

Menu of Actions

Use this tool to inspire action on your marketing and promotion goals. The menu includes activities, resources, and examples to support action in three areas: understanding and engaging your audience, choosing marketing methods, and communicating the value of your program. Start by choosing one or more activities that are feasible and meaningful for your program. Each step will build momentum. Come back to the menu for more inspiration as you need it.

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Understand & Engage Your Audience

Inviting student, family, and staff input and engagement builds awareness and investment in your program. The insights you gain will help you choose marketing strategies that make an impact.

Stay on top of trends and what matters to students

- Explore No Kid Hungry's [Youth Engagement Report](#) to learn about middle and high school students' perceptions and what motivates them to eat school and community meals.

*"One of the biggest motivators that would encourage teens to eat school meals besides taste, convenience, affordability and the opportunity to socialize, is **knowing that their school is listening to their views and opinions.**"*

- No Kid Hungry [Youth Engagement Report](#)

Invite student input through surveys

- The Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN)'s [Developing, Implementing, and Assessing Menu Surveys](#) (pdf) handbook covers selecting age-appropriate questions and survey methods, assessing results, and incorporating feedback.
- For sample surveys and questions you can adapt, check out:
 - No Kid Hungry's [Student Feedback Toolkit](#) and [School Meals Design Guide](#). You'll find tips, sample surveys in English and Spanish, a "Question Library," and more.
 - Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's [Elementary/Middle School Survey](#) (docx) or [High School Survey](#) (docx)
- The Center for EcoLiteracy's [School Lunch Survey Lesson Plan](#) engages students in designing and conducting a meal program survey as a class project in partnership with child nutrition staff.

Establish a student advisory group or hold focus groups

- ICN's tip sheet, [Implementing and Managing a Student Nutrition Advisory Council](#) (pdf), walks through assembling, managing, and working with an advisory council.
- No Kid Hungry's [Field Guide to Student Connection](#) (pdf) and [Student Interview Guide](#) (pdf) provide considerations and questions to guide conversations with students.
- For steps to hold a student focus group, review [Please Hear Us: Students Weigh In On School Food](#) from Farm to Institution New England.
- Consider sharing Team Nutrition's [How School Lunch is Made and How You Can Help](#) (pdf) with student advisory groups to explain meal program requirements and how students can make an impact.

Assess students' mealtime experience

- Use No Kid Hungry's [Meal Observation Tool](#) to look at mealtime from a student's perspective and find potential barriers and opportunities for program enhancement.
- The [Meal Appeal Self-Assessment](#) (pdf) developed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) evaluates the lunchroom atmosphere, food selection, student involvement, and other factors that can influence students' experience and participation.

Offer taste tests

- Team Nutrition's [Ingredients for a Successful Taste Test Event](#) and [Taste Testing Resources](#) offer a how-to guide, posters, stickers, and ballots.
- Food Corp's [Taste Test Guidebook](#) (pdf) provides step-by-step guidance.



Source: Bainbridge Island School District

Engage families through surveys, meetings, or focus groups

- Conduct a family survey to understand perceptions of school and/or afterschool meals and barriers to participation. These tools are customizable and can be adapted for print or web-based use:
 - Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's [Parent Survey](#) (docx)
 - National PTA's [Student and Family Meal Perception Survey](#)
 - No Kid Hungry's [Survey for Caregivers](#)
- Invite conversation and collaboration with families by attending events, participating in Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/PTO) meetings, or holding focus groups.
 - [The National PTA School Meals Leader's Guide](#) (pdf) was developed to support collaboration between PTA groups and school nutrition programs. It offers insight into topics and collaboration opportunities that may interest your PTA/PTO.
 - The [Focus Group Guidebook](#) (pdf) from the New York State Education Department includes focus group guidance, templates, and frequently asked questions.
 - Action for Healthy Kids' [Collaborating for Healthy Schools Guide \(pages 9-12\)](#) (pdf) offers best practices for collaborative meetings and building trust with families. The guide is based on lessons learned from successful school wellness committees.

Build understanding and support from staff and administration

- Seek opportunities to talk regularly with district/organization leaders and staff in one-to-one, staff, school board, or wellness committee meetings. Invite them to attend events, offer program tours, or explore partnership opportunities to increase awareness of your program and build connections.
- Consider what is most important for administrators and staff to know to be a partner and advocate for your program. What information would support their work? Are there points of confusion that you can help clarify? Is there data that they need? Have you shared your team's accomplishments? These resources offer examples:
 - [Nutrition Services Guide for Schools](#) (pdf) – Jefferson County Public Schools' (KY) handout for school staff highlights key messages, program features, and internal contact information.
 - [Understanding the Levels of Authority for School Food Systems](#) – This Center for Ecoliteracy page outlines school meals decisionmakers and their roles—from the federal level to teachers.
 - [School Board Presentation PowerPoint Template](#) (pptx) - Iowa Department of Education
 - [District Profile Template](#) – This resource from SNA's [Cafeteria Site Visit 101](#) toolkit is designed for policymaker visits, but the template can be adapted to provide a concise summary of key data for administrators or organization leadership.

