



Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

Project Ideas for Volunteer Dietetic Interns, Nutrition Students, and Professionals

Introduction

Working with dietetic interns, nutrition and hospitality students, and volunteer nutrition professionals has benefits for all. Your senior nutrition program can gain from their skills, and they can feel rewarded and get important professional experience by helping their community.

This resource can provide you with information about how each of these three categories of volunteers can enhance your senior nutrition program. The list of suggestions is just a starting point. Senior nutrition programs can offer experience in all these areas, and more, depending on the types of services they offer. Your agency will have unique needs for volunteers, along with policies that may impact the types of services volunteers can provide.

Dietetic Interns and Dietetic Technician Interns

Dietetic interns have completed a degree in dietetics or a related field and are completing a supervised practice in dietetics before taking the registry exam to become a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN). Dietetic interns must have a RDN who precepts (or oversees) the intern's rotation and works directly with their training program.

Dietetic technician interns are required to complete a supervised practice in dietetics before taking the registry exam to become a dietetic technician registered (DTR). Dietetic technician interns receive similar training to dietetic interns and work as independent team members under the supervision of RDNs.

Dietetic and dietetic technician interns may have rotations (i.e., experiences with each training location) lasting between one week to several months in areas that include clinical nutrition, foodservice management, and community nutrition.

- Foodservice
 - Draft a food substitution policy with food group substitution lists.
 - Develop individual theme or holiday meals with standardized recipes, nutrient analysis, or meal pattern analysis.
 - Conduct “make versus buy” decision models for menu items based on food cost and nutritive content comparisons.
 - Conduct weekly food safety and sanitation self-inspections.
 - Develop and deliver food safety or culinary training for staff and volunteers.
 - Assist with plate waste analysis or similar projects.
- Nutrition education
 - Develop and deliver nutrition education sessions or cooking demonstrations.
 - Develop nutrition education displays and display kits for meal sites.
 - Develop and deliver targeted nutrition education for people with chronic diseases such as diabetes or hypertension.
 - Identify federally approved or created nutrition education resources for potential use.
- Nutrition counseling
 - Under the supervision of an RDN, conduct nutrition assessment and counseling for individuals screened to be at high nutrition risk.
 - Identify community resources to initiate development of a nutrition counseling resource network.
- Other nutrition services
 - Develop client or staff training materials on malnutrition screening and treatment.
 - Develop menus or meal packages to meet the needs of persons identified with food insecurity, malnutrition, or who require a special diet.
 - Develop a blueprint to incorporate hunger or malnutrition screening questions into the existing nutrition screening tool.
 - Participate in nutrition site and meal route oversight duties.

Students

Student volunteers with an interest in nutrition or foodservice may be found at the local technical college, public or private universities, and even high schools with vocational programs such as culinary arts or hospitality. Appropriate topics often need to be time-limited and based on their skills and schedules.

- Foodservice
 - Assist with meal preparation or service on certain days of the week or for special event meals.
 - Draft a menu or perform an initial menu review based on meal pattern nutrition standards (RDN final review and approval required).
 - Source or develop food safety job aids for meal production and service staff and volunteers.
 - Conduct food and equipment temperature log reviews to verify policies are followed.
 - Develop kitchen, dining room, and vehicle cleaning checklists with daily, weekly, and monthly tasks.
 - Make suggestions for, and implement approved, low-cost dining room or meal service changes to make meal sites more welcoming.
- Nutrition education
 - Deliver an approved nutrition education session (after training).
 - Assist RDN or meal site managers during nutrition education sessions.
 - Set up nutrition education displays at meal sites.
 - Develop nutrition education social media posts and class notices.
- Other projects
 - Perform weekly or monthly uploads of menus and other senior nutrition program materials to the organization website.
 - Conduct a community scan for potential restaurant partners and pop-up meals sites.
 - Develop resource lists of local food pantries, grocery stores with delivery services, and farmers markets for use with participants and in referrals.
 - Conduct telephone reassurance calls with participants.
 - Assist with data collection during intake, screening, and re-assessment (after training).

Volunteer Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDN)

For a variety of reasons, RDNs may contact you to volunteer. Perhaps they have retired but still want to practice dietetics in the community, want to add volunteer work to their current job responsibilities, or are taking a break from paid employment and want to keep their skills sharp.

- Program operations
 - Mentor a new foodservice director, nutrition program manager, or serve as preceptor for a dietetic intern.
 - Develop financial scenarios to aid in decision making related to becoming a self-operated foodservice or using a foodservice management company or caterer.
 - Develop or revise operation manuals or training materials.
- Nutrition education and counseling
 - Develop nutrition education materials, including newsletter articles and online resources; present educational sessions or cooking demonstrations; or provide health promotion programs.
 - Provide nutrition counseling to program participants at high nutrition risk.
 - Help design or implement a malnutrition screening or nutrition counseling program if not currently offered.
- Advocacy
 - Represent and advocate for the senior nutrition program in local and regional initiatives related to senior hunger and malnutrition, healthy food access, health care, and other related topics.

Other Foodservice Professionals

Formally trained, credentialed professionals, such as certified dietary managers and certified chefs, can be valuable volunteers. Many enjoy sharing their professional expertise for the benefit of the community.

- Foodservice
 - Prepare a theme meal for participants or a fundraising event meal.
 - Provide ideas for improving kitchen efficiency.
 - Conduct culinary training for paid staff and volunteers.
 - Advise on purchasing new and replacement equipment.
 - Help make connections with suppliers and sources of local foods.

Finding Volunteers

- To find students, contact your local technical college, public or private universities, or high schools with vocational programs focused on culinary arts or hospitality.
- To find dietetic interns, dietetic technician interns and volunteer RDNs, contact your state's dietetic association, local hospital, or search for RDNs on the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website](#) and dietetic and dietetic technician internships using the [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics program directory](#).
- To find other foodservice professionals, ask your foodservice distributor about their chef services. Talk to local chef-owned restaurants, businesses with employee cafeterias, nursing homes, assisted living communities, or school or college dining services.

Resources

[How-To Guide: Partnering with Dietetic Programs](#)

Benefits of partnering with dietetic programs and interns

[Volunteer Utilization](#)

Tips on nontraditional roles for volunteers