

The Healthy Neighborhood Stores Initiative

Strategy Work Book



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Florida Prevention Research Center

Purpose of Workbook

The purpose of this workbook is to guide the development and implementation of a policy initiative to improve access to healthy foods in neighborhood stores in Lexington, Kentucky. Information presented in this workbook is based on findings from:

- ❑ A literature review
- ❑ Interviews with neighborhood residents in the East End, Georgetown Street, and Winburn neighborhoods in Lexington) (n=30)
- ❑ A group interview with youth in the East End (n=8)
- ❑ Key informant interviews with Lexington Fayette Urban County Government (LFUCG) Council Members (n=6)
- ❑ Interviews with neighborhood store owners (n=6)
- ❑ Phone conversations and email communications with colleagues in Louisville, Baltimore, and Philadelphia who have coordinated successful neighborhood store initiatives (n=4)

A social marketing framework will be used to guide discussion of the information summarized in the workbook and to make a set of strategic marketing decisions. The resulting Policy Enactment Plan will provide strategies to:

- ❑ Encourage the policy makers in Lexington, Kentucky to enact policies that encourage access to affordable, healthy foods in neighborhood stores
- ❑ Encourage neighborhood store owners to provide affordable, healthy foods in a manner conducive to consumer purchases
- ❑ Encourage neighborhood residents to purchase healthy foods from neighborhood stores

The Policy Enactment Plan will include the following components:

- ❑ A summary of the project
- ❑ A review of key findings that provides information on the foundation for the Policy Enactment Plan

- ❑ Strategic recommendations for how to influence the three primary audiences, based on each component of the marketing mix:
 - **Product:** How to maximize opportunities to enact policy and engage in the desired actions.
 - **Pricing:** How to minimize the perceived costs associated with policy enactment and the desired actions.
 - **Placement:** How to develop program partnerships to disseminate information about policy enactment and reinforce the proposed actions.
 - **Promotion:** How to promote policy enactment and the associated actions in a manner that is relevant, appealing, and accessible for the all stakeholders.

- ❑ Implementation plan
 - A structure for how to pursue policy enactment and implementation.

Project Summary

The Tweens Nutrition and Fitness Coalition and Florida Prevention Research Center are using an innovative planning framework, Community Based Policy Making and Marketing (CBPM²), to promote policies to prevent obesity. CBPM² provides community coalitions and their research partners a systematic, sequential, step-by-step planning framework and accompanying toolkit to select evidence-based policies and prepare marketing strategies to promote policy change at the organizational, local, or state level.

Following the CBPM² planning process, the Coalition reviewed evidence-based policies proposed in the Institute of Medicine 2009 report, *Local Policy Initiatives to Prevent Childhood Obesity*, and selected the enhancement of healthy food access as the most promising policy direction for Lexington. The coalition also decided to use the CBPM² planning framework as part of this overall initiative to develop and promote policies that encourage neighborhood stores located in areas designated as food deserts to sell healthier items. In keeping with the CBPM² planning process, marketing research was conducted to understand this issue from the perspective of neighborhood store owners, residents, and policy makers.

Research Methods

Individual, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from six store owners, 30 community residents and six policy makers.

Corner stores owners were recruited by reviewing a list of Lexington neighborhood stores. We began by calling to set appointments in stores located in food deserts but when that was found to be ineffective, we changed to dropping into stores to arrange interviews and/or talk with owners while they worked.

Residents of the three target neighborhoods were recruited through personal connections with coalition members, as well as through the staff of three neighborhood community centers: William Wells Brown, Winburn, and Black and Williams. Respondents were given \$25 Wal-Mart gift certificates to participate in the interviews. Twenty one face-to-face interviews were conducted in May, 2011 and nine interviews were conducted in November and December, 2011. A discussion was also conducted with a group of young people to understand their experience using neighborhood stores in the East End of Lexington.

Policy Makers were selected from the 15 LFUCG Council Members based on the neighborhoods they represent (constituents in food deserts) and their track record on the Council for being effective in working on similar types of initiatives.

Store Owners

Audience Profile

All of the store owners/managers interviewed are either first or second generation US residents, with most being of Palestinian descent. In several of the Palestinian-owned stores, the ownership pattern appears to pass from generation to generation within extended families. After a store owner has lived for a number of years in the US and has acquired financial resources to move into other types of businesses, the store is sold or transferred to a younger relative who has recently immigrated to the US.

