



Grab and Go 101: A Quick Guide for Aging Nutrition Programs

July 2023

Introduction

Grab and go meals, also called carry-out, drive-through, or pick-up meals, have emerged as a common service delivery approach. This quick guide provides definitions, reporting guidance, a considerations worksheet, and examples of how grab and go meals are being provided nationwide.

Before implementing a new program, policy or procedure, reach out to your Area Agency on Aging (AAA) and/or your State Unit on Aging (SUA) to make sure it meets all state and local policy requirements, including any pre-approvals which may be necessary. As with any program, more restrictive policies can impact participation and outreach.

Definitions and Reporting

The following State Performance Report (SPR)¹ definitions are offered to support aging nutrition programs in accurately reporting grab and go meals. Refer to your state and local policies for any restrictions that may impact the ability to offer grab and go meals.

Congregate Meal: A meal provided by a qualified nutrition project provider to a qualified individual in a congregate or group setting.

Home Delivered Meal: A meal provided to a qualified individual in his/her place of residence.

Use this [Title III C Decision Tree](#) to help you decide whether a meal should be reported and funded as a congregate meal or a home delivered meal.

Considerations

First, review state and AAA policies. Have discussions with these entities to clarify questions you may have about implementation.

Then, use this worksheet to help you determine how grab and go meals will enhance or affect your congregate and home delivered meal program:

¹ [State Program Report \(SPR\) Appendix A: Data Element Definitions](#)



Question	Resources to Explore	Complete this section as you consider how grab and go meals will affect your program
Is there something about our current congregate meal setting, meal choice, mealtime, location, staff, or another factor that is not working for our current older adults in the community?	<p>The setting in which guests eat their meals can make or break the overall experience and can ultimately be the reason why a guest participates or not.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meal Site Environment: Institutional or Innovative • Meal Site Environment Quickinars • Instructional Campus on Aging Nutrition (ican!) Module 2 Three P's of the OAA: Participation and Promotion and Module 4 Business Management 	
Have we gathered older adult and participant feedback to make sure our meal services are person-centered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023 Summer Webinar Series: EVALUATION • Using Data and Satisfaction Surveys to Solicit the Voice of the Customer in Menu Planning • Diversity and Cultural Competency ACL information page • Underserved Communities 	
Have we taken advantage of all available flexibilities under the OAA, state and local policies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick Tips: OAA Title III-C1 Congregate Meals • Quick Tips: OAA Title III-C2 Home-delivered Meals 	
How do we gather the correct data from participants? Do we need to collect any additional data points from participants?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nutrition Service Reporting Quick Tips • Innovations and Lessons Learned from COVID-19 Discusses experiences, challenges and opportunities related to gathering data. • Data Collection & Analysis 101 • Aging, Independence, and Disability Program Data Portal 	
Do we need to develop prioritization criteria to ensure these meals are reaching those with the greatest economic and social need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick Guide to Prioritizing Participants • Senior Nutrition Program Elements for Sustainability: Guide to Prioritizing Clients • Targeting Strategies • Prioritizing Clients 	
Are there additional eligibility criteria from the state, area agency on aging, or another source for home delivered meals (example: "homebound")?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note that "homebound" is not in eligibility criteria in the Older Americans Act • Quick Tips: OAA Title III-C2 Home-delivered Meals 	

Question	Resources to Explore	Complete this section as you consider how grab and go meals will affect your program
Do we need to develop policies and procedures to ensure consistency and accountability? Do we need to provide additional training and education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and Procedures templates • Instructional Campus on Aging Nutrition (ican!) Module 4 Business Management 	
Have we evaluated the costs and benefits of providing grab and go meals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the Total Cost of a Meal • Instructional Campus on Aging Nutrition (ican!) Module 9 Meeting Needs and Module 10 Diversifying Funding 	
Do we have enough funding to provide grab and go meals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Skills 	
Can we utilize another funding source or establish a private pay program to provide grab and go meals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick Tips: OAA Nutrition Program Funding Options • Guide to Establishing a Fee-for-Service Private Pay System • Instructional Campus on Aging (ican!) Module 10 Diversifying Funding 	
Are there other organizations already providing this kind of service?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Assistance resources • Partnerships 	
How will we frequently monitor to make sure this service model is needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Evaluation • Placing the 'Value' in Evaluation: Practical Tips for Measuring Impact Presentation (YouTube) 	
How are leftovers of meals and packaging handled?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick Tips: OAA Title III-C1 Congregate Meals • Food Safety resources address leftovers 	

Examples from the Network

The following are challenges, examples and stories shared from the aging network.

