

School Nutrition Program New Sponsor Process

To participate in School Nutrition Programs (SNP), prospective sponsors must complete 10 tasks prior to State Agency approval to claim meals for reimbursement. This process can take six to nine months to complete and should be started a minimum of six months prior to the first day of school nutrition operation.

As you begin, keep in mind these critical details:

- The date that all required complete application materials are received by Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is the earliest potential date for claiming meals for reimbursement. No meals served prior to this date will be reimbursable.
- In order to claim meals, the sponsor must be operating the program in its entirety at that time. For example, the sponsor must be actively determining students' eligibility statuses and not charging families for the meals.
- All prospective sponsors will receive an on-site approval visit to verify critical operational systems are in place.
- On-site approval visits are scheduled after all required application materials have been received by MDE.
- Approval to claim meal reimbursement may be delayed and meals served disallowed if compliance issues are identified during the approval visit.
- Potential sponsors should work on many of these tasks at the same time.
- Licensed and certified childcare programs are not eligible for U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) school nutrition programs and can apply to participate in the [Child and Adult Care Food Program](#).

Note: Schools participating in the School Nutrition Programs as a joint agreement site do not need to complete the New Sponsor Application Process. Instead, complete the Joint Agreement Contract with the existing school nutrition sponsor. For more information on joint agreements, review the [Joint Agreement Guidance](#).

Task 1: Complete Orientation to School Nutrition Programs

View SNP Orientation Videos:

- [Deciding to Participate](#) (30 minutes)
- [Meal Benefit Eligibility Basics](#) (30 minutes)
- [Basic Meal Pattern Requirements](#) (30 minutes)
- [Food Safety and Staffing Needs](#) (30 minutes)
- [Professional Standards-Hiring Standards for New School Nutrition Directors](#) (12 minutes)

Task 2: Obtain a Food and Beverage License for Each Site

All SNP sites must be licensed by the local health agency prior to approval. Some facilities require renovation prior to receiving a food and beverage license. Local health agencies are often available to visit proposed locations to determine if facility renovations will be required prior to securing a lease.

Contact the local health-licensing agency for instructions to apply for a food and beverage license. Access the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) [Licensing Jurisdiction: State and Local Environmental Health Delegated Agencies Map](#) to determine the local health-licensing agency.

Note: A vended meal provider's food and beverage license does not meet the requirement for the school facility to be licensed.

Task 3: Complete New Applicant Information Form

This form is the initial submission of information and intent to apply for the School Nutrition Program. MDE will use the information provided to pre-screen prospective sponsors to ensure eligibility for the USDA Child Nutrition Programs. MDE will also use the information to create your sponsor's access to the Cyber-Linked Interactive Child Nutrition System (CLiCS). Once you receive access to CLiCS, your organization can submit the sponsor and site applications for the School Nutrition Programs. The following information will be required to complete the [New Applicant Information Form](#):

- Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) number
- Minnesota Management and Budget (MMB) Vendor number
- Copy of Food and Beverage License for the school
- [CLiCS Site ID Form](#)

UEI number: The UEI number is a unique nine-character number that identifies an organization and is used to track how federal child nutrition program funding is allocated. To verify if the organization has a UEI number, or to register for a UEI number, visit [Unique Entity Identifier](#).

MMB Vendor Number: The vendor number is issued through MMB and will be used for all transactions and contracts. To register for the first time and access additional vendor information, [visit the MMB website](#).

CLiCS Access: A separate user id and password will be provided for each person listed on the New Applicant Information Form. Each user will receive a confirmation email from FNS Administrator, which will include a login screen address, their user ID, and password. User IDs and passwords must not be shared.

Task 4: Decide Meal Service Model

Self-Operation: With this model, the SNP operator prepares food on-site with school staff. The operator is responsible for planning compliant menus, procuring food and supplies, hiring/supervising kitchen staff and overseeing all areas of meal preparation, service and clean-up.

Vended Meal Contract: A vended meal contract is for meals only. Meals may be vended from another school food authority or a commercial vendor such as a catering company or restaurant.

Meals provided by a commercial vendor must be competitively procured. MDE has developed a template that combines the procurement document and contract. This template must be used by organizations that purchase meals from a vendor.

Refer to task 5 for procurement requirements and template contracts.

Food Service Management Contracts (FSMC): This type of contract is for schools requesting meals plus additional services. A FSMC is a commercial enterprise or a nonprofit organization that will manage any aspect of the school's food service operations. FSMC contract procurements require oversight by the State Agency. Refer to task 5 for procurement requirements and template contracts.