This transfer pattern is, in part, linked to the general undesirability of the work of running a store in the eyes of many informants. When asked what they like about owning a small store, the most common response is a list of things they don't like – long hours, troublemaking customers, relatively little profit. Most store owners report working long days (10+ hours), often 6-7 days per week. An important caveat

is that the store owners successfully interviewed may be more likely to work longer hours than those researchers have not yet been able to contact. In several stores, the interviewer stopped by five or more times to attempt to talk with the owner, who was never present. These owners apparently stop by the store infrequently and/or sporadically, and their responses to the questions we asked may very well be different from the answers of the owners who are in the stores full-time.

Store owners interviewed reported feeling that they provide an important service to the neighborhoods. They expressed interest in selling healthier foods, but they do not feel the demand for those foods in their neighborhoods will support this change. Several store owners said they liked to feed their own families healthy food and wouldn't let their own children eat some of the unhealthy products they carry. A regular refrain was their willingness to sell whatever products there is demand for from their customers.

Store owners lack formal business or marketing training. Store displays, sales, new products, advertising posters, and other "innovations" were generally reported to be at the initiative of suppliers, rather than implemented by owners. However, several owners stressed they do try new products requested by customers to see if they will sell well.

None of the owners reported any involvement in neighborhood associations, generally citing the need to be working in their stores during the times these meetings are held. Also, no owners live in the neighborhoods where the stores are located.

Because so few store owners agreed to be interviewed, experts working with corner store initiatives in Baltimore and Louisville were consulted. Their advice is included in the findings summarized below.

Marketing Mix: The 4 P's Store Owners

This section summarizes information obtained from store owners of neighborhood stores and experts working with small store owners in other communities. Key findings are organized into the four components of a marketing plan: the product strategy; the pricing strategy; the placement strategy; and

the promotional strategy. Each section concludes with a list of strategic “marketing” questions to guide discussion and decision-making.

Product Strategy Store Owners

To be marketed successfully, social marketers believe new policies and practices should provide a solution to problems consumers consider important and/or offer them benefits they truly want. The goal of product strategy is to identify the benefits that store owners would receive from adopting recommended changes (e.g., stocking healthy items, working with residents to clean up store, discouraging loitering, lowering prices).

Key Findings

- Increased sales are the key to motivating store owners to sell healthier items. Store owners must be convinced that demand for healthier food items exists among neighborhood residents. A few owners are willing to sell healthy items even if they just break even or if they bring people into the store, but most owners must be convinced that selling them is potentially profitable.
- To optimize profits and prevent financial losses, Joel Gittelsohn, a leading corner store initiative expert, reports that stores in his Baltimore project added new, healthier items in phases, starting with the least risky (i.e., less perishable items like low sugar cereals) and then introducing those that are more challenging to sell (i.e., highly perishable fresh produce).
- Another successful strategy Gittelsohn recommends for ensuring profitability is to connect store owners with local food producers and suppliers to provide fresher produce with longer shelf lives.
- An even lower risk option is for owners to allow other vendors to sell fruits and vegetables outside their stores. As long as owners are reassured these sales would not detract from their current profits, most store owners seemed amenable to working with local residents to find ways to increase healthy food access by selling items on consignment or allowing them access to space outside their stores.

- Store owners may be receptive to a program that offers them a package of services to enhance their profitability, including:
 - Safety training/awareness
 - Marketing & business skills
 - Access to grants and low interest loans
 - New products (healthier food items)
 - Promotional support
 - A spot on G-TV to promote their stores

- An opportunity to improve their stores' image in the local neighborhood and city is another benefit that would attract some owners to sell healthy items. These owners would like to contribute to the local community as well as improve their community relations.
- Providing a "Good Neighbor" brand for participating stores interested of some store owners; however, the qualifications for being designated "A Good Neighbor" would need to be clear and provide value-added, e.g., increased sales or improved image. (Note: the "Good Neighbor" designation is an example only, and would need to be tested with store owners and residents before adoption.)
- Even if produce does not generate a large amount of revenue, it may attract more families, thereby improving the stores' image, customer profile and walk in business.
- Another benefit of selling healthier food in the store is that store owners' families have better food to eat while they're working there.
- At least one store owner is very interested in getting an expansion loan, suggesting that other financial incentives might be attractive
- Safety is a primary concern for store owners as well as residents.

