CHAMPIONS for CHANGE™

My Neighborhood, My Store

Building Community Leadership for Healthy Changes

For CalFresh information, call 1-877-847-3663. Funded by USDA SNAP-Ed, an equal opportunity provider and employer. Visit www.CaChampionsForChange.net for healthy tips.

Introduction

Meaningful community involvement is critical to the long-term success of healthy corner store conversions and helping corner stores thrive.

This fact sheet discusses many different ways that community members can influence healthy changes in small food stores, from program design to implementation. It also outlines the important role of local health department staff in reaching out to community members and supporting their work, over the course of a healthy corner store project.

Connecting with Community Members

It is essential to start strong with the community outreach phase of the healthy corner store project. Once you understand resident priorities, you can further refine your outreach strategy.

Advocates may initially become involved with a project in order to help improve health outcomes in underserved communities. But some neighbors may have different concerns, such as:

- Public safety and related issues like loitering, littering, and illegal sale of alcohol and tobacco to minors.
- High prices, limited selection, and poor quality products at the store.
- Seeking a different assortment of products in the store, such as ethnic specialty foods.
- Building a thriving local business district and supporting economic revitalization through small business development.

There are many approaches to connecting with community members and learning more about what they want to see in the corner store.

The most important tool for engaging residents is word of mouth—ideally, one resident talking to another—outside the store, at school, at work, or at church. Get residents talking to each other about their neighborhood store and how they would like it to change. Listen closely to what is said.

Many healthy corner store projects partner with community based organizations to make the first connections to neighbors. Here are some ways you can think "outside of the box" to reach out to residents:

- Contact community organizations that do not have a health focus. Youth-serving organizations, church groups, and neighborhood associations are all great places to meet residents and learn what changes they would like to see in the store.
- Ask local elected officials or the community development agency which community groups are active in the neighborhood around the store.
- Attend neighborhood meetings and ask if you can be added to the agenda to speak about the corner store project.
- Search the web for neighborhood listservs (like Yahoo! Groups and other e-lists) where you can connect with residents electronically.
- Look for community leaders by asking everyone you speak with to tell you who *else* you should be speaking to. In many neighborhoods, the most important

> It is worth taking time with the community outreach phase of the healthy corner store project.

community leaders are long-time residents who may not have formal connections to an organization, but are widely known in the community.

Do not overlook the store itself as a place for community outreach.

- With the store owner's permission, talk to residents as they shop or after they leave the store.
- Ask if the store owner would be willing to put up a bulletin board, or hand out flyers at the counter with information about your corner store project.

Getting to Work

Community residents are vital in all stages of healthy corner store conversion. Some residents will want to be involved at every stage of the project. Others may help with specific tasks during the project.

Consider what community members will get out of participating in the project. Many healthy corner store projects approach community engagement as a way to build the skills of residents to tackle projects in the future.

- Many projects offer transportation support or childcare to make it easier for residents to participate in activities.

- Projects may provide training on public speaking or surveying techniques.
- Some projects can offer stipends or salaries to residents, to compensate them for their time. For example, the *San Francisco Southeast Food Access project* employs community residents as Food Guardians, who get training and have become a driving force behind the project in the community.

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Project Design

In the early stages of project design, residents can conduct market research to assess the local food environment and the local demand for healthy changes in the store. Community residents can conduct market research surveys to understand the preferences of the store's customers (or potential customers).

- Market research is a great way to engage local organizations serving youth, who may be interested in skills building and leadership opportunities.
- A community food assessment, such as *CX*^{3} is a fantastic tool for identifying which corner stores might be good candidates for upgrades.
- You can find sample surveys at the *Network for a Healthy California Retail Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Guide* and the *Healthy Corner Stores Network*.

Consider developing simple ways for community residents to communicate with the store owner on an ongoing basis.

Consider developing simple ways for community residents to communicate with the store owner on an ongoing basis. By creating many different ways for residents to communicate with the store owner and for the owner to respond, you send the message that this store cares about its customers, which can create a positive feedback loop.

- Feedback can be quite simple, such as a suggestion box at the checkout counter, or a bulletin board in the store.

- A store owner could set up an email or Twitter account, and share that contact information with customers.
- In New York City, the *Adopt-a-Bodega program* distributed pre-addressed postcards to community organizations that could be delivered to the store with customer requests to stock favorite healthy foods.

