

**State Nutrition Action Committee  
Summer Food Service Program**

**Marketing Survey Report  
March 2021**



# Marketing Survey Report for the Summer Food Service Program

## March 2021

**Acknowledgments:** The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Work Group of the State Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC) wants to thank the program operators for participating in this survey. The primary author of this report is LeCroy & Milligan Associates, including Michele Schmidt, MPA, Pam Hill, MPH, and Steven Wind, PhD. SFSP Work Group contributing partners include:

- Arizona Department of Education (ADE)
- Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS)
- County health departments
- Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN) and local food banks
- Local school districts that participate in SFSP
- Regional AZ Health Zone SNAP-Ed programs
- The Dairy Council® of Arizona
- OH Partners

**Suggested Citation:** LeCroy & Milligan Associates, Inc. (2021). *Summer Food Service Program: Marketing Survey Report*. Tucson, AZ.

**About the State Nutrition Action Committee:** The USDA has charged the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) with developing a State Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC). The mission of the Arizona SNAC is to strategically align nutrition and physical activity efforts across programs to ensure that all Arizonans have equal access to knowledge, as well as the ability, to make choices to live a healthy lifestyle. The Arizona SNAC Steering Committee (SNAC-SC) has met weekly since 2017, with representatives from the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) SNAP-Ed program, the Arizona Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES), the Dairy Council® of Arizona, and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) Child Nutrition Programs.

## **Report Contents**

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Survey Methodology .....	5
<b>Marketing Survey Results.....</b>	<b>6</b>
SFSP Operator and Community Characteristics .....	6
Words Families and Children Use to Describe Local SFSPs.....	11
Challenges in Providing SFSP .....	12
Challenges Compared by Operator/Community Characteristics .....	13
Marketing Efforts in 2020.....	14
Marketing Methods Utilized and In Need of Additional Support.....	14
Timing of SFSP Marketing Efforts.....	17
Improvements to Marketing Efforts in 2021 .....	18

## **List of Exhibits**

<b>Exhibit 1. Types of SFSP Operators .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Exhibit 2. Basis for Deciding Where to Operate SFSP .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Exhibit 3. Types of Areas Served .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Exhibit 4. Map of SFSP Survey Respondents' Zip Codes .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Exhibit 5. Communities Served.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Exhibit 6. Grades of Children Served by SFSP Operators.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Exhibit 7. Languages Spoken by Populations Served.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Exhibit 8. Top Challenges Faced in Providing SFSP Services to Children and Families</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Exhibit 9. Sources of Marketing Materials for SFSPs .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Exhibit 10. Methods Used to Market SFSPs and In Need of Additional Support.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Exhibit 11. Start of SFSP Marketing Efforts by Operators.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Exhibit 12. Feelings About Using the Word "Free" in Marketing Efforts .....</b>	<b>18</b>

# Executive Summary

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Work Group conducted an online marketing survey in November 2020 to better understand the marketing needs of SFSP operators and what can be done to improve marketing efforts in 2021 and beyond. A total of 200 operators responded to this survey, for a response rate of 50 percent. This report highlights the results of this survey.

- 58 percent of SFSP operators were a school food authority operating under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) and 42 percent were operating the Simplified SFSP.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** Simplified programs could use additional support. Simplified operators were significantly more likely to report having challenges communicating with parents/caregivers and with advertising and marketing their program, compared to SSO operators. Simplified operators were significantly more likely to use their own marketing materials, and a higher percentage reported starting SFSP marketing late - two weeks or less before summer break or after summer break had started.
- 72 percent decided where to operate SFSP based on the location of local schools, 34 percent relied on historical data, and 16 percent used information from community partners.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** Sites should consider utilizing Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping resources such as <https://arcg.is/0COq50> to determine where to operate sites.
- 53 percent operate in a rural location, 38 percent in an urban location, and 11 percent in a suburban location. Thirty-seven percent serve tribal communities. Transportation was identified as a top challenge to providing SFSP services to children and families by 48 percent of respondents, regardless of whether the site is rural or urban. Operators that serve tribal communities were significantly more likely to report transportation and weather as challenges to SFSP service provision.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** Access to transportation is a topic that needs more attention in order to discover solutions and messaging that would help to break down this barrier.

