

Background

Senior nutrition program services are proven to make a difference in the lives of the homebound elderly and persons with disabilities. Yet, senior nutrition programs are being faced with challenges that prevent them from serving seniors who are in most need of these services. Recent reports suggest that funding limitations and rising operations costs result in senior nutrition programs modifying the services they offer and reducing staffing, operating timeframes and meal delivery modalities.

Several key factors challenge the smooth operation of senior nutrition programs. These include:

1. Decreased revenues from donations
2. Decreased funding from federal and state governments
3. Increased food costs
4. Competition from for-profit meal delivery programs

Opportunity: Shared use kitchens

Local senior nutrition programs are encouraged to pursue entrepreneurial enterprises to build diverse and sustainable funding sources. Senior nutrition programs can rent their cooking facilities on a part-time basis when kitchens are not in use (during the kitchen's off days, on weekends and during off-hours) to food entrepreneurs needing a place to prepare food products.

What are shared use kitchens?

Shared kitchens or food incubators are legally licensed commercial kitchens used by local food entrepreneurs, caterers, food truck operators, and others who produce value-added food products without having to invest in owning and operating a commercial kitchen. The popularity of these ventures is the result of an increased interest in locally sourced and produced food products, the growing shared economy, and the popularity of entrepreneurship.



Benefits of shared kitchens

In addition to providing a source of revenue, shared kitchens provide benefits to the community and may also increase the visibility of a senior nutrition program. Shared kitchens support local farms, assist community entrepreneurs, build economic opportunities, create jobs, and can assist in revitalizing communities. Providing space for food entrepreneurs is an especially valuable resource in rural areas that have limited commercial food preparation facilities.

A word to the wise

Prior to embarking on a shared kitchen endeavor, senior nutrition programs need to research the needs of local food businesses in their local area looking for rental space. To gain more insight into the advantages of shared kitchens and critical business planning steps that all senior nutrition programs need to keep in mind, visit <https://nutritionandaging.org/briefs/> to access the Extended Brief.

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Reference: Colpaart, Ashley M., Grahm, Wendy, & Seymour, Devon. (2017). Shared-use Kitchens: A Policy Landscape Report. Fort Collins, CO: The Food Corridor. Available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B6KNb3JpFJl8TIY1dmZMd0haNzg/view>. Accessed 3/12/2019.