Marketing Questions

- *How will store owners benefit if they adopt the new policies being promoted? What would they get from the changing that would make their lives better?*
- *Which benefit would make the new policies or practices better than what they are currently doing? What can we do to ensure they truly benefit in this way?*
- *Which foods should be recommended to add to their inventory?*
- *What other business practices are recommended that can enhance access to healthy foods?*
- *What policies will motivate store owners?*

Pricing Strategy

Store Owners

In social marketing, price refers to the psychological, social, and financial costs that consumers exchange for product benefits. The goal of the pricing strategy is to identify the costs or barriers store owners encounter in relationship to adopting the recommended changes and developing strategies for helping owners overcome those barriers.

Key Findings

- Difficulty in obtaining healthy foods at prices competitive with supermarkets is a deterrent
- Financial losses due to inability to return unsold fruits and vegetables is a deterrent
- Lack of demand from neighborhood residents deter store owners from selling healthy items

Marketing Questions

- *What policies can help owners acquire fresh food products at lower costs?*
- *How can local residents be encouraged to shop at neighborhood stores?*
- *How can food spoilage be reduced to avoid financial losses?*
- *What other policies could help lower the costs or barriers that deter store owners from offering healthy items?*

Placement Strategy

Store Owners

Placement refers to the location where products or services are available and time or place where the recommended changes are most likely to be made. The goal is to develop strategies to make it easier and more convenient for store owners to sell healthy foods, make their stores places residents want to shop, and adopt any other policies that will support this.

Key Findings

- Many store owners are “tied” to their stores
- Allowing community groups (e.g., SEEDS), local gardeners, or area farmers sell produce in stores on commission or in sidewalk markets in front of stores was of interest to some store owners (Food Trust, 2012).
- Owners are willing to explore opportunities to work with local residents to improve the store. The “store makeover” plan would require additional research; for example, at least one owner mentioned that exterior improvements (repainting, murals, etc.) are likely to be defaced by graffiti almost immediately
- Store owners seem interested in being a better community member as long as their contributions and costs are reasonable and they do not have to leave the store

Marketing Questions

- *What are owners willing to do to make their corner stores a place more people would shop ?*
- *How can partner organizations and individuals work with stores and distributors to “bring” healthier foods to store owners?*
- *Which partners can help owners make their stores more conducive to use by neighborhood residents?*

Promotional Strategy

Store Owners

The promotional strategy includes guidelines for designing effective, attention-getting messages, selecting appropriate information channels, and identifying promotional activities to persuade owners to change.

Key Findings

- There is no formal store owner organization in Lexington, although there are informal and family relationships between many store owners
- Store owners rely on both suppliers and customers for ideas about new items to stock
- Most owners expressed interest in talking with other owners who have successfully implemented healthier store improvements
- Partners in Louisville said it may be possible to connect Healthy in a Hurry store owners from Louisville with Lexington store owners to share their successes

Marketing Questions

- *What type of messages would motivate owners to make affordable and healthy foods available in a consumer friendly environment? What will get their attention? What tone should be most effective?*
- *What information channels are effective in communicating with owners?*
- *What types of educational or promotional materials would be effective?*
- *What spokesperson would they trust?*
- *What types of activities could would motivate them to change?*

Policy Makers

Audience Profile

Coalition members met with six members of the Lexington Fayette Urban County Council (LFUCG) to obtain their views on the issue and potential policy remedies. All the members with whom they talked are aware that access to healthy food is a problem in some Lexington neighborhoods. Two members were very knowledgeable about the topic of food access about the topic. Only one member had not heard the term “food desert”, but expressed interest in learning more about it.

Marketing Mix: 4 Ps Policy Makers

This section summarizes information obtained from policy makers and key informant community leaders in Lexington and experts in the issue of neighborhood store food policies in other communities. Key findings are organized into the four components of a marketing plan: the product strategy; the pricing strategy; the placement strategy; and the promotional strategy. Each section concludes with a list of strategic “marketing” questions to guide discussion and decision-making.

