

# Community Lunch Program

## Frequently Asked Questions

Pima Council on Aging | 2026

<b>Release Date:</b>	April 15, 2026
<b>Webinar:</b>	April 23, 2026, 9:00 AM MST
<b>Webinar Registration:</b>	<a href="https://www.eventbrite.com/e/community-lunch-webinar">CommunityLunchWebinar.eventbrite.com</a>
<b>Contribution Submissions Due:</b>	May 15, 2026 at 5:00 PM MST
<b>Questions:</b>	RFP@pcoa.org

This document answers common questions about the Community Lunch Program's Expression of Interest and Proposal of Contribution process. If your question isn't answered here, email RFP@pcoa.org. This FAQ will be updated as new questions come in.

### About This Process

#### Is this a Request for Proposals?

No. This is not a competitive RFP and there are no awards. We are asking organizations, businesses, faith communities, and others to tell us what they bring to this work, and we will convene contributors and create opportunities for partnerships to form around operating a Community Lunch site. Think of it less as an application and more as an introduction.

#### Why is PCOA doing it this way?

Because a competitive procurement process was not the right tool for what we are trying to build. Traditional RFPs ask organizations to compete against each other. The strongest proposal wins and others don't. That model advantages organizations that already have resources and connections, and it discourages collaboration. What we are trying to build is a community network, and networks are built through relationships, not competitions. We want to find every organization that has something to contribute and figure out together how those contributions can add up to something none of us could create alone.

#### What are the three stages and what happens in each one?

Stage 1 is this process: you tell us who you are and what you bring. Stage 2 is where sites are established. PCOA reviews all contributions, identifies where full programs can be assembled through a single contributor or a group of contributors, and works with contributors to form cohorts where needed. Cohorts define roles, agree on how they will operate, and begin the documentation process. Stage 3 is contracting: cohorts that are ready to move forward formalize their work into agreements with PCOA. Each stage builds on the last, and we will communicate clearly with everyone about what comes next.

#### What is a cohort?

A cohort is the group of contributors who together operate one Community Lunch Program site. A cohort might be a single organization that can do everything, or it might be four or five organizations each bringing a different piece. What matters is that together they cover all six contribution areas for their site.

#### Do I need to have partners already to submit a contribution?

No. You can submit on your own, describing what you bring, and PCOA will work to connect you with potential partners during Stage 2. If you already have partners in mind, that's great too. But having partners is not a requirement for Stage 1.

### **What if I submit and don't get partnered in a cohort with anyone?**

Not everyone who submits in Stage 1 will be partnered in a cohort in this first cycle. Geographic coverage, what areas need to be filled, and the overall landscape of contributions all affect whether a cohort comes together around any given contributor. Everyone who submits will receive a response from PCOA.

### **Does each site need to be open to all older adults 60+, or can a site serve a specific population?**

The Older Americans Act governs the Community Lunch Program and requires services to be available to adults 60 and over. That is the driving factor. Within that, sites can be oriented toward specific cultural communities through the food served, the language used, and the programming offered. Cultural fit matters because the socialization piece of the program depends on people feeling welcome and at home in the space. PCOA will factor cultural focus into how cohorts are formed in Stage 2.

## **The Contribution Areas**

### **What are the six contribution areas?**

The six areas represent the different things a Community Lunch Program site needs to function well:

- Place: a physical space where older adults can gather
- Nourishment: nutritious meals produced and delivered safely
- People: the staffing and coordination to run the site day to day
- Programming and Belonging: activities and social experiences that make participants want to come back
- Wrap-Around Support: connections to resources, referrals, and benefits navigation
- Fiscal Responsibility: financial management and accountability for the site

Read the Guide for Partners for a full description of what each area involves before completing your contribution proposal.

### **What if I can contribute to more than one area?**

Contribute to all the areas that genuinely fit your organization. If you run a community center with a kitchen, staff, and programming capacity, you might contribute to Place, Nourishment, People, and Programming all at once. For each area you select, describe your current capacity and how you would do that work. Be honest about what you can do now and what would require growth.

