Increasing Access to Healthy Foods
Community Toolkit

Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE)

Acknowledgements

Society for Public Health Education, 10 G Street, NE, Suite 605, Washington, DC, 20002
Tel. 202-408-9804 | Fax 202-408-9815 | www.sophe.org

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Introduction

This toolkit was created to help guide you as you work to make healthy living easier where people live, learn, work, and play—with a particular focus on increasing access to healthy foods.

This toolkit was specifically created for:
- Public health professionals and educators
- Community-based organizations
- Community residents passionate about improving the food environment in their communities or neighborhoods

Why is access to healthy foods important?
Healthy eating is important to a person's overall health, including preventing illness and disease. Poor nutrition can lead to obesity, early death, cancer, diabetes, and heart disease.[1,2,3,4,5,6,7] Over the last 30 years, adult obesity has doubled and childhood obesity has tripled—resulting in more than two out of every three Americans being obese or overweight.[8]

Many communities — from large cities and neighborhoods to schools and business — have limited access to healthy foods. By not having healthy food options, people must overcome obstacles to get healthy foods, or settle for high-calorie, low-nutrient foods.[1-2,5] Access to healthy foods includes healthy foods being both available *and* affordable.[9]

Did you know?
- Increasing communities' access to healthy foods including fresh produce has been shown to directly increase the population eating fruits and vegetables.[6]
- Access to stores that offer healthy foods is associated with lower Body Mass Index (BMI) scores and lower rates of obesity.[10]
- Farmers' markets in a community increase the availability of nutritious foods while also lowering household spending on food.[11]
- Each additional meter of shelf space offering fresh vegetables in a grocery store is associated with an increase of 0.35 servings of fresh produce per day.[12]

By improving access to healthy foods, we can ensure food security, defined by the World Health Organization as existing **"when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life."**[13]

Case Study

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Healthy Communities Program works through local, state, national, and territorial partnerships to address health disparities and prevent chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. One of the main focuses of the program is healthy eating. As a result of the program's efforts, many communities have made changes to improve access to healthy foods.

Some of these successes include:
- More than 550 parks in Chicago, Illinois, now have vending machines that offer 100% nutritious items.
- All city agency events and meetings in Miami, Florida, provide healthy snacks and beverages such as water and granola bars.
- Rural Montgomery County, Alabama, created nine community gardens to provide surrounding neighborhoods with healthy and fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Eastern Highlands, Connecticut, serves all its pre-kindergarten students with healthy snack options every day.
- Grand Rapids, Michigan, created new farmers' markets and several new school- and community-based gardens in low-income communities to increase the availability of nutritious produce.

Get Started

If you aren't already working with an organization or coalition, here are some steps to get started:

1. Form a committee.
2. Assess your community's food environment.
3. Establish objectives.
4. Create a logic model.

Step 1: Form a committee

The first thing you can do to start improving access to healthy foods in your community is to form a Healthy Foods Committee that can work to address this important issue.

The purpose of a Healthy Foods Committee is to plan and coordinate activities and interventions that will promote community-wide changes and improve access to healthy foods.

The committee can be comprised of community residents, community leaders, local farmers, school and hospital administrators, local business owners, and other individuals and organization representatives who are invested in this health issue.

The team can be location specific by targeting a certain neighborhood, county, or ZIP code, or it can focus on a specific organization or setting such as a hospital or school.

The committee can:[14]

- Conduct a food assessment of your community.
- Form an action plan with a timeline and specified objectives, goals, and strategies.
- Support existing initiatives in your community with training and partnerships.
- Monitor new programs or activities.
- Communicate successes, positive changes, and best practices to organizations, businesses, and the greater community to further encourage healthy changes.
- Evaluate activities to measure impact.

Who can join the committee?
It's important that your Healthy Foods Committee include a diverse representation of individuals and organizations. This will help spread group responsibilities and ensure a variety of viewpoints and perspectives are included. This is key to identifying and using effective, long-lasting, sustainable strategies.

You can invite:[14]

- Public health department staff
- Wellness coordinators
- Purchasing directors

- Agency leaders
- Community leaders
- Staff from legal departments
- School administrators
- Food service staff
- Nutritionists
- Evaluation staff
- Food vendors
- Community residents
- Representatives from local businesses
- Hospital administrators
- County planners
- Health communication specialists
- Health educators

Tip: It can be helpful to decide on a regular meeting date that works best for most of the committee—and to stick to the meeting date and try not to exceed the time allotted for the meeting. For example, have a standing meeting on the first Monday of every month. By having a set date, your committee can regularly communicate and work together. Plus it makes it easier for members to remember to attend the meeting.

