.0*	87.2
Average number of operating hours	6.3	6.4*	5.7	6.0*	6.7
Median number of operating hours	5.6	5.9*	4.9	5.3*	6.5
Sites with afternoon start times ^b					
Percentage of sites	7.7	8.7*	2.5	6.1	10.4
Average number of operating hours	1.5	1.5*	0.6	1.0	2.0
Median number of operating hours	0.4	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.6
Sites with evening start times ^c					
Percentage of sites	1.5	1.8	-	1.0	2.4
Average number of operating hours	2.4	2.4	-	1.3*	3.1
Median number of operating hours	2.0	2.0	-	1.0	2.6
Number of sites (unweighted)	929	729	200	609	320
Number of sites (weighted)	67,279	56,172	11,107	41,877	25,402
Operating hours					
Sites operating ≤ 2 hours	14.6	16.0*	7.4	13.0	17.1
Sites operating > 2 and ≤ 4 hours	13.4	14.2	9.5	11.4	16.7
Sites operating > 4 and ≤ 8 hours	47.6	42.9	71.4	57.3*	31.7
Sites operating > 8 hours	24.4	26.9*	11.7	18.3*	34.6
Number of sites (unweighted)	916	719	197	602	314
Number of sites (weighted)	66,673	55,706	10,968	41,538	25,135

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Estimates with “-” did not have an evening start time.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

^a Sites with AM start times.

^b Sites with start times between 12:00 p.m. and 4:59 p.m.

^c Sites with start times 5:00 p.m. and later.

Table A-14. Percentage of sites providing free meals only and percentage providing meals and activities, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Site activities	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Site provides free meals only	5.3	6.2*	0.9	2.9*	9.3
Site provides free meals and activities	94.7	93.8*	99.1	97.1*	90.7
Number of sites (unweighted)	942	740	202	618	324
Number of sites (weighted)	67,918	56,653	11,266	42,253	25,665

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-15. Frequency and type of activities offered to children at summer meal sites, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Frequency and type of activities offered ^a	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Frequency					
Activities provided every day the site is open	77.3	77.1	78.3	77.2	77.4
Activities provided most days the site is open	12.5	12.7	11.4	11.3	14.4
Activities provided a few times over the summer	9.1	9.2	8.5	9.8	7.9
Other	1.2	1.0	1.8	1.7*	0.3
Number of sites (unweighted)	827	648	179	544	283
Number of sites (weighted)	59,395	49,223	10,172	37,502	21,894
Type					
Education/Instructional activities	81.2	79.2*	90.5	82.4	79.3
Arts and crafts	62.3	66.5*	42.5	49.2*	83.0
Supervised free play	54.8	59.3*	33.5	41.8*	75.3
Sports	48.7	51.6*	34.5	41.4*	60.1
Off-site field trips	39.4	42.1*	26.1	34.4*	47.2
Multicultural activities	27.8	31.3*	10.9	16.1*	46.2
Performing arts	26.9	29.0*	16.8	18.9*	39.5
Swimming	21.2	23.7*	9.0	15.6*	29.9
Counseling, therapy, social skills development	18.7	20.4*	10.2	13.9*	26.3
Supervised child care	18.3	20.6*	7.5	16.6	21.0
Cooking	15.2	16.9*	7.2	10.6*	22.4
Religious activities	11.4	12.6*	5.7	8.2*	16.4
Reading programs/books	1.6	1.9*	0.3	2.2	0.8
Gardening	1.4	1.7	0.0	1.3	1.6
Other	4.7	4.9	3.8	4.9	4.4
Number of sites (unweighted)	764	601	163	490	274
Number of sites (weighted)	54,513	45,058	9,455	33,337	21,176

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

^a Includes sites offering activities only. Respondents were asked to check all activities that applied.

Table A-16. Number of activities offered, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Number of activities	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
1 activity	22.2	19.2*	36.9	30.9*	8.5
2 to 4 activities	34.5	33.1	41.3	39.3*	26.9
5 or more activities	43.3	47.8*	21.8	29.8*	64.5
Number of sites (unweighted)	764	601	163	490	274
Number of sites (weighted)	54,513	45,058	9,455	33,337	21,176

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-17. Provision of transportation, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Sites provide transportation	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Yes	29.9	28.0*	39.8	36.9*	18.6
No, not provided	59.3	60.3	54.2	55.4*	65.6
No, not needed	10.8	11.7*	6.1	7.7*	15.8
Number of sites (unweighted)	935	735	200	611	324
Number of sites (weighted)	67,529	56,391	11,138	41,853	25,676

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-18. Site transportation characteristics, by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Transportation characteristic	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
Cost to participants					
Free	84.6	83.2	89.5	88.8*	70.8
Provided for a separate fee	2.9	3.8*	0.0	3.2	2.0
Included in the program fee	11.2	11.4	10.5	7.4*	23.6
Provided through a voucher for public transportation	1.3	1.6*	0.0	0.6*	3.6
Number of sites (unweighted)	294	223	71	230	64
Number of sites (weighted)	19,327	15,060	4,266	14,854	4,472
Type of participants who are provided transportation					
All children who go to the site	46.2	44.5	51.9	47.1	43.4
Children who live some distance away from the site	16.7	14.0	25.9	20.3*	5.8
Those who request it	22.3	26.0*	9.9	17.5	37.3
Children enrolled in a program on site	12.3	12.7	11.2	13.0	10.1
Other	2.4	2.8	1.1	2.1	3.4
Number of sites (unweighted)	288	217	71	224	64
Number of sites (weighted)	19,222	14,872	4,351	14,522	4,700
How transportation is provided					
Shuttle buses or vans	60.8	64.3	42.9	47.1*	81.9
School buses	22.8	19.0*	41.8	35.6*	2.8
Public transportation	18.9	19.3	16.6	23.8	11.2
Volunteers drive children in their own vehicles	7.9	7.2	11	5.8	11.1
Other	3.1	3.3	2.3	1.8	5.2
Number of sites (unweighted)	155	123	32	103	52
Number of sites (weighted)	9,891	8,244	1,648	6,020	3,871

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Answered only by those who reported providing transportation.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.

Table A-19. Use of site-provided transportation on a typical day (not including field trips), by summer meal program type and sponsor type

Children at the site	Percentage of sites				
	All sites	Program type		Sponsor type	
		SFSP	SSO	SFA	Non-SFA
All or almost all children	28.4	31.2	18.6	24.3	41.5
Most children	35.2	34.0	39.5	37.9	26.6
Some children	30.6	28.2	39.0	32.5	24.4
Few or very few children	2.6	2.6	2.9	2.7	2.4
No children	3.2	4.1*	0.0	2.6	5.0
Number of sites (unweighted)	297	225	72	232	65
Number of sites (weighted)	19,872	15,489	4,384	15,129	4,743

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Summer Meals Study, Site Survey, summer 2018. Tabulations are weighted to be nationally representative of all sites offering the summer meal programs.

Note: Total may not add to 100 due to rounding. Answered only by those who reported providing transportation.

* Differences are significant at the 0.05 confidence level using t-tests.