### **What if I can only do part of one area?**

That's fine. Tell us what part you can do and what you would need from a partner. That information helps us figure out what kind of cohort would work around your contribution.

### **We're a restaurant. Which area do we fit in?**

Most likely Nourishment, where meal production and delivery lives. A restaurant partnership can be a wonderful way to bring culturally relevant, high-quality food to a site. You might also contribute to Place if you have space available during off-hours. Read the Nourishment area description in the Guide for Partners to understand what meal production involves in this program.

### **What nutritional guidelines are used for meal approval?**

Every meal served through the Community Lunch Program must meet the nutrition standards established under the Older Americans Act (OAA) and implemented in Arizona through the DES/DAAS Nutrition, Food Service, and Wellness Manual (AAA-1182A). At a minimum, that means:

- Meals align with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGAs).
- Each meal provides at least one-third (1/3) of the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) for older adults, per OAA §339 and 45 CFR §1321.87.
- All food must be domestically produced to meet Nutrition Services Incentive Program (NSIP) reimbursement requirements; imported foods may not be used to satisfy NSIP.
- Menus must be planned and approved by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) in accordance with AAA-1182A.
- Providers submit six-week cycle menus with RDN approval and full nutrient analysis at least 30 days before the service month.
- All menu substitutions must be logged, and any substitution that materially affects nutritional content must be re-approved by the RDN.
- Full nutrient analysis documentation must be kept on file and available for PCOA review.

Beyond this nutritional baseline, PCOA also looks at whether a site's meals meet the broader needs of a community lunch program, including cultural relevance and the health needs of the older adults being served at that site.

### **Will every site be held to the same meal specifications?**

Yes. Every site in the Community Lunch Program is held to the same foundational nutrition standards, regardless of who produces the meals or where they are served. The RDN approval process is what ensures consistency across the network: every six-week cycle menu must be reviewed against the DGAs, the DRI requirements for older adults, and the requirements in AAA-1182A before it can be served. The governing standards are public and are linked in the next question, so that any contributor can review the requirements that their own menus, and every other site's menus, must satisfy. If a site's menu appears to fall short of these standards, that is a conversation to raise with PCOA.

### **What regulations and resources govern the program's nutrition requirements?**

Contributors working in the Nourishment area should be familiar with the regulations and resources below. PCOA can point you to additional resources and technical assistance during Stage 2 and Stage 3.

- Older Americans Act (OAA) nutrition program — ACL: [acl.gov/programs/health-wellness/nutrition-services](https://acl.gov/programs/health-wellness/nutrition-services)
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans: [dietaryguidelines.gov](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov)
- FDA Food Code: [fda.gov/food/retail-food-protection/fda-food-code](https://www.fda.gov/food/retail-food-protection/fda-food-code)
- Arizona Nutrition, Food Service, and Wellness Manual (AAA-1182A) — DES/DAAS: [des.az.gov/digital-library/arizona-nutrition-food-service-and-wellness-manual](https://des.az.gov/digital-library/arizona-nutrition-food-service-and-wellness-manual)

### **Do I need to be a nonprofit to participate?**

No. We are open to organizations of all types, including nonprofits, faith communities, local government, restaurants, caterers, food businesses, and others. What matters is what you bring to the work, not your organizational structure. The one requirement is that each cohort must have one legally incorporated organization serving as the fiscal agent, but that organization does not have to be your organization.

### **What if we don't have food safety certifications yet?**

You don't need to have everything in place at the time of submission. Stage 1 is about understanding what you bring and what your capacity looks like. Certifications, permits, and compliance documentation are collected during Stage 3, the contracting stage, once a cohort has formed and roles are confirmed. What we do need you to have is a clear sense of what certifications you would need and a realistic plan for getting them.

## Cohorts and Coordinating Partnerships

### How does PCOA support cohort formation?

PCOA will look at the full landscape of contributions: what areas each contributor offers, where they are located, what populations they serve, and what languages they work in. Where a single contributor can operate a full site, we will work with them directly. Where contributors need to come together to form a cohort, PCOA will facilitate those connections. This is not an algorithmic process. It involves real conversations and relationship-building, and we will be active participants in it.

