



Sponsor Guide: Supporting Summer Meal Access For Immigrant Communities

Recent immigration enforcement activity and executive orders from the current presidential administration may be causing hesitation to participate in summer nutrition programs. The federal rules on eligibility have **not** changed and do **not** limit participation based on immigration status. However, families' concerns are understandable, and there are steps you can take to help make them feel more comfortable.

Approximately **1 in 4 U.S. children** live in families that include at least one immigrant parent. Of the over 17 million children with immigrant parents, the overwhelming majority (87%) are U.S. citizens.¹ Children of immigrants live in families with median incomes 20% lower than the family incomes of children of native-born parents.² Learn more at: [Quick Facts on Immigrant Families in the United States](#).

Summer Meals Program Design Considerations

Considering the needs of immigrant communities when building your non-congregate summer meals program can greatly impact your overall program engagement and participation. Ensure you are meeting all state and federal rules and requirements when considering the following tips:

Tips for Operations:

- Offer stigma-free meal registration and pick up experiences. Strive to create an environment where families feel welcome to participate and avoid language or direction that can leave families feeling ashamed.
- Expand non-congregate service where allowable via home delivery or multiple grab-n-go sites.
- If serving via walk-up distribution, consider moving service to an indoor location to reduce visibility.
- Have a policy/procedure in place in the event immigration officials visit your meal site. Ensure staff onsite are trained to respond accordingly.

Summer Meals Program Design Considerations

- If serving non-congregate meals consider the following:
 - Increase number days worth of meals provided per service to decrease number of site visits needed by families.
 - Reduce barriers to participation by limiting the collection of information from families to only information required by federal law or state policy.
 - Allow alternative caregivers or family members to pick up meals for children in accordance with state guidelines.
- In the event a site operator is questioned by an outside entity regarding the status of participant children or their families, Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition (PIF) provides the following recommended language: *“Congress decides who’s eligible for summer meals, and we’re going to make sure we’re serving everyone who qualifies under federal law.”* Acknowledging one could anticipate an immediate follow-up doubling down on serving undocumented kids, the recommendation is to redirect again to Congress/federal law: *“This site serves summer meals to everyone who’s eligible by Congress and qualifies under federal law.”*

Designing Culturally Inclusive Programs:

- Engage with community members in culturally and linguistically responsive ways.
 - Provide culturally responsive services and culturally relevant food.
 - Hire trusted community-embedded, bilingual staff and community members.
- Identify trusted locations and voices within your immigrant communities that can support as potential meal sites or messengers to promote your program.
- Connect with school district case workers, local immigrant support organizations, faith-based organizations or others who may have strong ties to the immigrant community you serve.
- Conduct focus groups with parents/caregivers and community members to better understand how to best reach children in immigrant communities this summer. Check out [Let Your Community Shape Your Meal Program](#) and [Conversation Starters for Designing More Inclusive School Meals Programs](#) to learn more.

Resources

Children Thrive Action Network:

- [Rapid Response Resources](#)
- [Toolkit for Providers on Protecting Locations from Immigration Enforcement](#)

[Protecting Immigrant Families \(PIF\)](#)

- [Privacy Protections for Federal Programs](#)

[KeepYourBenefits.org](#)

National Immigration Law Center (NILC):

- [Know Your Rights, Multiple Languages](#)
- [More Resources from NILC](#)

Reports:

- [From Fear to Trust: Community-led Solutions to Increase Food Access in Immigrant Communities](#)
- [Food Over Fear: Overcoming Barriers to Connect Latinx Immigrant Families to Federal Nutrition and Food Programs](#)

¹ Batalova, J. (2024, March 13). Frequently Requested Statistics on Immigrants and Immigration in the United States. Retrieved from migrationpolicy.org website: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states-2024>

² the Urban Institute. (2010, November). Children of Immigrants. Retrieved May 14, 2025, from The Annie E. Casey Foundation website: <https://www.aecf.org/resources/children-of-immigrants>