- 93 percent of respondents serve families that speak English, 74 percent serve Spanish-speaking families, and 16 percent serve families that speak Navajo.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** There are a variety of languages spoken throughout the state and at particular sites. Site staff have a clear understanding of languages spoken by their families and ensure that materials and communications are available in additional languages, so that they reach as many families as possible. Continuing to offer marketing resources in both English and Spanish is strongly supported by the data. Consider utilizing a local partner from the Navajo Nation to collaborate with on marketing efforts in the Navajo language.
- Grades of children served range from pre-K to high school.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** Marketing materials and messaging would be more effective if they have different creative and messages to match these different age groups so as to better resonate with their target audience.
- 70 percent developed their own materials to market the SFSP and 30 percent utilized the Summer Lunch Buddies marketing materials provided by AZ Health Zone. Operators who developed their own marketing materials were more likely to report challenges in communicating with parents/caregivers.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** There is great opportunity for SFSP operators to further utilize fully-developed assets and toolkit materials that can be used as is or customized with their site's information. The toolkit and assets can be found here ([https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xeAQgiALn2hmc6-oNmY72MoCAob0Bf6L?usp=sharing\\_eil&ts=5ea0c77e](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1xeAQgiALn2hmc6-oNmY72MoCAob0Bf6L?usp=sharing_eil&ts=5ea0c77e)).
- More than half of operators (58 percent) started marketing efforts for SFSP two weeks prior to summer break or after it had begun.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** There is great opportunity and benefit to beginning to market the program four to six weeks prior to the start of SFSP operations.
- Use of the school district's website, flyers, Facebook, automated phone calls/texts, and print advertising were the most commonly reported methods used to market programs.
  - ⇒ **Recommendation:** Methods of outreach vary greatly and help to reinforce that there are many different touchpoints at which to reach children, parents, and partners. Additional outreach could include, but is not limited to, using the school menu, personal phone calls, local partnerships, PTA groups, and social media. Methods that respondents would like additional support in using include: flyers, print advertising, mailers, district website (including logos and graphics), Facebook, and promotional videos.

# Introduction

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) Work Group of the State Nutrition Action Committee (SNAC) has met biweekly since September 2019 with the overarching goals of creating greater awareness of the SFSP and increasing participation and sponsorship in SFSP. The SFSP Work Group represents the following agencies:

- Arizona Department of Education (ADE)
- Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS)
- County health departments
- Arizona Food Bank Network (AzFBN) and local food banks
- Local school districts that participate in SFSP
- Regional AZ Health Zone SNAP-Ed programs
- The Dairy Council® of Arizona
- OH Partners

The SFSP Work Group conducted an online marketing survey in November 2020 to better understand the marketing needs of SFSP operators and what can be done to improve marketing efforts in 2021 and beyond. This report highlights the results of this survey.

## Survey Methodology

The SFSP Work Group collaborated with LeCroy & Milligan Associates to develop the online marketing survey. A total of 400 SFSP operators were invited to participate in this survey by an initial and two follow-up email messages. Data collection took place from November 9, 2020, through November 24, 2020. A total of 200 operators responded to this survey, for a response rate of 50 percent. The survey was anonymous, so it is possible that more than one staff person per site responded. The survey consisted of 17 questions, including three open-response questions and 14 closed-ended categorical questions. Closed-ended questions included an “Other” option to capture open-ended data. Questions collected data about the SFSP operator, clients served, marketing strategies used in 2020, challenges and successes in providing services to children and families, and areas for additional marketing support. Quantitative survey data were analyzed using SPSS 24 and percentages were rounded up. Open-ended questions were analyzed using a thematic coding approach in Microsoft Excel to identify and quantify common themes reported.

# Marketing Survey Results

## SFSP Operator and Community Characteristics

More than half of SFSP operators were a school food authority operating under the Seamless Summer Option (SSO) (58 percent) (Exhibit 1). Another large proportion (42 percent) were a school food authority operating the Simplified SFSP. Other sites included non-profit organizations and sites that operate due to the COVID-19 pandemic and provide families with emergency food.

