

Senior Nutrition Program Spending Ideas

The aging network is always adapting and innovating. Created based on real experiences of senior nutrition programs, this document offers a range of ideas that may help programs to brainstorm new and/or expanded ways to meet older adults' nutrition, socialization, and wellness needs with Older Americans Act (OAA) funds.



Remember: All spending must be related to providing nutrition services (meals, nutrition education, nutrition counseling, other nutrition services) which meet the intents of Title IIIC.

More information: [Funding Flexibilities for Senior Nutrition Programs](#)



Consider: COVID-19 and the health of participants and staff as you make plans, policies, and purchases. Ideas presented should be adapted to adhere to local and state public health guidance and requirements.

More information: [Senior Nutrition Program Reopening & COVID-19 Response Resources](#)

Food & Meals¹

- Increase number of meals served and/or locations where they are served
 - Add breakfast/dinner/weekend meals
 - Send home an extra meal with congregate clients
 - Nutritional supplements to persons at nutritional risk
- Extend hours of operation:
 - Multiple seatings to meet capacity limits
 - Update menus to maintain food quality (cold items including sandwiches and salads), heat hot items close to service
- Increase quality and variety of foods, which may include:
 - Choice in entrees which participants pre-order
 - Add local specialty or seasonal items
 - Connect with farmers to supply local produce
 - Medically tailored
 - Vegetarian and vegan
 - Culturally tailored (e.g., Kosher, Halal)
- Purchase in bulk:

¹ Groceries are foods that may be used by seniors to prepare meals; they may not be counted as meals for reporting purposes. Please refer to [ACL's COVID-19 webpage](#) guidance or contact ACL for more information on how to report groceries. If groceries are provided, caution should be used – remember the senior nutrition program is a meals program, there are other Federal programs which give seniors ways to purchase groceries, and we do not want to be duplicative of such programs.

- Shelf stable meals (food pantry, schools, or recreation departments may provide added storage space)
- Frozen meals
- Prepackaged snacks
- Bottled water
- Nutritional drinks
- Individually packaged condiments, utensil, and napkin packages
- Partner with food trucks to deliver to participants' homes or set up in communities
- Launch your own food truck (be sure to factor in maintenance and operational costs)
- Hand out "goody bags" or letters from school children at events or when delivering meals
- Work with a chef to create new and nutritious meals, or invite someone to teach seniors how to prepare quick, easy, nutritious meals on a budget
- Develop a cookbook featuring quick, easy, and nutritious recipes to mail to participants and hand out at events and centers
 - Include culturally tailored recipes
 - Create a food demo live or online
 - Set up a "cooking buddy" program

Related Resources

- [AAA Best Practices in Nutrition](#) – n4a
 - [Short-term food storage](#) and [long-term food storage](#) – University of Georgia
 - [Community Food Partners](#) – Healthy Food Playbook
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Partnerships & Vendors

- Restaurants and other food establishments
 - Restaurant voucher programs
 - Pop up cafes (temporary restaurants hosted at various locations for a limited time)
 - Deliver meals or make "to-go" bags
 - Include culturally diverse restaurants
 - Part of senior center without walls (programs and services that take place outside of the center)
 - Hospitals, nursing homes, or [Food is Medicine](#) for medically tailored meals and nutrition counseling
- Community organizations (e.g., faith-based, LGBTQ+, or cultural groups) to lease space, cohost events, or conduct programming
 - Identify new meal sites, caterers/restaurants, meal volunteers, culturally appropriate communications
 - Enhance equity and diversity, meet OAA intent to serve individuals at highest social and economic need
- IT Consultants
 - Help select hardware and software
 - Bridge communications between IT providers and your organization
 - Set up hardware for participants to allow for ease of use
- Schools to create intergenerational activities that include meals, cooking, farmers markets, or nutrition education

