

Increasing Access to Summer EBT/SUN Bucks for Harder-to-Reach Children and Families

Join us for an engaging and solution-focused workshop where participants will collaborate to tackle the challenges of accessing Summer EBT (also known as SUN Bucks). Participants will work alongside experts and community advocates to explore challenges faced by immigrant communities, parents and caregivers with limited English proficiency, children and families experiencing homelessness, Tribal students, those navigating the foster care system, families dealing with mailing address challenges, and those needing to apply for the program. We'll discuss practical solutions to ensure every child can access essential summer nutrition resources.

The workshop participants were divided into seven groups, each guided by a topic area expert for their discussion. The following are the notes from each group's discussion.

Harder to Reach Populations

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Students experiencing mailing address barriers

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- They might not have a safe place to pick up or leave mail.
- They could be too busy to talk to school staff, especially since staff might not be around in the summer.
- Privacy concerns and outdated addresses can also be problems.
- Sometimes, different databases have conflicting addresses, and Medicaid data issues can make things worse.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- One idea is to let families pick up mail at local Department of Social Services offices or schools when they pick up their kids.
- In places like Washington and Illinois, schools decide who needs to pick up their Summer EBT cards.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- First, families need to know why updating their addresses is important.
- Schools should guide them to state government websites to update their information, like in Arkansas.
- It is also helpful to tell people they are eligible and show them the address numbers on file, as done in Illinois.
- Creating more opportunities for word-of-mouth communication can also help.

Indigenous communities and students

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- Issues with getting cards to the right places.
- Problems with mailing addresses.
- Sharing school and eligibility data.
- Limited broadband access.
- Lack of trust.
- Accessing fees.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- Collaborate across state lines where service areas overlap.
- Have a liaison advocate from the community work with Tribes.
- Design communications to be inclusive and reflective of Tribes.
- Use language and images that resonate with the community.
- Work with WIC agencies.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- Include a sovereignty clause in data-sharing agreements.
- Offer alternate card pick-up locations, like WIC offices.
- Attend community events to reach more people.
- Partner with WIC agencies and Community Advocates.

Immigrant communities

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- Many immigrant families are afraid that schools will share their household information with immigration authorities.
- Meals provided feel very different from using a state-issued card. We need to assure them that there is nothing to fear.
- Many families at CEP schools need to understand how S-EBT is different than SNAP and that it is not related to immigration status.
- Social Security numbers included in forms and no paper applications are also barriers.
- Some people receive a card in the mail but do not know what it is or how to use it.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- Create a toolkit that includes social media posts, robocalls, letters, TV ads, and PSAs.
- Community-based outreach programs involving elected officials and board members can help spread the word.
- QR codes that link to flag images can improve language access.
- Using social media in middle and high schools can also help.
- Free or low-cost ads through State Associations of Broadcasters can be effective.
 - For example, Tennessee used Spanish language ads for PEBT successfully.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- A notice explaining that this benefit is for non-citizen children.
- This might be the first time they get a letter for a benefit they did not apply for, so we need to explain why, what, and how in multiple languages.
- S-EBT information should be part of the welcome packet for refugee families.
- Reach out to resettlement agencies and explain.

Language access and limited English proficiency

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- People do not know what they need to know.
- Schools lack enough information to share with kids and parents.
- Translators hired might not be effective.
- Literacy levels can be challenging.
- People feel more comfortable in their native language.
- Translations need to be accurate and simple.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- Identify the main languages spoken in the community.
- Be more culturally responsive.
- Build partnerships within the community.
- Use people who already speak those languages for outreach.
- Make sure outreach teams reflect the community's diversity.
- Use food banks to share information.
- Find radio stations that broadcast in their language since people trust them.
- Meet people where they are, like at community centers or markets.
- Use hotlines like 211 with updated info.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- Identify the languages spoken in the community and stay updated on this data.
- Partner with organizations and schools to find out what information is most helpful.
- Modify current outreach methods as needed.
- Work with nonprofits that already serve ethnic groups to spread information.
- Hire more staff who represent the community.

Students experiencing homelessness

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- Usually, they cannot get important mail because they do not have an address.
- They need hot food options.
- They need access to both online and paper applications.
- Sending kids to school is tough without transportation.
- Barriers with ID/information.
- Some benefits run out because people cannot be reached in time.
- Individualized card challenges.
- Cities with homeless liaisons do better, but rural areas do not have these resources.
- Kids can fall through the cracks when moving between schools.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- Flexibilities for hot foods.
- Options for flexibility.
- Homeless liaisons: messaging, template language, information on applying.
- Can use school addresses for cards.
- Hotel program contact information.
- Better job of connecting with government agencies.
- Family resource coordinators in schools.
- Leverage distributions like Christmas. Non-profit partners could help here.

- County agency support and addresses.
- Communication with women's and children's shelters. Other places to mail addresses.
- Use WIC and CACFP to qualify. Plus, childcare subsidies and benefits.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- Awareness: shelters, food kitchens, childcare subsidies, YWCA, CACFP, retailers, WIC.
- County agencies.
- Homeless liaisons
- School, school secretary.
- Call to action: Clear messages for community folks.
- Communications channel for key partners with agencies.
- In-person events and partners.

Students in foster care

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- Children can move often and change addresses frequently.
- There are challenges with sharing and collecting data, and privacy issues.
- Some counties receive cards while others do not.
- Social workers might not see the child for a while.
- Cards are sometimes sent to the biological family, even when the child is in foster care.
- Some children are on trial home visits, and others are institutionalized.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- Singular system with data-sharing access across systems
- Separate systems need to communicate better.
- The IES can improve data quality for S-EBT.
- Focus on issues affecting foster youth first.
- Use a SharePoint site to handle return cards and collaborate across agencies.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- Work with organizations that already serve foster youth.
- Partner with community case workers to collect updated addresses and prioritize issuing to foster youth first.
- Include a flag to indicate if the child has likely moved and create a process for triage.

Students that need to apply for Summer EBT

Question 1: What barriers to accessing summer EBT is this population encountering? What could be the reasons this population is experiencing these barriers?

- Lack of knowledge about the program
- Misinformation
- Thinking they do not need to apply.
- Technology issues
- Fear of applying; stigma
- Language barriers
- Parents receive information differently.
- Caregivers do not know student ID or other required info
- Virtual or homeschool situations with no physical resource base.
- Limited time
- Schools collecting data in different ways making it hard to identify the whole family.

Question 2: What new or different approaches could be tied to better connect and serve this population?

- Expand community knowledge of summer EBT and rely on partners.
- Use text messaging.
- Involve community advocate voices and trusted messengers.
- Include summer EBT information in enrollment packets with income charts.
- Work with schools and school liaisons.

Question 3: What concrete actionable steps could be taken to implement new approaches? What partners could help make those a reality?

- Go to places where people already know and receive help.
- Use TikTok and other social media for agencies to share information.
- Make applications mobile-friendly.
- Incorporate summer EBT into existing screeners.
- Partner with PTAs, PTOs, libraries, corporate sponsors, parent leadership groups, community colleges, food councils, town halls, schools, and parents.