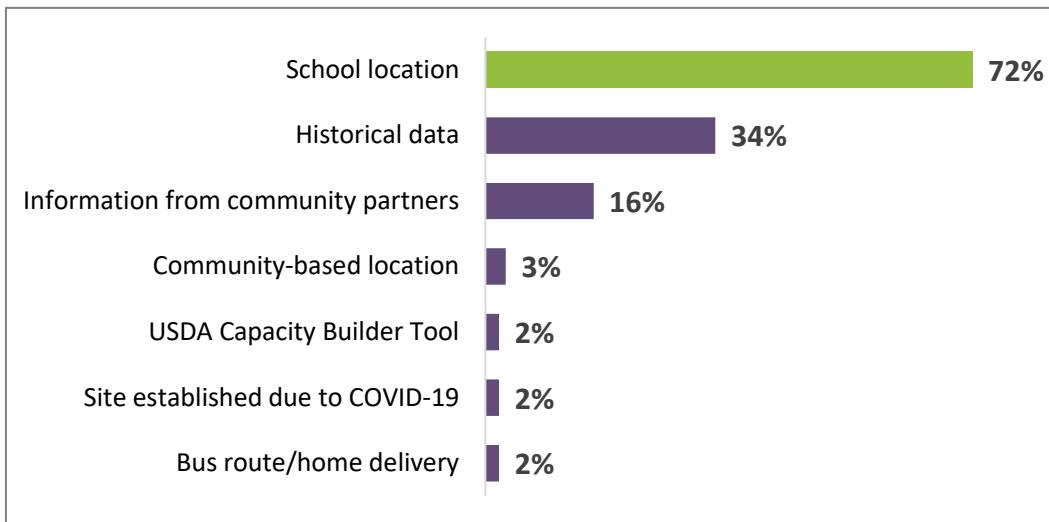
Exhibit 1. Types of SFSP Operators

Type	Percentage (number)
School food authority operating the Seamless Summer Option	58% (115)
School food authority operating the Simplified SFSP	42% (83)
Non-profit community organization	2% (4)
Other	2% (4)

(n=200). Note: Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply. "Other" responses included At-Risk Snack/Supper, Open site, and two sites that normally would not be participating in the program but are doing so due to COVID-19.

The majority of respondents (72 percent) operate SFSP at school sites. Historical data was an important factor in choosing the location of sites for 34 percent of respondents. Some respondents used information from community partners (16 percent) or chose a site based on a convenient community-based location, such as a recreational center (3 percent). A few respondents commented that they are operating SFSP because of the COVID-19 pandemic or are utilizing bus routes to deliver food, per the USDA waivers. Only 2 percent used the USDA Capacity Builder tool.

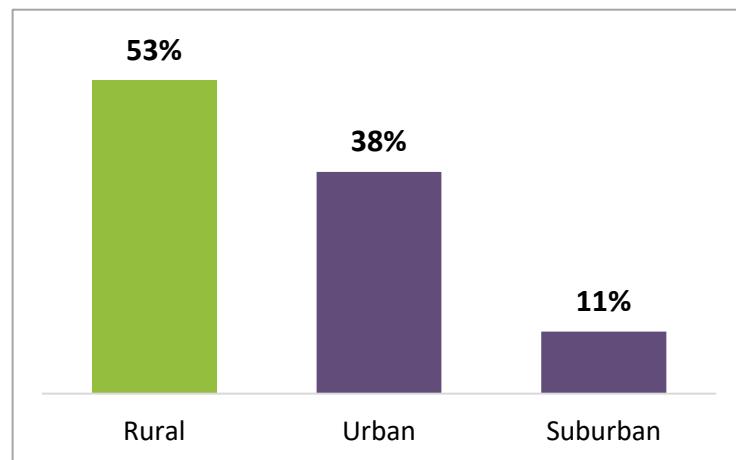
## Exhibit 2. Basis for Deciding Where to Operate SFSP



(n=200) Note: Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply.

Rural sites made up the largest proportion (53 percent) of those that participated in the survey (Exhibit 3).

## Exhibit 3. Types of Areas Served



(n=200) Note: Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply.

Exhibit 4 shows a map of the zip codes of SFSP sites reported by survey respondents. The purple shading indicates zip codes of survey respondents. Locations with a darker shading indicate that more people responded to the survey in that area.

