



THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site

A Toolkit from Steps to Health that Helps Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice at Community Sites

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COVID-19 Disclaimer

Due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), Steps to Health encourages Extension professionals and other partners to consult with state and local health officials to determine whether and how to implement initiatives in this toolkit. For CDC guidance on community sites specifically: cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/community-based.html.

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Steps to Health, NCSU SNAP-Ed



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What IS STEPS TO HEALTH?

Steps to Health is NC State University's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program-Education (SNAP-Ed) program. Our program offers a comprehensive approach to improving health and nutrition outcomes for limited-resource people in North Carolina. First, in partnership with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, we teach nutrition education to youth and adults at qualifying locations. Second, we work to improve policies, systems, and environments (PSE) around healthy eating and active living. Our PSE initiatives are based on the many factors that influence what people eat and how they choose to be active. From access to healthy food to the walkability of communities, people adopt certain health behaviors for a variety of reasons. We work to positively influence the environments where people live, learn, work, shop, and play, so that the healthy choice becomes the easy choice.

Why THIS TOOLKIT?

Less than one-half of North Carolina adults get the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity per week. **Meanwhile, nearly one-third of adults in North Carolina are obese** and just **one-tenth meet the recommended vegetable intake each day**. Further, these statistics are disproportionately high in limited-resource communities. Many factors contribute to these high rates of obesity, like low intake of fruits and vegetables and physical inactivity. There are strategies that help create communities that are supportive of healthy behaviors. In addition to being places where people can learn about nutrition and physical activity through Steps to Health's Take Control nutrition education program, we want to help community sites create an environment that encourages and supports health and nutrition.

For the purposes of this toolkit, community sites include public housing developments, community centers, congregate nutrition sites, homeless or domestic violence shelters, and work sites. This could include staff, residents, people who eat meals at the site, or community members who regularly utilize site amenities.

The goal of this toolkit is to support community sites in creating healthier environments. This toolkit is for you, the Extension professional, and the purpose of the toolkit is to equip you to share best practices with your partners at community sites across North Carolina.



How to use this toolkit

This toolkit outlines a six-step process designed to assist with data collection, analysis, and action planning. The first and most important step in building healthier communities is for Extension professionals to establish a strong relationship with the site. This **partnership** will be the foundation for data collection, training, and other collaborative activities.

After identifying a site that is interested in creating a healthier environment, it is time to gather information about the site. A **baseline assessment** is included in this toolkit for the site and Extension professional to complete together. The assessment is quick and direct: either the site is implementing the healthy practice in question, or the site needs some improvement in that area.

The **resource guide** helps Extension professionals better understand why questions are included on the assessment, and how the site can improve its practices related to each question.

Once the baseline assessment is completed, the Extension professional can organize and lead **trainings** for community members or site staff as appropriate. This toolkit includes two trainings, *Cultivating Healthy Environments at Community Sites* and *Promoting Healthy Choices at Community Sites*. These trainings are designed to prepare sites to more fully understand how they can support their staff and community members in making healthy choices.

The next step is for the Extension professional to work with site leadership to develop an **action plan**, which is also included in this toolkit. No goals are too small, and sites can start with short-term goals and expand to longer-term ones as the partnership progresses.

When the Extension professional and site have completed all the components of the toolkit, it is time for **evaluation**. The same baseline assessment will also act as the follow-up assessment. We recommend that sites complete the follow-up assessment around six months after having completed the baseline assessment. All of this information will be useful to Steps to Health as we measure the impact of this toolkit in communities across North Carolina.

Baseline Assessment

Instructions: The following baseline assessment should be completed by the Extension professional (you, the data collector) by working closely with the site coordinator or manager to answer each question as accurately as possible. The results of the baseline assessment are designed to serve as a snapshot of the community site's environment and to guide future conversations about where there is potential to make improvements to assist community sites in creating an environment that makes healthy choices easier for staff, residents, and community members.



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BASELINE ASSESSMENT

Extension Professional: _____ Date of Assessment: _____

Site Name: _____

County: _____

Total number of people served per month: _____

	YES – The site is leading the way!	NO – There's room for improvement!
1. Does the community site have an active health committee?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 1 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
2. Does the community site implement guidelines on food and beverages that are served in meetings or during activities?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 1 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
3. Does the community site adapt its hours of operation to improve access to and convenience of programs and facilities?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 2 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
4. Are there on-site physical activity facilities that are open to community members outside of regular hours?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 2 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
5. Does the community site offer staff members accessible and free or low-cost physical activity programs?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 3 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
6. Does the community site offer staff members accessible and free or low-cost health and nutrition programs?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 3 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
7. Does the community site partner with local groups to promote and provide healthy activities for community members?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 3 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
8. Is water framed as the beverage of choice at the community site?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 4 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
9. Has the community site improved appeal, layout, or display of foods to encourage consumption of healthy foods?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 4 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
10. Has the community site improved facilities or equipment to accommodate healthier options?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 4 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
11. Do staff and volunteers model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors at the community site?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 5 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
12. Does the community site provide daily physical activity opportunities for community members?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 6 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
13. Is there a garden at the community site?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 6 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site

Resource Guide

The following guide provides resources and best practices to assist community sites in creating an environment that makes healthy choices easier. The sections in the guide directly correspond with the baseline assessment.