Need to address service quality and meet participant needs:

- Many nutrition programs are concerned that grab and go can result in social isolation. Nutrition programs are intended to promote socialization and have proven impact at improving social connection.² AAAs and providers are challenged to find new ways to build and maintain strong social connections and referral pathways to needed services for participants. Some organizations offer “grab and stay” picnics and tailgating events, while others add virtual or phone contact to connect and identify risk for [social isolation](#) and provide opportunities to assist with referrals to needed services.
- With concerns about people returning to congregate meal sites, programs are challenged to re-evaluate current congregate meal settings, meal choices, mealtimes, locations, staff, or other features to make them more attractive to older adults.
- Nutrition education is a big part of the nutrition program. Grab and go meals can limit opportunities to for interactive nutrition education and health promotion activities.
- The impact of grab and go meals on the nutrition program’s intent to enhance participants’ nutrition, socialization and health/well-being is uncertain. To justify funding, research is needed.

Reaching new participants:

- Grab and go meals can be an opportunity to engage new participants who gradually begin to take advantage of additional needed services after the connection is made.
- States report they are leveraging the grab and go model to build relationships with new participants who are reluctant to dine in a meal site but still have unmet needs.
- New participants include those who take grab and go meals home where they may serve as caregivers for grandchildren or others. Participants may also include those who are still working or have other responsibilities but who may be able to participate in provider-arranged programming at other times.
- Grab and go reached younger participants who were not previously well-represented in their aging nutrition programs: “When we offered the grab and go March to July 2020, we didn’t see this demographic in any other place.”
- “Curbside opened people’s eyes to what we do here and what we can offer.”
- Grab and go reached participants who “aren’t homebound but feel uncomfortable, for a variety of reasons, in eating in a dine-in setting, and also those who don’t have the time to stay to eat.”

Managing eligibility, data, and reporting:

- In states with a “homebound” requirement for home delivered meals, some report they are implementing a waiver process to offer grab and go meals where appropriate. Providers must demonstrate how homebound participants and those in greatest need will be prioritized.
- Some states report they are offering training and guidance and are working with providers to update their participant registration processes. States acknowledge that the needs of participants who access a grab and go meal are often different from those who need a traditional home delivered meal, and grab and go consumers may be more reluctant to share the Title IIIC-2 data set (e.g., ADLs, iADLs). Some states have developed processes to demonstrate that the attempt was made to collect the data, while ensuring services are not denied in cases where a participant may refuse.
- States have developed systems that allow providers to identify grab and go meals as a subservice of Title IIIC-2. These meals are labeled “to-go meal” for tracking utilization of the service delivery model.

Examples of how grab and go policies may be implemented throughout the network:

State (policy)³

- Grab and go meal: included as an option for delivering Title III C-2 services, reported as home delivered meals. Carry-out meals may be provided and are subject to local health regulations.

AAA (policy and procedure)

- Case managers will perform annual client priority screening for home-delivered meals, and as clients' circumstances change significantly. Nutrition projects will establish procedures that allow the highest priority clients to receive the service. Service delivery plans should align with client needs in the project's jurisdiction.

Local (procedure)

- Clients scoring as highest priority according to their level of nutrition risk, food insecurity risk and/or malnutrition risk need home delivered meals. Therefore, grab and go services, which generally meet the needs of lower priority clients, will be discontinued, or made available for private pay only.

Conclusion

Grab and go meals are just one example of how congregate and home-delivered meals can be served in flexible and person-centered ways. Aging nutrition professionals are encouraged to use the definitions, considerations worksheet, examples and resources referenced in this document to collaborate with participants and stakeholders to determine if, and how, offering grab and go meals may enhance or affect the congregate and home delivered meal program.

³ A state [Grab and Go Meals](#) template is available on the Nutrition and Aging Resource Center.