**Exhibit 4. Map of SFSP Survey Respondents' Zip Codes**

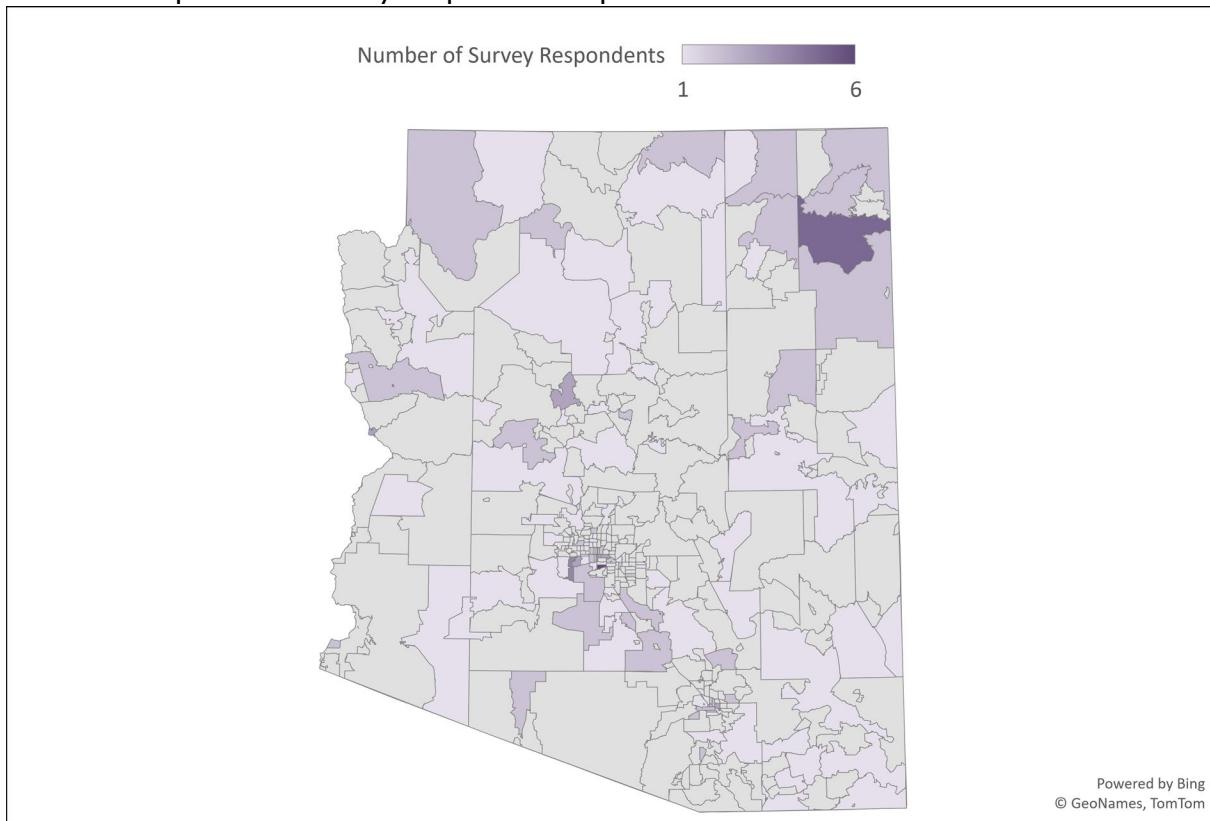
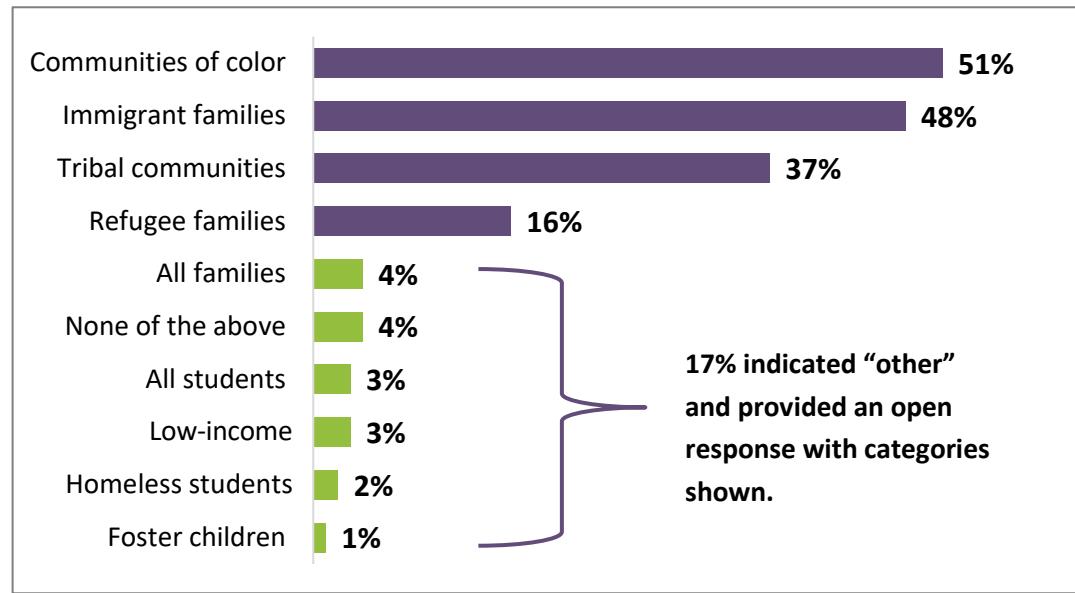


Exhibit 5 shows the types of communities that respondents serve. Respondents could select all options that applied to them and provide open-ended data. Over half (51 percent) of the respondents reported that their program serves communities of color, 47 percent serve immigrant families, 37 percent serve tribal communities, and 16 percent serve refugee families. A total of 17 percent of respondents chose “Other” and reported serving the specific groups shown in Exhibit 5.