- Community kitchens or housing authorities to share kitchen space for meal preparation
- Meal delivery services (e.g., Uber, DoorDash) and shipping companies (e.g., FedEx, UPS) to deliver meals²
- Parks and recreation centers, churches, local/county/state park facilities to lease space for events
- Dietitians, University Cooperative Extension Staff, or dietetic interns
 - Nutrition education, cooking demos, nutrition counseling
 - Expanded menus, menu approval, work with restaurants
 - Food safety, sanitation monitoring
 - Create garden
- Wellness and fitness programs to expand classes or formats
- College, university, or academic center
 - Identify whether new programs are meeting goals
 - Recommendations on areas to improve quality, equity, meet OAA intents

Related Resources

- [Find A Nutrition Expert](#) – Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
- [Contracting Toolkit](#) – Aging and Disability Business Institute (ADBI)
- [Creating and Maintaining Coalitions and Partnerships](#) – Community Tool Box
- [Navigating Network Partnerships](#) – NCOA Business Acumen “Office Hour”
- National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging:
 - [Tele or Virtual Nutrition Education for Older Adults](#)
 - [Business Acumen Example: Jesse Hill Market Initiative](#)
 - [Social Enterprising Aging Network Example - REAL Grille](#)
 - [Guide to Working with Restaurants and Grocery Stores for Meals](#)
 - [Contracting Tips for Purchasing Meals](#)

Technology

- Purchase devices and accessories to enhance human connection and allow seniors to engage with nutrition services (factor in training and maintenance costs)
 - Desktop computers, laptops, and tablets (software and video or internet access pre-loaded for ease of use)
 - Printers, copiers, and scanners
 - Digital cameras and cell phones (work use only)
 - Chargers, headsets, mice, and keyboards
 - Barcode scanners or other touchless tech
 - [Adaptive/assistive technology](#)
- Buy accounts/subscriptions/programs:
 - Virtual meeting platform for online events
 - Computer programs, including anti-virus software
 - Online design, email marketing, and survey tools
- Enhance website to accept online donations, offer meal reservations, host an online collaboration tool with other agencies and projects, etc.

² Reference to any specific commercial products, process, service, manufacturer, or company does not constitute its endorsement or recommendation by the U.S. Government or the Administration for Community Living (ACL).
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Related Resources

- [Tools for Reaching a Remote Audience](#) – NCOA
 - [Assistive Technology](#) – Eldercare Locator
 - [Help Older Adults Get or Upgrade Computers, Internet](#) – AARP (*resources below story*)
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Marketing & Communications

- Work with a videographer and photographer to create a unique library of images/videos
- Purchase stock images or video that can be used in promotions
- Buy radio, local newspaper, billboard, social media, and/or magazine ads
- Donations awareness campaign
- Develop inserts for “to-go” bags (e.g., contact information, recipes, inspirational notes)
- Create educational materials and/or signage (e.g., nutrition tips, fact sheets, recipes)
- Develop or enhance a weekly/monthly nutrition newsletter to mail to participants’ homes
- Produce program signage for facilities and community locations
- Translate materials and market in multiple languages

Related Resources

- [Marketing Tools for Any Senior Center](#) – MA Councils on Aging & NCOA handbook
 - [Telling Your AAA's Story: Creating & Implementing Your Brand](#) – ADBI
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Staffing and Training

- Retain IT staff/consultants to create develop an app or provide technical training
- Add Registered Dietitians or increase Registered Dietitians’ hours
- Pay interns (e.g., college/recent graduates) for communications or admin support
- Hire outreach staff to conduct phone calls, social connection, and in-person home visits
- Add a volunteer coordinator to centralize volunteer recruitment, training, and retention
- Find a mental health or fitness expert to offer training and supply subject expertise
- Analyze program data and identify areas for improvement using a paid evaluator
- Hire someone to survey participants on meals, times, activities, education, etc.
- Attend professional development events (e.g., mental health first aid)
- Bring in a marketing and communications coordinator

Related Resources

- [Choosing Evaluators](#) – Community Tool Box
 - [Developing Training Programs for Staff](#) – Community Tool Box
 - [Enhancing Socialization through Making Meaningful Volunteer Connections during COVID-19](#) – National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging
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Supplies & Materials

