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SYSTEMS CHANGE STRATEGIES

FOOD & FITNESS PLANNING TOOLS

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Prioritizing Potential Policy & Systems Change Strategies
FOOD & FITNESS PLANNING TOOLS



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Introduction

Food & Fitness Assessment and Planning Guide

Funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF), the Food & Fitness Initiative was established to create community-based approaches to local systems and policy change, leading to sustainable change in opportunities for health equity in neighborhoods across the U.S.

Starting in March 2007, the Food & Fitness partnerships began the planning process for local policy and system changes for increasing equitable access to good food and safe places for physical activity for families.

During the two-year planning period from 2007-2008, the Food & Fitness partnerships began a collaboration with Technical Assistance teams as well as with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation staff to create planning documents to provide guidance and a strategic approach to assessment and planning for the Food & Fitness collaboratives.

The purpose of these documents were to both assess the community as well as the food and active living environments – looking at what already existed, and what opportunities were available for the Food & Fitness partnerships work.

Acknowledgments

Special acknowledgment to Active Living By Design in Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Michigan State University Center for Regional Food Systems in East Lansing, Michigan for their role in the early development of these tools and their efforts to translate them to the work of the partnerships.

Thank you to the University of Michigan Center for Managing Chronic Disease who conducted the evaluation and provided early coordination and Technical Assistance.

Purpose

The previous assessment and analysis steps described in the *Food & Fitness* Initiative planning tools will likely generate more possible policy and systems strategies than any collaborative will have the time, resources, and energy to address. How can collaboratives best narrow their choices to select the most promising strategies? The purpose of this guide is to assist collaboratives as they prioritize their policy and systems strategies and help collaboratives refine and ultimately limit potential strategies that will be written into their Community Action Plans. Assessments of *Health Equity, Community Impact, and Feasibility* were selected because of their connection with the core principles of the *Food & Fitness* Initiative and their relevance to policy and systems changes. Collaboratives can "filter" each proposed strategy through these assessments by answering the associated questions described within the sections below. A collaborative may wish to create additional assessments to reflect additional values in their communities, e.g. environmental impact.

This guide provides a process for facilitating prioritization and decision-making within a diverse collaborative. Collaboratives may expand or adjust their decision-making process depending on the history of collaboration, power dynamics, range of agendas, viewpoints, and personalities within the group.

Action Model for Facilitating Prioritization





An action model for conducting an effective prioritization process is depicted above and described in detail on pages 11-13.

NOTE: This process presumes that the collaborative has already created a list of strategic options, or "candidate" strategies each being consistent with the overall vision. The screening discussion will help prioritize and ultimately reduce them to a manageable number of strategies and policy change targets. The model above includes proposed core values that can be adopted for the priority setting discussions. It also suggests a sequence of meetings that involve: 1. The full collaborative agreeing on the value, process, and timeline. 2. Subcommittees scoring and ranking candidate strategies using the screening criteria. 3. Narrowing the list of possibilities as a larger group. 4. Determining the two or three core strategies for food and fitness. 5. Validating the core strategies in community meetings.

The following sections provide context and associated questions for each assessment and can be used to guide discussion about prioritization.



SEQUENCE OF COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS

- 1. The full collaborative agreeing on the value, process, and timeline.
- 2. Subcommittees scoring and ranking candidate strategies using the screening criteria.
- 3. Narrowing the list of possibilities as a larger group.
- 4. Determining the two or three core strategies for food and fitness.
- 5. Validating the core strategies in community meetings.

NOTE: A companion worksheet can be found at the end of this guide. (Page 18):
"Prioritizing policy and Systems Change
Worksheet." The worksheet can be used as a tool that complements the discussion questions in this narrative and provides a method for scoring various potential food and fitness strategies. Collaboratives are encouraged to customize the suggested prioritizing process and assessments for their community and partnership context.

Assessing Health Equity - Who Benefits from the Strategy?