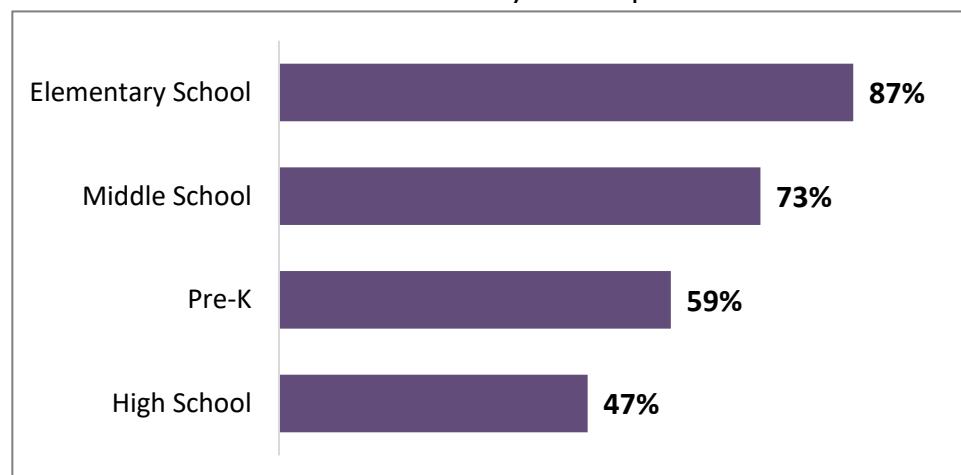
**Exhibit 5. Communities Served**



(n=200) Note: Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply.

The largest proportion (87 percent) of operators reported serving children who attend elementary school, followed by those who attend middle school (73 percent) (Exhibit 6).

**Exhibit 6. Grades of Children Served by SFSP Operators**



(n=200) Note: Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply.

Most of the respondents (93 percent) reported that the populations they serve speak English, with 74 percent indicating that they serve Spanish-speaking families (Exhibit 7). Additionally, 16 percent of respondents indicated that their clientele speaks Navajo. A small proportion of operators reported that their families speak other languages, as shown in Exhibit 7. The diversity of languages of families served suggests that SFSP resources could be translated into the Navajo language or other languages that are spoken locally.

**Exhibit 7. Languages Spoken by Populations Served**

Language	Percentage (number)
English	93% (185)
Spanish	74% (147)
Navajo	16% (31)
Arabic	7% (14)
Chinese	5% (10)
Somali	5% (10)
Philippine	4% (8)
Swahili	3.5% (7)
Indian (Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu)	3.0% (6)
Hopi	2.5% (5)
O'odham	2.5% (5)
French	2.0% (4)
Hebrew	2.0% (4)
German	1.5% (3)
Havasupai-Hualapai	1.5% (3)
Hawaiian	1.5% (3)
Korean	1.5% (3)
Italian	1.0% (2)
Japanese	1.0% (2)
Milanese	1.0% (2)
Pakistani	1.0% (2)
Cocopah	0.5% (1)
Mojave	0.5% (1)

(n=200) Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply. Percentages that are less than 4% include one decimal place to interpret the data more accurately.

## Words Families and Children Use to Describe Local SFSPs

The survey asked respondents to list the words that parents and children who participate in SFSP use to describe it. Key words are shown in the word cloud below and a summary of the key responses is provided below. In the word cloud, words that are larger were said more often than the words that are smaller.



- Respondents most commonly reported that families used terms of gratitude when speaking about the program, such as appreciate, thankful, grateful, etc. "Helpful" was another common word used to describe the program.
- Respondents reported that families used positive terms for the program, such as awesome, wonderful, excellent, and great.
- A number of respondents indicated that parents referred to the program as being "much needed" and other terms with the same theme such as "fills the gap" and "helps the food budget." Some families used even more emphatic terms, such as a blessing, lifesaver, or miracle.
- Respondents also noted that parents and children spoke of the quality of the food provided using terms like healthy, nutritious, home-cooked, and yummy.
- Words that families used to describe the program also focused on the participant-friendly characteristics of how the food is distributed, including dependable, available, organized, accessible, convenient, and grab and go.
- Respondents reported that families used the word "free" to describe the program, while others noted that families appreciated the staff who served them at sites, using terms like friendly staff and good service.

- The following examples illustrate the range of survey participants' responses:
  - *Helpful, easy, convenient.*
  - *Nutritious and fun.*
  - *Thank you and We appreciate your school for feeding our children especially during this time.*
  - *Great service, great food, convenient hours.*
  - *Safe, nutritious, convenient, helpful during these financially challenging times.*
  - *Thankful they would have food for their child/children.*
  - *Variety, fortunate, grateful, happy.*
  - *Yummy, healthy, helpful.*

## Challenges in Providing SFSP

Exhibit 8 shows the top challenges faced by survey respondents in providing SFSP services to children and families. Respondents could select all challenges that applied to them, so the percentages do not total 100 percent. Almost half of respondents (48 percent) identified transportation as one of the challenges they faced in providing SFSP services to children and families. Other common challenges include staffing (26 percent), packaging (22 percent), and communicating with parents/caregivers (18 percent). Other challenges mentioned include the availability of products due to COVID-19, providing food delivery to homes, knowing how many meals were needed, meeting congregate feeding requirements prior to waivers, and poor rural road infrastructure.