Choose Your Marketing Methods

Choose the outreach strategies you will use to promote your program and elevate child nutrition.

Build your program's brand

Using a brand to center your marketing efforts builds a consistent and familiar image for your program. Being intentional about defining your program's brand, mission, and vision gives you control of the tone and what stands out about your program.

- Review the [School Meals Brand](#) section of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's "Marketing Your School Meals" online course or visit The Lunch Box's [Branding Your Program](#) page to get started.
- Visit some of the websites listed on the right. Consider how they communicate their program's mission and value (for example, nutritional contributions, student health, and academic success).

Child Nutrition Brand Examples

- **[Aberdeen School District Food & Nutrition Services](#)** (WA) – Logo, welcome
- **[Ellensburg School District Child Nutrition Services](#)** (WA) – Mission, vision
- **[Boys & Girls Club of Columbia Basin](#)** (WA) – See "Healthy Fuel" and "More than a Snack"
- **[Lovejoy Independent School District Student Nutrition](#)** (TX) – Director's note, mission, goals
- **[Cambridge Public Schools Food and Nutrition Services](#)** (MA) – Vision, mission, objectives, department highlights
- **[Oxford School District Child Nutrition](#)** (MS) – Logo, descriptions "Good Nutrition is Essential to Learning!"

Create engaging and informative web pages

Your website may be the first introduction families have to your program. Investing time in your site can help make sure they walk away with a positive impression and the information they need.

- Start by assessing your website and identifying areas you can strengthen. Visit your website and imagine that you are a family member or student looking at it for the first time. Consider the following questions:
 - What is your initial impression? Is it welcoming? Is it easy to read and navigate (clear titles/headings, navigation, etc.)?
 - What can you tell about the program? Is the program's mission/vision clear? Can you tell if local foods, scratch cooking, or nutrition are priorities?
 - Can you tell how a student can participate? When and how are meals and snacks served? What does it cost? Is an application required?
 - Is it clear what a complete/reimbursable meal or snack includes? Are there pictures or videos of the program or meals? Does the food look/sound nutritious and appealing?

This is also a good time to check your website for required content. The USDA Nondiscrimination Statement is required for all sponsors (see the [Civil Rights Reference Sheet](#) (pdf) for current text). School Meal Program Sponsors, review the [School Meal Program Webpage Requirements Reference Sheet](#) (pdf) for additional requirements. Please reach out to your specialist with questions.

Use your menus to give students and families a flavor of your program

Your menus may be the only communication from your program that families see regularly. Use them to showcase your program and the nutritious and delicious foods you offer.

- The Lunch Box's [sample menu](#) (pdf) includes abbreviated labels (for local, scratch, gluten free, etc.), the Harvest of the Month, and a featured recipe using their [menu template](#).
- Check out [Selah's menu](#) and [read more in Canvas](#) to see how they used emojis on their menu to convey their brand (for example, ❤️ = kitchen created, 🚜 = farm to school)
- Iowa Department of Education's [MyPlate menu templates](#) feature food jokes, riddles, and nutrition education facts to engage families and younger students.
- If you use a web-based menu, consult your vendor about options to add photos or designate items as local, scratch cooked, etc. Some offer stock images you can add (for example, to explain meal components and offer versus serve). You can also add culinary or nutrition details to the menu item's name (for example, a recent [Vancouver Public Schools' menu](#) featured "Homemade Pozole," "Local Bison and Lentil Chili," and "Whole-Grain Mozzarella Breadsticks."