### Can we suggest our own partners?

Absolutely. If you have existing relationships with organizations you think would make strong cohort partners, tell us in your contribution proposal. You can also use the webinar as an opportunity to make connections—register at [CommunityLunchWebinar.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/communitylunchwebinar). PCOA will take existing relationships into account as cohorts come together.

### What is a fiscal agent and does every cohort need one?

Yes. Every site must have one organization that serves as the fiscal agent: the organization that receives PCOA's per-meal reimbursement, manages financial accountability, and distributes funds to cohort partners. In a single-organization cohort, that organization is automatically the fiscal agent. In a multi-partner cohort, one organization takes on this role. The fiscal agent must be a legally incorporated organization with documented financial management systems. Identifying and agreeing on the fiscal agent is part of what happens in Stage 2.

### Can multiple organizations contribute to a single site with different pieces of the cost?

Yes. That is exactly the model we are building toward. A single site can be operated by multiple organizations, each contributing what they bring: one organization might provide the meals, another the staff and paper goods, another the space, and so on. The \$10.00 per-meal reimbursement is shared across all contributors at that site; it is not a per-organization amount. The partners in a cohort determine together, as part of their Stage 2 agreements, how that reimbursement is allocated based on each organization's role and contribution.

### What happens during Stage 2 and how long does it take?

Stage 2 is where cohorts form and get ready to move into contracting. PCOA will review all Stage 1 contributions and build a picture of what exists across the county. Where a single contributor can operate a full site, we will work with them directly to move toward Stage 3. Where contributors need to come together into a cohort, PCOA will facilitate those connections. Cohorts will develop a shared understanding of how they will operate, reach agreement on roles including identifying a fiscal agent, and begin working through documentation requirements needed before contracting. We are planning approximately eight weeks for Stage 2, which we recognize involves real work and real relationship-building.

## Reimbursement and Funding

### How much is the per-meal reimbursement?

PCOA reimburses \$10.00 per meal for every eligible older adult served through the program. That rate is the same for all sites. The \$10.00 is a per-site amount shared across all contributors in a cohort, not a per-organization amount; how it is allocated among cohort partners is determined together by the partners as part of Stage 2. It is a meaningful contribution and is not designed to cover the full cost of operating a site — which is why partnership matters. Contributors are expected to bring their own resources to close the gap.

### Will the reimbursement cover all our costs?

It is not designed to. This program is built on the premise that no single funder can or should carry the full cost of this work. The reimbursement is PCOA's contribution to the partnership. Contributors are expected to bring

their own resources, whether that is donated space, volunteer labor, additional funding, in-kind food donations, or other support. During Stage 2, cohorts will develop a full financial picture that accounts for all of those contributions.

### **What is the funding source for this program?**

The primary funding for the Community Lunch Program comes through the Older Americans Act, specifically the Title III nutrition dollars that flow from the federal government to the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Division of Aging and Adult Services, and then to PCOA as the designated Area Agency on Aging for Pima County based on a state allocation formula. PCOA continues to explore opportunities to diversify funding so the program can be more resilient over time.

### **Is the reimbursement based on meals ordered or meals served?**

Reimbursement has traditionally been based on meals ordered, with the expectation that sites manage their ordering to stay aligned with actual participation. If a site orders 100 meals a day but is only serving 75, PCOA works with that site's partners to either grow attendance or bring the ordering down to match reality. In Stage 2, once we understand the capacity proposed at each location across the county, PCOA will determine the total number of meals we are able to fund community-wide at the \$10.00 reimbursement rate and apply that to individual sites. Sites will receive an authorized meal number rather than an unlimited count. That does not mean a site cannot serve additional meals beyond that number — it means PCOA's reimbursement applies to the authorized number, and any meals served above it would need to be covered through other resources the cohort brings.

### **What other funding might we need?**

That depends on what you are contributing and what your costs look like. A Place contributor whose primary contribution is donated space may have very little additional cost. A Nourishment contributor producing meals for 50 people a day will have real food and labor costs beyond what the reimbursement covers. Contributors are expected to come to Stage 2 with a sense of what resources they bring and what their costs look like. PCOA will help contributors understand the full picture, including how the reimbursement rate fits, what other funding sources are typical, and what a site's full cost structure looks like. The financial planning work happens within the cohort.

