



September 16, 2020

Kim Frinzell
Director of Nutrition Services Division
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5901

RE: Recommendations for Successful Remote Visits in CACFP during the Pandemic

Dear Kim and CACFP team,

Over the past month, the CCFP Roundtable convened the Remote Visit Protocol Workgroup made up of CACFP experts in the community to discuss the opportunities, challenges, and protocols involved in off-site reviews based on the COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #39 (Nationwide Waiver of Onsite Monitoring Requirements for Sponsors in the Child and Adult Care Food Program). The goal of the Workgroup is to ensure clarity and agreement between local CACFP Program Operators (Program Operators), CACFP Sponsoring Organizations (Sponsors), and the California Department of Education (CDE) about the processes put in place while operating under aforementioned Nationwide Waivers.

The Remote Visit Protocol Workgroup prioritized equity and integrity within the CACFP. We acknowledge the diversity across local Program Operators and extensively discussed how that may affect access to technology. We believe our recommendations uphold the integrity of the CACFP without creating barriers – especially during a time when access to the meals provided through the CACFP are of the utmost importance to the families receiving the meals.

Listed below are four recommendations developed by the Workgroup, grounded in policy and practice, that will ensure streamlined and practical processes for remote visits, while still upholding integrity of the program.

Recommendation 1: Establish simple and clear definitions of offsite reviews.

While operating under COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #39, the Nationwide Waiver of Onsite Monitoring Requirements for Sponsors in the Child and Adult Care Food Program, there are three acceptable definitions for an offsite review.

- 1) Remote Desk Reviews: A review where the only type of technology required is a telephone. The Sponsor will conduct the review with the local Program Operator over the telephone and, if needed, request supporting documentation via email or postal service. This review is acceptable as an offsite monitoring review.
- 2) Virtual Monitoring Reviews: A review where the facility can be seen through the use of a video conferencing platform and/or use of a photo sharing technology. This review is acceptable as an offsite monitoring review, but not required.
- 3) Combination of Remote Desk Reviews and Monitoring Reviews: A review that combines elements of both remote desk and virtual monitoring reviews. The Sponsor representative will split the review in half: (a) the local Program Operator will use video conferencing and/or photo sharing technology to show the Sponsor representative parts of the facility, and (b) the remainder of the review is conducted as a remote desk review. The combination review is acceptable as an offsite monitoring review, but not required.

Rationale: Sponsors and local Program Operators need the offsite review flexibilities to protect the integrity of the program during the pandemic. The Remote Visit Protocol Workgroup recommends a minimum standard that can work for everyone across the program in the event that local Program Operator's only access to technology is the telephone (i.e. remote desk reviews), while also promoting best practices that can be achieved (i.e. virtual monitoring reviews or a combination thereof).

Recommendation 2: Allow CACFP Sponsors to use an anticipatory timeframe for unannounced visits with local Program Operators.

An expanded definition of "unannounced visits" that accounts for the logistical complications of offsite visits without notification is needed while operating under COVID-19: Child Nutrition Response #39, the Nationwide Waiver of Onsite Monitoring Requirements for Sponsors in the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Unannounced visits during the pandemic will need to include an anticipatory timeframe, which maintains the spirit of an unannounced visit. For example, the Sponsor could offer a specified window such as a two-week timeframe prior to the unannounced visit. The Sponsor could also provide a timeframe for a return call after a Program Operator was contacted for an unannounced visit, but did not answer the call.

Rationale: Allowing an anticipatory timeframe for unannounced visits during the pandemic will ensure the Sponsor is able to execute the required unannounced visits. It is common and appropriate for local Program Operators to not answer their phones or be near their smart devices while caring for children. It will prove very difficult to reach many of the local Program Operators without some coordination parameters.

Flexibilities must be in place in order to execute unannounced visits during the pandemic. It is unfair to penalize a local Program Operator for not answering a phone or tablet while juggling competing demands. Elsewhere in child care licensing, it is recommended that during the pandemic unannounced visits be waived.¹

Supportive Policy/USDA Nationwide Waiver: 7 CFR § 226.2 defines an unannounced review as an “on-site review for which no prior notification is given to the facility or institution”. The aforementioned waivers (#27, #39, and #40) allow for offsite monitoring and waive the requirement that at least one unannounced review must include observation of a meal service. However, “prior notification” is not addressed in the waivers. Given the complicated circumstances, we believe our recommendation to allow for coordination of an “anticipatory timeframe” for unannounced visits remains within the spirit and scope of relevant policy.

Recommendation 3: Establish clear and fair protocols for obtaining signatures on monitoring forms during the pandemic.

The Remote Visit Protocol Workgroup recommends that the acceptable signature on monitoring forms include:

- Sponsor will document on the monitoring form that a [desk review or virtual visit] occurred with [name of Program Operator] at [time] on [date].
- Sponsor will email the Program Operator stating that a visit occurred, at [time], on [date]. Sponsor will retain email with the Program operator’s records.

Rationale: Original signatures during remote visits is unrealistic, inefficient, and more costly to obtain. There are many other industries that rely upon alternative methods for documenting signatures which can be applied to the CACFP. The options above are feasible and offer flexibility for the local Program Operators who do not use email. Mailing forms back and forth presents undue burden during the COVID-19 pandemic. The USDA’s monitoring waivers (#7, #27, #39, and #40) do not establish requirements for signatures for remote reviews.

¹ *Remote Inspections in Child Care Settings: A Viable Alternative during Emergency Situations, National Association for Regulatory Administration.*

Recommendation 4: Do not make changes to current documentation form requirements for Remote visits.

The Remote Visit Protocol Workgroup recommends that the monitoring form or platform the CACFP Sponsor was using prior to the pandemic and waiver of onsite monitoring is sufficient documentation for remote reviews.

Rationale: The documentation and monitoring forms/platforms are still relevant and do not need to be changed. Changing the forms would create an undue burden on the sponsors, local Program Operators, and the state agency.

It is imperative to the health, safety, and economic wellbeing of the CACFP community across the state of California for CDE to act on these recommendations. We thank you for your attention to this matter, your willingness to work with the CACFP community, and we look forward to discussing these priorities. If you have any questions, please contact Elyse Homel Vitale (elyse@ccfprounhtable.org). We stand ready to work with you to address the needs of California's CACFP.

Sincerely,



Elyse Homel Vitale, MPH
Executive Director, CCFP Roundtable

On behalf of the CCFP Roundtable Remote Protocol Workgroup