



Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

15 Strategic Pointers for Grant Success

What you need to know to stay compliant, confident, and on track.

Getting Started

Read your Notice of Award. Carefully review your Notice of Award (NoA) and program-specific terms and conditions. Everything you need to know starts there, and your project officer (PO) is always available to help you interpret it. Also, understand the grant's intent and workplan (from your application). Important note: the first NoA issued has all the terms and conditions, but subsequent NoAs don't.

Know who does what. Administration for Community Living (ACL) POs are federal staff responsible for the programmatic oversight of your grant.

- Programmatic or grant-related decisions go to your ACL PO. They review reports, approve amendments, provide programmatic guidance, and are your official point of contact for anything related to your award and compliance.

Technical assistance liaisons (TAL) are non-federal partners funded by ACL to support your day-to-day implementation success.

- Implementation support and program delivery questions go to your TAL. They can help with training, tools, resources, best practices, and problem-solving around program delivery, but they do not have authority to approve changes to your grant.

Both POs and TALs should be copied on all emails, and grantees should include their grant number in the email subject line. For more information, see [ACL's Managing a Grant](#).

Grant Management and Compliance

Fidelity to the approved program model and grant scope is required. While some evidence-based programs may be adaptable for different settings and populations, grantees may only implement the program with the population, setting, and scope

approved under their grant award. Any proposed changes outside of the approved grant scope must be reviewed and approved by ACL PO prior to implementation.

Maintaining fidelity to the program design (review and follow the program fidelity manual) and approved grant parameters is essential to ensuring outcomes remain valid, meaningful, and comparable across grantee cohorts.

Select appropriate staff for grant roles. Your cooperative agreement with the government is a legally binding agreement. The individuals designated as principal investigator (PI) or project director (PD), and authorized organization representative (AOR) are the only official responsible parties. For example, there is no provision for a co-PI/PD. These two individuals are the only people with whom the PO or other ACL representatives can discuss grant-specific details. It is important that your organization has selected the appropriate people for these roles to support ongoing communication. The PI/PD must be present at all meetings with ACL.

Budget and workplan modifications need prior approval. Because these are cooperative agreements, all budget and workplan changes require prior written approval. There are no exceptions. Depending on the type and amount of change involved, approval may be required from your ACL PO or your ACL grants management specialist. Most budget modifications will require a formal amendment request. Contact your PO before you make any workplan changes or spend or reallocate any funds. Do not assume a change is allowable without confirmation.

Reach the priority populations. ACL expects intentional outreach to underserved older adults. As an ACL grantee, you must document your outreach strategies and who you are actually serving. And don't forget to include data on who you're not reaching because that matters too.

Sustainability planning starts in year one. Don't wait until your final year to think about how your program continues after federal funding ends. Identify local partners, billing pathways (e.g., Medicare Advantage, Medicaid, health system partnerships), trained leaders, and community champions early and revisit the plan every year. Provide updates on your sustainability efforts in reports so your PO can track your efforts over time.

Communicate proactively with your PO. Your PO is your partner, not your auditor. If you're facing challenges such as low enrollment, master trainer shortages, workshop cancellations, staff turnover, or a delayed subcontract, reach out early. Your PO is here to help you. Solutions are much easier to solve before a problem becomes a crisis.

Program Implementation

Deliver only what you proposed and only what is approved. You must deliver the approved programs in your grant proposal, such as specific evidence-based programs or services you identified in your grant application, not a different program, even if it appears on the approved list. Any change to the program(s) you deliver must be requested through your PO and approved in GrantSolutions before making the switch. This type of change will need to be submitted as an amendment request. Additionally, you may only offer programs that appear on the list of approved evidence-based programs included in the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) you applied to. Delivering an unapproved program or switching programs without prior approval jeopardizes your fidelity, your outcomes, and your status as a grantee.

Document everything. Keep records of participant rosters, workshop logs, leader/facilitator certifications, master trainer credentials, sub-award agreements, and memorandums of understanding (MOU). Tracking trained leaders and their ongoing fidelity is also a must. Federal grants require documentation that can withstand an audit years after the award closes.

Share what's working and what isn't. ACL values learning across the grantee community. Share promising practices, implementation challenges, and lessons learned with your PO and peers. Your real-world experience in delivering nutrition, falls prevention, and chronic disease self-management education (CDSME) programs helps shape the field for everyone.

Reporting and Data Management

Reporting deadlines and requirements. Know your reporting schedule and submit on time. Performance progress reports are due at regular intervals and must be submitted through GrantSolutions. Late or incomplete reports can affect your good standing as a grantee. Ask your TAL if you're unsure of your reporting window or what data is expected, and make sure to copy your PO on the correspondence.

Close-out requirements. Plan for close-out from the start. Federal grant close-out has specific requirements such as final reports, final financial reports, disposition of equipment, and return of unobligated funds, all within a specific window after your grant ends. Ask your PO what to expect well in advance.

Know your performance measures inside and out. Understand exactly which data elements are required for your program (e.g., OAA Title III-C, III-D measures, ACL reporting fields). Know whether you are reporting on nutrition, falls prevention, or CDSME measures,

and make sure your data collection systems are set up to capture each correctly from the start.

Start data collection on day one. Don't wait until your program is "running smoothly" to collect data. Baseline, enrollment, and workshop completion data collected late or not at all cannot be reconstructed. This is especially critical for CDSME pre/post health status measures and falls prevention participant tracking.