Step 2: Assess your community's food environment

Once you have formed your committee, it is important to learn more about your community's food landscape. To do this, you can conduct a food assessment. The food assessment needs to focus on the geographical area where your committee is dedicated to improving access to healthy foods. This may be an entire city, a neighborhood, or a smaller location, such as a school, workplace, or hospital.

Conducting the food assessment and analyzing the results can help your team identify:
- Gaps that need to be addressed
- Strategies that may be effective in addressing gaps
- Potential partners
- Community assets and resources

The next few pages include guidelines on how to conduct a food assessment and identify free tools and resources that you can use to help you gather information about the food environment in your community.

> **What is a community food assessment?**
> A community food assessment is a process that allows you to identify areas with limited access to healthy and fresh foods to help communities plan more effective healthy food interventions.[15]

Questions to ask
Below are sets of questions to incorporate into your food assessment to better understand the food environment in your community.

1. Assess your community's perceptions and behaviors regarding food purchasing and eating habits.[16]
- Where do community members get their food?
- What is the quality of the food offered?
- How does your community compare to others in terms of food items offered?
- What are the purchasing and eating habits of your community?
- What does your community know about the importance of healthy eating and selecting nutritious foods?
- What barriers do community members believe prevent them from accessing healthy foods?
- How can you educate community members about healthy food purchasing and preparation?
- If healthy foods are available, why aren't community residents purchasing them?
- How do community members think access to healthy foods can be increased?

2. Look at the number and location of grocery stores and healthy food outlets in your community and determine how easy or difficult it is for people to get to them.
- Are they accessible by public transportation or on foot?
- Is the public transportation reliable, safe, and affordable?

- Is it safe to walk to these locations?

3. When looking at a specific building, find out how many vending machines, snack bars, or other food-providing facilities are available and investigate whether they offer healthy options.
- Are low-sugar beverages provided?
- Do beverage options include milk, 100% fruit juice, and water?
- How many healthy options are available compared to junk-food items?
- Are snacks offered that are high in nutrients (e.g., protein, vitamins, fiber)?

4. Identify what settings and partners will help promote access to healthy foods.
- Are there individuals in the community with a strong passion for and interest in healthy foods who can serve as valuable resources?
- Are there individuals interested in forming their own businesses?
- How many farmers work in your community and can provide fresh produce?
- Is there a strong level of community support?

5. Identify the challenges you may face when using strategies to increase access to healthy foods.
- Is there a lack of understanding of the importance of nutritious and healthy eating?
- Do some staff or community members appear to be resistant to healthy changes? Why?
- Are systems conducive to healthy eating already in place but not being properly monitored or supported?

6. Identify what settings and partners will be important to work with to improve access to healthy foods.
- Are some community members interested in developing a new healthy food outlet such as a farmers' market or grocery store?
- Are health professionals such as community health workers, nutrition experts, health educators, and health care providers willing to partner and work with your team to improve nutrition and healthy eating?

7. Assess what trainings, facilities, and supplies may be beneficial for staff so they can start implementing new strategies.
- Does food service staff require additional training on how to prepare and purchase healthy food items?
- Do buildings need additional refrigeration or food preparation areas?

Facilities to examine

When you are conducting your food assessment there are many facilities you can focus on, including:[14]

- **Cafeterias**: facilities that provide prepared foods (can include hot meals) and drinks, usually through a line where customers select and serve food items themselves; can be found in locations such as schools, workplaces, or hospitals
- **Vending machines**: automatic facilities that dispense food items when currency is inserted; usually do not include eating accommodations or an onsite supervisor
- **Concession stands, snack bars, and carts**: facilities that usually offer previously prepared food items for a light meal such as sandwiches and salads; include an onsite manager and can sometimes have eating accommodations
- **Patient meals**: meals provided to patients in a hospital or to patients in a long-term care facility
- **Meals served in institutions**: meals provided to individuals in nursing homes, prisons, and psychiatric hospitals
- **Distributive meals**: meals provided through after-school snack programs, child care facilities, soup kitchens, or home delivery for seniors or children

Note: You can find these facilities in different buildings and locations such as hospitals, schools, community centers, parks, and workplaces.

