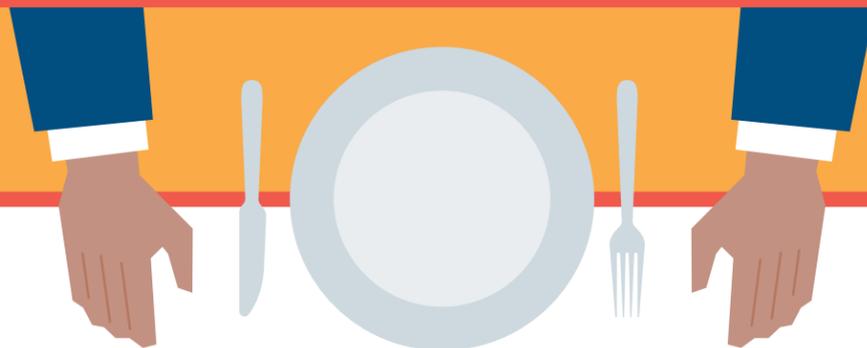


STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE NUTRITION TRAINING

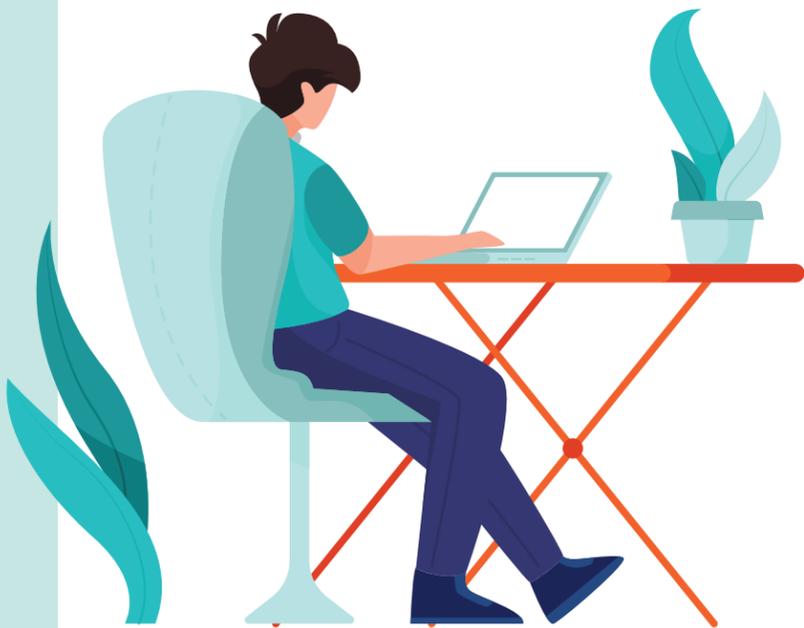
FOR CONGREGATE NUTRITION PROGRAM STAFF



Congregate nutrition programs are designed to support older adults, specifically those facing social and financial difficulties. Nutrition services like healthy meals are typically offered at senior centers, churches and other facilities but sometimes fall short on meeting the expectations and desires of those they are set up to serve. Congregate nutrition program providers have indicated that more training is needed for staff to better understand the intricacies of the program, what's allowable, what's not, and how to create flexible meal offerings that meet the continually evolving needs and desires of current and eligible participants. From food safety to funding, congregate nutrition program staff are hungry for information.

There are several ways to strengthen staff knowledge, foster creativity and enhance resources available to best meet the needs of a community's congregate nutrition program. The strategies noted below have been cited as effective practices by meal sites across the country. Consider what may work for your organization, and how to tailor these practices to best meet your needs.



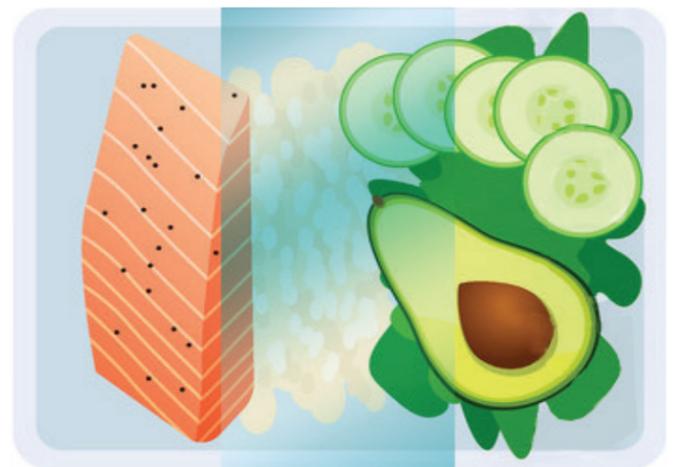


INVEST IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Encouraging professional development also empowers staff to be successful in their roles and can help with staff retention. Staff knowledge can be bolstered with local, regional and national conferences. It can be supported with outside experts – like nursing students – that can offer falls prevention, nutrition and other workshops to both staff and participants. If staff do move on, staff loss can be buffered by cross training volunteers and employees to work in a variety of settings within congregate meals.

INSTITUTE FOOD SAFETY TRAINING, LIKE SERVSAFE, FOR VOLUNTEERS

This can reinforce good handling and storage practices and ensure that if client meals are transported home, they receive the needed education and assistance to align with best practices.



ADDRESS THE VARIETY OF CULTURES AND SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS OF YOUR PARTICIPANTS

This may mean hiring staff that can speak multiple languages, investing in cross cultural and diversity training opportunities, ensuring that print materials are translated into locally predominant languages, and working with foodservice staff and clients to ensure that meals served reflect the cultural practices of the community.





IDENTIFY POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

The local Area Agency on Aging, United Way and other national organizations with local chapters often have resources, best practices and materials available for dissemination to a variety of audiences. Some organizations may also provide grant-writing assistance while others may even serve as non-traditional partners that provide additional funding and professional development opportunities.

ENSURE STAFF UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLE(S) WITHIN THE CONGREGATE NUTRITION PROGRAM SETTING

Hang posters with meal guidelines/requirements, encourage open communication between staff and management, conduct group trainings and consider creating an opening and closing list to make sure all responsibilities are completed each day. Bring together staff at all levels (kitchen managers, site managers, cooks, volunteers, etc.) to determine what's working at a congregate nutrition program setting.



INCENTIVIZE CREATIVE THINKING WHILE CREATING EFFICIENCIES

Share recipe ideas that are new and exciting to both prepare and serve and still meet the congregate nutrition program requirements. Simplify meal planning by using MyPlate as a mechanism to follow the Dietary Guidelines. Consider using technology to modernize data entry, including meal counts and attendance.

To learn more about these best practices and to get additional ideas and inspiration on how to implement new ideas at your congregate meal site, check out these key resources:

National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs
nanasp.org

National Resource Center on Nutrition and Aging
nutritionandaging.org

NRCNAengage – a networking platform for senior nutrition programs
nrcna.mn.co

