

Toolkit for Conducting Community Conversations on Food

Created by the Office of Sustainability and the University of Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson School (graduate students in the 2015-2016 *Food for All* Policy Research Process Class under the direction of Professors Drs. Erin Lentz and Raj Patel)

Recommendations and key takeaways

- The focus group locations should be determined based on a demographic breakdown of the target community. The aim should be to reflect a diversity of experiences as well as to include voices that may have otherwise been left out of the conversation.
- Translation services are critical for engaging non-native English speakers who are often excluded from policy making processes. Facilitators should ask administrators from the focus group location which translators will be needed.
- Respondents are busy. Providing childcare and incentives for participation recognizes this.
- Target high-traffic areas for focus groups to ensure adequate participation. Arrive to focus group sites early in order to recruit participants day-of.
- Bring surveys (or business cards) to give to people who are unable to participate due to size limits. This will give those people an outlet to provide the city with their input even though they cannot participate in the focus group.
- Work with community leaders to set up focus groups for hard to reach populations that might not be in higher traffic locations. Ask those leaders for times that are convenient for the group participants.
- Focus groups are only as good as their facilitators. Good facilitation requires practice and should be coordinated to ensure consistency across conversations.
- Asking people about their resources provides a perspective on what people value and what they wish they had. This can be a fruitful alternative to diving straight into “needs.”
- In general, questions should be open-ended and asset-based. Facilitators are primarily there to listen - not to direct the participants in a certain direction.

CENTRAL QUESTIONS

Mapping Exercise as ice-breaker exercise

[All the guiding questions for the exercise will be up on the board.]

- Think about where you go in a typical week/month and try to capture those things on a hand drawn map.
- What are the good things in your neighborhood? (important to use layman language like *good/bad* rather than words like *assets*)
- The bad things?
- The things you'd like to see fixed?
- Anything that's not in your neighborhood that you'd like to see?

Ask someone to share something about their map. What is their favorite and least favorite thing about food in their neighborhood? How do you get to the store (walk, bus, bike, get a ride, car)? How long does it take you to get there?

- Which stores do they prefer to go there and why? What's one reason they might not go to their preferred store?
- What are your top five considerations when selecting food? Possible items to include: Nutrition Information (content of sodium, saturated fat, sugar, or other ingredients), Convenience, Freshness / expiration date, Familiarity with ingredient/product, Price, Availability (whatever is available in-store), Product is grown or made locally, Product/item is certified organic, Ability to be stored (canned, frozen, shelf stable)
- How satisfied are you with the food options in your community?

- How satisfied are you with the quality fresh produce options in your community? Are you able to find what you are looking for, at a reasonable price, and of good quality (fresh)?
- Which of the following resources exist within your community? Where you would send your neighbor to learn more?
 - Nutrition counseling or guidance (classes, demonstration, healthy recipes)
 - Monthly Food Assistance (SNAP/WIC/Lonestar Card/Food Stamps)
 - School lunch and breakfast program
 - Emergency Food Assistance (food pantries, free meals)
 - Community garden or urban farming
- Commercial kitchens

Closeout: What do you think the community (government, business, people) could do to make it easier for people to get enough healthy food? Think about how they could work to make food accessible, available, and affordable. (USDA)

BACK-UP QUESTIONS

*Note to facilitator and note-takers: Use the following themes to explore the barriers raised by participants
Stores/Shopping Patterns (USDA)

- There are many different types of stores you can shop at for food – (1) large supermarkets, (2) medium or small neighborhood grocery stores, (3) warehouse stores, (4) specialty stores (bakeries, butchers, fish markets), (5) ethnic food stores and (6) gas station or convenience stores. I would like to find out about the types of stores used for the majority of your shopping. (USDA)
- For each type of store, please raise your hand if it is the type of store you use to buy most of your household groceries? (Next to each store type, write down the number of people who use it for their shopping)
- Now let's focus on the stores used by people for the majority of their food shopping. Why do you use these stores the most? (USDA)
- How do you get to the store? How long does it take you to get there? (USDA)
- What's the furthest distance you needed to travel to get to a store that meets your needs? (Report on Community Connections Fair-Spanish Speaking)
- *Are there other stores that you would rather use but that you don't? Why not? Why do you want to go to those stores in the first place?* (USDA)
- Have you heard of healthy corner stores? These are convenience and corner stores that stock a limited selection of healthy foods. Would having a healthy corner store in your community change your shopping patterns?

Access: Community Food Production Resources & Alternatives (USDA)

- Are there community gardens in your community? If so, how many of you grow food in a community garden? Why/why not? (USDA)
- How heavily do you rely on these foods in your regular food supply? (USDA)
- Are there farmers' markets in your community? Does anyone ever go to a farmer' market to buy food? Why/why not? (USDA)
- Have you heard of community kitchens? Would you use one? For what?
- Are there alternative food sources easily accessible and used in the community? What are they? Who organizes them? (USDA)

Availability: Safety

- Now think about all the different types of stores you shop at. Are you satisfied with the stores you use most frequently? (i.e. quality of food and service, location, cleanliness, food cost, and variety) (USDA)

- Is healthy food available at your closest shop?
- Does the shop you use for the majority of your shopping stock healthy foods?
- What foods do you wish the shop where you do the majority of their food shopping would stock?

Affordability: Household and Community Food Security and Food Assistance (USDA)

- Let me start by asking you to list all of the food assistance programs that you are aware of in this community. (Write a list on the board to ensure all programs are included). (USDA)
- What would you say are the best features of the food assistance programs? That is, what makes them really work? (USDA)
- What are some problems you have had or have heard about when using or trying to use the food assistance programs? (USDA)
- Are there certain stores where you feel more comfortable using SNAP / WIC benefits? Why?
- If you or someone you know runs out of food or money for food (or have in the past), where could you go for support? (Also probe for food assistance programs, food pantry, soup kitchen, etc.) Why? (USDA).

Information/Culture:

- Have you ever had to change or alter your meals due to not having the adequate foods or ingredients for meals? (Food Empowerment Project)
- How often do you come across unfamiliar produce? Do you think having them labeled in another language would be useful? What would the other languages be?
- Have you ever attended (or would you attend) a workshop on healthy food preparation? Why/why not? (Report on Community Connections Fair-Spanish Speaking)

Transportation:

- Can you go where you want to go when you want to?
- Do you currently take the bus? If not, why not? If so, to go where? What has been your experience?
- How long does it take you to get to the place where you buy your food?
- What is your primary form of transportation? What else do you have available to you (bike, car, rideshare, etc.)? Why might you not use some of those alternative options?
- Are there any programs that are working for you?
- If there were a voucher program for Uber or Lyft, would that be useful to you?
- Would you use a mobile market that went into your neighborhood?
- Is there a place that you go to regularly where it would be convenient to buy food?
- Do you feel that public transportation is easy to navigate?