Increase visibility with high-quality pictures or videos

- Focusing on the quality of your photos can help ensure they have a positive impact.
 - Watch Georgia Department of Education's short (3 minute) tutorial, [Take Great Meal Photos](#).
 - Look through the [How to Use Photos](#) (pdf) and [How to Compose Photos](#) (pdf) slides from the Minnesota School Nutrition Association.
 - Texas Department of Agriculture's [Food Photography Basics](#) (pdf) is a detailed guide for child nutrition directors to build their own skills or partner with students on photography projects.
- [Team Nutrition's Flickr Photo Collection](#) and the toolkits on page nine also offer images to enhance your communications.
- Video offers a powerful tool to orient families and students to your program, provide nutrition education, or highlight all that you offer. Check out these examples:
 - [We are FWPS: Nutrition Services](#) – Featured on [Federal Way Public Schools Nutrition Services home page](#), this video describes the program from the perspectives of the dedicated staff.
 - [Introduction to School Lunch at Austin ISD](#) (3:50) – Featured in English and Spanish on [Austin ISD's Food Service home page](#) and social media accounts, this video packs a lot of valuable information about school meals into four minutes.
 - [What Makes a Meal?](#) (3:32) - Jefferson County Public Schools (KY) Nutrition Services team partnered with an elementary teacher and students to create this video to show their peers how to choose required components and minimize food waste.



Photos: Local Food for Schools coho salmon (Source: Bainbridge Island School District);

La Conner Middle School meal featuring a Lummi Island Wild pink salmon burger (Source: OSPI)

Use social media to showcase your program and nutritious foods you offer

Social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram are valuable tools for shining a light on your program and keeping your community up to date. The ability to make regular, quick posts and share pictures or videos makes it ideal for promoting the nutritious foods you offer students every day.

Getting started

Explore how other child nutrition programs use social media and research what platforms fit your program and audience best. These resources offer a good overview of the options and what to consider.

- [School Nutrition Outreach Toolkit Guide](#) (pages 8-12) (pdf) - Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- [Social Media and Digital Marketing Toolkit](#) (The Lunch Box)

Be sure to check your organization's social media policies. Get approval before investing time in setting up an account. Outlining how you will use social media, expected benefits, and examples from other programs can strengthen your request.

Keep content fresh

- Plan to post and monitor engagement on your account as a regular part of your routine.
- Make a habit of taking photos. See the resources on page five for tips on taking high-quality photos. Follow your organization's policies for using identifiable photos of students or staff.
- Check out the toolkits on page nine for ready-to-use social media posts and graphics.

Have a plan for negative comments

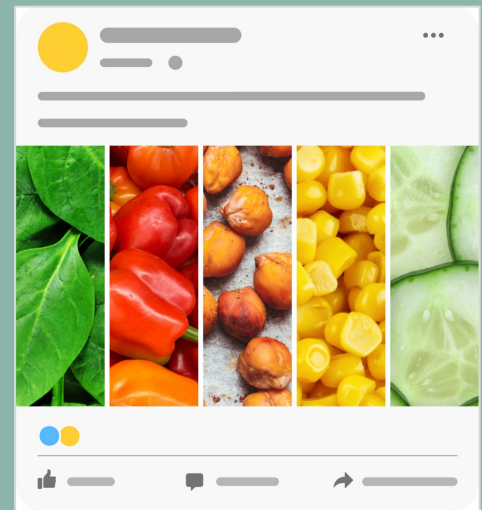
- Ask if your organization has policies about managing and responding to comments.
- ICN's [Social Media Response Flow Chart](#) (pdf) offers a decision tree with recommendations for handling negative interactions.

What if you can't create and manage your own account?

If your district or organization has active accounts, talk with the staff who manage them to explore ways you can work together to promote your program. Collaborate to create a content calendar and set a goal to provide the content for a post (photo/graphic and a caption) on a regular basis (for example, 2-3 posts a month). Existing district or organization-level accounts often have a large reach. This can be a win-win partnership that helps keep your time demands in check.

Examples

- **Ellensburg School District Child Nutrition** ([Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#))
- **Everett Public Schools Food & Nutrition Services** ([Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#))
- **Northshore School District Food and Nutrition Services** ([Facebook](#))
- **Austin ISD (TX) Food Service** ([Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#))



Build visibility using district or organization communication channels

Using established district or organization channels such as newsletters and family communication apps can expand your reach and reinforce that your program is an integral part of the school or afterschool community.

- Ask teachers or afterschool site staff how they provide information to families. They may be able to add an announcement to a class newsletter, forward an email, or help distribute letters or flyers.
- [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's School Nutrition Outreach Toolkit](#) includes newsletter, email, and other templates to promote school meals, new menu items, farm to school, and events.
- For a sample article, scroll through [Vancouver Public Schools' VPS Now](#) for "School Lunches: Better Than Ever."

Present at meetings or events

For sample presentation slides and ideas of what to present at PTA/PTO, School Board, or staff meetings, check out:

- Iowa Department of Education's [School Board Presentation PowerPoint Template](#) (pptx)
- No Kid Hungry's [Understanding Caregivers](#) resource for a customizable "[Meal Program Introduction and Request for Feedback](#)" presentation.
- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's [School Nutrition Outreach Toolkit](#) for sample PowerPoint slides and speakers notes to present about School Lunch, School Breakfast, New Menu Items/Taste Tests, and Farm to School.

