



Nutrition and Aging Resource Center

Use of Nutrition Program Funds for Gardening Activities

Funding Eligibility

Can nutrition program funds be used for gardening activities? Potentially, yes, limited gardening-related expenses may be allowable under other nutrition services when they support nutrition services, nutrition education, participant engagement, or access to fresh fruits and vegetables for older adults.

Can Nutrition Incentive Program (NSIP) funds be used for gardening activities? No, NSIP funds are specifically designed for food used in eligible meals and may not be used for gardening activities, gardening infrastructure, or other gardening expenses.

Can funds designated specifically for congregate or home-delivered meals be used for gardening projects? Programs should not use funds that are specifically designated for meal service delivery in a manner that reduces or replaces the program's ability to provide meals to eligible participants.

Funding Considerations for Gardening Activities

Why might some gardening activities still be considered allowable? The Older Americans Act supports nutrition and wellness beyond the provision of meals alone. Gardening activities may promote healthy eating, nutrition education, social engagement, and physical activity while increasing access to fresh produce.

What types of gardening expenses may be allowable? Examples may include seed or starter plants, small gardening supplies used for nutrition programming, nutrition education activities connected to gardening, and produce used in congregate meals, demonstrations, or nutrition education activities.

What types of expenses may not be appropriate? Large-scale gardening construction, significant infrastructure projects, or ongoing operational expenses that substantially reduce the program's ability to provide meals or core nutrition services may not represent the best use of the limited nutrition funds.

Can programs build raised garden beds using nutrition funds? Programs are encouraged to seek community partnerships, volunteer support, donations, or other alternative funding sources for infrastructure-related costs where possible. For example, community groups or volunteers may assist with building garden beds while nutrition funds support limited program-related activities.

Integrating Gardening With Nutrition Services

How should gardening activities be connected to nutrition services? Gardening activities should ideally be tied to nutrition education or participant wellness activities. For example, a program may:

- Conduct a gardening class while planting seeds.
- Discuss the nutrition benefits of the produce being grown.
- Offer a follow-up cooking or nutrition demonstration using harvested produce.

Can produce from gardens be used in meals? Yes, when appropriate food safety practices are followed, produce grown through program-supported gardening activities may be incorporated into congregate meals, demonstrations, or nutrition education activities.

Financial Stewardship and Resource Considerations

Is there a spending limit for gardening activities? There is no specific spending limit. However, all costs should be reasonable, necessary, and proportionate to the overall goals of the nutrition program. Programs should carefully consider whether expenses are an effective use of nutrition funds.

Should programs rely primarily on nutrition funds for gardening projects? No, programs are encouraged to maximize donations, partnerships, volunteer support, seed swaps, and other community resources to help support gardening activities.

Will gardening requests automatically be approved? No, the request may still require a case-by-case review to ensure proposed expenses are aligned with program goals, funding requirements, and responsible stewardship of the nutrition program funds. Local providers should check with their area agency on aging (AAA), AAAs should consult with their state agency, and states should consult with the Administration for Community Living, as needed.