**Exhibit 8. Top Challenges Faced in Providing SFSP Services to Children and Families**

Challenge	Percentage (number)
Transportation	48% (96)
Staffing	26% (51)
Packaging	22% (43)
Communicating with parents/caregivers	18% (36)
Weather	16% (31)
Advertising/marketing your program	15% (29)
Funding available for broader summer programs	12% (23)
Other	11% (21)
Funding for SFSP	10% (19)
Scheduling conflicts with meal service times	7% (14)
Food safety	7% (13)
Stigma behind food insecurity	7% (13)
Limited administrative support	4% (7)
Food quality	3% (6)

(n=200) Note: Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply.

### Challenges Compared by Operator/Community Characteristics

Operators that serve **tribal communities** (65 percent) were significantly more likely to report transportation as a challenge compared to those who do not work with tribal communities (38 percent). Operators that serve tribal communities (31 percent) were also significantly more likely to report **weather** as a challenge compared to operators that do not serve tribal communities (6 percent).

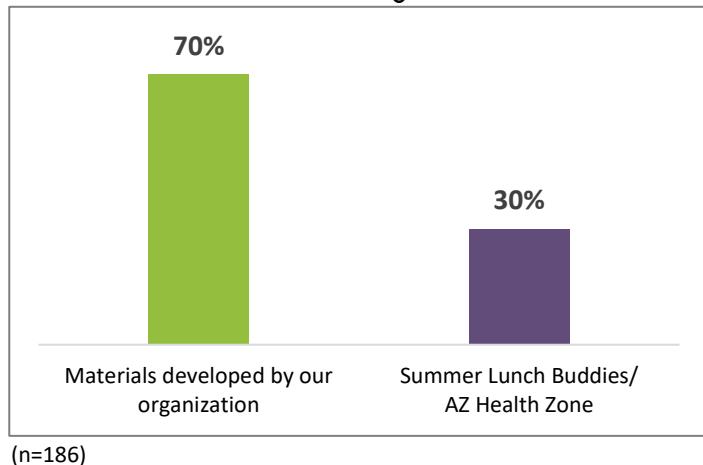
Respondents who reported that they **developed their own marketing materials** for SFSP had a higher percentage (23 percent) reporting that it was challenging to communicate with parents/caregivers, compared to operators who used AZ Health Zone-prepared materials (9 percent). A higher percentage of operators in **rural locations** (23 percent) reported communicating with parents/caregivers as a challenge, compared to those in urban locations (14 percent).

**Simplified** operators were significantly more likely to report having challenges **communicating with parents/caregivers** (25 percent) compared to those operating SSO (13 percent). A higher percentage of **Simplified** operators (19 percent) also reported **advertising and marketing their program** as a challenge, compared to SSO operators (11 percent).

## Marketing Efforts in 2020

Exhibit 9 shows that 70 percent of the respondents indicated that their organization developed its own materials to market the program and 30 percent utilized the Summer Lunch Buddies marketing materials provided by AZ Health Zone. Simplified operators were significantly more likely to use their own marketing materials (83 percent) compared to SSO operators (62 percent).

**Exhibit 9. Sources of Marketing Materials for SFSPs**



## Marketing Methods Utilized and In Need of Additional Support

Use of the school district's website, flyers, Facebook, automated phone calls/texts, and print advertising were the most commonly reported methods used to market programs (Exhibit 10). Methods of outreach vary greatly and help to reinforce that there are many different touchpoints at which to reach children, parents, and partners. Methods that respondents would like additional support in using include: flyers, print advertising, mailers, district website (including logos, graphics), Facebook, and promotional videos.

**Exhibit 10. Methods Used to Market SFSPs and In Need of Additional Support**

Method	Percentage (number)	Percentage (number) Needing Additional Support
	Utilized	
District website	<b>74% (148)</b>	<b>22% (44)</b>
Flyers	<b>73% (147)</b>	<b>34% (67)</b>
Facebook	<b>66% (132)</b>	<b>20% (40)</b>
Automated phone calls	<b>37% (74)</b>	8% (15)
Print advertising	<b>30% (59)</b>	<b>34% (68)</b>
Automated texts	<b>24% (47)</b>	9% (17)
Banners	22% (43)	<b>32% (64)</b>
Mailers	20% (40)	<b>23% (45)</b>
Radio	16% (32)	16% (31)
Individual phone calls	16% (31)	3% (5)
Instagram	13% (25)	7% (14)
Billboards	11% (22)	12% (23)
Twitter	8% (16)	6% (12)
Nutrislice	7% (13)	2% (4)
School email list	7% (13)	0%
Peach Jar	6% (12)	2% (4)
School newsletter	5% (11)	0%
School marquee	2% (4)	0%
ClassDojo	2% (4)	0%
Promotional videos	2% (3)	<b>18% (35)</b>
NextDoor	2% (3)	5% (9)
Community locations	1% (2)	0%

(n=200) Percentages do not total 100% because the survey asked respondents to check all that apply.

