



Offering a Non-Congregate Summer Meal Service



Health and Nutrition Services
Arizona Department of Education

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Introduction

WHAT IS A QUICK GUIDE?

Quick Guides are an abbreviated resource developed by the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Health and Nutrition Services (HNS) Division. Quick guides are intended to compliment ADE's Step-by-Step Instruction: How-to Guides. They do not count towards Professional Standards training hours.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This resource is intended for School Food Authorities (SFAs) applying/intending to operate the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or National School Lunch Program (NSLP) Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and Community Organizations (COs) interested in offering a non-congregate meal service in rural areas during summer meals.

PURPOSE OF THIS QUICK GUIDE

As USDA expands flexibility in summer feeding programs, transitioning from congregate to non-congregate meal service can increase access to meals for children in rural or underserved areas. This guide provides SFAs and COs with a step-by-step approach to making the switch while maintaining compliance.

A young boy with dark hair and a slight smile is the central focus, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a blue shirt. In the background, slightly out of focus, are other children sitting at a table outdoors. On the table, there are white trays with food, a purple juice carton, and a small white container. The setting appears to be a school cafeteria or an outdoor eating area with green grass visible in the far background.

SECTION ONE:

Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirements

ELIGIBILITY ASSESSMENT

Operators interested in serving non-congregate meals must:

-  Be in good standing (see definition below).
-  Be designated as rural.
-  Be located more than 2 miles away from another site. Sites cannot be located in close enough proximity that each site could serve the same children the same meals.
-  Be in an area eligible to participate in SFSP (Summer Food Service Program) or SSO (Seamless Summer Option).

Definition of Good Standing

An operator is in good standing if:

- They have met all Program responsibilities.
- They are current with financial obligations.
- If applicable, they have fully implemented all corrective actions within the required timeframe.

Conditional Non-Congregate Meal Service

A site not meeting area eligibility and not classified as a “camp” may qualify for conditional non-congregate service.

- To receive reimbursement, the site must document each child’s eligibility for Program meals.

Approval Process

HNS must approve all non-congregate meal services through the summer meals application.



SECTION TWO:

Application & Approval

Application Process

For School Food Authorities (SFAs) and Community Organizations (COs) **NEW** to Operating a Summer Meal Site:

1. Complete the SFSP Prospective Entity Form:

- *Community Organizations Only:* Begin by filling out the [SFSP Prospective Entity Form For Community Organizations](#). This form collects essential information about your organization and initiates the application process.

2. Complete State Agency Training:

- After submitting the form, key staff members must complete the required training provided by ADE on our webpage for [Summer Meal Trainings](#).

3. Submit a Permanent Agreement:

- *Community Organizations Only:* Read and complete the [Summer Food Service Program Permanent Agreement for Community Organizations](#), which formalizes your organization's commitment to program requirements. The agreement can be completed electronically or manually, as outlined on the [SFSP Program Forms and Resources page](#).

4. Access CNPWeb:

- Upon approval, you'll receive credentials to access ADE's CNPWeb system, where you'll manage site and sponsor applications.

5. Submit an SFSP or SSO (SFAs only) Application:

- Complete an **SFSP** (Summer Food Service Program) or **SSO** (Seamless Summer Option) application through CNPWeb.
- Indicate whether the site will operate as:
 - A non-congregate feeding site; or,
 - A combine congregate and non-congregate feeding site (must follow service restrictions).

Application Process

For EXISTING Operators Seeking to Offer Non-Congregate Feeding:

1. Notify HNS of Intent to Operate Non-Congregate via HelpDesk

- Log into the ADE [HelpDesk](#) using your ADEConnect account and submit a ticket to notify HNS of your intent to operate non-congregate meal service. An HNS Specialist will guide the operator through the process.

Approval Process

Application Review & Approval

- HNS will review the application to determine eligibility for rural/non-congregate participation.
- If the site meets the **rural designation criteria, area eligibility** must also be verified.
- **HNS must approve** all non-congregate meal services through the **summer meal application**.

Documentation & Reporting

- Approved operators must keep non-congregate meal documents separate.
- Non-congregate meal records are reported separately in the reimbursement claim.
- When counting bulk or multi-day breakfast or lunch meal distribution, make sure to tally each day for which the meals are distributed. (i.e. Making one tally mark when distributing five days' worth of meals would only indicate meals being provided for one day. All five days should be marked/tallied)

Conditional Non-Congregate Application and Approval

APPROVAL REQUIREMENTS FOR NON-CONGREGATE MEALS IN NON-AREA ELIGIBLE RURAL LOCATIONS

To be approved to serve non-congregate summer meals in non-area eligible rural locations, operators must:

-  Certify that participants' eligibility information will be collected to support the reimbursement claim.
-  Obtain income eligibility documentation through:
 - Household applications, or
 - Income eligibility data provided by the school system.
-  Only claim reimbursement for meals served to eligible participants (children who qualify for free or reduced-price meals).
-  Notify participants about the availability of free meals and whether a free meal application is required, following requirements for camp and closed enrolled site sponsors.
-  Provide meal options for non-eligible children by:
 - Charging them for meals (without overt identification), or
 - Using non-Federal funds to cover the cost of their meals.