- Indoor/outdoor tables and chairs
- Tablecloths (disposable and cloth)

- Pop-up tents in a variety of sizes or table umbrellas
- Disposable and non-disposable meal supplies in bulk, including:
 - Serving platters, plates, bowls, cups, utensils
 - “To-go” cartons/containers
 - Paper products such as bags, paper towels, and napkins
- First-aid kits and emergency preparedness supplies
- Fire extinguishers and smoke detectors
- Cleaning and sanitizing supplies (e.g., gloves, masks, face shields, safety barriers)
- Care packages with inserts, healthy snacks, and recipes
- Birthday/greeting cards to mail to participants
- Office supplies such as pens, paper, clipboards, computer paper, and toner ink

Related Resources

- [American Rental Association Vendor Locator](#)
 - [Emergency Supplies Checklist](#) – Webstaurant
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Rural Communities

- Establish a community food garden (factor in costs for care and maintenance)
- Set up a greenhouse or partner with a local organization to set up and operate one
- Partner with a farmer/farm stand for ingredients or have participants pick up produce
- Partner with local organizations (e.g., Cooperative Extension, 4-H) to build capacity
- In areas of food shortage, buy livestock (e.g., cows, chickens); factor in costs to feed, care, and house animals³
- Increase number of meal deliveries (including shelf-stable and frozen meals) and meal delivery time slots to fit agricultural work schedules
- Partner with a regional organization, chef, or restaurant to deliver meals

Related Resources

- [How to Create a Community Garden](#) – American Community Gardening Association
 - [Addressing Nutrition and Social Connection Needs of Rural Adults during COVID-19](#) – National Resource Center on Nutrition & Aging presentation
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Events & Activities

- Create nutrition program for nutrition participants:
 - Festivals or outdoor events focused on nutrition, socialization, or exercise
 - Clubs centered on participants’ interests (e.g., books, chess, bingo, tea, knitting)
 - Weekly or monthly outdoor activity (e.g., group trail walk, yoga, tai chi)
- Invite a guest speaker to talk about a nutrition or health-related topic
- Museum tour (virtual or in-person) to deliver nutrition and health education
- Host “dinner and a movie”

³ This option should be used on rare occasions. It is not the intent of the Senior Nutrition Program to establish or run small farms. All program activities must meet the requirements and intents of Title III-C of the Older Americans Act.

Related Resources

- [Senior Nutrition Program Activity Guides](#) – ACL
- [Activities for Communities](#) – Older Americans Month
- [Safety Guidance on Events & Gatherings](#) – CDC

Facilities & Equipment



Always be sure to follow all policies and procedures on purchasing, and when necessary, request approval in advance of purchases.

- Lease additional space, including additional parking space for staff or participants
- Remodel or modify facilities to comply with COVID-19 requirements and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Refresh facilities with new paint, lightning, or decorations
- Upgrade or update HVAC systems
- Install air purifier systems
- Purchase equipment, such as:
 - Back-up generator for kitchen equipment
 - Weather-related items for the nutrition site (e.g., snow shovels, fans, air conditioners)
 - Additional refrigerators and freezers, and replace other outdated equipment
 - Storage shelves or units, including renting storage space

Related Resources

- [Information and Technical Assistance on the ADA](#) – ADA.gov
- [Ventilation in Buildings to Reduce the Spread of Disease](#) – CDC

Transportation

- Purchase vehicles (e.g., van, delivery truck) (factor in gas, insurance, and maintenance)
- Purchase weather-related items (e.g., snow tires, ice scrapers, window washer fluid)
- Partner with a local provider to offer rides to community events, activities, and centers
- Take advantage of existing transportation like jurisdictional vehicles or school buses
- Purchase pre-filled ride cards to distribute to seniors who use public transportation

Related Resources

- [Approaches for Promoting Lifelong Community Mobility](#) – University of Michigan
- [ADA Accessibility Guidelines for Transportation Vehicles](#) – U.S. Access Board