



COMMUNITY HEALTH
IMPROVEMENT PARTNERS
making a difference together



ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY



INTRODUCTION TO ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY:

Your promotional and marketing strategy would not be complete without considering how you are engaging your community and audience. Engaging your community includes considering who is impacted by your school meal and Farm to School programs. When examining how to best format your message or marketing plan, you will want to consider what messages will resonate with your community. An effective communications strategy will include opportunities for your audience (e.g., students, families, staff, administration, community members, etc.) to be involved and aware of your messaging. Do not be afraid to think outside the box. You can be very creative when engaging your community to make a lasting impact (e.g., taste tests, competitions, videos, etc.).

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY CHECKLIST:

- **Use your school calendar:** Review your school calendar to find ways to engage your school community throughout the year. Are there school events where you can promote your school meal and Farm to School programs? Examples include Back to School Nights, Farm to School Month (October), National Nutrition Month (March), and School Lunch Hero Day (first Friday in May).
- **Be responsive to your audience:** As you communicate with your audience, be sure to listen and take notes on feedback and responses. Take the time to engage in a conversation and respond to questions. Remember to be positive and encouraging when discussing your school meal and Farm to School programs.
- **Engage your advocates:** Do you have a community member who is proud of your school meal and/or Farm to School program? Be sure to invite them to different promotional events. Do not forget to include your staff at promotional events. Staff members can be great advocates for your program.
- **Invite new people to events:** Brainstorm with your staff and think outside the box on who could attend school events to better promote your school meal and Farm to School programs. Feel welcome to include student voices or other members of the community.
- **Remember to have fun:** Be creative with your promotional materials and events to better engage your community. Do not be shy about taking pride in your work. For example, one of the Farm 2 School Collective school districts creates unique posters to promote their new menu items to students by using puns and fun images. Remember to be creative and have fun with your Farm to School promotion.

ACTIVITY

ENGAGING YOUR COMMUNITY IN ACTION: STUDENT AND FAMILY SURVEY ACTIVITY



- Surveys can be a great tool to better engage your community and receive feedback on how to improve your school meal and Farm to School programs. You can use Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, or another online platform to create your survey.
- In drafting your survey questions, think about what it is you want to know from families and students. Keep questions neutral rather than including your opinion in the prompt.¹



- Keep language simple and easy to read. Be aware of the languages your audience speaks and translate your survey into multiple languages if needed. Consider having another staff member read through the survey or get feedback from your target audience (i.e., a family member or student) before promoting.
- Promote your survey! Use your district webpage, Peachjar, or other school district newsletter platforms to promote your survey to parents and students. You can also use a QR code on your materials for families to scan to access additional resources or information.



- Look through the survey feedback and do not be afraid to address negative comments. Remember not to take any comments personally. For a step by step guide on how to address negative comments, read through the Social Media in Action: How to Address a Complaint in the *Social Media Promotion* section of the Farm to School Promotional Strategy Guide.
- Identify feedback you can use to further promote your Farm to School program. For example, if parents and/or family members mention they want to see more fruits and vegetables on the menu, you can use this to your advantage. For example, "95% of parents surveyed mentioned it was important to have fruits and vegetables on the school menu. In response, we have added more options to our salad bar!"



- Showcase your results! You can present results from your data at parent and staff meetings to highlight your program. Be sure to share with your audience what feedback you received and the positive ways you are working to grow and improve your program.

¹ For a list of suggestions for drafting survey questions, visit Survey Monkey's [Guide to Writing Good Survey Questions](#)



TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED

Engaging your community starts with coming up with a list of activities or engagement opportunities throughout the year. Get together with your team to brainstorm ways to promote your programs all year. Here are some ideas to get you started:



Student Engagement

- Taste tests
- Posters in cafeterias or classrooms
- School announcements
- Contests or events
- Surveys on school meal preferences
- Social media
- Friendly competitions/contests
- Teacher encouragement



Staff and Administration Engagement

- Letters or email messages
- Invitations to taste test events
- PowerPoint presentations during staff meetings²



Family Engagement:

- Flyers or take-home materials
- Events (e.g., Back to School Night)
- Articles in newsletters
- Automated phone messages
- Parent meetings
- Parent-teacher conferences
- Surveys

Farm to School Collective: Example Resources

- [Example Survey Questions - Students, Parents, Staff](#)
- [Sample Survey - Students](#)
- [Sample Survey - Parents](#)

Additional Resources:

- [Menu Planner for School Meals: Marketing School Meals for Success! - USDA](#): Guide to marketing school meals, including considerations for messaging for different audiences. (For more information on engaging different community audiences, visit pg. 233-235).

² **Source:** USDA. (2018, July). Menu Planner for School Meals: Marketing School Meals for Success! Retrieved September 22, 2020 from https://childnutrition.ncpublicschools.gov/information-resources/menu-planning-production/h1819_menuplnr_ch7.pdf

