

## **A COMMUNITY NUTRITION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INITIATIVE: LESSONS LEARNED THAT CAN AID COMMUNITY EFFORTS**

In most communities, there are limited local resources for implementing nutrition and physical activity initiatives. Many people who are interested in helping with such an initiative, also have other job demands that keep them from providing a concentrated effort. Therefore, rather than try and implement new initiatives that add to their existing workload, a better option would be to find out what they are already doing that might contribute to the initiative. In other words, look to combine or slightly modify existing local initiatives to better coordinate current efforts rather than start new initiatives that will add a significant workload to individuals and may not be part of their normal job duties. The following steps will help in developing a local initiative with existing resources.

- 1) Start with a high level concept of what you want to do.  
Do some initial planning within the existing coalition to develop a “portfolio” of strategies and roles the coalition can play and identify what’s needed from the community or other partners. This should be done at an early stage in your strategic planning process.
- 2) Once you have a high level plan, enlist key partner involvement.  
Determine who is already doing similar work that can be enlisted to help implement the plan. Sketch out a high-level comprehensive plan and then present it to potential partners and let the partners help formalize the plan.

Identify partners by looking for those individuals or organizations that have similar missions, interests, or funding to accomplish similar goals, in addition to those who are already doing what is needed to help the project.

The [asset mapping document](#) will help to complete this step.

- 3) Use a strategic planning process to ensure a sound plan that has partner involvement and a better chance for a significant outcome. The [strategic planning guide](#) will help to complete this step.
- 4) Coordinate the plan, don’t “do it all” yourself.  
Spread the workload to involve more people and increase the likelihood of both individual and organization buy-in and more significant results.
- 5) Coalition Role – Leader? Facilitator? Doer?  
The coalition role can be any or all of the above. Once the plan and partner roles are determined, the coalition needs to consider how to best fill those roles based on what’s needed.
- 6) A Community Initiative – Can you deliver enough “dose”?  
Is it possible to have an impact where the neighborhood or community is too extensive or mobile, or is it only possible in self-contained communities? For instance, if the community has multiple restaurants, grocery stores, schools and other key environments, can you create enough change in all those environments to impact behavior? The bottom line question is: can there be sufficient “dose” or exposure to the defined strategies if the “community” is too big? It would appear that the easiest environment to impact may be a smaller community with limited restaurants, stores and schools and a location far enough away from other communities that most physical activity and nutrition related things are done in the community. Regardless of the size of the “community”, time should be taken on

the front end to select strategies with the greatest potential impact. Focusing initially on a smaller, targeted set of strategies might be the best way to start. Give this some thought prior to determining your objectives and focus your resources where they can affect the most with multiple dose opportunities.

- 7) Measuring health change at the community level should have a longer time horizon.  
It will take time to change the nutrition and physical activity environment and additional time for that change to show up in changed health behavior or health indicators. Communities should consider a longer time frame of 3-5 years to see measurable change.
- 8) "Timing is everything".  
In some cases, you may have to wait for the "right time" to try and institute certain changes. Take advantage when opportunities present themselves and be patient and look to reintroduce ideas that may have failed on the first try.
- 9) "Find Champions".  
Certain initiatives need a key champion to make them happen. On any initiative see if there is someone you can recruit that increases your chance of success. This might be an elected official, a media person or a local advocate. The point is: can you identify a key "someone" who can help make it happen.
- 10) RE AIM.  
Although you need a well thought out plan going in to any initiative, don't get so tied to the plan that you can't step back and refocus if necessary. Rather than continue down a path that has proven to be ineffective, stepping back and reevaluating or modifying an initiative is a good idea. One way to do that is to have regular ways to check in with the target audience.