Tools You Can Use

USDA Food Environment Atlas

http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx

Use this map to find statistics on your community's food environment, including:

- Food choice indicators such as access and proximity to a grocery store, number of food stores and restaurants, and expenditures on fast foods
- Health and well-being indicators like rates of food insecurity, diabetes, obesity, and physical activity
- Community characteristics including demographics, income and poverty levels, and access to recreation and fitness centers

USDA Food Access Research Atlas

http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/go-to-the-atlas.aspx

Use this map to find out about:

- Access to sources of healthy foods by distance to stores in the specified area
- Individual-level factors that influence accessibility (e.g., family income)
- Neighborhood-level factors (e.g., public transportation access and average income)

Step 3: Establish objectives

Once you and the committee have conducted a food assessment to identify gaps, assets, and opportunities, you can develop objectives that will help you select effective activities to create change.

To begin, think about these questions from the CDC:[17]

- **WHAT** are we going to do?
- **WHY** is it important for us to accomplish this activity?
- **WHO** is going to be responsible for the activities?
- **WHEN** do we want this to be completed?
- **HOW** are we going to do these activities?

Then you can establish SMART objectives, which are:[17]

- **Specific**: Describe your objectives in detail and be concrete so you know exactly what you are working toward and have clear expectations.
- **Measureable**: Quantify your objectives using numbers so you can measure progress and achievements.
- **Achievable**: Make sure your objectives are feasible and possible to meet.
- **Realistic**: Think about factors such as your resources, costs to meet your goals, personnel, and the time frame you are working within to ensure that your objectives can be met.
- **Time-Bound**: Establish a time frame for goals to help structure your plan for achieving objectives.

> **Tip:** When you're creating objectives, try starting them with verbs such as:
> - Assess
> - Create
> - Decrease
> - Demonstrate
> - Evaluate
> - Identify
> - Implement
> - Increase
> - Plan

Examples

- After two years, County X will open at least five new local farmers' markets with fresh fruits and vegetables available to County X residents at an affordable cost.
- By the end of this year, a new shuttle will provide residents in Community Y with free bus rides to and from local grocery stores and residential areas.

Tools You Can Use

Develop SMART Objectives
http://www.cdc.gov/phcommunities/resourcekit/evaluate/smart_objectives.html

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Step 4: Create a logic model

Once you have identified your objectives, it is important to map out specific components of your program. One way to do this is by creating a logic model to visually display factors such as the resources needed for your program, activities, influences, outputs, and initial, intermediate, and long-term outcomes.

Some benefits of creating a logic model include:[18]
- Having a clear vision for your program
- Identifying how each objective and activity supports your program goal
- Thinking about how you want to use resources and assign responsibilities
- Creating a framework that can be used for program evaluation

Sample logic model

Tools You Can Use

Logic Model Templates
http://www.uwex.edu/ces/pdande/evaluation/evallogicmodelworksheets.html

Introduction to Program Evaluation for Public Health Programs: A Self-Study Guide
http://www.cdc.gov/eval/guide/introduction/

Take Action

There are many ways to improve access to healthy foods in your community. This section provides ideas by partner and by activity.

As you begin planning to improve access to healthy foods in your community, remember to focus on particularly vulnerable populations. Every community is unique and requires a set of strategies that takes into account particular assets, needs, and community interests. **Working directly with community residents and community leaders can help ensure that you tailor activities and strategies in a way that is effective and sustainable.**

By partner

Get ideas for improving access to healthy foods by working with partners including:
- Local farms
- Food vendors
- Schools
- Organizations

Local farms

When working to increase access to healthy foods, it is important to involve local farmers. They support the sustainable production of healthy and fresh produce and food—and can help increase access to healthy foods in the local community.

You can:
- Locate farmers in your community and invite them to be members of your Healthy Foods Committee or to partner in your initiatives.
- Support farmers by expanding their production capabilities, connecting them to venues (e.g., schools, cafeterias, restaurants) where they can sell their produce, and encouraging individuals interested in farming to pursue their interests by connecting them with supportive resources.
- Listen to and learn about your local farmers to help identify assets and opportunities for growth that can lead to sustainable and healthy changes in your community.

Tools You Can Use

start2farm.gov
http://www.start2farm.gov/
This resource can provide farmers with helpful tools and programs to help them succeed in their first few years of farming. This site provides a database of programs and resources with tailored information such as education and training, finance support, and networking.

