

# **Feeding America Kids Cafes and Afterschool Snacks and Meals: Program Evaluation and Assessment**

## **Executive Summary**

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## Overview

*Feeding America Kids Cafes and Afterschool Snacks and Meals: Program Evaluation and Assessment* was conducted to learn more about the key drivers behind trends for Kids Cafes and Afterschool Snacks and Meal programs within the Feeding America network. Feeding America selected Westat to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data from a small sample of food bank members and selected partner sites, with focus on the FY2009-FY2012 time period. These findings were combined to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Kids Cafe and Afterschool Snack and Meal programs within the Feeding America Network. Outcomes from this evaluation will be utilized for Feeding America's fiscal year 2014 (FY14) programmatic strategic plan.

## Methods

Westat analyzed food bank operational and program data from the FY2009-FY2012 Network Activity Report (NAR) by examining trends where data are available, computing statistics for individual years and identifying outliers as a means to better grasp the accuracy and difficulties associated with the reported values. The NAR is a survey developed annually to collect a variety of operational, human resource, and programmatic data from each food bank within the Feeding America network.

Westat also collected qualitative data by leading a group discussion and conducting interviews with Feeding America National Office (FANO) staff, 10 food banks, and six site coordinators:

- **A small group discussion at the Community Kitchen Chef Day.** Westat moderated a small group discussion with nine attendees at the Community Kitchen Chef Day, held at the New Hampshire Food Bank. They held a variety of positions (e.g., Chef, Director of Community Kitchen, Director of Outreach Services, Nutrition Education and Programs Director) at food banks across the U.S. The purpose of this discussion was to inform other aspects of the evaluation, including clarification of the research questions and development of discussion guides for use with National Office program staff as well as food bank and program staff.
- **National Office Program Staff Interviews.** Westat conducted in-person group interviews with staff from the Feeding America Program, Corporate Partnerships, and Nutrition and Purchasing Offices. We also conducted a group interview via telephone with members of the Compliance and Capabilities Office. Information on trends in programs, support provided to local food banks and programs, and perception of barriers to participation in various programs was collected. The purpose of these interviews was to: 1) help finalize discussion guides for interviewing food bank staff and Kids Cafe site coordinators; and 2) gain insights into the National Office program

staff's perspectives surrounding Kids Cafe and other afterschool feeding programs around the network.

- **Food Bank and Site Staff Interviews.** Westat conducted telephone interviews with nine food bank staff and five site coordinators. In-person interviews were held with food bank staff at a northeastern food bank and at one of its Kids Cafe sites. Food banks were selected based on their program capacity, geography, program delivery model, and CACFP participation. The purpose of these interviews was to gain insights in the food bank and programs perspectives surrounding the Kids Cafe Program model, its challenges, how it fits with the other programs offered and what makes it unique; the Federal reimbursement process and its impact; and ways the model might be changed to improve afterschool feeding.

Discussion summaries and notes were analyzed and themes were identified. Verbatim quotes that exemplified findings were incorporated into the report.

## Program Background

Feeding America's Kids Cafe program has focused on alleviating child hunger by providing low-income children with free and nutritious meals and snacks during afterschool hours. Kids Cafes are operated at a safe place, under the supervision of trustworthy staff, and at locations where children have opportunities for participating in educational, recreational, and social activities. Some food banks participate in Kids Cafe while others have chosen to operate comparable, but non-equivalent Afterschool Snack/Meal child feeding program (Non-Kids Cafes) and/or the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). The Afterschool Snack program serves nutritious snacks (and possibly meals) to children, in an afterschool setting. The SFSP operates when school is not in session.

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture makes available Federal funding to support programs serving school-aged children at risk of hunger. One main source of funding for programs serving meals and/or snacks to youth ages 18 and under is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). It is administered through state agencies working with sponsors, which are non-profit organizations responsible for fiscal and regulatory compliance with program regulations. Since CACFP enables "at risk" afterschool care programs to receive reimbursement for meals or snacks, food banks can serve as sponsors for their partner agencies. In addition to CACFP, programs that operate in the summer may receive Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) meal reimbursement.

## Summary of Key Findings

There has been a consistent decline in the number of food banks offering Kids Cafes, but this is not an indicator of overall program performance. While the number of food banks offering Kids Cafe has decreased, the number of children and meals served has grown within established program territories; very few Kids Cafe programs have been newly initiated by food banks. FANO staff, as well as food bank staff, indicated that the decline in the number of food banks offering Kids Cafes could be attributed primarily to the aging of the brand but other explanations are linked to the cost of operating the program, newer initiatives gaining more donor support, and the burdensome application and reimbursement for CACFP.

Since FY09, the number of food banks participating in Kids Cafes has declined by 15%, however, the number of Kids Cafe sites has grown by 30% and meals served have grown by 18%. Expansion of sites is occurring in existing Kids Cafe territories, likely based on food bank assessment of need, demand, and resources.

Table 1. Trends in Kids Cafe (FY09-FY12)

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
<b>Number of food banks using KC<sup>1,2</sup></b>	<b>122</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Number of KC meals</b>	<b>12,301,691</b>	<b>11,781,338</b>	<b>12,962,265</b>	<b>14,529,003</b>
<b>Average # meals/FB participating in KC</b>	<b>100,834</b>	<b>103,345</b>	<b>124,637</b>	<b>139,702</b>
<b>Number of KC sites<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>1,491</b>	<b>1,544</b>	<b>1,780</b>	<b>1,957</b>
<b>Average # meals/site</b>	<b>8,251</b>	<b>7,630</b>	<b>7,282</b>	<b>7,424</b>
<b># of KC sites at 95 common FB</b>	<b>N/A<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>1,395</b>	<b>1,731</b>	<b>1,875</b>

<sup>1</sup> Due to inconsistency in data reported, one southern food bank's FY2011 Kids Cafe data has been excluded from this report.