Product Strategy Policy Makers

The goals of the product strategy are to: identify specific policies that would help neighborhood stores sell healthier foods, and identify the benefits that would make these policies attractive to policy makers.

Key Findings

- The following policy options were identified in the literature and/or in discussions with local council members. Some of these policies would be enacted by the Lexington Fayette Urban County Council, while others would be made by specific departments within local county government.
 - A council resolution to increase city commitment to healthy food access in underserved neighborhoods as a way to raise awareness and create a foundation for other policy enactment.
 - Financial initiatives

- Grants to open new stores
 - Grants to existing store to help them stock healthy items
 - Loans (low interest or interest free)
 - Tax breaks
 - Planning, zoning, and development priority given to healthy corner stores
 - Streamlining licensing and permitting
 - Food sales permits/health department concerns
 - Permits to sell food outside store (such as on sidewalks, parking lots)
 - Certification programs
 - Logo/brand support
 - Infrastructure expenditures to improve transportation and safety around stores
 - Bus route expansion
 - Sidewalk expansion
 - Diminish barriers and increase opportunities for corner stores to accept food assistance benefits
 - WIC
 - SNAP
 - Assistance in negotiating wholesale prices and delivery
 - Preferential access to small business services already provided by the government
 - Increased police monitoring of loitering and other safety hazards
 - Increased monitoring of cleanliness and sales of out-of-date food
- Council members would be motivated to enact policies to help local stores sell more healthy foods by the following benefits:
 - **Creating a more equitable community.** Policy makers commented on the inequities in Lexington and the importance of making healthy lifestyles available to all residents.
 - **Creating a safer community.** This goal falls within elected officials' responsibilities.
 - **Streamlining government.** Some members would like to enact policies that eliminate some of the paperwork currently required by stores. Eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy and reducing government intrusion into business would enhance the reputation of the council in their eyes.

- **Having a quick, feel good win.** One council member would like to promote a policy that would “be a quick, feel good win with little opposition.”
- **Improving the health of Lexington residents.** Health is highly valued in the council, in part because of skyrocketing health care costs. One member is known as the “health guy” and is interested in getting Lexington in the national limelight for positive efforts to dispel the notion that Lexington is such an unhealthy place.
- **Preserving downtown neighborhoods.** “Downtown neighborhoods have saved downtown so it is important that we serve them and keep them.”
- **Doing good things for their districts.** Lawmakers want to show their constituents they care about them.

Marketing Questions

- ***Which policies should the coalition promote?***
- ***Which benefits would make enactment of these policies seem worthwhile to policy makers?***
- ***How can we frame these policies to optimize their perceived value?***
- ***What values, metaphors, symbols, messengers, pictures, or stories should be used to convey this position/frame in a powerful, memorable way?***

Pricing Strategy

Policy Makers

The goal of the pricing strategy is to identify barriers that would deter policy makers from enacting the recommended policies and to develop strategies for lowering these barriers and their resistance.

Key Findings

- Government mandates for businesses are unpopular. The current LFUCG council is divided in terms of their perspectives about how much government should be involved in regulating businesses. Five members tend to vote against government intervention but there is a range within that group. Diminishing barriers and increasing opportunities are more palatable than creating mandates.
- Opposition will arise for anything that has a price tag. Policies that incur low or no cost are preferred.

- General resistance to change. “There is human reservation about the unknown.” Most members shy away from issues that could put them in a negative light.

Marketing Questions

- ***What can be done to lower resistance to the policies we are promoting?***
- ***How can we make this a political “plus” for council members?***

Placement Strategy Policy Makers

A placement strategy for policy makers identifies advocates or partners who will persuade and support them to enact the recommended policy.

Key Findings

- Council members recommend the coalition use a wide variety of experts as advocates, not just those from the health field, to avoid making it a special interest issue.
- They recommend that the coalition ask store owners to testify that ‘we want this and it will work’.
- Citizens who advocate for their communities are also seen as very credible.
- Joel Gittlesohn’s project has called help from law enforcement, neighborhood associations, and churches to advocate for change.

