The Opportunity: Funding from the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) is available for Illinois CBOs that work with older adults. For the next year, Illinois CBOs that offer the Fit & Strong! exercise program can receive all startup costs and a stipend of $10 per Fit & Strong! class participant.

The Program: Fit & Strong! is a group evidence-based exercise program for older adults with joint pain/stiffness. The program can be offered in-person or virtually. Fit & Strong! is endorsed by the CDC, the National Council on Aging, and the Administration for Community Living (ACL). CBOs that offer Fit & Strong! may be eligible for Title III-D funding form the Older Americans Act and grant funding from the ACL and CDC.

https://www.ncoa.org/article/evidence-based-program-fit-strong

Initial Steps

- **License**. Interested organizations will sign a Fit & Strong! license (costs covered by the IDPH funding) authorizing them to market and use the program.
- **Instructor Training**. Organizations will identify staff/volunteers eligible to be Fit & Strong! instructors. Candidate instructors generally fall into one of these categories:
    - Fitness certified or exercise professionals (PT aides, kinesiology major, etc.) or,
    - Not fitness certified, but trained in another evidence-based program such as, Matter of Balance, Chronic Disease Self-Management, Walk With Ease, etc.
    - Candidate instructors will complete the online, self-paced training – total time about 6-8 hours (training costs are covered by the IDPH funding)

Implementation

- Fit & Strong! iterations are 24 class sessions that are 90 minutes each
    - 60 minutes of physical activity and 30 minutes of health education and group discussion
    - Can be offered 2 or 3 days per week (12 weeks or 8 weeks). There must be at least 1 day off in between class sessions
    - Classes can be led by 1 instructor, or co-led with multiple instructors
    - **We expect each partner organization to offer at least 1 Fit & Strong! class iteration by June 30, 2024.**
- Resources needed:
    - Exercise equipment. Adjustable ankle weights and resistance bands will be given to the CBO at no cost. The equipment is reusable between classes.
    - *In-person classes* require a general-purpose room that can accommodate up to 20 participants. Participants should have enough room to move their arms and legs without hitting each other. Other spaces, like the outdoors and hallways can be used for aerobic activities, but are not necessary. A sturdy chair is needed for each class participant.
    - *Virtual delivery* of Fit & Strong! is an option. Virtual classes are delivered live via Zoom or similar software.
- Data collection/ Program Evaluation. All Fit & Strong! instructors will have access to our website, which will be used to collect the following data:
    - Daily class attendance

- A pre/post participant survey given to all participants at the start and end of the class
- An evaluation for participants and instructors to provide open-ended feedback about the class and their experience

- Compensation. IDPH funding will cover the cost of the Fit & Strong! license, instructor training, and exercise equipment. Additionally, licensed providers will receive $10 for each Fit & Strong! participant enrolled. The funding will cover the costs of the license, instructor training, and exercise equipment upfront, meaning no out-of-pocket costs for the participating organization. Stipend payments will be mailed by check after completing Fit & Strong! classes

Sustainability: The purpose of this IDPH funding is to provide CBOs with the resources and knowledge to deliver the Fit & Strong! program in a sustainable manner with the expectation that CBOs will continue to offer the program into the future.

For more information, please contact Andrew DeMott, Fit & Strong! Program Manager at ademot1@uic.edu or reach out to the general Fit & Strong! email at fitandstrong@uic.edu.