Food vendors

Food venue staff, such as managers or owners of grocery and convenience stores, can be important partners to help increase community access to healthy foods. You and your team can collaborate with these partners and provide support to both increase the selection of healthy food items and improve consumer access to and identification of the healthy food items.

When meeting with local grocery store owners and managers, consider discussing options to:
- Invite local food venue partners to be members of your Healthy Foods Committee.
- Encourage and work with food venue staff to hold in-store demonstrations of healthy food items, to provide healthy recipe handouts, and to help customers read and understand nutrition labels.
- Discuss the placement of food items and work with food venue partners to display healthy food options more prominently and at eye level.[14]
- Encourage consumer taste tests of healthy foods.
- Hold a training workshop for community members interested in opening up a healthy food–related business in order to connect them with resources and contacts that can support their business endeavors.
- Explore whether or not local food venue staff can discount healthy food items or provide coupons for healthy options.

Case Study

The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative was successful in improving the food environment in Pennsylvania through a public-private partnership between the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Reinvestment Fund, and the Food Trust. After six years, the initiative resulted in:[19]
- 88 new or improved grocery stores in underserved communities
- 400,000 residents with increased access to healthy food
- 5,000 jobs created or retained
- $540,000 increase in local tax revenue from a *single* store in Philadelphia
- $190 million total project costs resulting from $30 million state seed money

To learn more or to contact the organization for more information, visit:
http://www.ncsl.org/documents/labor/workingfamilies/PA_FFFI.pdf.

Schools

Improving access to healthy foods for students in a school setting is another way to improve the health of your community. Obesity has increased dramatically over the past few decades, particularly among children.[20,21,22] A major contributor to the rising rates of childhood obesity is the consumption of unhealthy foods and beverages, which are often made available in the school setting.[23] **Improving the quality of foods offered in the school setting can be beneficial in improving children's health**. Recent research shows that students in states with strong nutrition standards regarding school foods such as drinks and snacks experienced less weight gain over three years than students in states without similar nutrition standards.[24]

Did you know?
Today about one in three children from ages eight to 19 years old are either overweight or obese, and have an increased probability of developing chronic diseases (such as diabetes and heart disease) and having psychosocial problems.[20,21,22]

Students often consume a good portion of their calories, about 35% to 50%, at school.[21,25] Studies have found a strong association between a child's diet and nutrition and his or her academic performance and success.[21,26,27,28,29,30]

What you can do to improve access to healthy foods in schools
Below are recommendations on what you can do, through partnerships with local schools and administrators in your community, to increase access to healthy foods in schools:
- Limit the sale of sports drinks.[21]
- Limit the availability of caffeinated products.[21]
- Set school standards that require food and beverages sold for fundraisers to meet nutrition guidelines.[21]
- Provide trainings to school food service staff on the importance of healthy eating and nutrition, and how to order and prepare healthier food items.
- Connect local farmers to food service staff and school administrators to facilitate a school partnership that enables farmers to sell their produce to schools.

- Apply for a Farm to School Grant from the USDA to help you fund partnerships between local farmers and schools. For more information visit: http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program.
- Train teachers and school administrators on healthy eating and nutrition—and address how these topics can be incorporated into school curricula.
- Work with vending machine providers to replace vending machine items with healthier items.
- Work with teachers and school administrators to plant school gardens that students help run.

Case Study

As part of the CDC's Communities Putting Prevention to Work initiative—an initiative developed to promote local strategies for healthy living—Hamilton County, Ohio, targeted 22 school districts to increase access to healthy foods and beverages in schools.[31] As a result of the initiative, more than 50 schools and 50,865 students have access to nutritious foods and snacks through vending machines, à la carte items, and school stores.[31] Hamilton also increased the availability of affordable and healthy foods by forming 20 church-based community gardens, with the majority in low-income areas.[31]

To learn more or to contact the organization for more information, visit: http://bit.ly/1KuZd0W.

Tools You Can Use

State and National School Snack Policies
http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/fact-sheets/2015/01/state-and-national-school-snack-policies
Learn what state policies are in place around healthy snacks in schools.

Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools
http://www.saladbars2schools.org/
View tools and grant opportunities to get a salad bar in your school.

USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit
http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/f2s/F2S_Planning_Kit.pdf
Use this step-by-step guide to create a farm to school program.

Organizations

You can work with local organizations and institutions to improve access to healthy foods. For example, you can partner with faith-based organizations, local businesses (both big and small), workplaces, non-profit organizations, hospitals, parks and recreational facilities, and

community centers to address food options available to members, staff, volunteers, and customers. Conduct research to determine if an organization's goals and objectives align with your project.