SECTION THREE:

How to Operate

How to Operate

STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL NON-CONGREGATE OPERATION

1 Assess Community Needs – Identify areas where kids face barriers to traditional meal sites.

- Analyze participation trends in existing meal programs
- Conduct surveys, gather feedback from families, and community partners
- Identify rural areas and transportation challenges

2 Obtain State Approval – Work with the ADE to obtain the necessary waivers and approvals.

- Review USDA and ADE regulations for non-congregate feeding
- Submit required documentation
- Stay updated on reporting and compliance expectations

3 Determine Distribution Method – Choose from grab-and-go, mobile routes, or home delivery.

- Assess available resources, such as vehicles, staff, and packaging supplies
- Consider partnerships with local organizations or transportation services
- Plan meal pick-up sites or routes to maximize accessibility

4 Develop Meal Packaging Plans – Ensure meals meet USDA requirements and maintain food safety.

- Select packaging that maintains food quality and safety
- Plan menus that comply with nutritional standards and storage requirements
- Implement labeling for meal components, allergens, and heating instructions

How to Operate

STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL NON-CONGREGATE OPERATION

- 5 Train Staff** – Educate food service workers on non-congregate procedures, meal tracking, and reporting.
 - Provide training on proper meal assembly, portioning, and packaging
 - Educate staff on meal counting, documentation, and compliance requirements
 - Establish clear procedures for food safety, distribution, and inventory management

- 6 Spread the Word** – Use school websites, social media, and flyers to inform the community
 - Develop simple, multilingual communication materials
 - Engage with school principals, teachers, and the community for outreach
 - Use automated calls, newsletters, and social media to share schedules and locations



SECTION FOUR:

Non-Congregate Meal Service

Non-Congregate Meal Service

SERVING MEALS IN A NON-CONGREGATE MEAL SERVICE SETTING

Meal Production – Batch prepare meals in advance to streamline distribution.

- Plan meals in advance to allow for efficient bulk prep while maintaining variety and nutritional balance
- Consider shelf-stable, frozen, or easy-to-reheat meal options for convenience.
- Implement quality control checks to ensure meals remain fresh and appealing.

Storage & Transport – Ensure cold storage and temperature control during meal transport.

- Use insulated containers or refrigerated vehicles to maintain safe temperatures during transport
- Monitor and log temperatures during transport
- Separate hot and cold items to prevent cross-contamination and ensure proper food quality upon arrival
- Establish a contingency plan for equipment failures or delays to maintain food safety

Bulk Meal Distribution – Reduce distribution frequency by offering bulk meal items instead of pre-assembled meals - may offer up to 5 days bulk meals.

- All food items that contribute to a reimbursable meal are clearly identifiable
- Menus must be provided and clearly indicate the food items and portion sizes for each reimbursable meal along with clear storage and reheating instructions for families
- Consider packaging that separates perishable and non-perishable items

Non-Congregate Meal Service

SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR MEAL SERVICE METHODS

Multi-Day Meal Distribution – Requires Multi-Day Meal Issuance Document.

- Multi-day Meal Issuance document on letterhead must be submitted to ADE during the application process for each site offering multi-day meal distribution
- Reduce distribution frequency by offering several days' worth of meals - may offer up to 10 days of multi-day meal bundles.
- Ensure all meals meet USDA requirements, and are labeled with portion sizes, identifying what makes a reimbursable meal
- Provide clear storage and reheating instructions for families
- Consider packaging that separates perishable and non-perishable items

Parent/Guardian Pickup of Grab n' Go Meals – If allowed, establish proper documentation procedures.

- Provide clear instructions to parents/guardians on:
 - Pickup locations and times (curbside pick-up or walk-up
 - Required identification or documentation for parent/guardian meal pickup
 - May offer up to 10 days of multi-day meal productions, or 5 days of bulk meal distribution
- The And Justice for All poster should be displayed at pick-up site

Home Delivery – Requires parental consent form.

- The starting address is the approved site (not the home address)
- May offer up to 10 days of multi-day meal bundles, or 5 days of bulk distribution.
- The non-discrimination statement could be placed on meal boxes, parental consent forms, or the delivery vehicle.

Mobile Routes (Bus Routes) – Meals may be picked up from stops along a route (parks, parking lots, apartment complexes, recreation centers, crossroads, etc.)

- Each stop on the route is considered a “site” in CNPWeb and needs to be approved
- Parent or Guardian may pick up
- May offer up to 10 days of multi-day meal bundles, or 5 days of bulk distribution
- Use the FNS routing tool: [Mobile Route Maker](#)

Thank you!

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