Project Implementation

Once community residents have identified the changes they would like to see in the store, there are many different ways that residents can be involved in implementation of the project with the store owner's permission:

- Consider organizing a store clean-up day, if changes involve moving fixtures, painting, or other store upgrades.
- Ask residents to help fix up the outside storefront: removing advertising, replacing bars with more attractive security bars, washing windows, and installing new awnings.
- Consider partnering with a mural arts organization to brighten the outside of the store.

Together with community partners, you may be eligible to apply for new funding to support outside storefront ("façade") improvements. Contact your local economic development agency to learn about funding sources available in your area. Improvements to the outside storefront send a strong message to the community about the positive changes inside the store.

Community partners may have their own unique ideas about how to promote the healthy store project.

- Community residents can help get the word out about the healthy changes in the store through neighborhood listserves and e-lists (like Yahoo! Groups), newsletters, and local media.
- Many healthy corner store projects have engaged neighbors, often youth, in designing promotional materials (posters, flyers and shelf tags) to point out their new healthy choices.

- Consider organizing a celebration in front of the store and invite residents and community leaders.
- In Philadelphia, The Food Trust worked with a group of students to develop *a comic book about healthy snacking in corner stores.*

The most important way that the community can support changes at the store is by shopping there! Work with the store owner to develop innovative strategies to build customer loyalty.

- Stores can offer customer loyalty cards and promotions (such as "Buy 5, Get 1 Free") or frequent shopper discounts.
- Work with the store owner to solicit regular feedback on store changes, and to change the product mix to meet popular demand.

It may take time—but by involving the community in the corner store conversion project from the start, you will lay a strong foundation for the success of the project.

Youth Involvement in Healthy Corner Store Change

Young people have a special role to play in healthy corner store work. In many communities, kids and teenagers form a core customer base for the corner stores, so it is especially important to involve youth in making healthy changes.

Consider reaching out to youth-serving organizations, including after-school programs, recreation centers, and church youth groups. These groups can help design a curriculum that educates youth about why these changes matter, and builds leadership skills that young people can use in future projects.

Youth can participate in healthy corner store projects in many ways:

- Identify what kinds of food are and are not available in their neighborhood.
- Talk to neighbors about what kinds of changes they would like to see in the store.
- Ask the store owner to carry the kinds of healthy snacks, grab-and-go and deli items they would like to buy.
- Develop their own marketing ideas to promote the project to their peers.
- Grow produce at a community garden and sell it at the store.
- Paint a mural on the outside storefront.
- Plant flowers or trees in front of the store.

Local health departments can work with their youth-serving community partners to develop ideas and raise funds to support youth in playing a leadership role in healthy corner store work.

Resources

Community Food Assessment Resources

CX³ Food Availability and Marketing Survey
Survey examples, instructions, and other tools. (*CX³* stands for Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Prevention.)

http://www.cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Pages/CX3_Main_Navgation.aspx

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit
Includes guides for profiling general community characteristics and community food resources.

www.ers.usda.gov/publications/efan-electronic-publications-from-the-food-assistance-nutrition-research-program/efan02013.aspx#.Uhurlj8pgQs

Sample Customer Surveys

Retail Fruit and Vegetable Marketing Guide
Includes sample customer surveys.

http://cdph.ca.gov/programs/cpns/Documents/Retail%20FV%20Marketing%20Guide_5_060811_FINAL.pdf

Healthy Corner Stores Network
Includes surveys developed by healthy corner store initiatives around the country, which you can customize for your research.

www.healthycornerstores.org/tag/surveys

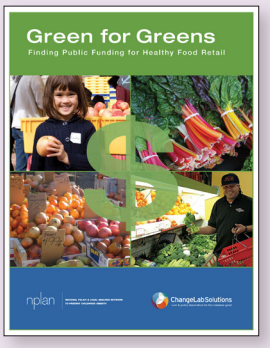
Funding Work With Community Partners

California FreshWorks Fund
http://www.cafreshworks.com

Healthy Food Financing Initiative
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/resource/healthy-food-financing-initiative-0

Green for Greens
Overview of economic development and ideas for how to approach economic development agencies with healthy food retail proposals.

www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/green-for-greens



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CDPH California Department of PublicHealth

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