Marketing Questions

- ***What organizations, leaders, or other partners can be enlisted to persuade and support decision makers to adopt the policy?***
- ***Where and when should decision makers be engaged?***

Promotional Strategy Policy Makers

The goal of the promotional strategy is to develop communication guidelines and educational and informational activities and materials to encourage policy makers to enact the recommended policy.

Key Findings

- Advocates should work with the appropriate committee before bringing the issue to the full council.
- Advocates should use simple, clear facts to define problem and present a rationale for how the proposed policy will benefit Fayette County. Evidence that it has been successful in resolving the problem in another community is valued.
- The council respects knowledgeable experts who are prepared and able to answer questions.
- Council members like to be prepared ahead of time so they are effective and look good. The smoke-free group met individually with every council member to educate them before testifying to the council.

Marketing Questions

- *What activities, e.g., media advocacy, testimonials at council meetings, are needed to advocate for enactment?*
- *What types of advocacy materials are needed to communicate with them?*

Residents

Audience Profile

Adults living in the neighborhoods designated as food deserts do the majority of their food shopping at big chain stores—*Kroger, Wal-Mart, Meijer, Aldi, and Sav-a-Lot*—often using a combination of stores to get the mix of preferred products and prices (see table below). While some have their own cars, some catch a ride with a family member or friend. A few take the bus. Produce freshness, overall food quality, and lower prices make it worthwhile to travel outside the neighborhood.

Neighborhood	Stores frequented by residents
West End/ Georgetown Street area	Save-A-Lot, Kroger, Wal-Mart, and Meijer
Winburn	Wal-Mart , Aldi, Kroger, and Save-A-Lot
East End	Wal-Mart, Kroger, Aldi, Save-A-Lot, Farmers' Market

The adult residents interviewed shop infrequently at these small neighborhood stores, using them primarily for snacks, sodas, and an occasional item they need to complete a meal.

As discussed in greater detail below, the most important values that residents consider when deciding where to shop include: freshness convenience, competitive prices, friendly and respectful treatment of customers, and safety. For some, community connections, community pride, and fairness were also mentioned.

In contrast, youth who live in the East End say they purchase snacks from small neighborhood stores regularly (i.e., 1-3 times per week). The stores mentioned include M&M, Thornton's, Dollar Tree, Griffiths, Save-a lot, Wal-Mart, Sammy's, Pac-n-Save, Franks, and Kareem's. They are attracted to these stores by the variety of snacks sold, cheap prices, and proximity to their homes.

Marketing Mix: The 4 Ps Residents

This section summarizes recommendations for neighborhood residents based on four components of an integrated marketing plan: the product strategy; the pricing strategy; the placement strategy; and the promotional strategy. Each section includes an overview of the key findings and a list of strategic "marketing" questions to guide the discussion.

Product Strategy

Residents

The goal of the product strategy is to identify the desired behaviors to promote and the benefits residents would receive from doing so.

Key Findings

- Residents are unlikely to shop at small corner stores for general grocery items. However, residents with limited access to transportation would use neighborhood stores if they sold better foods, and most would shop more often if the food was fresh and offered at a reasonable price.
- Foods that residents would be most likely to purchase at neighborhood stores include: fresh fruits and vegetables (local when possible), bread, eggs, cereals, lean meats, and fresh deli and packaged foods. Good sandwiches, soups, and rotisserie chicken were also favored. When asked about specific food items, most residents said they would buy bananas, apples, oranges, carrots/celery with ranch dressing, yogurt, string cheese and crackers, granola bars, whole wheat bread, eggs, skim milk, oatmeal, low sugar cereals, frozen vegetables, canned vegetables, fresh vegetables, and frozen dinners.
- Some residents said they were likely to buy the following meal kits: tuna casserole, sandwich fixings, beans, cornbread, and greens, and salmon croquettes.
- The most attractive benefits of shopping locally include:
 - Convenience of being able to walk to the store and shop quickly
 - Saving money on gasoline needed to drive to larger stores
 - Being able to shop more often, and therefore, waste less perishable food

Marketing Questions

- *What foods do we want them to buy from local stores?*
- *What benefits should we offer residents for shopping locally?*
- *Should we offer residents incentives for working with owners to improve local stores?*

Pricing Strategy

Residents

The goal of the pricing strategy is to identify the costs or barriers residents encounter when purchasing healthy foods from corner stores and develop strategies for helping owners overcome them.