When reaching out to partner with these organizations, find a contact person like a human resources representative, manager, or administrator by calling, going online, or stopping by in person. After introducing yourself, your initiative, and objectives, invite him or her to partner with you to improve the health of the community.

As you develop strategies to work with an organization, business, or food venue to improve healthy options, try to:[32]

- Encourage executives and leaders to think about the message the organization is sending to the public and staff through the food and beverage items it offers.
- Believe in your intervention and strategies so that your passion motivates and inspires others.
- Remember that support from leaders is important to your intervention's success.
- Motivate staff, employees, and partners to make and maintain healthy changes.
- Cultivate strong relationships with food service and wellness staff to create healthy practices and policies for everyone.
- Review and assess food and beverages contracts. If a contract is not specific about what food items and beverages must be purchased, there is flexibility to request healthier options. Even if a contract is specific, you can attempt to revise or update it.
- Provide training to food service staff on measuring ingredients—this can ensure that the nutrition information of foods is accurate, and it helps cut waste and costs.
- Listen to consumer preferences about the healthy foods they like and will purchase.
- Increase awareness to make healthy living easier where people live, work, learn and play.

Case Study

The New Mexico Diabetes Prevention and Control Program created a "Kitchen Creations Cooking School" to educate community members on healthy food preparation and planning skills through four interactive classes.[33] The classes cover topics including meal planning; balancing carbohydrates; using vegetables, beans, and whole grains; and heart healthy cooking.[34]

In recent years, participants in the program increased their:
- Consumption of whole grains or beans by 92%
- Intake of two or more non-starchy vegetables during meals by 142%
- Use of food labels by 98%[33]

Kitchen Creations is sponsored by the New Mexico Department of Health, Public Health Division, Diabetes Prevention and Control Program, and the New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service.[34]

To learn more or to contact the organization for more information, visit:
http://efcs.nmsu.edu/kitchencreations.html.

By activity

Consider these activities as you make a plan to improve access to healthy foods in your community:

- Healthy food festival
- Community gardens
- Food co-ops
- Farmers' markets
- Grocery store tours
- Improving transportation

Healthy food festival

Host a healthy food festival to showcase healthy foods in the neighborhood.

- Invite local grocery stores, healthy restaurants, farmers, and other healthy food vendors to participate in the event. Let them know the event will be great publicity!
- Advertise! Promote the event through social media and flyers.
- At the event, provide handouts with healthy recipes and coupons for healthy food items. You can encourage vendors to do the same.
- Offer taste tests of healthy foods (e.g., smoothies, fresh fruit, salads).
- Set up kid-friendly activities to encourage families to attend the festival.

Sample festival postcard

Healthy Food Festival!

Join us to:

- Taste new healthy foods from local farmers, grocery stores, and restaurants
- Learn delicious recipes to prepare at home
- Get coupons and free samples

Where: Springfresh Community Center, 6790 Healthy Lane, Garden City
When: Saturday, April 9th from 12:00 to 4:00 p.m.

Bring the kids to enjoy free face painting, games, and dancing!

Community gardens

One way to increase the availability of fresh produce, such as fruits and vegetables, is to create and grow community gardens!

Below are some steps that can help you create a community garden:[35]

- Identify a group of people interested in creating a community garden and form a planning committee. You can reach out to people in schools, church groups, recreation centers, and specific neighborhoods.
- Identify a planning coordinator to lead the planning and establishment of the garden and to take on leading specific tasks such as funding, partnerships, construction, and communication.
- Tap into local resources! Find out who in the community has helpful skills (like gardeners and landscapers) and is willing to donate his or her time to help out with the garden or lead a class on how to take care of the garden.
- Secure an ongoing source of funding. This could be through a sponsor, membership dues, or quarterly fundraising activities to cover costs such as water, seeds, planting equipment and containers.
- Locate an appropriate garden site that has access to water and sunlight, can be protected against animals or vandalism, and is easily accessed by potential gardeners.
- Request permission to use the site for at least three years if possible. Find out if the site can be used for free, requires a lease, or can be purchased. Also find out if you need to acquire public liability insurance to use the site.
- Organize a group of volunteers to clean and prepare the site for planting.
- Locate a place to store tools, figure out where in the garden you want to put pathways, and organize the garden space.
- Establish rules for the garden such as how funding will be allocated, who will have access to the garden and when, and how often the planning committee will meet.

