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# *Partnering with Small Stores to Improve the Retail Environment*

Inland Desert Training & Resource Center, UC San Diego

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We are excited to have you as a participant in our webinar!

This packet contains two separate activities, tailored to webinar participants at different stages in their retail efforts. Choose and complete the activity that's best suited to where you are.

**Activity A: Interviewing a Storeowner (page 1)** is intended for webinar participants who are already working with small stores, and who have established an initial relationship with a storeowner.

**Activity B: Baseline Store Assessment (page 3)** is intended for webinar participants who are new to healthy retail efforts altogether, and who have not yet begun working with storeowners.

Please complete *either* Activity A *or* Activity B by Thursday, 3/5, and email your responses to Phebe Gibson ([pgibson@changelabsolutions.org](mailto:pgibson@changelabsolutions.org)), cc: Elle Mari, Inland Desert TRC ([emari@ucsd.edu](mailto:emari@ucsd.edu)).

You'll have an opportunity to share what you learned and observed during the webinar on March 10.

Contact Phebe Gibson ([pgibson@changelabsolutions.org](mailto:pgibson@changelabsolutions.org)) if any questions come up.

## **Activity A**

### **Interviewing a Storeowner**

*This activity is intended for webinar participants who are already working with small stores, and who have established an initial relationship with a storeowner. If you are new to working on retail efforts altogether, please skip this activity and complete Activity B: Baseline Store Assessment.*

#### **Purpose**

An in-store visit is one of the most important strategies for developing and maintaining relationships with a storeowner. The purpose of this activity is to engage a storeowner in a brief, in-person interview, in order to better understand what healthy items their store offers, the barriers storeowners face in stocking healthier options, and the kinds of assistance storeowners need.

#### **Directions**

Conduct an in-store visit with a storeowner who you have already established an initial relationship with. Use the prompts below to guide you through the conversation. The interview should take about 10 minutes to complete (though this may vary depending on how busy the store is).

#### *Introduction:*

While the storeowner should already be familiar with you, you should re-introduce yourself and remind him or her of the organization you're affiliated with. Be sure to tailor this introduction based on your relationship with storeowner. One opening line might be, "Hi, I'm [name] with [organization]. As you know, I'm interested in helping stores carry healthier foods. Do you have a couple minutes to talk?"

#### *Key Questions:*

1. What healthy foods do you already offer?
2. Where do you buy them?
3. What type of healthy foods would you be interested in carrying?
4. What's hard about carrying healthy food?
5. What would make it easier to carry healthy food?

*Closing*

Thank the storeowner for their time, and let them know how they can reach you if any other thoughts or questions come up. Again, tailor your closing message based on your relationship with the storeowner, and let them know of any next steps your program has identified.

*Tips for a smooth interview:*

- In-store visits should be conducted as close to the time the store opens as possible. This will give you the best chance of having the storeowner’s undivided attention.
- If possible, make a small purchase at the store. Doing so will provide a natural entry point for you to engage the storeowner in conversation, and will help ensure you have his or her undivided attention. If there are customers in line behind you, ask if it would be okay for you to stick around for a few minutes and to talk once there’s a lull in customers.
- Allow the storeowner to do most of the talking. The objective here is to strengthen the relationship by beginning to see things from the storeowner’s perspective.
- Your goal is to engage the storeowner in a conversation, and not make them feel as though they’re being interviewed or evaluated on the spot. Try memorizing the guiding questions and avoid bringing pen and paper into the store. Listen actively, and wait until you’re outside of the store to record notes.
- Once you leave the store, take a few minutes to write down the storeowner’s responses. In addition, note any other non-verbal takeaways from the conversation. Was the storeowner approachable and willing to engage with you? Did he or she seem particularly enthusiastic about an issue that was discussed?

Use this space to write down notes from the in-store interview.

**Activity B**  
**Baseline Store Assessment**

*This activity is intended for webinar participants who are new to healthy retail efforts altogether, and who have not yet begun working with storeowners.*

**Purpose**

The purpose of the baseline store assessment is to collect information that informs a healthy food retail program. This assessment occurs before a store owner is formally approached about participating in a program. It can also help public health advocates learn more about small store retail environments in their community.

**Directions**

The objective of the store readiness assessment is to spend 10-15 minutes browsing an entire store, observing the storeowner's interaction with customers, and making a small purchase. Making a purchase is a best practice, but it is not mandatory.

When you conduct the assessment, pose as a customer, dress casually and take mental notes. Do not carry survey materials with you. Once you leave the store, fill out the assessment as soon as possible away from the store. It is a good idea to memorize the survey questions before you enter the store.

The entire assessment should take 20-30 minutes.

**Assessment**

Store Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of person conducting the assessment: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Describe the outside of the store.**

What does it look like?

Is there a sign for the store name?

Are there advertisements or product signs in the window? If yes, what is being advertised?

**2. Describe the inside of the store.**

What's the first thing you notice when walking into the store?

How's the lighting inside the store? (Good lighting is helpful for produce sales)

Is the store clean? Are there stains or spills on the floor, shelves, or walls?

**3. Describe the product selection.**

What types of products are sold at this store (alcohol, tobacco, snack food, frozen foods, fresh/frozen fruits or vegetables, beverages, grocery items, merchandise)?

Are the products organized in a recognizable manner or does it seem the shelves are stocked randomly?

Are there sales prices or signs on the products?

Does the store accept EBT?

Does the store participate in WIC?

**4. Describe the owner, manager, or employees**

How many people appear to be working at the store?



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What's the customer interaction like? Do owners/managers appear to know customers by name? Do they engage customers in conversation or do they appear standoffish, uninterested, or distracted?

5. What did you purchase and how was your experience?

6. Please share any other notes you feel may help inform a healthy food retail program.