Key Findings

- High prices and lack of freshness are the primary deterrents to shopping in corner stores for residents in all of the neighborhoods.
- Price comparison through local advertisements was an important factor in determining where residents shop for routine food items such as meats and vegetables. Neighborhood stores rarely offer discounts or special offers (or advertising) that would attract customers.
- Residents say they are unwilling to pay a significant amount more for food items than that charged by larger stores. However, in some stores, high prices are offset by the availability to obtain store credit that allows residents to pay grocery bills at the end of the month.
- High prices have generated distrust of owners. A number of respondents felt that store owners had purchased items from Wal-Mart for sale locally at unfair mark ups.
- Residents prefer fresh foods whether vegetables, meat/fowl/fish, or packaged foods, and report neighborhood stores do not typically have fresh items.
- They report that corner stores sell poor quality “off brands.”
- They also distrust how neighborhood store owners date items, believing that some use incorrect dates to disguise outdated items. Some residents felt strongly that stores need to follow food regulations on not selling out of code food. It was recommended that the health department and city to monitor this more closely and “to crack down” on stores not in compliance.
- Youth and adults believe the local stores are often dirty, cluttered, and smell bad.

- Many residents feel unsafe shopping in some local stores because people loiter outside them. They believe the police should work with store owners to stop loitering, drug dealing, and other illegal practices near community stores.
- Some residents feel the store owner and employees are not as friendly and respectful as they should be, particularly to older residents. Residents perceived that foreign ownership, generational differences and lack of understanding of customers and the neighborhoods, by store owners was a barrier to use of the stores.

Marketing Questions

- ***What policies could help improved neighborhood stores to:***
 - ***Lower prices?***
 - ***Offer fresher foods?***
 - ***Become more customer-friendly and accessible?***
 - ***Safer?***

Placement Strategy

Residents

The goal of the placement strategy is to make healthy foods more accessible, enjoyable places to shop.

Key Findings

- Most residents feel that a corner store make-over would be beneficial and they and/or their neighbors would be willing to participate in such an undertaking.
- In the East End, residents reported that residents are “very motivated to revitalize the neighborhood” and “a lot of people really depend on the store(s)” so they would likely be willing to help with the effort. Residents would be even more likely to participate in a make-over if given incentives such as gift cards and coupons for store products.
- Some residents would like store owners to be more involved with community events and attend meetings which would allow store owners to hear the needs of residents and residents to understand how store owners are working to improve their stores and increase customer traffic.

Marketing Questions

- *How can we make corner stores a more enjoyable place to shop?*
- *How can store owners be encouraged to engage more in neighborhood activities?*

Promotional Strategy

Residents

The goal of the promotional strategy is to develop communication guidelines and educational and informational activities and materials to encourage residents to purchase healthy foods from corner stores.

Key Findings

- Residents believe a range of promotional items would be effective attracting their interest in neighborhood stores including: advertisements, sales, coupons, discount cards, honoring other store coupons, flyers, taste tests, banners, and in-store signage,
- Word of mouth is favored among East End and the West End residents as a way to notifying neighbors of neighborhood store improvements/changes
- Special events such as “grand re-openings” with door prizes and cookouts in front of the stores were recommended
- Customer referrals for discounts was recommended
- Many residents thought that store owners should be more involved with community events and meetings. This would benefit both the store owners and the residents by allowing the store owners to hear the needs of residents and for residents to understand how store owners are working to improve their stores and increase customer traffic. If store owners were more engaged with the community, it could encourage residents to patronize the stores more frequently because they would have a better overall feeling about the stores.
- Educating store owners about interacting with neighbors was seen as important. (Similar to the approach Gittelsohn took in training Korean store owners in Baltimore to learn the communication styles of the customers they served.)

Marketing Questions

- ***What information channels are needed to deliver messages to residents at a time and place when they will be attentive and able to act on the message?***
- ***What types of educational or promotional materials are needed to deliver messages?***
- ***What type of messages would motivate residents to adopt the desired behaviors to buy healthy foods from neighborhood stores? How can we get their attention? What is the appropriate message tone? Appeal? Brand Promise?***

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