In addition to increasing the availability of healthy and nutritious produce, creating and taking care of a community garden can also provide other positive benefits to a community. Some benefits of creating a community garden are that it:

- Creates a fun and safe way for youth and children in the community to spend their time
- Promotes physical activity—gardening can be a great way for residents to stay active, burn calories, and build muscle
- Facilitates community ownership by creating a site that residents can feel proud of and involve civic groups
- Beautifies the neighborhood and environment
- Facilitates entrepreneurship by allowing youth to take care of and sell produce from their assigned plots

Case Study

To address concerns of low fruit and vegetable intake after analyzing data from a Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, the Cleveland Steps Program worked with the Community Gardening Program (GSP) and Ohio State University Extension (OSUE) to help increase access to fresh produce.

What did they do?
- GSP began offering a "Starting a Community Garden" workshop in Steps Program communities, partnering with social service agencies in order to supply gardening tools and materials.
- OSUE focused outreach efforts on schools and recreation centers to assist them in creating new gardens.
- Many new gardens were created, and each proudly displays a sign titled "Steps to a Healthier Cleveland Community Garden" to encourage other community residents to create their own.

The new gardens improved access to healthy produce for community members and also increased physical activity for the gardeners. The program produced thousands of pounds of fruits and vegetables, which were donated to food pantries and sold at a farmers' market created by the program. Additionally, the program created new jobs and received thousands of dollars of funding from local businesses and foundations to expand gardens and improve garden infrastructure.

Tools You Can Use

Community Gardening Toolkit
http://extension.missouri.edu/explorepdf/miscpubs/mp0906.pdf

Food co-ops

A food co-op can be a useful tool for increasing access to healthy food. Food co-ops offer a diverse number of products, empower communities, and foster cooperation through forming a sustainable community-run operation.

Some community benefits of a food co-op are:[36]
- Healthier foods and improved nutrition
- Increased civic engagement and empowerment
- New jobs
- Improved prospects for future developments

DrPH,Below are some steps that can help you create a new food co-op:[16,37]

- **Gather information**. Find out what you need to do to establish a food co-op, who in your community is interested in forming a co-op, and if it is a feasible option for your community.
- Form a co-op **planning committee** and identify individuals who can take the lead in planning—and putting that plan into action.
- Find a central, safe, and convenient **location** for the co-op that is conveniently located for community residents.
- **Recruit** co-op members and establish a **membership system** and structure.
- **Lease the co-op location** for affordability and to provide flexibility in changing real estate markets.
- Form a **business and financial plan**.
- Find out **what healthy foods community residents want** and will purchase.
- **Promote** the co-op through local advertisements (flyers, social media, local papers, and announcements at social gatherings, churches, and schools).

Tools You Can Use

Food Co-op Initiative
http://www.foodcoopinitiative.coop/resources
This organization aims to increase the number of successful and sustainable food co-ops in the country to increase access to healthy foods. It provides training and seed grants and conducts research on developing and maintaining healthy food co-ops.

How to Start a Food Co-op Manual
http://www.grocer.coop/index.php?q=library/start-a-food-coop
From the Co-operative Grocers' Information Network, this manual can help you throughout the process of forming a food co-op and provides specific details on how you can develop a business plan and assess the feasibility of establishing a co-op.

Farmers' markets

Below are some steps to help you create a community farmers' market:[16,38,39]

- Identify a group of people interested in establishing a farmers' market and start planning.
- Establish a Board of Directors and identify a market manager.
- Locate and partner with local farmers and vendors to supply produce and food items to sell. Make sure you take into account what foods residents would like to purchase and eat!
- Locate a convenient and central location for the market. Look into leasing or finding a free unused space.
- Identify relevant state or city laws and regulations that you must follow to open a new farmers' market.

- Identify sources of funding for the market. You could look into loans or grants, sponsorships, partnering with local business or non-profits, or charging membership fees for vendors.
- Submit applications to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service to ensure that your market can accept payments from residents in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP).
- Determine market style and layout and confirm hours and days of operation.
- Promote your market and advertise!

Tools You Can Use

USDA National Farmers Market Directory
http://search.ams.usda.gov/farmersmarkets/
This directory provides information about locations, directions, times of operations, food items offered, accepted forms of payment, and more.

Register to accept WIC and SNAP at your farmers' market.
For WIC visit: http://www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp/fmnp-contacts.
For SNAP visit: http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailers-0.