[Learn more about the different types of meal service contracts.](#)

Task 5: Complete Procurement Process

See [Procurement and Contracts \(mn.gov\)](#) for more detailed information on procurement requirements and methods for federally funded programs.

Self-Operation

SNP operators preparing their meals will need to secure a kitchen facility and procure equipment, food and supplies.

Self-Operational Procurement Process

- Plan menus
- Determine equipment needs
- Develop grocery/supply list
- Secure facility, connect with health inspection agency for potential kitchen upgrade needs
- Procure needed equipment
- Develop and solicit bids for grocery/supplies/milk
- Hire and train food service staff to receive and store equipment, food and supplies

Task 5: Complete Procurement Process

Vended meal contracts

There are two types of vended meal contracts:

1. [Agreement for Vended Meals Provided by a School Food Authority](#) – SNPs may establish an agreement to purchase meals from another school food authority. No procurement process is required for these agreements. These agreements are based on a fixed price per meal.
2. [Invitation for Bid Vended Meal Contract](#) – These contracts are based on a fixed price per meal and must be awarded to the lowest price responsive and responsible bidder.

Vended Meal Contract Procurement Process

- Create Invitation for Bid (IFB) – [Invitation for Bid Vended Meal Contract](#)
- Advertise IFB and distribute to known vendors
- Hold pre-bid meeting
- Review bid responses and select the lowest responsible and responsive bid
- Prepare contract – [Invitation for Bid Vended Meal Contract](#)
- Upload procurement documentation to CLICS School Nutrition Sponsor application, including the board-approved and signed contract and the completed [Procurement Description for Vended Meal Contracts](#).

Food Service Management Company Contracts (FSMC)

Program operators must use the template [Request for Proposals \(RFP\) Template – Food Service Management Contract](#).

Federal regulations require MDE to approve the RFP for Food Service Management Company contract prior to distribution to potential bidders and approve the contract with the awarded company prior to execution. Follow the procurement process for these contracts outlined in [New Food Service Management Contracts](#).

FSMC Contract Procurement Process

- Create RFP – [Request for Proposals for a Food Service Management Contract](#)
- Send RFP to MDE for review and approval – mde.fsmc@state.mn.us
- Advertise MDE approved RFP and distribute to known vendors
- Hold pre-proposal meeting
- Form evaluation committee
- Receive proposals and evaluate responses – [Bid Point Calculator](#)
- Select highest scoring bid response
- Prepare draft of contract – [Food Service Management Contract – Fixed Meal Prices](#)
- Submit draft of contract to MDE for review/approval with the completed [Procurement Description for Food Service Management Contract](#)
- Present approved contract to school board for approval
- Send copy school board-approved and signed contract to MDE – mde.fsmc@state.mn.us

Task 6: Determine Staffing Needs and Obtain Necessary Certification(s)

Hire a school nutrition director who meets USDA Professional Standards Hiring Requirements

All SNPs must have a school nutrition director who meets [USDA's education and experience requirements](#). New school nutrition directors are also required to have completed 8 hours of food safety training either in the previous 5 years or within the first 30 days of hire.

MDE may approve an exemption for a Local Education Authority (LEA) with an enrollment under 500 students to hire a school nutrition director who has a high school diploma or GED diploma but less than the required three years of relevant foodservice experience. To submit an exemption request, contact mde.fns@state.mn.us.

Ensure a staff member on-site is a Certified Food Protection Manager (CFPM) through MDH

All licensed facilities in Minnesota must have a CFPM on staff.

Your vended meal provider's certification is not accepted unless he/she is also the person who serves the meals on-site as well. Obtaining this certification can take a significant amount of time. Please see the MDH website for [initial certification instructions](#).

Task 7: Determine Benefit Issuance and Meal Counting and Claiming System

A benefit issuance system maintains student eligibility benefit documentation, ensures correct benefits are issued at the point of service and records accurate meal counts by eligibility category.

For resources on determining eligibility status, such as the Application for Educational Benefits and the Direct Certification manual, see the [MDE Free and Reduced-Price Process web page](#).

In the first year of operation, an individual who did not make the original eligibility determination must complete a second review of each Application for Educational Benefits in schools that do not use an electronic system to determine eligibility. This requires a re-evaluation of the eligibility determination made by the original determining official, based on the information provided by the household on the application.

Manual System: With a manual benefit issuance system, student meal benefit eligibility is determined without the assistance of software systems. The School Food Authority (SFA) maintains the roster of student eligibility separately from the student information system, takes point of service counts using classroom rosters/check sheets and manually calculates the daily/monthly meal totals by eligibility category.

MDE has developed a [template meal counter spreadsheet](#) that can be used as a manual point of service student checklist to automatically calculate the daily and monthly meal count totals by eligibility category.

