



Spotlight on Texas A&M University's DINE in Texas Program

Q&A with Nandita Chaudhuri, PhD, Chief Investigator, Public Policy Research Institute,
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Note: This document presents an interview conducted by the Nutrition and Aging Resource Center to spotlight the work of ACL grant recipients and share practices with the aging network. Responses are presented verbatim.

Program Introduction

DINE in Texas: it stands for Developing Innovative Dining Experiences for the seniors. It's a three-year research-to-practice translational project, and it is replicating Iowa's Encore Café model through a learning collaborative approach that brings the peers together. There is peer-to-peer learning, learning from subject matter experts. And then the whole enterprise, or the whole initiative, is actually evaluated through a mixed methods evaluation to build a repertoire for the successes.

Interview Insights

Tell us about the “why” and motivation behind your project.

We conducted a similar project in modernizing the senior nutrition programs in Texas from 2019 to 2022. That project helped us understand that there is not much engagement and participation in the congregate meal programs in Texas, which is in keeping with the rest of the nation actually. So during that time, we conducted pilots all over Texas that implemented low-cost innovations to increase the engagement and participation of the seniors in the congregate meal programs, but it happened during the pandemic. This time, the replication project, the DINE in Texas, gave us the opportunity to test the pilot that we could not do at that time. This was the motivation, actually, to replicate the successful elements of the Encore Café model but also add some other innovative elements which are local and low cost to the repertoire of the evidence base for the project.

What do you wish you would've known prior to beginning the project?

I wish I knew how complex it is to adapt a program to another geography and the differences that we have in program management. We have a county government, a city government, and a nonprofit as our sites. So it's kind of really complex from that standpoint.

The other thing I wish I knew is this: that if we could use social marketing right from the get-go to just facilitate the adaptation and engagement, it would've been really good. Because social marketing has power to make everything so positive and to create the buy-in for the program. So I wish I knew that I could access it from the very, very first month of the project.

What aspects of your project do you enjoy the most?

I do come from a university, and we do lots of research-to-practice projects. I really enjoy that part of bringing the benefits of university research to the residents of the state, trying to understand the community impact, and making the stakeholders also understand the community impact for the project, and the human connection to make the seniors feel more valued and their voices heard. So that's also really interesting from our university research standpoint.

How will this project be sustainable once your grant period is done?

The learning collaborative structure, which is the key part of the project, is a sustainable component for the project because the sites, they learn from each other. And then also they are making others learn from them. The subject matter [experts] are there to guide other people and projects if they want to replicate a project like this. So the repertoire would be there beyond the life of the project. The sustainable lessons and the sustainability lessons are there for people to learn from. It's inherently set up as a project that is sustainable beyond the life of the grant.



Learn more from the [Nutrition and Aging Resource Center](#), funded by the [Administration for Community Living](#) to build the capacity of senior nutrition programs funded by the Older Americans Act.