Grocery store tours

Educating consumers on which food items are healthy is a necessary component of increasing access to healthy foods. It is also important for consumers to know that healthy eating is possible given their budgets. One way to educate community residents is through grocery store tours!

A tour will help participants learn about how they can select healthy foods at the store, how to prepare healthy foods, and how to eat healthy on a budget.

Contact local grocery store owners, managers, or staff to see if they are already hosting tours. If they are, ask how you can support their tours. If not, find out if you can work with them to set up a regular tour.

Tools You Can Use

Cooking Matters at the Store
http://cookingmatters.org/at-the-store
This resource provides free online trainings, materials, and handouts to help you facilitate a healthy grocery store tour.

Improving transportation

Transportation is a critical barrier that often keeps community members from accessing healthy foods. Consider increasing transportation services to existing healthy food outlets in your community, and to any new healthy food venues you might plan to create or support.

Think about these questions when planning transportation strategies:[40]
- Would it actually be effective in increasing access to healthy foods?
- Who will be responsible for operating the project?
- What are the costs (e.g., start up, operations)?
- Does a similar service already exist?
- Will employees or volunteers be needed? If so, how many?
- What is the food source to which we will be connecting residents?
- Will we need any special licenses or permits? If so, what does that process look like?
- Will we need to change or address any current policies?
- What are some challenges we might face, and what are some limitations of this option?

Below are ideas of transportation strategies:[41]
- Create a grocery store shuttle program or a mobile market.
- Create a grocery delivery service program.
- Create a car- or bike-sharing program.
- Add additional transit routes for existing transportation services directly to healthy food outlets.
- Provide coupons or reduced bus fare for existing transportation services such as ride-share or taxi services.

Case Study

Baltimarket, a partnership between the Baltimore Health Department, Santoni's Supermarket, Enoch Pratt Library, United Way of Central Maryland, and Maryland Institute College of Art, formed a virtual supermarket at local libraries where community members can browse, order groceries online, and pick them up at the library the next day. The free service allows residents to avoid bus rides or long walks home. This model can be used in other communities in central locations such as schools and community centers.

To find out more about the virtual supermarket and other Baltimarket activities, or to contact the program visit: www.baltimarket.org.

Get the Word Out

When promoting activities, you need to get the word out to recruit participants, gather support, build partnerships, and spread awareness about the importance of healthy eating and nutrition. Below are tips that can help you effectively communicate with your community.

Define your target audience

Whom are you trying to reach? Instead of trying to reach "the public," consider targeting your audience by age, gender, race, location, or socioeconomic status.

Be as specific as possible. Make sure to consider if reaching this audience is in line with your overall goals and objectives. You may have more than one target audience—for example, community health workers and pregnant women. If so, develop key messages and identify communication preferences for each audience.

Develop your key message(s)

Create messages that accomplish two tasks:
- Align with your overall goals and objectives
- Speak to your audience

To speak to your audience:
- Make sure your messages are actionable—tell your audience what you want them to do (e.g., visit your website, take a healthy food quiz, buy and try a vegetable they've never had before).
- Create messages that use language your audience uses and understands.
- Give realistic messages—for example, if your audience is on a strict budget, provide affordable or no-cost ideas.

Discover your target audience's communication preferences

Before you start planning and developing promotional materials and advertisements, learn more about your target audience's communication preferences. For example, older adults may not use social media or email, so you may want to use in-person interactions or written materials. Or, if you are recruiting teens, who are often more tech savvy, you may want to use social media.

To find out how your target audience likes to receive information:
- Conduct focus groups.
- Conduct one-on-one interviews.
- Go door to door.
- Send out a survey.
- Speak to other organizations that also reach your target audience.
- Include communication questions in your food assessment.

- Reach out to people via social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

These activities will let you know how your target audience uses communication channels, what channels they trust (particularly for health information), and the channels through which they would prefer to receive information about healthy foods and community events. This information can help guide your programs and activities.

The following pages provide examples of communication channels and when they may be effective.

