

FEEDING OLDER & YOUNGER AMERICANS: A SUMMER MEALS CASE STUDY



SUMMARY:

In 2012 Horizons—A Family Service Alliance, a member of the Meals On Wheels Association of America started serving meals to kids through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The program was a strong fit for the organization’s mission and leveraged its core competency of serving healthy meals through federally reimbursed programs. The meal component and service requirements for serving kids are very similar to those for seniors, enabling Horizons to provide both populations healthy food with little waste. By working with partner organizations such as the United Way, County Extension services, schools and the Cedar Rapids Parks and Recreation Department, Horizons was able to serve thousands of meals to kids while, at the same time, yielding a small financial gain and increasing the organization’s volunteer capacity. Horizons recommends that other Meals on Wheels programs considering expansion to serve kids during the summer build on what is already being done in their existing meals programs (e.g., adjust senior menus rather than start from scratch), utilize volunteer capacity as much as possible and develop community partnerships with organizations that already connect to kids.

BACKGROUND:

[Horizons - A Family Service Alliance](#) is a multi-program agency with a mission to instill hope, change lives, and brighten futures by providing life changing services to underserved populations. Headquartered in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Horizons serves older adults and those with disabilities through its Meals on Wheels program. Horizons serves 800 meals a day to seniors, 7 days a week through both congregate and home delivered meals (commonly referred to as Meals on Wheels). In addition to Meals on Wheels, Horizons has also provided meals to young children through 5 HeadStart programs including one in the building.

Horizons leverages funding from many sources to achieve its mission, including:

- The Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III Nutrition Programs (e.g. congregate and home delivered meals)
- The Elderly Waiver (Title XIX Medicaid Waiver)
- United Way funds
- County Funds
- Fundraising
- Private donations

PROVIDING SUMMER MEALS FOR KIDS:

In 2012, the United Way of East Central Iowa invited representatives from Horizons to attend a meeting of the Summer Meals Coalition, introducing the organization to the [Summer Food Service Program](#) and the opportunity to become a sponsor. The Summer Food Service Program provides reimbursements for meals served to kids in low-income areas while school is out. Although the program is funded by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), it is administered by state agencies, such as state departments of education, and run by public and private organizations, including schools, nonprofits and faith-based organizations.

Horizons was sold on the program for several reasons: it was within the scope of its mission; leadership was very interested in serving kids; the program has a large commercial kitchen; and pursuing It could contribute to operating

revenue. Horizons developed a partnership with the local [Parks and Recreation Department](#) to sponsor sites and provide meals at its locations during the summer, particularly in places in low income areas where kids already spent time during the summer. Horizons also sponsored what are known as closed sites for summer school programs. In 2013 and 2014 Horizons expanded sponsored open programs to local mobile home courts, apartment complexes, libraries, and churches. Partnering with a local transportation agency made it possible to get the meals out to the new locations. A mobile library was made available to all sites that allowed children to receive a new book, which they could keep, each week. The agency and its partners continue to explore other activities that can be made available and potential grants to implement those that need financial support.

PROGRAM SYNERGY:

Adding SFSP was also an easy proposition because it worked very well with the programs Horizons was using to fund its work with older adults. Nutrition requirements governing Older Americans Act (OAA) Title III Nutrition Programs encourages providers to think about intergenerational families and specifically cites the example of childhood nutrition programs.

THE MEALS:

The meal plans are similar, allowing for easy adjustment to make kids meals from the components of senior meals. This allows Horizons to manage food to avoid waste. For example, food that isn't used for SFSP can be reserved for adult meals. Thus, Horizons is able to be responsive to changing levels of participation at summer sites without worrying about losing meals or funds in the process.

HOW MEALS MEET PEOPLE:

PROGRAM	SITE TYPES	DESCRIPTION
Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)	Open Sites	Sites in locations where any kid can come and receive a meal, such as public parks, libraries, or mobile sites.
	Closed Sites	Sites in a location where only a specific number of kids enrolled in a program receive a meal, such as a school or day camp.
Congregate Meals	Closed Sites	Sites at a senior center or other location where seniors or other qualifying adults/volunteers can receive a meal.
Home Delivered Meals	N/A	Meals delivered directly to the home of a client.

THE PROGRAMMING:

Because Horizons already provided congregate meals to seniors in low-income areas, the organization knew how to manage the logistics of SFSP. It was also able to add SFSP service to a senior congregate site, serving both populations in the same space. Seniors are able to interact with kids and help provide supervision in the process. Some more able-bodied seniors are even able to serve as volunteers in either preparing or serving meals at closed SFSP sites.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY:

As with SFSP program, Meals on Wheels operations also rely heavily on volunteer support. Recruiting, training and managing volunteers were already core competencies for Horizons. Volunteers were able to help with both programs—and many recruited specifically for summer have stuck around to work with the Meals on Wheels program.

THE REPORTING:

While the reporting is different for the two programs, SFSP is simpler because the program eligibility is based on the location of the meal service, not the individual child.

