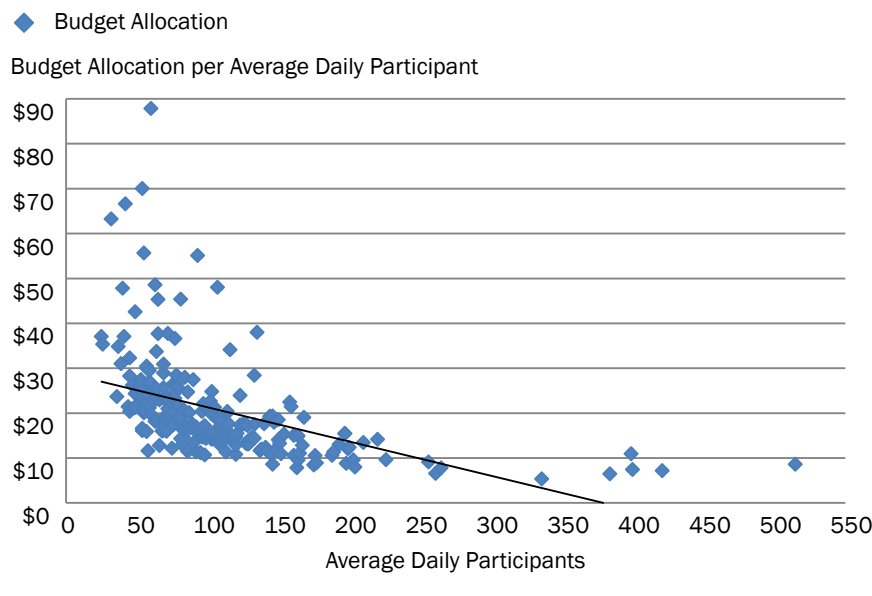


Why Is the City Rethinking How Budgets Are Developed for Senior Centers?

For years, some providers of city-funded social services have questioned disparities in the funding of their programs, with wide differences in how much support some groups receive for each participant despite offering a similar set of services. To address this, in fiscal year 2018 several city agencies began creating “model budgets” for the programs they fund other organizations—generally nonprofits—to provide. The model budget process aims to improve equity in funding by creating a standard model for what a successful program’s budget should look like and increasing support to those contracted programs that were comparatively underfunded (the comparison does not include rent and utilities and the budgets for meal programs are now being reviewed). The funding disparities are apparent when comparing the budgets of senior centers supported by the Department for the Aging in 2017, the year before the implementation of model budgets.

Average Daily Attendance at Senior Centers Did Not Fully Account for Differences in Budget Allocations in 2017



- Attendance at senior centers varies widely, with average daily participation in 2017 ranging from 25 to 515. In that year, budgeted spending per participant per day ranged from \$5.34 to \$87.83 and was roughly correlated with the number of daily participants, with larger centers generally spending less per participant, likely as a result of economies of scale.
- Despite this relationship between budgeted spending and senior center attendance, neither the number of participants per day nor the number or types of services provided at each center fully explained the wide variation in per person budget allocations across centers.

- For example, three centers in Brooklyn and the Bronx each served an average of 77 daily participants and provided a similar set of services; yet while two of them received roughly equivalent budget allocations of \$22.54 and \$23.25 per participant per day, the third center received \$36.59—over 1.5 times more than the other two.
- Conversely, two senior centers in Manhattan received virtually identical budget allocations of \$10.92 and \$10.93 per participant per day, in spite of the fact that one served 399 participants on an average day while the other served 152, fewer than half as many.

In 2018, the de Blasio Administration added \$10 million to the roughly \$100 million allocated annually for programs at neighborhood senior centers. The additional funds were distributed to senior centers as part of the agency’s model budget process. This first phase focused on programming and staffing. Some centers received additional funds based on the model budget, and no center had its funding reduced. In the next phase of the process, the budget for senior centers is expected to increase by an additional \$10 million by 2021 to continue to improve funding equity in these and other areas, including support for meal programs.

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Prepared by Amanda Gallear
New York City Independent Budget Office

SOURCE: IBO analysis of Department for the Aging data

NOTES: Average daily participants is defined as the average number of seniors who enter the senior center on a given day, regardless of what activities they participate in. Senior centers operate 250 days per year. Excludes services funded by City Council discretionary funds, when calculated to include Council funding, the distribution was not significantly changed. Excludes Innovative Senior Centers.