Channel	When to use	Pros	Cons
SMS (text) messages	Target audience uses cell phones	-Can reach a wide range of target audiences, since a majority of individuals have a phone with basic messaging capabilities -Various affordable "bulk" SMS service providers available online -Cost per SMS is relatively low	-Requires that you maintain a database of target audience cell phone numbers -Won't be able to incorporate any branding or visual components in the SMS—content will be text-based only -Due to anti-spamming laws, SMS recipient can opt out of receiving future text messages
Phone calls	Target audience has access to phones and feels comfortable answering an unfamiliar number	-Allows for a personal experience through a one-on-one conversation with target audience -Will be able to track the number of successful calls -Allows for receiving more information from call recipient, or obtaining feedback, therefore serving multiple purposes during one call	-With this method, call recipient can choose to end the call prematurely and thus might not receive the message you wish to deliver -Due to anti-spamming laws, call recipient can opt out of receiving future calls -Won't be able to incorporate any branding or visual components in the call

Channel	When to use	Pros	Cons
Emails	Target audience has access to internet via computer or smartphone	-Email can be formatted to contain graphics, images, branding, and links to informational videos and additional resources -Ability to track the percentage of emails that are viewed and clicks to your website/portal	-Due to anti-spamming laws, email recipient can opt out of receiving future emails -Requires that you maintain a database of target audience's email addresses
Door-to-door contact	Target audience values face-to-face interactions and is comfortable opening their doors to someone they might not know	-Ability to track whether target audience was able to receive your message -Allows for a personal experience through a one-on-one conversation with target audience -Allows for soliciting more information from the conversation with the recipient, obtaining feedback, leaving flyers, and providing additional information, serving multiple purposes during one visit	-Requires a lot of resources (i.e., people, transportation, and time) -Many individuals post "no solicitation" signs, or visit recipient might not wish to open the door or receive the message -Requires that you maintain a database of target audience's residential addresses -Visits are only successful during times when target audience is at home (e.g., on weekends, after work hours)

Channel	When to use	Pros	Cons
Distributing flyers door to door	Target audience prefers receiving information and materials to read at their convenience	-Ability to incorporate branding elements, graphics, and additional sources of information -Not dependent on a specific time (i.e., target audience doesn't need to be home)	-Printing can be costly, especially if you incorporate graphics and colors -Inability to track whether the flyers were read or received -Requires that you maintain a database of target audience's residential addresses -Requires a lot of resources (i.e., people, transportation, time)
Posting flyers in high-traffic areas	Target audience is in a particular location such as one building (e.g., schools, businesses, grocery stores, hospitals)	-Ability to incorporate branding elements, graphics, and additional sources of information	-Dependent on whether the target audience will notice and read the flyers, and whether you are able to obtain necessary approvals from the location to distribute flyers -Printing can be costly, especially if you incorporate graphics and colors -Inability to track whether the flyers were read or received -Distributing the flyers can require a lot of time

Channel	When to use	Pros	Cons
Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)	Target audience has access to internet via computer or smartphone and is active on social media channels	-Ability to incorporate branding elements, graphics, and additional sources of information -Ability to track post popularity and viewer traffic to your page -Ability to engage in conversations with active audience -Low set-up and maintenance costs -Potential for sharing your content on personal social media pages, allowing for additional outreach	-Requires active monitoring and maintenance of posts and comments made -Requires regular engagement and content development to keep audience engaged -On certain platforms, you might not be able to track whether your post was viewed
Social media (blogs)	Target audience has access to internet via computer or smartphone and is active on social media channels	-Ability to incorporate branding elements, graphics, and additional sources of information -Ability to target audience that is interested in specific topics -Can track page views -Ability to engage with your audience, and potential for sharing your content on personal webpages, allowing for additional outreach	-Requires active monitoring and maintenance of posts and comments made -Requires regular engagement and content development to keep audience engaged

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Channel	When to use	Pros	Cons
Earned media (e.g., pitching a story idea to the local newspaper)	Target audience has access to and is an audience of the newspaper, magazine, radio station, or television station or program	-Ability to reach a large number of people at low or no cost -May lead to partnerships with previously unidentified organizations and individuals -These sources are often seen as more trustworthy than advertisements	-Takes time to develop connections -May not be able to control your message (e.g., the journalist will use your press release to create a story; a radio host may not ask all the questions you want to answer) -Difficult to determine if your specific target audience received the message
Paid media (e.g., running a print ad in the local newspaper)	Target audience has access to and is an audience of the newspaper, magazine, radio station, or television station or program	-Ability to reach a large number of people while completely controlling your message -Can lead people to your social media channels, website, and events where you can expand upon your message -May lead to partnerships with previously unidentified organizations and individuals	-High cost -Difficult to determine if your specific target audience received the message -Some audiences don't trust advertisements -Lots of organizations use these channels, so may be hard to cut through the "noise"

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