The first assessment suggested to collaboratives for filtering their potential strategies is health equity. Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be healthier. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.¹ It focuses on closing gaps in both social and environmental determinants of health; and it implies giving priority to less advantaged social groups in order to eliminate systematic health disparities. Health equity is based on notions of fairness and relative outcomes between social groups. Three factors are used to help collaboratives best consider whether strategies support health equity. They are Values Clarification, Potential Benefits and Potential Risks.

Values Clarification

This factor attempts to shed light on attitudes, beliefs, and concerns of collaborative members on the topic of fairness and equity. The purpose of clarifying values will help determine whether partners agree that a particular strategy can address health inequities and whether the healthy eating and physical activity barrier being addressed has greater impact on community members.

Helpful Questions to Clarify Values Include:

- » For this potential strategy, what reasons do collaborative members give for unequal access to healthy eating or physical activity supports among community members?
- » How clearly do these reasons suggest inequitable or unfair treatment of less advantaged groups based on social characteristics (i.e., age, gender, income, race/ ethnicity, immigrant status, geographic distribution, socio-cultural norms? What is the level of consensus that this strategy addresses health equity?

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be healthier.
This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.

» In what ways have the opinions and priorities of community members influenced the development of this strategy? Currently, how well positioned are community members to implement the strategy and influence the ultimate outcome?

¹Braveman, P., Arkin, E., Orleans, T., Proctor, D., & Plough, A. (2017). What Is Health Equity? And What Difference Does a Definition Make? Princeton, NJ: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Retrieved from: https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/05/what-is-health-equity-.html

Potential Benefits

This factor examines the proposed benefits of strategies toward remedying observed inequities in food and fitness environments. The purpose of this series of questions and discussion of the collaborative is to examine each proposed strategy's potential to specifically benefit people affected by food and fitness related disparities.

Consider the following:

- » What are the likely benefits for community members?
- » How does the proposed policy or systems change promote equitable access to supports for healthy eating and active living? (i.e., distribution of facilities, programming, information, maintenance of supports, financial accessibility, safety improvements)?
- » How does the proposed policy and system change promote equitable utilization of supports for healthy eating and active living? (i.e., respecting a community's social and cultural values, fitting with community demographics, dismantling of barriers, encouragement and incentives)?
- » What will be the effect of this strategy on long-term capacity in the community and among its leaders to advocate for more equitable opportunities in the community?
- » How will this strategy affect prospects for further change (i.e., a clear stepping stone or foundation for something larger)?

BENEFITS Strategies toward emedying observed

Strategies toward remedying observed inequities in food and fitness environments



Potential Risks

This factor considers the risk if the proposed strategy succeeds or fails. The statement of these risks should not disqualify proposed strategies. Instead the acknowledgment of possible risks should allow the collaborative to take steps to reduce or eliminate unintended negative consequences.

Ask your collaborative:

» What are the possible risks of a successful strategy?

For example, improved parks and streetscapes may increase the displacement of low-income households through gentrification.

» What are the possible risks of a failed strategy?

For example, the expenditure of political and social capital or a damaged political relationship could diminish the likelihood or effectiveness of future attempts.









Assessing Community Impact - Will It Work?

The second assessment, **Community Impact**, focuses on identifying strategies with the greatest likelihood of producing policy and systems changes that will positively impact the largest number of people. Three factors gauge the likelihood that the proposed strategy will result in the intended change in food and fitness environments:

Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness refers to whether the proposed strategy is likely to have the desired effect. Though a collaborative is obviously not in the position to evaluate a strategy before its implementation, promising strategies from other communities and the research literature can be reviewed for past success.

In addition, consider the following questions:

- » Does the proposed strategy have a logical and likely sequence of steps that lead to the intended outcome? Is this path supported by "best practices", local experience or research?
- » How well does the change address the most essential elements of the issue, i.e. unhealthy eating, physical activity? Would other significant supports be necessary for the strategy to succeed at advancing healthy eating or active living?
 - Community Impact focuses on identifying strategies with the greatest likelihood of producing policy and systems changes that will positively impact the largest number of people.

- » How many people stand to benefit directly and indirectly from the potential change?
- » How significant an impact will the proposed strategy have on the larger community as a whole?



