

Healthy Eating PSE Projects in Food Pantries

Summary of Key Findings

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR OBESITY PREVENTION STUDY

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The Building Capacity for Obesity Prevention Project (BCOP) is a partnership between Case Western Reserve University, Mary Ann Swetland Center for Environmental Health, and the Ohio State University SNAP-Ed program. The aim of this researcher-practitioner collaborative project is to develop diagnostic tools that can be used by SNAP-Ed and other community nutrition practitioners as they implement and sustain nutrition-related policy, systems, and environment (PSE) interventions. Currently, the targeted PSE interventions include: *Farmers' Markets*, *Healthy Food Retail*, *Farm to School*, *Healthy Eating Policies in Childcare*, and *Healthy Eating in Food Pantries*.

This report focuses on analysis of qualitative data collected from 9 counties in Ohio (4 rural, 5 urban) in 2021. Data collection included interviews conducted with 12 SNAP-Ed practitioners and 26 community members, as well as a consensus conference of 11 food pantry experts. The data that are the focus of this report provide rich information about factors perceived to influence successful implementation of healthy eating PSE projects in food pantries.

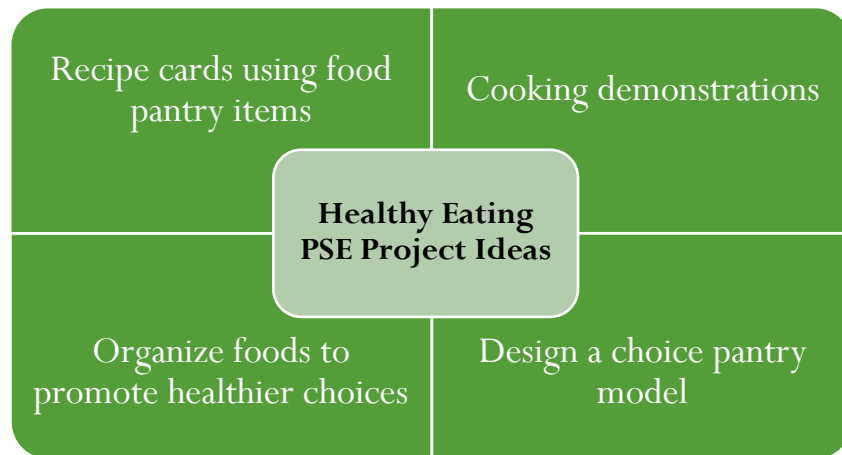


FIGURE 1. EXAMPLES OF HEALTHY EATING PSE PROJECTS IN FOOD PANTRIES

Our study was grounded in conceptual framework that includes measures on *community readiness for PSE implementation*, *practitioner capacity for PSE implementation*, *obesity and food insecurity burden*, and *socio-political context*. The qualitative data revealed that successful healthy eating PSE projects in food pantries are dependent on (1) food pantry capacity and logistics; (2) networks & relationships; (3) community nutrition practitioner capacity; (4) food pantry user characteristics, and (5) stigma & stereotypes. These themes are explored further in the remaining pages.