### **Does the \$10.00 per-meal reimbursement include transportation?**

The \$10.00 per meal is inclusive of everything necessary to provide a community lunch program. For some cohorts, that will include transportation — for example, transportation of meals to the site when the meals are being produced by a different partner or vendor. If PCOA receives funding in the future that is specifically earmarked for transportation, we will come back to contributors to talk about how that would work. For now, the \$10.00 is inclusive.

### **Are voluntary participant contributions still allowed?**

Yes. Voluntary participant contributions remain allowable, and cohorts can factor expected contributions into their overall site budget in Stage 2. To ensure sites have clear and consistent guidance on what participant contributions can look like, PCOA will provide further guidance and suggested language to use around this as we move through the stages.

## **Timeline and Logistics**

### **What is the deadline to submit?**

Contributions are due May 15, 2026 at 5:00 PM MST. Submit your completed form to [RFP@pcoa.org](mailto:RFP@pcoa.org) with the subject line: Community Lunch Program: Contribution Proposal: [Your Organization Name].

### **What is the webinar and do I need to attend?**

*Last Updated 4.23.2026*

The webinar on April 23, 2026 at 9:00 AM MST is an information session. We will walk through the program and the process, answer questions, and give participants a sense of who else in the community is interested in contributing. It is not mandatory, but it is worth attending, especially if you have questions or are uncertain where you fit. Register at [CommunityLunchWebinar.eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com/CommunityLunchWebinar).

### **What if I have questions before the deadline?**

Email [RFP@pcoa.org](mailto:RFP@pcoa.org) by May 10, 2026. We will respond within two business days, and we will post answers to questions of broad interest on the PCOA website so that everyone has access to the same information.

### **When does the program launch?**

The goal is for Community Lunch sites to begin operating October 1, 2026. Working backward from there: Stage 2 of cohort coordination runs through approximately mid-July, Stage 3 contracting follows, and a mandatory onboarding orientation for all contracted contributors will be held in mid-September before the October 1 start.

### **What will PCOA ask for during contracting that isn't being asked for now?**

Stage 1 is intentionally light on documentation. Stage 2 is where we begin collecting documentation that is needed before contracting can happen, and Stage 3 is where remaining requirements are finalized and agreements are signed. What is collected and when depends on each contributor's role. A Nourishment contributor will need food safety certifications, food handler cards, and food service permits. A fiscal agent will need to document their financial management systems. A Place contributor will need health and safety approvals for their space. PCOA will guide each cohort through what is needed and when.

### **How many Community Lunch Program sites currently operate in Pima County?**

There are currently six Community Lunch Program sites.

## **After the Program Launches**

### **What does PCOA's ongoing support look like?**

PCOA is a partner in this work, not just a funder. We will provide onboarding and orientation before the program launches, ongoing check-ins and site visits, reporting tools and templates, access to the PCOA resource network, and facilitated convenings where contracted contributors and other community partners come together to think collectively about how to better serve older adults across the county. You are not doing this alone.

### **What are the reporting requirements?**

Monthly reporting is required, due by the 10th of each month. PCOA will provide templates. Required data includes total meals served, attendance, nutrition education sessions delivered, screenings completed, referrals made, voluntary contributions received, and complementary meals served. The site coordinator is responsible for compiling and submitting this data. PCOA will walk all contributors through reporting expectations during onboarding.

### **Can we add partners or change our cohort structure after contracting?**

Significant changes to cohort structure, including adding or removing partners, require PCOA's knowledge and agreement. The goal is stability, but we also understand that circumstances change. The most important thing is to communicate with PCOA early if something shifts, rather than after the fact.

### **Still Have Questions?**

We want to hear from you. If something isn't clear, ask. That's what this process is for.

**Email:** [RFP@pcoa.org](mailto:RFP@pcoa.org)

**Subject line:** Community Lunch Program Questions: [Your Organization]

**Questions deadline:** May 10, 2026

**FAQ updates posted at:** [pcoa.org](http://pcoa.org)