

Options for Contracting Meals

As of October 14, 2021

Senior Nutrition Programs can be faced with an unforeseen circumstances where they must externally source meals. When this happens, different types of foodservice providers should be considered. The chart below provides suggestions with the level of expertise and the provider’s ability to meet the needs of senior meal programs. The list is not exhaustive, and the availability of these suggested providers will vary based on your local and state conditions. Chart definitions can be found in the Appendix.

SUAs may not require AAAs or local nutrition service providers to purchase meals from a state contract or require that the AAA contract with certain providers but permit the AAAs the option of whether or not to receive these items.

Meal Provider	Fresh Meals	Flash Frozen Meals	Shelf Stable Meals	Medically Tailored Meals	Large-Scale Feeding	Bulk Delivery to Program	Plated Delivery to Program	Plated Delivery to Client	Experience with Emergency Meals
Hospitals	Yes	Varies	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
Senior Living & Nursing Homes	Yes	Unlikely	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
Business & Industry	Yes	Unlikely	Varies	No	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
Airline Catering Companies	Yes	Varies	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
College & Universities	Varies	Unlikely	Varies	No	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
K-12 Schools	Varies	Unlikely	Varies	No	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
Corrections	Yes	Unlikely	Varies	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies
Retail Grocery Stores	Yes	Unlikely	Yes; components	No	Varies	Yes, if they offer catering	Yes, if they offer catering	Yes, if they offer catering	Varies
Restaurants	Yes	Unlikely	Varies	No	Varies	Yes, if they offer catering	Yes, if they offer catering	Yes, if they offer catering	Varies
Foodservice Management Companies ¹	Yes	Varies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Varies	Varies	Yes
Food/Meal Manufacturer	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
FEMA	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Culinary Arts Programs	Yes	Varies	Varies	No	Yes	Varies	Varies	Varies	Varies

¹For more information on foodservice management companies, refer to [“2020 Top 50 Management Companies”](#) Food Management Magazine, March 23, 2020.

Once you have selected your list of potential meal providers, be prepared to answer questions and summarize your “ask.” The chart below provides suggested questions for this discussion.

Company	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who is the provider? Are they handling everything internally or using subcontracts for the meals? Who is using them as a meal provider? References? Quality Assurance process and qualifications of staff who will be directly involved in overseeing your meal program? Does the company have all of licenses and inspections required, including safety requirements? 	 <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Product	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the nutritional requirements of the meals? Do they have a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist on staff? Meal specifics: daypart (i.e., lunch, dinner); fresh, frozen or shelf stable; reheating requirements. Who is being feed? What age group? What is the target price per meal? 	 <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Financial	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the required procurement process and what other staff must be involved in developing and issuing a foodservice contract? Billing details: company name, address, phone, email, attention (invoice addressee). What are the payment terms? Do they offer discounts for early pay? 	 <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Timeline	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When can they start supplying meals? Lead time to place an order? How long will you require meals? How many meals per day? Per week? 	 <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Logistics	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is the order approval process, payment, and delivery instructions? Would there be other partners or volunteers who could/would be involved in logistics? Do they have sufficient staff, vehicles, and other resources to deliver meals to clients or various locations? What length of time will meals be transported, and will temperature controls be in place? If pick-up required, what is their protocol? Delivery time window? Is a loading dock available? Point of contact for order? What is the process for delivery acceptance? Where are their operations located? 	 <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Review and evaluate each potential meal provider based on their ability to provide the highest-quality meal and meet the needs of your program and clients. Use the criteria above for your decision-making process. Once the meal provider is selected, a written agreement must be secured. Click on the link [Contracting Tips for Purchasing Meals/Food](#) for information on how to maximize the contracting process.

Appendix

The descriptions below provide detail around the terms used in the matrix:

- **Fresh (Meals)** – consumable food which has not been preserved and has not spoiled yet.
- **Flash Frozen (Meals)** – the process of freezing an item or meal quickly at an extremely low temperature with cold, circulating air resulting in no ice crystal formation.
- **Shelf Stable (Meals)** – sometimes referred to as ambient this food can be safely stored at room temperature in a sealed container.
- **Medically Tailored (Meals)** – meals approved by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) reflecting appropriate dietary therapy based on evidence-based nutrition practice guidelines to address a medical diagnosis, symptoms, allergies, medication management and side effects while ensuring the best possible health.
- **Large Scale Feeding** – action or feeding event that involves a large number of people vs. few.
- **Bulk Delivery to Program** – food which is packaged in a manner that is not intended for an individual consumer but instead quantity feeding and shipped directly to program site.
- **Plated Delivery to Program** – food which is packaged in manner that is intended for an individual consumer and shipped directly to program site.
- **Plated Delivery to Client** – food which is packaged in a manner that is intended for an individual consumer and shipped directly to the client.
- **Emergency Meals** – typically shelf stable food stored in case of emergencies.

Additional definitions that may be helpful include:

- **Hospitals** – an institution providing medical and surgical treatment and nursing care for sick or injured people.
- **Senior Living & Nursing Homes** – housing and services that are suitable for the needs of an aging population; ranges from independent living to 24-hour care.
- **Business & Industry** – large corporation employee dining services to local, regional, and national companies. These services include employee dining centers, on-site catering, vending, executive dining rooms, and other managed services.
- **Airline Catering Companies** – business that provides food service at a remote site, specifically airline companies. It involves providing meals for passengers on board an aircraft as well as for restaurants situated at airport terminals.
- **Colleges & Universities** – two terms used interchangeably, and both mean a school at the postsecondary level.
- **K-12 Schools** - short form for the publicly supported school grades prior to college. These grades are kindergarten (K) and the 1st through the 12th grade (1-12).
- **Retail Grocery Stores** – places that consumers can buy food and take it off-site for preparation and consumption.
- **Restaurants** – a place where people pay to sit and eat meals that are cooked and served on the premises.
- **Corrections** – state and federal prisons excluding jails.
- **Foodservice Management Companies** – outsourced companies providing foodservice to non-commercial sectors (ex., hospitals, education, college/universities).
- **Food/Meal Manufacturer** – process of taking edible raw materials and transforming them into food products that can be bought and sold. Meal manufacturer is specific to companies producing frozen or shelf stable meals delivering the nutritional requirements of seniors (60+ years).
- **FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency)** – federal agency charged with coordinating a disaster response when state and local authorities are overwhelmed.
- **Culinary Arts Programs** – programs that focus on the skills needed to excel as a professional in the food industry. Curriculum focuses on food safety, hospitality, baking, restaurant service, nutrition, world cuisine, and beverages. Can be found at colleges, trade schools, and high school career centers.