

Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

Nutrition Education: What are the Requirements?

Updated: December 2021

Under the Older American Act (OAA), nutrition education is a service that must be provided. Section 331 and 336 of the OAA authorizes states to provide nutrition education, nutrition counseling, and other nutrition services, as appropriate, based on the needs of meal participants. In addition, Section 339 requires nutrition projects to utilize the expertise of a dietitian or other individual with equivalent education and training in nutrition science, or if such an individual is not available, an individual with comparable expertise in the planning of nutritional services.

It is the responsibility of State Units on Aging (SUAs) to develop policies, procedures, and guidance for service implementation; they may delegate some responsibility to area agencies on aging (AAA) or local providers, who may outline further policies and procedures. To find out how frequently your nutrition project needs to provide nutrition education, or other policies such as who can provide nutrition education, length and type of education methods permitted, etc, check with your SUA.

Definition of Nutrition Education

The State Performance Report (SPR)/Older Americans Act Performance System (OAAPS) indicates the following definition:

An intervention targeting OAA participants and caregivers that uses information dissemination, instruction, or training with the intent to support food, nutrition, and physical activity choices and behaviors (related to nutritional status) in order to maintain or improve health and address nutrition-related conditions.

Content is consistent with the DGA; accurate, culturally sensitive, regionally appropriate, and considers personal preferences; and is overseen by a registered dietitian or individual of comparable expertise as defined in the OAA.

The SPR/OAAPS definition does not require a specific length of time for nutrition education. In fact, brief interventions may be quite effective:

- [Nudging in education](#)
- [Why nudges work and how to use them to keep students on track](#)
- [The Use of Nudges and Other Behavioural Approaches in Education](#)

Service Units

The service units for nutrition education must be reported. SPR/OAAPS definition allows for nutrition education to be delivered in-person or via video, audio, online, or through the distribution of hardcopy materials. Your SUA policies may be more restrictive or include additional, specific requirements.

Estimated Audience Size

The audience size for nutrition education must be reported. SPR/OAAPS definition allows for duplicated counts of the persons who attend nutrition education sessions. Your SUA policies may require

unduplicated (each person is only counted once) counts. Resources that may be helpful for counting social media include:

- [How to Find out Who Is Watching Your YouTube Videos](#)
- [How to track post views on Facebook](#)
- [About your activity dashboard](#)

So, while the OAA authorizes nutrition education to be provided, and the State Performance Report/OAAPS requires reporting of nutrition education service units and estimated audience size, each SUA (and possibly AAA and local providers) establish specific implementation policies and procedures. We therefore encourage you to work directly with your SUA to clarify nutrition education requirements that apply to your organization.

To Learn More

The [National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging](#) has several resources about providing nutrition education including:

- [Nutrition Education: What's New for Reporting and Connecting with Clients](#)
- [Tele or Virtual Nutrition Education for Older Adults](#)
- [Native Elder Nutrition Education & Training Needs Assessment](#)
- [Emerging Learnings About Nutrition Status, COVID-19, & Nutrition Education in Older Adults](#)

Check back frequently, as materials are added on a regular basis.

How to Find Reliable Nutrition Education Materials

OAA Senior Nutrition Programs may not have a dietitian or person of comparable expertise on staff. In these situations, an SUA may allow for nutrition education to be provided if it was developed by a reliable source, which is overseen by a dietitian or person of comparable expertise.

Meeting nutrition education requirements can be easy and fun!

Below is a list of valid websites that provide valuable nutrition education. This list is not all inclusive. A good rule of thumb is to stick with websites that have edu, gov, or org in the URL. Make it fun by combining this information with a program at your congregate site, an online game, or catchy handout. Examples of these are:

- <https://acl.gov/senior-nutrition>
- <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/>
- www.health.gov/paguidelines
- www.choosemyplate.gov
- <https://www.nutrition.gov/>
- <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/publication>
- <https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>
- www.eatright.org
- www.diabetes.org
- <https://www.foodsafety.gov>
- www.aarp.org/health
- www.health.gov/nhic
- www.cdc.gov
- www.fsis.usda.gov