

USFA STRATEGIC PLANNING, 2024

USFA Strategic Plan 2025-2027

**To be the leading change agent for
advancing high-quality school meals that
foster student achievement**

Leveraging our collective voice to transform school meals

Existing USFA Values

- **Elevate Environmental Stewardship.** We strive to keep sustainability at the forefront of our decision-making.
- **Partner with Purpose.** We believe that partnership and collaboration are key to systems-change success.
- **Promote Equity.** We are tenacious about ensuring that all students have access to the food they need.
- **Remain Visionary.** We strive to set an innovative standard for what a positive school meal experience should be.
- **Prioritize Student Health.** We are dedicated to keeping the wellbeing of our students at the forefront of every decision.
- **Lead with Influence.** We responsibly use our expertise and experience to strengthen school meals.
- **Nourish Children.** We believe that all students deserve high-quality, healthy meals to learn and grow.

Revised USFA Values (per Committee feedback)

- **Remain visionary and lead with influence.** We responsibly use our expertise and experience to strengthen school meals and we strive to set an innovative standard for what a positive school meal experience should be.
- **Nourish children and prioritize student health.** We believe that all children require high-quality, healthy meals to learn and grow and we put the well-being of students at the forefront of every decision.
- **Ensure access.** We are tenacious about ensuring that all students have access to the food they need.
- **Partner with purpose.** We believe that partnership and collaboration are key to cost-effective systems-change success, particularly within Alliance member districts.
- **Elevate environmental stewardship.** We strive to keep sustainability at the forefront of our decision-making.

Core Work

- Representing large urban school districts in nutrition policy and procurement

Core Strengths

- Membership itself and resources to be gained from network
- Collective voice for urban districts
- Expertise in efficient procurement and policy advocacy
- Strong USDA relationship

Priorities of Existing Plan

- Institute strong governance, financial, and operational systems
- Pioneer school meals systems change
- Amplify the impact of our work

Priorities of Next Plan

- Case-making for the value of school meal programs
- Leverage partnership relationships and voice—for members and the field
 - Continue and expand strong USDA partnership
- Increase membership ROI
- Leverage expertise to facilitate procurement best practices

Most-Frequently Cited Key Areas of Value

Public Voice

- Belief that USFA provides a unified voice for urban districts
- Desire for USFA to do more to leverage that voice and to make a case for:
 - School nutrition
 - USFA
 - USFA members

Policy

- DC and Hill presence seen as very valuable to members
- Potential to influence federal policy due to numbers of collective members
- General agreement on importance of specific policies

Procurement

- Potential to negotiate favorable procurement terms based on numbers of urban members
- Although, examine how far USFA should go in negotiating procurement or informing it
- Data collection is significant issue here

Practice

- Members want to learn from other members who have like (urban) issues
- They are pleased with what is happening but also want to see and do more

Factors / Challenges To Be Considered in Next

- Implications of the election (2024)
 - USDA leadership
 - Policy changes, particularly program funding and design
 - Changing nutritional regulations and standards
- USFA leadership transition (2026)
- Funding and potential funders
- Changes in partnerships
- Scope of membership size

**Develop the strategic direction for USFA
that builds on its evolution to date**

Goal 1: Influence

Goal ONE: INFLUENCE

Position USFA as the leading public voice regarding the school meal needs of urban districts

What this looks like: Build public understanding of and education about the value and benefits of school nutrition and of the innovative and effective practices that are delivering healthy meals for urban students.

Goal ONE (INFLUENCE): Strategies

1. Provide a unified voice for member districts to make the case for the value of school meals
2. Leverage that unified voice to make a case for:
 - School nutrition
 - USFA itself
 - USFA members
3. Influence federal policy through education—using evidence, data, and urban district experiences
4. Collaborate on research and data that informs, adds credibility, and moves the field forward
5. Partner with universities, research centers or public health organizations to collaborate on communications and education efforts
6. Share trends and options in procurement best practices
7. Develop and share communications and marketing tools for member use

Goal ONE (INFLUENCE): Objectives

1. Develop a comprehensive communications plan to articulate the value and benefits of school nutrition programs in urban districts
2. Expand USFA's influence on federal policy by leveraging data and urban district experiences
3. Leverage existing research and collaborate on studies that demonstrate the impact of innovative school nutrition practices in urban settings
4. Launch a quarterly thought leadership series, featuring insights from USFA members on emerging trends and successful strategies in urban school nutrition
5. Implement a media outreach campaign(s) to secure multiple high-profile placements annually in national publications, showcasing USFA's expertise and advocacy efforts
6. Create a unified messaging platform for member districts to effectively communicate the value of school meals and USFA's role
7. Develop a toolkit of customizable marketing and communications templates for member districts to promote their school meal programs and highlight USFA initiatives
8. Establish an annual "State of Urban School Nutrition" report, compiling data and best practices from member districts to inform policy discussions and public understanding

Goal ONE (INFLUENCE): Metrics of Success

1. Increase number of high-profile media placements featuring USFA expertise on urban school nutrition issues by 50 percent year-over-year
2. Achieve 90 percent participation rate from member districts in unified messaging campaigns and using USFA-developed marketing and communications tools
3. Increase unique visitors to USFA's website by 30 percent annually, with a focus on pages featuring research or best practices
4. Grow USFA's social media following across all platforms by 40 percent year-over-year, with a 25 percent increase in engagement rates
5. USFA staff/members give 15 to 20 presentations at major conferences or events annually
6. Measure targeted stakeholders' understanding of USFA's role within the sector
7. Promote research and white papers with established universities, public health organizations, and other nonprofits
8. Track downloads and/or citations of the annual "State of Urban School Nutrition" report

Goal ONE (INFLUENCE): Critical Success Factors

- Political and policy climate toward school nutrition
- Member buy-in and participation
- Membership turnover rates
- Retaining a successful PR/Marketing firm that understands business of school nutrition
- Consensus on messages we want to promote as an alliance
- Attaining/maintaining funding for this work
- Inquiries from non-members

Goal 2: Support

Goal TWO: SUPPORT

Enhance member benefits and engagement

What this looks like: Serve as a convenor and facilitator of best-practice sharing and member learning.