Efficiency

This factor examines whether there are alternatives to the proposed strategy that are viable pathways to the same (or a better) outcome. A strategy should not be considered efficient if the same or better outcomes can be achieved using fewer (or more renewable) resources (e.g. time, money, energy, social capital, etc.).

Ask your collaborative:

- » Are there possible alternatives to the proposed strategy? Consider alternative pathways to achieving the same goal in terms of how they use finite resources or resources that must be shared or replaced.
- » Some of the alternative strategies may have already been eliminated during earlier discussions. If the rationale for exclusion still resonates with members of the collaborative, the alternatives can be set aside. If new alternatives are created, these strategies should be assessed using all three assessmentss.

Sustainability

This relates to the future outlook of a proposed policy and systems change and whether monitoring and maintenance will be needed to ensure continued success.

Consider the following questions:

» What are the resources required in the short-, mid- and long-term to maintain the proposed policy or systems change? Can the collaborative and the community marshal those resources?

For example, if a park or recreation facility is planned, what is needed to keep it clean, safe and inviting for all kinds of people during a variety of seasons and times of day? If supports like lighting, security/policing and routine maintenance are not adequately covered by local government, what capacity does the community have to provide supports?

» In the absence of active, continuing support, what are the likely mid- and long-term impacts of the proposed change?

Once a short list of priority strategies is determined, collaboratives should also consider the sustainability of the Community Action Plan package as a whole.

Assessing Feasibility - Can it Be Done Here, and at This Time?

Feasibility, the final assessment, allows collaboratives to consider the likelihood that proposed strategies can be accomplished and are appropriate and suitable for reaching the target audience. Two factors are considered: *Viability and Readiness*. Viability refers to the environment where the proposed strategy will be implemented and includes the community context, the political context, and resources. Readiness refers the status of the collaborative itself and considers leadership, capacity, and collaborative health.

Viability

Viability describes the social and political conditions likely to affect the proposed policy and available resources.

Consider the following aspects and associated questions listed below.

Community Context includes consideration of a community's values, history and culture. "Community" should be defined broadly (i.e., not solely on geographic or demographic boundaries).

- » How does the proposed strategy reflect the community's priorities? Where do community members rank healthy eating or physical activity relative to other community development priorities? What are the competing concerns? Can the proposed strategy bridge well to existing priorities and efforts (i.e., safety, economic development, pollution reduction)?
- » How has change occurred or been pursued in the past? If possible, give detailed anecdotes. How might this affect motivation, attitudes and communication towards this strategy?

Political Context focuses on the political climate including recent events, decisions, and elections. The underlying question is whether the proposed strategy can move forward given existing power structures and decision making in a community.

- » What are possible political/bureaucratic barriers to the proposed strategy?
 - Human barriers
 For example, indifference/opposition of key players, change of personnel/leadership, loss of a
 - Structural barriers

champion.

For example, existing rules/ incentives/norms/habits, the level of resistance to change, ill-timing, budget cuts, financing obstacles.

Political Context Continued

- » What are the possible political/bureaucratic opportunities to the proposed strategy?
 - Human opportunities
 For example, alliance building, engaged partners, existence of a champion, new mayor or department head.
 - Structural opportunities
 For example, alignment with current agendas, absence of hardened opposition, able to generate/maintain momentum, restructuring of departments/agencies; changing professional ideas and standards.
- Who has the power to enact and implement the proposed policy/system changes? How does the collaborative have influence with them (as voters, consumers, taxpayers, friends, family, etc.)²
- » How does the proposed strategy align with recent decisions/successes?

Resource Allocation examines the acquisition of resources and the effective distribution among partners according to their workload and capacity needs.

First, determine what resources are necessary for this strategy.

What is the outlook for public financing/ resources for this strategy? What is the financial health and overall capacity of the local government, especially the most relevant departments? What is the private sector's willingness to fund or support this type of strategy? What about local and regional foundations? What types of in-kind resources are available to support the proposed strategy (i.e., staff and volunteer time, office space, administrative/monitoring/ enforcement capacity, ability to secure media support)?



