

July 8, 2026

Connecting Senior Centers to Federal Funding and Resources

This guide is intended to help congressional offices connect senior centers in their states and districts to selected examples of federal grant funding and resources.

Background on Senior Centers

Senior centers are a type of community center that offer a variety of programs and services for older adults, which may include meals and nutrition education, health and fitness programs, transportation, information and referrals to community services and resources, assistance accessing and enrolling in public benefits, assistance with employment and volunteer opportunities, social and entertainment activities, cultural and creative arts programs, and programs fostering intergenerational connections. Most senior centers are owned or operated by local governments, independent nonprofit organizations, area agencies on aging, or faith-based organizations. Local government agencies that operate senior centers include parks and recreation departments, health and human services departments, and other government entities.

According to the Administration for Community Living (ACL) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in FY2024 states reported a total of 9,572 senior centers, of which 5,881 (or 61%) received Older Americans Act (OAA) funding. ACL reports that most senior centers rely on three to eight different public and private funding sources, which, in addition to the federal resources discussed in this report, include state or local funds from area agencies on aging, parks and recreation departments, tax levies, or direct municipal funding. Other sources of support include private grants, businesses, bequests, participant contributions toward services or programming, revenue from special events, in-kind donations, and volunteer hours.

Grant Funding and Resources

Many federal grant funds are first awarded to state and local governments through various formula grant or block grant programs. The state and local governments receiving these direct awards are considered *prime* recipients, which then administer the program funding and may make subawards to other subrecipients. This subawarding is known as a “pass-through” process.

Other federal grants are directly awarded by federal agencies without a pass-through. These awards are typically reviewed in a competitive process overseen by the awarding federal agency. Identifying a competitive program’s Assistance Listing number (ALN) may be a useful way for grant seekers to search or monitor any open Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs) on Grants.gov. For more information on federal grants administration and search tips, see CRS Report RL34012, *Resources for*

Grantseekers, and CRS In Focus IF12910, *Searching for Federal Grants: An Overview of Resources*.

Senior Center Operations

ACL’s Senior Centers and Supportive Services for Older Adults formula grants (OAA Title III; 42 U.S.C. §3030d) may be used for senior center operations and staff compensation. Federal funding is authorized for activities that promote socialization, recreation, and lifelong learning and provide adult day care and transportation to and from the senior center, among other activities. Interested senior centers may contact their state units on aging or area agencies on aging (listed in the Eldercare Locator).

The Modernizing Senior Centers Resource Center (formerly funded by ACL, operated by the National Council on Aging) provides resources such as “Understanding Federal Funding for Senior Centers.”

Health-Related Programs

ACL’s Health Promotion Program formula grants (OAA Title III, 42 U.S.C. §§3030m–3030n) may support “evidence-based disease prevention and health promotion services and information at multipurpose senior centers.” Another ACL formula grant, the National Family Caregiver Support Program (OAA Title III, 42 USC §§3030s–3030s-2) supports family caregivers through training, support groups, information and referral, respite care, and other services. For these programs, interested senior centers may contact their state units on aging or area agencies on aging (listed in the Eldercare Locator).

ACL administers three competitive grant programs that can fund certain health promotion and disease prevention activities at senior centers. NOFOs specify each grant’s specific requirements and eligibility criteria:

1. Chronic Disease Self-Management Education Programs (ALN 93.734) support projects to help older adults learn to manage their chronic health conditions.
2. Evidence-Based Falls Prevention Program grants (ALN 93.761) support projects to prevent fall injuries among older adults.
3. Alzheimer’s Disease Programs (ALN 93.763, 93.051, 93.470) support services to individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

Other health-related resources include the HHS Office of Minority Health Resource Center and the HHS-funded Rural Health Information Hub, both of which offer customized funding searches for grant-seeking organizations.

Meals and Nutrition Services

ACL's Nutrition Services Program formula grants (OAA Title III, 42 U.S.C. §§3030d-21–3030g-23) support congregate meals, which are served in group settings such as senior centers. Interested senior centers may contact their state units on aging or area agencies on aging (listed in the Eldercare Locator). ACL's Nutrition and Aging Resource Center has resources for participating organizations on finances, business management, and funding.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program (42 U.S.C. §1766) reimburses nutrition providers for meals in adult day care centers, which are sometimes located in senior centers. Interested senior centers may contact their state agencies.