COMPARING PROGRAMS:

	SFSP	SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAMS
Meal Components	<p>Breakfast:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 milk 1 fruit/vegetable 1 bread/grains <p>Lunch/Supper:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 milk 2 fruit/vegetable 1 bread/grains 1 meat/meat alternate <p>Snack (select two):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 milk 1 fruit/vegetable 1 bread/grains 1 meat/meat alternate <p>http://www.fns.usda.gov/sfsp/sfsp-meals-and-snacks</p>	<p>Federal Requirements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Comply with the most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2) Provide <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. a minimum 33 1/3% of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) established by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences if the program provides one meal per day; b. a minimum 66 2/3% of the DRI if the program provides two meals per day; and c. 100 percent of the DRI if the program provides three meals per day. 3) Menus shall be developed with the advice and expertise of a dietitian or other individual with equivalent education and training or expertise. <p><i>Interpretation of the Federal requirements varies from state to state.</i></p>
Reimbursement Rates	<p>Breakfast: \$2.08</p> <p>Lunch/Supper: \$3.65</p> <p>Snack: \$.87</p> <p>*Rates reflect self-prep rates for 2015</p> <p>http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2015-01-21/pdf/2015-00877.pdf</p>	<p>Varies from state to state.</p> <p>Program requirements are developed and administered at the state level through grants or contracts.</p>
Program Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools, nonprofits, camps and government agencies can serve as sponsors • Meals must be served at sites in low-income areas • All children that attend may receive a meal at open sites • Meals must be served in congregate and monitored • A site may serve up to two meals a day (lunch and supper not allowed) 	<p>Varies from state to state.</p> <p>Program requirements are developed and administered at the state or Area Agency on Aging level. Nutrition services are targeted to seniors 60+ in greatest economic and social need.</p>

IMPACT ON THE ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNITY:

Based on the program's success, Horizons was able to add an additional seven summer sites in 2013. It grew from serving 2,822 meals in 2012 to 8,840 in 2013, more than tripling service. Not only was Horizons reaching kids who hadn't been receiving meals, but kids were getting meals from the first to the last day of summer break. Efforts were expanded to 11 locations, adding a new Parks and Recreation location that will serve both enrolled kids and those who show up, a church and a second senior meal site.

In 2014, Horizons increased its open sites to 20, continuing to serve in parks near swimming pools or by splash pads, churches, libraries, apartment complexes and mobile home parks. Based on a study of the 2014 programs that noted success at mobile home parks and apartment complexes, Horizons will focus 2015 expansion on these opportunities.

Adding programs required increased support from volunteers. Volunteers were recruited from businesses and organizations neighboring sites. They ranged from stay at home mothers to engineers for local firms. Each site had a team of volunteers who shared our goal of making sure all children in our community had access to food over the summer months while school was out.

The summer meals program has helped to increase the volunteer base for the organization both by adding to the volunteer count and breadth of opportunity offered, and by generating extensive, positive media coverage that contributed to volunteer recruitment.

Adding SFSP has provided benefits to the organization, including a financial gain over break-even that enabled Horizons to add four hours to the schedule of a part-time kitchen worker and to contribute in a small way to the budget.

The benefits extended beyond just serving kids. It created a partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation that not only helped serve meals to more children, but also identified an opportunity for Horizons to serve more seniors. The Department hosted a program for seniors at which Horizons was able to start serving congregate meals. It also brought together kids and seniors, creating an enriching experience for both.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Horizons attributes much of its success with summer meals to its partners and volunteers who provided most of the additional capacity for the program. Adding SFSP was also possible because it built on the organization's strengths and resources. Since the kitchen capacity and meal expertise needed for the program already existed, there was a short learning curve to get started, and in some ways making it easier to implement the OAA Nutrition Programs. The organization also credits its partnership with the Department of Parks and Recreation, which used its own organizational strengths to complete the requirements for a good program. The Department helped to locate parks, advertised meals in their brochures, picked up garbage from the sites, and improved site quality and capacity by adding tables. Partners such as the United Way, Neighborhood Transportation Service, the City of Cedar Rapids and County Extension Office have helped the agency to transport meals, seek funding for parent meals, provide site activities and connect to the community and the need.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For those Meals on Wheels programs considering expansion to Summer Meals, Horizons recommends:

- Not deviating too far from what you already do so that you build on existing organizational strengths without trying to do something totally new.
- Keeping costs down by using volunteers to the greatest extent possible, including engaging
- Utilizing volunteers who have a connection to the site such as residents in the area or neighboring business or organizations.
- Aligning meal components across the programs to avoid waste.

- Looking for opportunities to serve kids on your own, and seeking other partners with kids programs who can help coordinate efforts and activities (e.g. United Way).
- Connecting to Parks and Recreation Departments for opportunities to reach kids through open sites.
- Collaborating with programs that do summer activities (e.g. Americorps or summer school programs) to find places to serve meals at enrolled sites.

For Anti-Hunger Advocates looking to expand access to Summer Meals, consider:

- Identifying senior nutrition programs through your local [Area Agency on Aging](#).
- Reaching out to your local Meals on Wheels program to start the conversation.
- Enlisting Meals on Wheels as a vendor or sponsor.
- Recognizing the time, resource and capacity restraints of your local program.
- Learning the basics of Senior Nutrition Programs in your state before connecting with your local Meals on Wheels program.
- Making it a community project by connecting Meals On Wheels programs with partners who can help with all aspects of the program including marketing and activities at the site.

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ABOUT MEALS ON WHEELS:

Meals on Wheels America is the oldest and largest national organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based senior nutrition programs across the country that are dedicated to addressing senior isolation and hunger. This network exists in virtually every community in America and, along with more than two million volunteers, delivers the nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks that enable America's seniors to live nourished lives with independence and dignity. By providing funding, leadership, education and advocacy support, Meals on Wheels America empowers its local member programs to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time. For more information, or to locate a local Meals on Wheels program, visit www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org/.

ABOUT THE NO KID HUNGRY CENTER FOR BEST PRACTICES:

Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry® campaign is ending childhood hunger by connecting kids to the healthy food they need, every day; teaching families how to cook healthy, affordable meals through Cooking Matters®; and investing in community organizations that fight hunger. The No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices provides the tools and resources needed to help elected officials and their staff, educators and community leaders achieve success in fighting childhood hunger. Learn what works in the fight against childhood hunger and discover toolkits, case studies, hunger stats, issue briefs, reports and more at BestPractices.NoKidHungry.org.