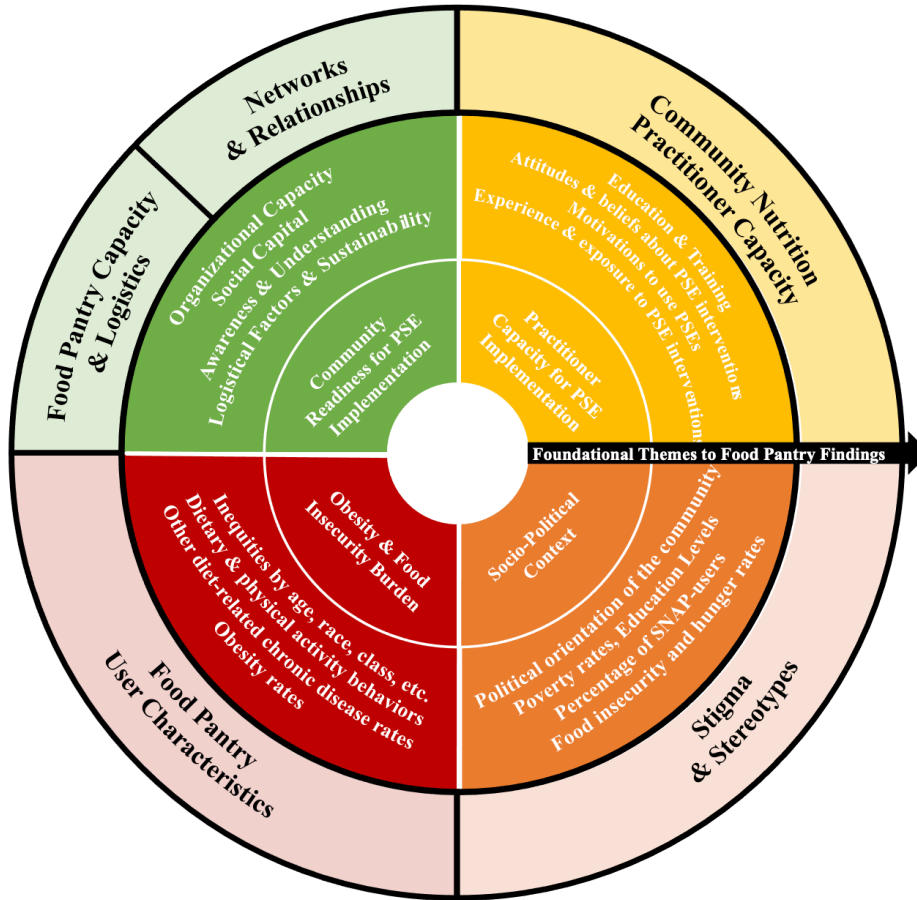


FIGURE 2. FACTORS INFLUENCING IMPLEMENTATION OF HEALTHY EATING PSE PROJECTS IN FOOD PANTRIES, FOLLOWING THE BCOP FOUNDATIONAL THEMES IN CONTEXT OF FOOD PANTRY SETTINGS.



Theme

Definition

Example Quote

1

Food Pantry Capacity & Logistics

Food pantry operations that influence the implementation of healthy eating PSE projects

“Our staffing in our food pantries is probably the biggest obstacle, but I think [the staff] do a great job, but they’re not looking to take on the extra responsibilities as a PSE would give them.” (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

“You have got to keep [fresh food] at a temperature, then those apples are probably okay, but if you have lettuce, you have to almost have refrigeration... a cooling system, and most food pantries don’t have that.” (Resident)

“I don’t know if pantries have even considered the possibility of people ordering groceries for the food pantry, almost like they go through and pick like they would at a grocery store.” (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

2

Networks & Relationships

Partnerships and key personnel that can help practitioners implement healthy eating PSE projects in food pantries

“The [advocate] sends out group emails to many community members asking for input or resources and distributing a donation list. She’s really the key to the community awareness of that particular food pantry...” (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

“I do have some connections... I know that my church has a food pantry that they’re working with, so just connecting with churches, and they’ll have somebody that you can talk to and work with there, along with [name of state social services agency] might have some connections with different food pantries, as well as hospitals.” (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

3

Community Nutrition Practitioner Capacity

Skills, resources, and capacity of community nutrition practitioners to support implementation of healthy eating PSE projects in food pantries

"The only concern that I would have is we don't have financial resources to support some of the things that we would like to do." (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

"A lot of [PSEs] feel like extra credit." (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

"I was able to do a survey with some clients at the food pantry as far as issues with where they bought their fruits and vegetables and if they had difficulty getting those." (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

4

Food Pantry User Characteristics

Knowledge, skills, and food habits influencing the use of food pantries by community members

"Well (they need to) open up more pantries and have better access to foods going forward...and find out what kind of food each culture eats, instead of just giving them anything, assuming that they eat anything and everything." (Resident)

"Food pantry clients are just trying to survive, figure out 'Okay how much food can I get? Do I still get food stamps?'" (SNAP-Ed Practitioner)

5

Stigma & Stereotypes

Perceptions and attitudes of community members about food pantries

"Not many people here use (the food pantry), and when people around here think about a food pantry, they think about the homeless people." (Resident)

"I'd be cool if they could make it a little bit more discreet than what they do. Just for people that aren't used to struggling, that are new to the struggle world, if that makes sense...so they won't be ashamed to ask for help and they won't be suffering because of it." (Resident)

Sample Indicators for Assessing Readiness and Capacity to Implement Healthy Eating PSE Projects in Food Pantries

Once the most important themes for successful implementation of healthy eating PSE projects in food pantries were identified, the BCOP team worked to create indicators that can be included in the diagnostic tool to assess readiness and capacity to implement these PSE projects in food pantries. The indicators were reviewed by leaders from SNAP-Ed as well as by experts with a background in food pantries and emergency food assistance programming. Below are two sample indicators for each theme. In summer 2022, these and related indicators will be incorporated into an online tool called [The PSE READI](#) for SNAP-Ed practitioners to use to guide action planning and goal setting.

Food Pantry Capacity & Logistics

- To what extent do food pantries in your service area have the capacity to store perishable, healthy foods (i.e. produce, dairy, meat)?
- To what extent can food pantries in your service area successfully recruit, train, and retain personnel?

Networks & Relationships

- To what extent do food pantries in your service area have an established relationship with food sourcing systems, such as food banks, that can provide pantries with healthy food items?
- To what extent have you collaborated with community leaders and/or organizations to raise awareness about healthy food choices available at food pantries in your service area over the past year? (i.e., via advertisements, events, newsletters, etc.)

Community Nutrition Practitioner Capacity

- To what extent is food pantry PSE work highlighted as a priority within your organization?
- To what extent does your organizational/program budget have sufficient funds to support food pantry PSE projects this year?

Food Pantry User Characteristics

- To what extent do people in your service area have the skills to utilize the food items received from the food pantry (i.e., cooking, meal building)?
- To what extent are the food tastes and preferences of people in your service area acknowledged and considered within the food pantry system?

Stigma & Stereotypes

- To what extent do people within your service area feel free from stigma and judgement when using food pantries?
- To what extent do people in your service area have positive perceptions about the food pantry operations and personnel?

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