²Source: The Praxis Project, https://www.thepraxisproject.org/sites/default/files/Miles/201204/Communicating%20for%20Health%20Justice.pdf. Your collaborative may want to review the materials available at the link above.

Readiness

This factor refers to a collaborative's ability to act as an advocate for change and includes issues of leadership and capacity - including collaborative health.

Leadership assesses key attributes of partners who are guiding the collaborative's activities.

» Does a "champion(s)" for this strategy exist? What are possible constraints on their participation? What is the quality and orientation of existing leadership to complete this strategy successfully (i.e., ability to engage/recruit/motivate, communication, reputation in the community, level of focus on issues, match of style to task)?



Capacity accounts for the skills available to the collaborative through community contacts, partners, and allies.

- » Is there sufficient passion and preparation among collaborative members to pursue this strategy? What existing skills and resources can the collaborative draw upon to successfully implement this strategy? (i.e., community organizing experience, skilled facilitators or trainers, track record of effective advocacy, survey and evaluation expertise, long-standing community ties; fundraising skills, engagement of partners already working on these issues)
- » Does the collaborative have particular capacities where it most needs them for long-term success of this strategy? Do healthy relationships and commitments exist within the collaborative that can contribute to a successful outcome for this strategy?

When considered together, these prioritizing assessments can help collaboratives identify which of the myriad potential strategies can have the greatest impact on food and fitness related inequities. The accompanying worksheet (page 18) can be used to carefully consider how each "candidate" strategy might perform against competing ideas. Collaboratives may wish to determine a threshold that any candidate strategy must reach before being drafted into the Community Action Plan and part of the ultimate implementation work.

For example, it may be unacceptable for any candidate strategy to receive a total "low" score for either Health Equity, Community Impact, or Feasibility. We encourage collaboratives to use the prioritizing worksheet on Page 18 and a discussion process to evaluate each candidate strategy objectively.

Tips for Facilitating Prioritization

The intent of this section is to suggest a collaborative approach for determining strategic priorities using the three assessments. Collaboratives are best served by gathering broad representation to answer these questions and work toward a consensus about priorities. A high level of engagement and ownership of the process is especially important for those who will be charged with implementing the policy and/or systems changes as well as for those who will live most closely with its consequences. However, it is not practical to analyze the entire range of potential strategies according to these considerations with everyone in the room.

Several meetings might be required and the combination of individuals would likely vary from meeting to meeting. Open comment periods can be used between meetings to inform members who cannot attend a meeting of decisions made and allow feedback to be considered. Email can be effective for communicating, but may be a barrier for some stakeholders; the necessity of mailings or phone calls to some individuals should be acknowledged. In cases where full participation of all collaborative members at every meeting is not possible, the following ideas are meant to help address practical challenges while supporting an inclusive and high-functioning decision-making dialogue that provides all collaborative members with a fair opportunity to influence the process and outcomes.



Proposed Core Values

Since collaboratives are ideally diverse "by design," members bring a variety of viewpoints, agendas and preferences. Furthermore, power imbalances inevitably exist. Therefore, it is important to agree upon core values and a decision-making approach up-front, which should: provide a common point of reference and a legitimate authority when questions or conflicts arise within the group; protect the interests of less powerful members; and help protect co-conveners and other more active leaders from potential allegations of unfairness.

Some of these core values include:

Inclusiveness -

This involves providing the maximum feasible opportunity for stakeholders to participate, including community members of all ages, by scheduling discussions at times, in places, and using means of communication that do not consistently disadvantage any group or individual. It also involves providing multiple opportunities and methods for involvement and feedback, including receiving formal commentary outside of meetings when scheduling conflicts exist. Since community members may be foreign-born, language translation may be appropriate and necessary to maintain an open process.

It is important to agree upon core values and a decision-making approach up-front, which includes protecting interests of less powerful members and the more active leaders from potential allegations of unfairness.

Transparency –

This involves providing participants with equal access to important information. Consider distributing all meeting deliberations (including analyses, recommendations and points of debate) to all participants, keeping meetings open (including committee meetings), sharing analyses and agendas in advance, posting or distributing all meeting schedules, agendas and deadlines with sufficient advance notice, and taking the time to encourage and answer questions of any member who asks.