CRS Report R48124, *Connecting Charitable Food Assistance Organizations to Federal Funding Information and Resources*, lists additional nutrition services programs.

Transportation

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities formula grants (49 U.S.C. §5310) support transportation for older adults and persons with disabilities. Interested senior centers may contact their state programs.

The FTA Coordinating Council on Access and Mobility's Program Inventory includes federal programs that fund human services transportation for older adults. The spreadsheet includes columns on eligibility and vehicle purchase eligibility, among other types of information.

ACL's Accessible Transportation Resource Center offers tools (including funding resources) for organizations that serve persons with disabilities and older adults.

Administrative and Volunteer Support

The Department of Labor's Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP, OAA Title V; 42 U.S.C. §§3056–3056p) provides formula and competitive grants to support part-time community service opportunities for low-income unemployed adults 55 years old and older. Program participants may be placed in senior centers. Senior centers interested in serving as host agencies may contact their local SCSEP projects.

The Corporation for National Service's Retired and Senior Volunteer Program (42 U.S.C. §5001, ALN 94.002) offers competitive grants to nonprofit organizations and state and local governments to recruit and manage volunteers age 55 and older for service activities, including in senior centers. NOFOs specify grant requirements.

Construction and Renovation

ACL's Senior Centers and Supportive Services for Older Adults formula grants may be used for the acquisition, alteration, construction, renovation, and modernization of multipurpose senior centers. Interested senior centers may contact their state units on aging or area agencies on aging (listed in the Eldercare Locator).

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG, 42 U.S.C. §5301 et seq.) funds may be used for a range of community development needs, including, in some cases, senior center construction and renovation. Interested senior centers may contact local or state administering agencies.

CRS In Focus IF12880, *Connecting Constituents with Federal Assistance for Community Centers*, describes programs for building or renovating community centers, which may be applicable to senior centers.

Tribal Funding

ACL's Services for Native Americans (OAA Title VI; 42 U.S.C. §§3057–3057o) are formula grants to American Indian tribal organizations, Native Alaskan organizations, and nonprofit groups representing Native Hawaiians. Grants support a range of services comparable to OAA Title III supportive and nutrition services programs. Funds may be used for senior center construction and renovation. Senior centers may contact OAA Title VI directors.

Other Funding Sources

ACL's Special Programs for the Aging (OAA Title II and Title IV, 42 U.S.C. §§3011–3020g, §§3031–3033a, ALN 93.048) include a range of aging-related competitive grants, such as for demonstration projects, innovation, and resource centers. NOFOs specify each grant's requirements.

HHS Administration for Children and Families Social Services Block Grants (42 U.S.C. §1397 et seq.) may be used to support a variety of services, including meals, adult day care, recreation, and transportation. Interested senior centers may contact their state or territory grantees.

HUD CDBG formula grants may support public services, including some "services for senior citizens," such as ride services, health services, meals, and recreational programs. CDBG public service expenditures are capped at 15% of a prime grantee's annual allocation plus 15% of program income generated by the prime grantee. Interested senior centers may contact local or state administering agencies.

State Medicaid programs (42 U.S.C. §1396 et seq.) may reimburse for certain services provided to Medicaid beneficiaries. Covered benefits vary by state but may include certain home- and community-based services and services to address health-related social needs. Interested organizations may contact state Medicaid agencies about covered benefits and how to participate as a provider.

ACL's Medicare Enrollment Assistance Program (42 U.S.C. §1395b-3 note, ALN 93.071) and State Health Insurance Assistance Program (42 U.S.C. §1395b-4, ALN 93.324) fund health insurance counseling, outreach, and enrollment assistance for Medicare beneficiaries, which are services that some senior centers may provide. NOFOs specify each grant's requirements.

Angela Napili, Senior Research Librarian
Kirsten J. Colello, Specialist in Health and Aging Policy

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