Goal TWO (SUPPORT): Strategies

1. Serve as intermediary that translates federal policy for practical implementation and that informs policy discussions with evidence from practice, including encouraging timely member participation in regulation and policy development
2. Improve local implementation through best practices
3. Enhance member learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities
4. Strengthen collaborations with industry leaders and USDA
5. Demonstrate ROI of members in USFA

Goal TWO (SUPPORT): Objectives

1. Strengthen federal policy translation and implementation support
 - Educate members on regulatory items and practices
 - Provide access and technical assistance for federal regulatory items
2. Develop/expand/improve/promote the best practices database for member districts
 - Procurement—Expand common product specs that help leverage USFA’s procurement power
 - Funding models for meal programs (e.g., catering, a la carte)
 - Operational efficiencies, use of technology
 - Student engagement
3. Enhance member learning and knowledge sharing opportunities
 - Launch and train members on CRM
 - Develop and promote training, technical assistance, and peer mentoring
 - Integrate member learning experiences at conferences, meetings, and webinars
 - Blog, chat groups, professional learning groups
 - Facilitated discussions among peers on current member issues
4. Strengthen collaborations with industry leaders and USDA
5. Boost member engagement across multiple platforms, maintaining urban focus
6. Demonstrate clear return on investment (ROI) for USFA membership

Goal TWO (SUPPORT): Metrics of Success

1. **Event Participation Rate.** Measure attendance and engagement at conferences, webinars, and training sessions
2. **Online Community Activity.** Monitor the number of posts, comments, and active users in chat groups and professional learning groups
3. **Member Satisfaction.** Achieve 4.0 or higher member satisfaction on member survey Lichert scale and increase likelihood of members to recommend USFA to others
4. **Usage of Membership Benefits.** Track views, time spent, and interaction rates of members utilizing specific benefits, such as the best practices database or training resources
5. **Collaboration Impact.** Measure the number and outcomes of joint initiatives with stakeholders, including co-authored white papers or joint webinars
6. **Member Retention.** Achieve 90 percent retention rate of existing members, as indicators of perceived value and ROI

Goal TWO (SUPPORT): Critical Success Factors

- Integration of customer relations management software
- Timely member participation in development of regulations and policies
- Member retention rates
- Member use of tools and trainings
- Development of quality content for tools and trainings
- Operational systems in place for member support

Goal 3: Build

Goal THREE: BUILD

Strengthen Organizational Capacity

What this looks like: Open opportunities for board, staff, and members to engage; secure sustainable funding to achieve goals.

Goal THREE (BUILD): Strategies

- Enhance internal operations and member management
- Improve board engagement and structure
- Expand and strengthen key partnerships
- Develop a comprehensive succession plan
- Expand funding sources
- Grow membership strategically, while maintaining urban focus and contributions to the Alliance

Goal THREE (BUILD): Objectives

1. Enhance **internal operations and member engagement**
 - Launch association management service/customer relations management service
 - Apply lessons from USDA Cooperative Agreement to practices
2. Improve **board engagement and structure**
 - Host additional board trainings
 - Continually encourage diverse board opinions
 - Educate and encourage members to participate on board
3. Expand and strengthen **key partnerships**
 - USDA
 - State agencies
 - Industry partners
 - Research and educational institutions

Goal THREE (BUILD): Objectives (cont'd)

4. Develop a comprehensive **succession plan**
 - Build on bylaws changes to develop plan for USFA leadership and staff
 - Create model for members
5. Expand **funding sources**
 - Continue to align philanthropic interests to USFA strategic direction
 - Leverage communications strategy and increased public voice/presence
 - Create a financial model for future growth
6. **Grow membership** strategically while maintaining urban focus, while maintaining urban focus and contributions to the Alliance
 - Board creates a plan for membership growth that sustains a member-led organization
 - Develop recruitment and onboarding process that encourages contributions from new members

Goal THREE (BUILD): Metrics of Success

1. **Organizational Efficiency.** Successful launch, rollout, and implementation of association management service or customer relations management with 90 percent of members having logged in the first year
2. **Board Engagement.** Track board member attendance and participation rates in meetings, committees, and initiatives, as well as their contributions to strategic decision-making
3. **Partnerships.** Quantify the number of new partnerships formed and the tangible outcomes (e.g., joint projects, funding secured, policy changes achieved) from collaborations with USDA, industry partners, state agencies, and research institutions
4. **Succession Planning.** Assess the organization's preparedness for leadership transitions through the development of succession plans and identification of potential future leaders
5. **Funding.** Calculate the percentage of funding from different sources (e.g., membership dues, restricted v unrestricted funding, grants, partnerships) to track progress in expanding revenue streams; create a financial model for future growth; attain Guidestar Platinum Seal of Transparency
6. **Member Growth.** Monitor the annual percentage increase in membership while ensuring new members align with the urban focus

Goal THREE (BUILD): Critical Success Factors

- Successful launch and implementation of CRM
- Sustained funding
- Build member ownership of strategic plan
- Align talent, work plans, and expertise to strategic goals
- Board agreement on membership growth plan
- Membership retention rates
- Support from state agencies

INFLUENCE

Position USFA as the leading public voice regarding the school meal needs of urban districts

SUPPORT

Enhance member benefits and engagement

BUILD

Strengthen organizational capacity

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