Automated System: With an automated system, student benefit eligibility is determined using a software system. The system is then able to track meals served and generate required reports for:

- Daily meals served by category
- Monthly meals served by category
- Roster of student benefits (free, reduced-price and paid)

Student Information System software often has a food service module available for purchase.

Task 8: Complete Mandatory Training: Essentials for School Nutrition Programs

School Nutrition Essentials online training modules must be completed by new sponsor staff that will perform the task related to the training. Each module will take approximately 3-5 hours to complete. A certificate is available upon the successful completion of the knowledge check for each lesson.

School Nutrition Essentials modules are available on the MDE website [Training: Essentials for School Nutrition](#).

Module – Staff Recommended to Complete Module:

[Free and Reduced-Price Process](#) – Office Staff/Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS) Coordinator/Administrative Assistant/School Nutrition Director

[Nutritional Quality and Meal Pattern](#) – Food Service Staff/ School Nutrition Director

[Counting and Claiming Systems](#) – Office Staff/MARSS Coordinator/Administrative Assistant/School Nutrition Director

[General Program Areas](#) – School Nutrition Director

Task 9: Submit New Sponsor Application Materials

Part 1: CLiCS sponsor and site applications

CLiCS Applications: After receiving notification that access to CLiCS is available, complete the sponsor and site application(s) for the school nutrition program.

[Adding a Sponsor or Site Application in the Cyber-Linked Interactive Child Nutrition System](#)

Step-by-step instructions on how to create sponsor and site applications in CLiCS.

Utilize the [CLiCS User Guide](#) for additional assistance with this step.

If utilizing a vended meal provider or FSMC, all procurement documentation must be uploaded to the sponsor application before it can be submitted. This documentation includes: the board approved and fully signed contract and the Procurement Description document.

Part 2: Required Documentation submission

After the new applicant information survey has been submitted, the applicant will be contacted by the assigned Nutrition Program Consultant. **Submit the following documentation via SharePoint, as directed by the assigned Nutrition Program Consultant.**

- Certificates of completion for the mandatory School Nutrition Essentials Training
- [CLiCS User ID Request Form](#) for the staff who will be completing:
 - Direct certification (this should be someone authorized by your school to view confidential student meal eligibility information)
 - Access to direct certification data will be granted by MDE up to 30 days prior to the first planned SNP operating day
 - Access will be granted no earlier than July of the school year
 - A Sponsor State Agreement signed by the school must be submitted
 - Food distribution (USDA Foods)

- [New Director Qualification form](#)
- Digitally signed Sponsor State Agreement
- [Free and Reduced Policy Statement \(FRP Policy Statement Reference Guide\)](#)
- [Local Education Agency Free and Reduced-Price Meals Fair Hearing Procedure Template](#)
- Certified Food Protection Manager certificate from MDH
- Menu Certification documents:

New sponsors must certify that breakfast and lunch menus meet federal meal pattern and nutrient specifications. Three documents are required:

- [USDA Menu Certification Worksheets](#). One workbook for each distinct breakfast and lunch menu served for one week. Name each workbook as outlined in [Menu Certification Submission Instructions](#). Remember to complete the Simplified Nutrient Assessment tab.
- A copy of the breakfast and lunch weekly menu, which reflects the menus submitted in the spreadsheets
- A signed [Attestation of Compliance with Meal Pattern Requirements](#)

The earliest potential date that meals may be claimed for reimbursement is the date that all complete application materials have been received by MDE.

Task 10: Demonstrate Compliance with State and Federal Regulations

An on-site approval visit will be conducted by a Nutrition Program Consultant following the submission of all required application materials. Compliance issues identified during the visit must be corrected prior to approval to claim meals.

Operational issues may result in approval delay and/or disallowed meal reimbursements.

Areas reviewed include:

- Counting/claiming system
- Applications for Educational Benefits approval
- Direct Certification completed to date
- Reimbursable meals provided
- Food Production Records
- Food Safety plan implemented
- Civil Rights training completed by all staff involved in foodservice operation
- Observe point of service for breakfast and lunch

After all compliance issues are corrected, the Nutrition Program Consultant will certify the first date to claim meals served based on the complete application submission date, identified compliance issues and required corrective actions. The CLiCS sponsor and site application will then be approved.

Claims for reimbursement may only be submitted following approval in CLiCS. To ensure claims are able to be submitted by the 60-day claim deadline, complete corrective actions must be submitted to MDE within 45 days of the first claiming month. This allows up to two weeks for MDE staff to process the corrective actions and approve the applications in CLiCS.

New sponsors will receive a full administrative review during the first or second year of operation.