Celebrate promotional events

With local and national promotional events, heritage months, and observances throughout the year, the calendar can inspire engaging opportunities to build program visibility, hold taste tests, feature new menu items, and make community connections.

- The School Nutrition Association's annual [Promotional Celebration Calendar](#) is filled with fun food holidays, national observances, and awareness weeks or months to offer inspiration throughout the year.
- Awareness event organizers often offer engaging themes and resources including graphics, announcements, social media posts, educational materials, and activities. Don't miss:
 - **October:** [Taste Washington Day](#), [Farm to CACFP Week](#), [National School Lunch Week](#), [National Farm to School Month](#)
 - **March:** [National CACFP Week](#), [National School Breakfast Week](#), [National Nutrition Month](#)
 - **May:** [School Lunch Hero Day](#)
- Help families get a taste of your celebrations by sharing photos on social media or in newsletters, like this example from Selah School District, [Selah Students Enjoy A Taste of Washington](#).

Reach out to local media

Your local media can be a powerful partner in getting your message out to your community. Program developments, events, grants or awards, and farm to child nutrition program achievements are examples of topics that can be newsworthy.

- Check with your district or organization about policies or procedures for engaging media outlets. If your organization has a public relations or communications manager, they may offer guidance and help you make connections.
- Wisconsin's [School Nutrition Outreach Toolkit Handbook \(page 14\)](#) (pdf) offers a helpful overview, tips, and templates to prepare news releases.
- No Kid Hungry's [Afterschool Meals Outreach Toolkit](#) includes a [sample press release](#) to promote afterschool meals sites.
- See the box on the right for examples of articles about Washington Child Nutrition Programs.

Examples of Child Nutrition in the News

- **Feeding young minds: County libraries use federal program to provide snacks to children and teens** (The Spokesman-Review)
- **Breakfast in the Classroom program shines in Federal Way** (Federal Way Mirror)
- **Ellensburg School District new chef revamps menu, with emphasis on scratch cooking and nutrition** (Daily Record)
- **Yakima school meals to get a revamp with less sugar and additives** (Yakima Herald-Republic)

Make program enhancements and address participation barriers

Making service or menu enhancements, addressing barriers to participation, and incorporating nutrition education can elevate your program and demonstrate your commitment to creating a positive student experience. Share your efforts on social media or in other communications to amplify the impact.

- Check out Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's online course [Upgrade School Meal Appeal](#).
- Creatively addressing barriers can make a big impact, like this example from Maryland: [Easy Peasy. Getting Your Lunch is Easy!](#)
- Use nutrition education to build engagement and reinforce that nutrition is central to your mission. Check out the [Power Up Your Program: Nutrition Education Menu of Actions](#) (pdf) in Canvas for ways to build more nutrition education into your meal program and throughout the day.

Promote the Value of Your Program

Help others see the impact of child nutrition and the value of your program. Showcase the nutritional quality of the foods you serve, your dedicated team's work, and what it means for your students.

Take advantage of toolkits

- **[Afterschool Meals Outreach Toolkit](#)** - No Kid Hungry's toolkit provides outreach strategies and resources to spread the word about CACFP afterschool meal programs:
 - Graphics and templates for social media posts, letters, press releases, signs, and banners.
 - Customizable website language including responses to frequently asked questions
- **[CACFP Outreach: Mealtime Memo](#)** (pdf) - This ICN resource offers strategies to communicate about your participation in CACFP and the benefits for your students and families,
 - "Did you know..." nutrition facts that you can share on social media or in materials
 - A CACFP parent/caregiver information sheet with benefits and ways families can engage
- **[Made With School Lunch Campaign](#)** - SNA and the National Dairy Council launched this campaign in fall 2025 to raise awareness and celebrate the value of school meals. Find ready-to-use resources including:
 - [Pre-written social media posts and images](#)
 - [Key messages](#) (pdf) for students, parents, educators, and administrators
 - Ten [short, shareable YouTube videos](#) addressing common misconceptions
- **[School Meals Outreach Toolkit](#)** - Developed through Wisconsin's School Meals Rock initiative, this toolkit includes:
 - [Customizable templates](#) for social media posts, letters, emails, newsletter inserts, and presentations to promote school meals, new menu items, farm to school, events, and more.
 - An [outreach handbook](#) (pdf) with key messages for families, students, and school staff along with ideas for photos and videos (pages 19-33)
- **[School Breakfast Program Marketing Resources](#)** – Visit USDA's school breakfast marketing resource page for:
 - Customizable newsletter inserts, outreach letters, flyers, key messages, and resources to encourage educator and principal support
- **[Summer Meal Program & Farm to Summer Toolkit](#)** – This Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Toolkit includes resources in English and Spanish designed to promote the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), Farm to Summer Week, and Summer Crunch.
 - Editable flyers, sample social media posts and captions, tips for using different platforms, and ideas to boost engagement online. Includes resources in English and Spanish.