Consensus for Decisions -

Since a consensus process requires all to agree or accept a given decision it is an excellent way both to build ownership of decisions and to narrow down a long list of potential strategies. However, true consensus building can be a time consuming process. If there are concerns that the rigors of consensus are unfeasible, the group could agree up-front about a back-up or alternate method. Two examples are: 1 allowing a large supermajority vote (e.g. 80 or 90 % vote; and 2 the "70/30 rule - if I can get behind this 70% then I would do so." As with any consensus decision making process, it is important to facilitate discussion that allows members to voice issues and concerns in a way that brings resolution. Additionally, it's important for all members to agree up-front to act with good will and support decisions that are made by the group.

Community and Partner Validation -

Selected priority strategies should be validated by a broader set of community members and by the larger collaborative before being finalized in the Community Action Plan. Having only a few community members and/or youth leaders involved in prioritizing analysis and discussions throughout the process can result in additional meetings or final "calls for comments". In doing so, the collaborative can ensure that the final strategies in the implementation plan are fully supported at all levels.

Flexibility -

This involves establishing a system for ongoing review and making action plan adjustments that respond to changing conditions in the collaborative and/or community. During discussions about priorities, members can be reassured that the collaborative remains free either to seize important new opportunities when they arise or to cast aside strategies that prove unfruitful. The standard for making specific changes should reflect the same screening and public input processes used for other potential strategies.

Mutual Accountability to Key Project Deadlines and the Spirit of Partnership —

This involves members agreeing to co-create or accept group approaches that allow the project to meet externally imposed deadlines and stay on-track. It also involves advance agreement among the members to enter decision-making processes with an open mind and a willingness to be influenced by the process and the collective thinking of the group.



For any particular meeting or interaction, the following guidelines used by the Food & Fitness community partnerships remain an excellent road-map for good communication across differences:

- *Try On* is an invitation to be open minded to others' ideas, feelings, worldviews and ways of doing things so that greater exploration and understanding are possible.
- It's OK to disagree assumes that disagreement is not only inevitable but can help produce better outcomes.
- •It's NOT OK to attack, blame, or shame assumes that we are less likely to take in what others are sharing and solve problems across differences when showing disagreement by making the other person "wrong."
- **Practice self-focus** assumes that our learning about differences can be accelerated and maximized when we listen to our thoughts, feelings and reactions; self-focus behavior includes "I" statements when expressing personal opinions.
- Notice process and content means being aware of not just "what we say," but "how" and "why" we say or do something and how the members of the group react.
- Practice "both/and thinking" invites us to see that more than one reality or perspective can be true at the same time rather than seeing reality as strictly either/or, right or wrong, good or bad. this or that.
- Be aware of "intent" and "impact" invites us to consider that in cross cultural interactions, our intent might not match our impact.
- Maintain confidentiality invites us to honor personal sharing and to not repeat personal or sensitive details outside of the group.



Sample Meeting Sequence Collaborative Meeting One - Kickoff Process with Whole Membership Agree on values for the process. Agree on basic screening criteria (here it's possible to use the suggested assessments, expand on those assessments or prioritize between assessments). Agree on thresholds that allow for quick elimination of strategies – this defines what would be a low, medium or high ranking on any screening criteria; it also defines the rankings that will be considered unacceptable; for instance, none that are low on health equity; none that don't rank high on a majority of criteria and high or medium across all criteria; none that are low on any one screening criteria. ☐ Agree on delegation of responsibility for analyzing and presenting information in each domain that will be considered -- committees/action teams; or individual leaders – and for drafting and distributing reports on meeting proceedings; and for final drafting of Community Action Plan. Agree on meeting schedule and deliverables schedule. Committee/Action Team Meetings (1-3 per committee) - Examining the Options Various committees may have already been tasked with analyzing data, discussing, and generating a long list of potential strategic options. All subcommittees involved in priority setting should apply the same core screening criteria. Committees should include community members and youth leaders as well as "professionals." If not, the model should be adjusted to ensure their input and influence early over the process and outcome. Committees distribute their analysis, rankings and any important discussion to all collaborative members in advance of the next full collaborative meeting with time to review and prepare questions comments).