<sup>2</sup> FY2012 Kids Cafe meals from one eastern and one western food bank were excluded from the totals because agencies and PDOs run those programs, respectively (not run by the food banks).

<sup>3</sup> 10 KC sites from one mid-western food bank were excluded from the total since there were no KC meals provided for this FB, and therefore not counted as FB using KC.

<sup>4</sup> No site information is available for 2009

Regarding the choice that food bank members may make between operating a Kids Cafe or Non-Kids Cafe afterschool meal program, a key finding was that there is confusion within the network over what constitutes a Kids Cafe; food banks are reporting afterschool meal/snack programs as both Kids Cafes and Non-Kids Cafes or exclusively as one program type even when FANO program standards differentiate program by unique characteristics. Some food banks and site

coordinators call their program(s) “Kids Cafe” even though the programs did not necessarily meet all of the criteria established by Feeding America. However, data show some distinctions in program operations between Kids Cafes and Non-Kids Cafes. Program data reveal trends such as a) smaller child feeding sites are much more likely to operate Non-Kids Cafe Afterschool Meal programs than Kids Cafes, b) year-round sites, as opposed to school only and summer only, are twice as likely to be reported as Kids Cafes and c) Kids Cafes are predominately located in urban areas, which is dissimilar to Non-Kids Cafe Afterschool Snack/Meal sites which are more likely than Kids Cafes to be located in suburban and rural areas.

One key lesson gleaned from operating or starting a Kids Cafe program is that having existing partnerships with program sites were found to be more feasible than the food bank recruiting or trying to create new sites. Another lesson is that a strong partnership is necessary between the food bank and agency sites. Communication is critical to maintaining partnerships. The food bank and partner develop a mutual respect for one another and focus on their common goal of feeding children. However, this is tempered with the understanding that feeding children is only part of the program offered by the site, as many sites offer attractive enrichment activities for children. Lastly, it is important for food banks and sites to select the best program delivery model for food and meal distribution that works for them. It was found that a self-preparation central production model, in which a food bank prepares and delivers meals to sites, or vended/purchases of meals, may work better at most sites; vending wasn’t an option for the rural sites interviewed due to cost, logistics, and difficulty getting the meals there in a timely fashion. Food banks gave quite varied responses when asked about the point at which the program is cost-effective and manageable for site coordinators because there are many variables to be considered including staffing and size of the space available.

A critical factor for program sustainability for food banks and agencies is the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimbursement; of ten food banks interviewed, six receive CACFP reimbursement as sponsors and for them it is the main source of funding to sustain their afterschool programs. However, the application and reimbursement processes have their challenges, making the process difficult to navigate and placing undue administrative burden on sponsoring organizations like food banks. Many Kids Cafe programs don’t get reimbursement from CACFP, even though they are aware of this funding source. Some food banks even reported losing sites from the program as the site organizers found alternative sponsors that are participating in CACFP and could

offer reimbursements. Furthermore, USDA requirements regarding space, food (what must be served, when it must be served, and how it is counted), and paperwork make it difficult to acquire partners for Kids Cafe sites.

Other than CACFP reimbursement, food bank interviewees voiced additional operational challenges they have faced with Kids Cafes or afterschool child hunger programs. One issue occurs at the site level where there is a constant trade-off between finding food that children will eat, that is nutritious, is available from the food bank, and has the necessary shelf stability (especially for rural sites). The result is that some of the food provided is high in sugar and/or salt and can contribute to child behavior problems for site staff. Moreover, the USDA's nutritional requirements are viewed as a significant barrier by many of the food banks. For instance, several mentioned that they would prefer not to be required to serve milk with every meal which can be particularly challenging for rural sites.

Another key operational issue mentioned frequently was staff; staff turnover, lack of staff to conduct administrative or monitoring activities, training volunteer staff on food safety, and difficulty with site staff enforcing program regulations was voiced by food bank staff as problematic. Food and staff are the most significant costs associated with running a Kids Cafe program but other significant costs include fuel, meal delivery, drivers, equipment, administrative costs, and maintaining a warehouse. Several food banks attribute high staff and transportation costs to the CACFP monitoring requirement. The necessity of using purchased food to ensure adherence to the CACFP guidelines was mentioned, indicating that some food banks are under the impression that they can't use donated food or may find difficulty doing so.

## **Key Takeaways**

Kids Cafe is a unique program that provides congregate meals, enrichment activities, and nutritional education in a safe afterschool setting. Despite being Feeding America's oldest program, Kids Cafe continues to be an important in the network, serving millions of children. However, there are some challenges associated with operating a successful and sustainable program.

Factors key to a successful, sustainable program include: dedicated staff, a cost-effective and manageable number of children, programming that engages the children, a stable site, and stable funding. Partnerships and community support are also important elements. FANO staff suggested

that the focus of program sustainability should be on encouraging food banks to participate in the CACFP and private money could then be used to fill the gap. Food bank staff indicated that Feeding America, serving as an advocate for their network of food banks, could address these issues and remove or reduce some of the barriers to program participation by: 1) serving as a central distributor for webinars and toolkits addressing topics such as the CACFP and SFSP reimbursement process, 2) providing financial and/or technical assistance with the CACFP application process, 3) disseminating research and program evaluation information to food banks to increase understanding of positive program outcomes, 4) educating other stakeholders, and 5) identifying fundraising and grant opportunities to support non-reimbursable costs. This program evaluation and assessment served as a pathway to understand key drivers behind program trends, but Feeding America will continue to learn from the network and support the success of the Kids Cafe and other afterschool feeding programs.