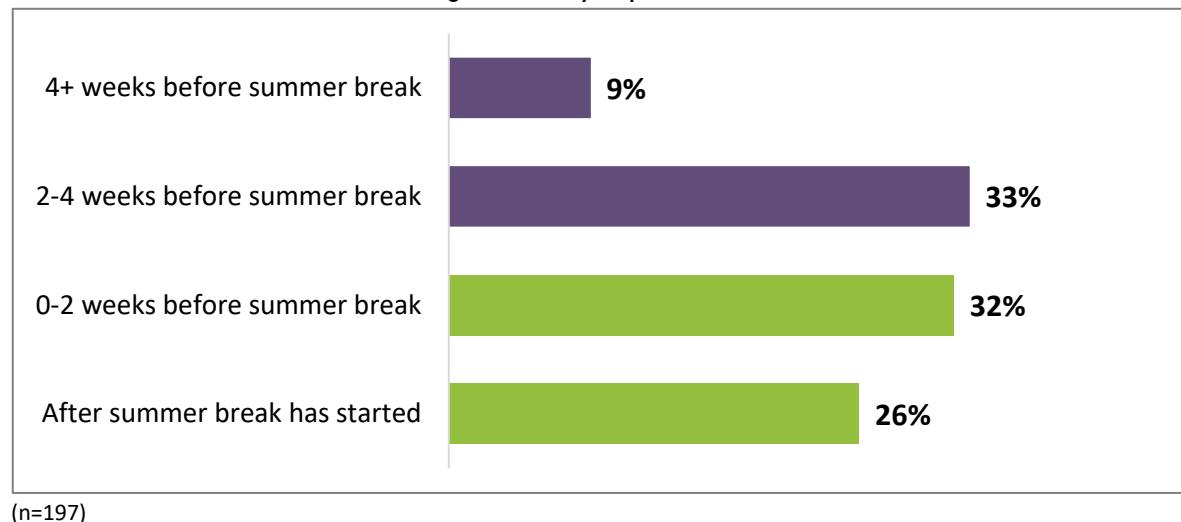
Respondents were asked the open-ended question: "What has worked well for you in the past in marketing your program?" Responses fell into four thematic areas, which are aligned with the variety of marketing strategies reported being used in 2020:

- **Communications directly to the parents by schools and districts** - Flyers about the program and marketing in school newsletters were the most often mentioned means of reaching parents. Other direct communication methods used included phone calls (sometimes specified as being automated), emails, text messages, and letters. Direct communication to parents and children was also cited by respondents, including cafeteria staff talking with students and announcements during school and at school events.
- **Use of online platforms/social media** - Several respondents indicated that their school used a particular platform to communicate with parents, such as Blackboard Connect, Parent Connect, or ClassDojo. Schools and districts also used other online platforms to market the program to parents. Quite a few of the respondents reported using Facebook, unspecified social media, or the school's or district's website for marketing SFSP.
- **Posting signage in the school and community** – Respondents indicated using a variety of signage, such as banners, posters, and signs displayed in the community, and marquee signs at schools to promote the program.
- **Use of mass media, including radio, television, and print advertisements** - Marketing the program through mass media was used less commonly by respondents, with only a small number engaging in radio, television, or print media advertising.

## Timing of SFSP Marketing Efforts

Less than half (42 percent) of respondents started marketing SFSP two or more weeks before summer break began, while 58 percent reported starting to market the program two weeks or less before break or after summer break had started (Exhibit 11). A higher percentage of Simplified programs (63 percent) reported marketing two weeks or less before spring break or after summer had started, compared to SSO programs (56 percent). Additionally, 59 percent of programs that developed their own marketing materials reported starting SFSP marketing during this late time frame, compared to 51 percent of programs that used AZ Health Zone-developed materials.

