

Nutrition Services Stakeholders Meeting Minutes  
November 22, 2022  
1:00 pm

Department of Aging and Disability Services  
55 Farmington Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06105

Meeting began at 1:03 PM.

Meeting Participants

**TEAMS:** Jannett Haughton, Margy Gerundo-Murkette, - Department of Aging and Disability Services/State Unit on Aging (ADS/SUA).

Annjerry Garcia – Department of Social Services (DSS); Kathy Chase – Senior Resources (ECAA); Gretchen James and Denise Andreas – Southwestern Connecticut Agency on Aging SWCAA) and Independent Living; Rick Liegl, Meriden Senior Center; Erin Harkrader – LifeBridge; Jaime Smith, Department of Agriculture (DoA); Joel Sekorski – Litchfield Hills/Northwest Elderly Nutrition Program (LH/NW ENP) and Connecticut Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Providers (CANASP); Marissa Karp – CT Community Care; Michael Hebert – Western Connecticut Area Agency on Aging (WCAAA).

The meeting commenced with welcome and introductions of new attendees, followed by a briefing of the last meeting.

**Discussion:**

Participants shared updates regarding re-opening congregate sites, “grab and go” services, and attendance at the sites. An update of the current re-opening status revealed that there are still some cafes that are still doing “grab and go” services. Some are completely “grab and go” due to spacing issues or senior centers not yet comfortable in re-opening while others offer both “grab and go” as well as congregate dining. One Elderly Nutrition Program (ENP) is looking to eliminate the “grab and go” service as a result of increased costs for this service while others have not experienced additional costs for their congregate services. Even though some sites are still experiencing a low turnout, others have experienced strong numbers at the gradual re-opening of their sites. Overall, they are not yet back to their pre-COVID numbers.

Sustainability of funding after ARPA funding ends is a concern. It is understood that with the eventual end of American Rescue Plan (ARPA) funding, providers will look to minimize the reduction of meals as they continue to face rising costs. Barriers vary by region. While some might not have accrued any additional cost to their congregate and fleet of vehicles, others are faced with the struggle of aging fleet and repair costs. There have been cost increases from caterers as well. Donations have also significantly decreased; one provider shared a loss of 80% of their donations.

In preparation for the end of ARPA funding, it was suggested that this would be a good time to reassess current participants and to screen new ones more thoroughly, adding new participants based on greatest need. One provider has found the updated Form 5 Consumer Registration Form to be very helpful in prioritizing meal participants with the greatest need. (The higher the score, the greater the need). An additional approach is to change days of delivery and reduce weekend service. There is one provider who still has a waitlist due to transportation issues.

The use of Farmer's Market coupons and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits were also discussed to fill the gap for seniors who qualify and may need these benefits. It was recommended to do outreach with SNAP and to get eligible seniors enroll. Nutrition providers and senior centers may also contact the Department of Agriculture for Farmer's Market coupon distribution.

Strategic planning is needed. In addition, prioritization will be critical, following the guidelines, considering regional differences including rural areas.

#### **Distribution of \$3 million ARPA funding through PA 22-118**

The SUA has initiated this process with OPM for the distribution of the funds.

- The ENPs have submitted requested budgets and proposals to SUA and the SUA and OPM are currently reviewing them.
- ENPs are asked to provide proof of negative economic impact suffered during the pandemic. They were also given a list of possible documents that can demonstrate this.
- The SUA is aiming to distribute funds by 12/31/22.

The SUA was acknowledged for their support and alignment between the SUA, the AAAs and the ENPs in communicating and collaborating to make this process for distribution of the funds more transparent and simpler. It was noted that this process will help as a guide in the distributing of other ARPA awarded funds.

#### **Collection of Information for "Public Act No. 22-32" Nutrition Report**

The request for information for this report has been sent to the AAAs and the ENPs. One ENP representative noted that the ENPs should be able to meet their targeted submission date. Some of the data being collected will also be beneficial in the preparation of the upcoming RFP process.

Suggestions were raised for statewide fundraisers to help maintain services. It was shared that the AAAs are planning a symposium in the spring to look at best practices, which includes nutrition.

#### **Meeting dates for 2023**

Our next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 21, 2022, at 1:00pm – 2:30pm via Teams. Other upcoming meeting dates set for next year are Tuesday, May 23, 2023, August 22, 2023, and December 5, 2023, at 1:00pm – 2:30pm via Teams. It was agreed upon by the group to change the November's meeting date to December, upon the request of the nutrition program members due to the numerous project deadlines they have for that month.

The meeting ended at 2:25pm.