

Social Ecological Model

The Network uses as its theoretical underpinnings the Social Ecological Model (SEM). Please see Figure 5 on the next page for a diagrammatic representation of the SEM. The tools of social marketing, which will be described below, should be applied over the range of levels in the following description of SEM.

Individual

The SEM can be represented by an onion, with one level wrapping around another. At the center of the model is the **individual**. At this level, we consider the internal determinants of behavior, such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills. This is the foundational level, but the model recognizes that many external forces influence these individual determinants. In order to facilitate behavior change it is important to address these external forces.

Social Marketing Tools: personal sales, sales promotion, and consumer empowerment.

Interpersonal

The next level of SEM considers the first of these external forces, **interpersonal** processes. We all can appreciate how the influence of people close to us affects our behavior. In this level, we consider primary groups of social interaction such as family and friends. This is the level where social norms operate, although they are generated at the institutional and community levels. These primary interactions represent the associations that provide social identity and role definition. In many interpersonal relationships there are some individuals in social roles, which are seen as key decision makers. It should be noted that identifying these decision makers, or persons of influence, is important to facilitating individual behavior change. For instance, in an intervention targeting children, parents would be an important decision maker to involve in the intervention. Promotoras, in the Latina community would be another example of key opinion leaders. Family dynamics in your target audience should also be considered, such as families with only one parent or culture specific family roles.

Social Marketing Tools: personal sales, sales promotion, and consumer empowerment.

Institutional/Organizational

Institutions and organizations are composed of assemblies of primary interpersonal associations. Think of your workplace, your church, or a volunteer organization to which you belong. There often are small groups or cliques that develop, however, all operate under a common set of rules and policies that guide behavior. The **institutional/organization** level of SEM considers these rules and policies. Interventions at this level can have tremendous influence over individuals. Workplace interventions, faith-based programs, and school-based programs are examples of programming at this level. While this level certainly includes policy, this is different from the social structure, public policy level of the

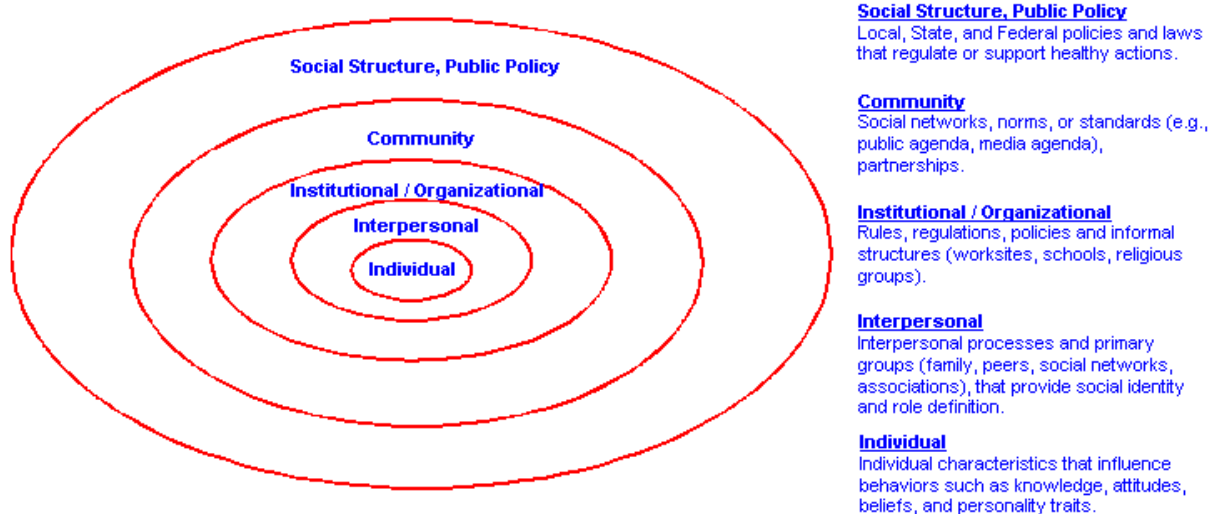
model. Consider for instance a program at a school or a workplace or a church, that with participant involvement, develops a food policy promoting good nutrition, by providing healthy snacks, including fruits and vegetables, and limiting the availability of junk food and soda at that site. This would be an example of an institutional/organizational intervention. An intervention at the social structure, public policy level might be a food policy for an entire school district.

(**Note:** developing and promoting policies, such as those just discussed, would be a very appropriate *Network* intervention to include in your SOW. However, the *Network* may not be able to provide funding for the actual implementation of the policy.

Social Marketing Tools: paid or public service advertising, publicity or public relations, and sales promotion.

Figure 5

A Social-Ecological Model for Nutrition Program Evaluation Spheres of Influence¹



¹McElroy KR, Bibeau D., Steckler A., Glanz K. "An ecological perspective on health promotion programs" *Health Education Quarterly* 15:351-377, 1988.

Community

The next level of SEM to consider is the **community**. This level includes all those individuals, businesses, institutions and organizations, which collectively comprise the larger societal fabric. These larger social constructs can be defined in many ways, such as by geographic location, membership in a particular group, or possession of certain beliefs that produce affiliations. For instance, there can be a community defined by a neighborhood. You can consider the African American or Latino community, or the community of health professionals. It is at

this level that many social norms and standards are generated. This is also an important level for setting the public agenda and developing partnerships. While individuals mediate work at this level, interventions targeting specific individual traits, or factors influencing behavior (described in the **individual** level), should not be confused with community level work. For example, a series of nutrition education classes, open to community members, would not be an example of a community level intervention. Such classes influence individual knowledge, attitudes, and behavior, not the larger social constructs encompassed by this level. Examples of interventions at this level, might include aggressive public relations and promotions aimed at setting the local media agenda, or the development of strong, functional partnerships with other organizations involved in promoting fruit and vegetable consumption and/or physical activity.

Social Marketing Tools: paid or public services advertising, publicity or public relations, sales promotion, partnerships, community-level policy, systems or environmental change, community empowerment/development, media advocacy.

Social Structure/Public Policy

Finally, the outermost level of SEM is the **social structure/ public policy** level. Public policy is defined as an authoritative decision made by a local, state, or federal governing body. Environmental change would be included in this level, as it is often achieved through policy decisions. Environmental change often involves a tangible change in a community or organization, whereas, social structural changes involve more normative or conceptual changes. This is the broadest level of the model and can influence all the other levels. The *Network* strongly encourages *LIA* contractors to include interventions targeted at this level of the model. While this can be seen as a daunting task, it is important to create sustainable change. There are a number of examples of qualifying social structure/public policy changes that *LIA* contractors can consider. You can plan to educate local elected officials about the importance of eating five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. You can support policies, through partnerships, that foster consumer empowerment, community development and environmental structures that promote fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. Please follow your agency or organization's guidelines for allowable policy activities. (**Note:** that while you can use your *Network* State Share budget to promote policy change, you may not be able to fund the implementation of policy decisions or engage in activities that can be categorized as lobbying).

Social Marketing Tools: policy, systems or environmental change.