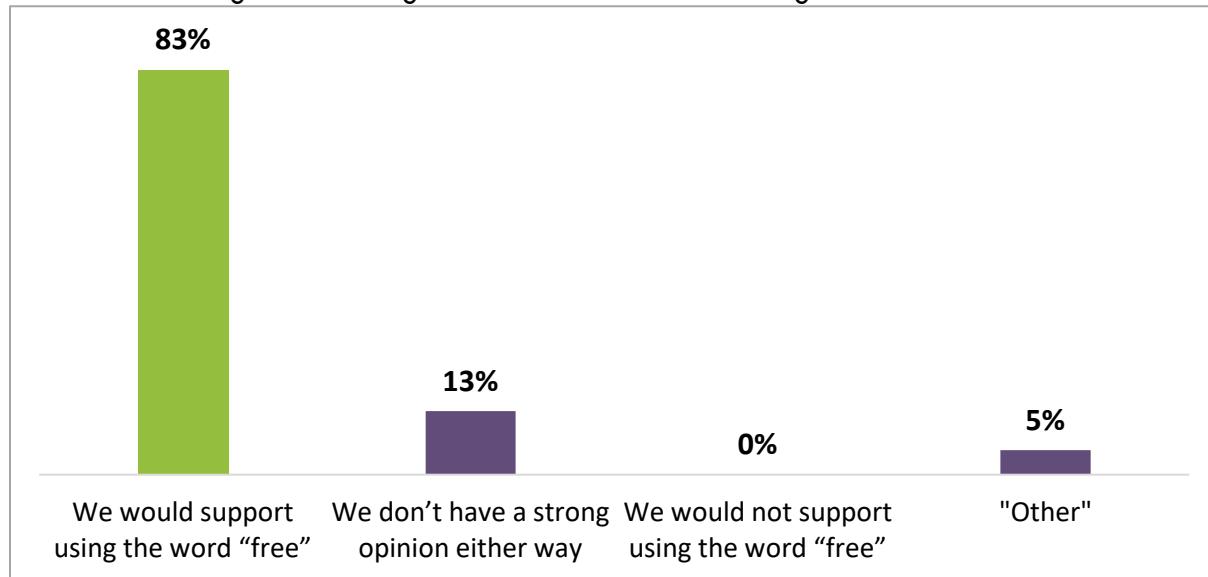
Exhibit 11. Start of SFSP Marketing Efforts by Operators



## Improvements to Marketing Efforts in 2021

Overall, key descriptors of SFSP that could be incorporated into future marketing materials include free meals/helps the food budget/fills the gap/helpful to families, good quality/healthy food, grab and go, convenient hours/locations, and friendly and respectful staff. Exhibit 12 shows that 83 percent of survey respondents support using the word "free" in marketing the program and 13 percent do not have a strong opinion. None of the survey respondents indicated that their program would not support the use of the word free.

Exhibit 12. Feelings About Using the Word "Free" in Marketing Efforts



(n=199) Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Nine respondents selected "Other" and provided an open-ended comment, including:

- *Children are living in rural area and nearest grocery store is 35 miles away.*
- *Historically our district did not like the use of the word "Free." However, I have been pushing it this year. Previously we were forced by the district to use "No Charge."*
- *If you do not CLEARLY state that the meals are free, parents will not bring kids to participate.*
- *School is located in rural area, no grocery store or fast food nearby, just Post Office.*
- *Under 18 years.*
- *Using the word free might help the parent understand that we offer free meals to anyone under 18 during this time of need.*
- *We prefer "At no cost."*
- *We use "At No Cost."*
- *When people see the word free when its advertised, they are more willing to come.*

The survey asked respondents to identify what would enhance their success in marketing SFSP in 2021. Not one particular strategy was reported by a large proportion of the respondents, but the most common responses focused on putting up banners, signs, or billboards about the program and advertising the program in the newspaper or on the radio or TV. A number of respondents indicated that starting promotion of the program earlier would be useful, both in terms of improving dissemination of information to parents and in getting support from the school administration. Better communication was also the theme of some responses, whether it be to parents, to students, or between sites. A number of respondents identified flyers as being important to their efforts. A few respondents noted that professional marketing materials about the program that could be adapted by a school would help save schools the time of producing their own. The following response examples demonstrate the wide range of ideas regarding improving the program at sites in the coming year.

- *Pre-made flyers and scripted messages for social media.*
- *More word of mouth, getting the community more involved.*
- *More advertisement, food quality improvement and extended variety.*
- *Having a budget for banners and flyers to catch more attention in our community.*
- *Our staff is the face of the program. Through great food and passion for our community we believe this is what makes our program successful. People do not want to feel they are another number in need and that there are people who truly care about them...Marketing focus has been more about the community and we are here for them through this time. Our SFSP is a part of many parts that convey this message!*
- *Quicker response time to start new sites.*
- *More advertising at the state level of all the sites that are open.*
- *Transportation to come get meals we think is a large problem in getting people to take advantage of the program. Not sure of what 2021 will be like to plan at this time.*
- *We cover marketing fine in our small rural community.*
- *Our district letting us text more messages.*
- *Printed materials. Start flyer-ing earlier.*
- *Promote that meals are FREE of charge.*
- *Quick and easy access to flyers and mailers so we are not spending valuable manpower creating and distributing.*
- *We will be sending out letters to the families to let them know we are operating the SFSP program and that the kids are able to eat for FREE.*