

SENIOR NUTRITION PROGRAM

CELEBRATE • INNOVATE • EDUCATE



INNOVATE: MAKE AN IMPACT

What is innovation?

When you hear the word innovation, it probably brings to mind well-known discoveries that have changed the way we live, such as the invention of the car or the internet. But did you know that not all innovations are so monumental? Even small innovations can make a big impact.

For example, think about the changes you make to your senior nutrition program all the time. Maybe it's adding more meal choices to the menu or starting a new fitness activity. These changes may not seem significant enough to be called innovations, but they make an impact that helps you to better serve the older adults in your community – and that's what innovation is all about.

Innovation certainly includes inventions, but it can also involve continuous improvement, creative approaches to routine tasks, and even simply challenging yourself to think differently about familiar topics.

So, it's time to start thinking of yourself – yes, you! – as an innovator. Here are some tips to help you on your journey.

Tips for becoming an innovator



Ask the right people the right questions. What improvements can be made to your program? Have clients consistently given the same feedback – maybe asking for more meal variety or different ways to access meals? Asking questions and gaining insight from your most important audiences – and doing so on a regular basis – can help you focus your innovative efforts.

Brainstorm. Work with staff, volunteers, organizational and community partners, and others to come up with new and creative ideas to improve your program and support your community. Try to include people you don't get to work with very often – they can add a valuable perspective to the discussion.



Find inspiration. Reinventing the wheel isn't always necessary. Explore the network and learn from what other programs and organizations are doing in your community, your state, and across the country. Tweak their approaches to fit your program – or let them inspire new ideas of your own.

How to jumpstart "outside the box" thinking

1. Question the status quo – ask "what if...?" often. Allow yourself the space to imagine a wide range of possibilities, thinking about uncommon solutions to common problems.
2. Draw a picture of a topic or challenge and possible ways to address it (as a team, if possible). This exercise engages the brain differently than traditional brainstorming.
3. Pick a topic and write as fast as you can without stopping to edit. Freewriting works best with a pen and paper. Set a short timer to force your brain to work quickly and unconventionally.
4. Work backwards and upside down. Reframing and rearranging things can reveal new patterns. Focusing on your goal instead of how you'll get there. Imagine if your least important outcome were the most important. Or imagine your best possible scenario and plan backwards to now.
5. Think like a child. Creatures of habit aren't always the most creative, and children don't yet have the same structured thinking. Think about how a child might explain how to do something (or ask one!) and allow yourself to be a "messy thinker."
6. Move your meeting outdoors. A change of scenery can lead to a change of mind. If you cannot meet outside, take a walk on your own beforehand to clear your head and make space for ideas.



What does innovation look like in senior nutrition programs?

Senior nutrition programs are always looking for new and better ways to serve the older adults in their communities. Check out these examples:

- [Expanding meal choices](#) for older adults.
- [Pivoting to a grab-and-go model](#) when meals can't be enjoyed inside together.
- [Starting a food truck](#) to raise funds for the local nutrition program.

To learn more about these incredible innovations and others, read the Nutrition and Aging Resource Center's [success stories](#). Or find inspiration from [ACL's Innovations in Nutrition Programs and Services](#).