Creating messages to convey the power of child nutrition

There are so many opportunities to shine a light on child nutrition. Use this table for ideas. The examples show a variety of messages and channels. Although they are not exhaustive, they can offer inspiration.

Topic	Message Ideas	Examples or Resources
Program Basics & Orientation	- Program basics (programs offered, where, when) - Cost - Eligibility - Orientation for new students/families	Introduction to School Lunch at Austin ISD (Video, Austin Independent School District, TX) Child Nutrition & Education Eligibility Benefit Application (CNEEB) Promo Reel & It's More than a Meal Application – How-to Complete the CNEEB (Videos, OSPI) Kindergarten Orientation (Video, Everett Public Schools) Meals in Secondary (Webpage, Northshore School District)
Impact & Benefits of Child Nutrition Programs	- Your students! <i>*Check district/organization policies for photos</i> - Reach/number of meals served - Research on the benefits of school/after school meals - Community impact (e.g., market for local farmers)	Did you know...During the 2023-24 school year, we served 1,129,185 meals (319,700 breakfasts and 809,485 lunches) ("Did you know?" facts on home page, Bremerton School District) 133,353 Meals & Snacks ("Our Impact" highlights on home page, Boys & Girls Clubs of South Puget Sound) Ellensburg School District bought nearly \$75,000 in local food... (Facebook post about Ellensburg School District, Chef Ann Foundation) 5 Great Reasons Your Child Should Eat School Meals (pdf flyer, Georgia Department of Education) - Research Briefs: Breakfast for Learning (pdf) or Breakfast for Health (Food Research & Action Center (pdf)
Meal/Snack Components & Nutritional Contributions	- What makes a meal or snack - Nutrition standards - Common misperceptions about nutritional quality - Nutrition education	Made with School Lunch Infographic (Handout, SNA & National Dairy Council) The Real Food Guide To School Breakfast or The Real Food Guide to School Lunch for Families (Flyers, USDA Team Nutrition) Mythbusters for School & Summer Meals (pdf handout, Colorado Department of Education) What Makes a Meal? (Video for students about offer versus serve, Jefferson County Public Schools, KY)

Topic	Message Ideas	Examples or Resources
Menu & the Variety of Foods Offered	- Examples of meals and snacks - New items/recipes - Culturally inclusive meals - Fruit and vegetable options/salad bars - Recipes	- Ellensburg School District's Facebook or Instagram accounts feature menu options and new recipes, like this post about a new addition to the salad bar Northshore School District Facebook (Posts weekly elementary school menu options with tray photos)
Program Enhancements & Points of Pride	- Engagement opportunities - Impact of student/family input - Scratch cooking - Farm to CNP - Harvest of the month - Gardens - Promotional Events	Harvest of the Season Toolkits (posters, family newsletters, and additional resources for 24 Washington local foods, OSPI) From Garden to Lunch Tray: Students Dig into Nutrition and Growth (Article, Federal Way Public Schools) Morning announcements for menu promotions and events (docx, OSPI) Farm to School Taste Test: Hearty Beef Stew a Hit with MMK Owls! (Newsletter article, Mary M. Knight School District)
Awards & Grants	Rooted in Excellence Awards for SFAs (OSPI) - CACFP Week Awards (OSPI) - Professional association awards or scholarships - Grant awards & activities	Boys & Girls Club earns awards for nutrition education (Columbia Basin Herald) Anacortes School District awarded \$26,000 grant for healthier foods (Go Skagit) Healthy Meals Incentives Recognition Award announcement (Instagram post, Ellensburg School District)
CNP Team & Partners	- Staff shoutouts - Staff introductions - Partner acknowledgements - Behind the scenes	We are FWPS: Nutrition Services (Video, Federal Way Public Schools) To Our Hard-Working Kitchen Crews, Thank you! (Article, Northshore School District)

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1. **Mail:** U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Mail Stop 9410, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
2. **Fax:** (202) 690-7442; or
3. **Email:** program.intake@usda.gov.

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