Collaborative Meeting Two – Creating the Short List											
Committee present the analysis of each potential strategy considered, their rankings and justification for each proposed priority strategy in their domain.											
The full collaborative discusses the rankings, validates the elimination of lower ranked strategies and creates a short-list of priority strategies with the goal of selecting a manageable number of priority strategies that balances effort between "food" and "fitness."											
If additional work is necessary, the group either agrees to another meeting or empowers an "executive group" to collect remaining feedback and complete the task in preparation for the final decision making meeting.											
Co-conveners/staff distribute proceedings of this meeting to all members in advance of the final decision making me ting of the full collaborative (with time to review and think about questions).											
Collaborative Meeting Three – Making the Choices											
The full collaborative reviews the rankings among the short-listed strategies, looks for opportunities for integration or mutual reinforcement, and discusses how they might fit as a package for the collaborative's long-term implementation work.											
The collaborative selects two to three core strategies from each "food" and "fitness" (no more than six total) around which to build the eight-year Community Action Plan.											

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	Community and Youth Forum(s) – Validating the Priorities									
	If input by representatives of target communities and youth leaders has									
	not been broad and regular, the collaborative should consider special "report									
	back" meetings to validate its priority strategies before considering them final.									
	These forums should focus on identifying any selected priority strategies that									
	are not validated by the target communities, collecting information to help									
	reconcile any conflicting viewpoints that exist, and listening for any significant themes or blind spots.									
	The proceedings of such meetings should be distributed to collaborative									
	members and feedback should be collected before the drafting process for the									
	Community Action Plan begins.									
	For collaborative members who cannot attend any of these meetings, the									
	process should allow advance written commentary to allow all partner's ideas									
	and concerns to be considered in group settings.									
	We encourage collaboratives to share priority strategies with the TAP team and									
	solicit their questions and feedback before drafting the Community Action Plan.									
	Collaboratives should also build enough time into the drafting process to collect									
	and potentially incorporate feedback on tactics, activities and the strength and									
	integrity of the plan as a whole.									

PRIORITIZING POLICY AND SYSTEMS STRATEGIES WORKSHEET

—FOOD & FITNESS INTITATIVE PLANNING TOOLS—

Note: Each item below corresponds to a set of discussion questions listed in this guide. This worksheet is intended for the meeting facilitator or collaborative staff to keep account of the collective rankings made by various groupings of collaborative members.

Proposed Strategy: For this strategy, consider the following and rate the degree (high, medium, or low) to which this strategy satisfies each statement.

HEALTH EQUITY			COMMUNITY IMPACT				FEASIBILITY			
Values Inequities are addressed Residents opinions and priorities have been fairly considered	Ranking med	_	Effectiveness There is a clear path and good reasons to believe that it will lead to success	low	Ranking med	high	Viability Community Context Strategy supports community priorities Community is motivated to do it		Rankin med	_
Benefits Residents are likely to benefit			The most important parts of the issue for supporting healthy eating or active living are addressed				Political Context Barriers can be overcome Opportunities can be leveraged The collaborative can influence			
Equitable access to supports for healthy eating and or active living is promoted			Enough people will benefit The whole community will benefit				decision makers and implementers Strategy builds on recent decisions or successes			
Equitable use of supports for healthy eating and/or active living is promoted Residents are better able to advocate for			Efficiency The strategy uses the fewest				Resources • Needed resources are likely to be available			
their interests as a result			resources to achieve the goal (or uses the most renewable resources) Readiness							
Strategy provides a foundation or "stepping stone" to further change			Sustainability Resources will be available to maintain the change long-term				LeadershipA champion and strong supporting leaders are engaged			
Risks Benefits of succeeding outweigh any risks			If support disappears, there will not be bad effects long-term				CapacityCollaborative has the relationships,commitments, skills and resources to succeed	d ed		
Equity Overall			Impact Overall				Feasibility Overall			