1

SECTION 1: Health Policies and Health Committees

Health committees are comprised of individuals at a community site who are interested in improving nutrition, health, and wellness for community members and staff. These committees can be organized in a variety of different ways and might go by different names, such as “health advisory boards” or “wellness committees.” Community site users, staff and other partners who care about the health of community members can be involved in the health committee. Forming a health committee at a community site can help to identify, implement, and promote healthy behaviors. Having an active health committee will help create an environment where staff and community members can be healthy, active, and engaged. We recommend that health committees are made up of individuals with diverse backgrounds and roles at the site and community partners.

How to Start a School Health Committee

Step 1: Build the Foundation

If a community site is interested in establishing a health committee, they can start by identifying a few champions who are passionate about nutrition and health to organize the committee. This small group can work together to build a list of additional individuals who (1) have a passion for health, (2) can influence the community, and (3) have time to commit to supporting the committee’s goals.

Step 2: Recruit Committee Members

After building their list of potential team members, it is time for the small group to contact the people on the list. Health committees generally consist of about 4–8 members, so the recruitment goal should be within that range. The group can then draft an invitation to join the health committee. The invitation can include an explanation of why the site is forming a health committee, what they hope to achieve, and an overview of the schedule and time commitment involved.

Step 3: Plan a Meeting

Once the health committee is formed, the group can set up its first meeting. Some tasks that the committee might address during the first few meetings include:

- Completing the baseline assessment in this toolkit to assess the site environment.
- Developing, expanding, or implementing health and nutrition policies at the community site.
- Talking with relevant stakeholders about community health and wellness.
- Identifying goals and objectives with the action plan included in this toolkit.

How to Create Written Health Policies

Community sites can create official policies that guide their efforts to promote health and wellness. When community sites have these policies on file, they are better able to shape the environment so that the healthy choice becomes the easy choice.

Templates for wellness and physical activity policies are also available from **Eat Smart Move More NC**.

Depending on the community site, their role might be to offer meals in a cafeteria, host meetings and programming, or provide access to snacks in vending machines. Establishing healthy policies and norms around the foods and beverages that are consumed at the site can lead to **healthier choices for staff, visitors and community members**. In addition to creating new policies, Extension professionals can work with sites to implement policies that may be on file, but are not currently being enforced.

Developing Policies around Healthy Meetings and Other Gatherings

When it comes to creating healthy environments during meetings and other gatherings, community sites can employ a range of strategies. Drafting, documenting, promoting, and adhering to site-wide policies is the most effective way to ensure that healthy food and beverages are provided at meetings and gatherings. North Carolina Eat Smart, Move More published **Healthy Meeting Guidelines** that outline how to host healthy meetings and gatherings.

General recommendations for sites hosting meetings or gatherings include:

- Support healthier choices, provide leadership and role modeling, and help to create a social norm around healthier choices and behaviors.
- Offer nutritious food and beverage options.
- Place healthier foods and beverages in prominent positions, where they are more likely to be seen and more likely to be chosen.
- Provide reasonable portions of foods and beverages (i.e., avoid serving large portions).
- Consider physical activity at breaks.
- Offer physical activity opportunities that promote physical activity each day.



How can Steps to Health help?

In addition to working with stakeholders to develop goals and an action plan around health committees and policies at community sites, Steps to Health can also:

1. Work with staff to promote nutrition and physical activity policies once they have been established.
2. Partner with site staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders to start a health committee.
3. Communicate health policies to community members, staff, and visitors.



SECTION 2: Physical Activity and Shared Use

According to the **Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans**, regular physical activity reduces the risk for obesity, hypertension, and other health issues. Research by the **CDC** indicates that the way a community is designed can play a role in how active its residents are. Physical activity may be easier to incorporate into a daily routine for people who can safely and conveniently walk to their destinations rather than those who need to constantly drive to their destinations.



In communities where it is safe and convenient, wayfinding signage can encourage people to walk or bike to everyday destinations. Wayfinding involves using landmarks, signs, pathways, and markers to guide pedestrians to local attractions and businesses. Community sites can use simple wayfinding signs as a tool to encourage people to walk from their site to local amenities, like schools, the library, or the park. For example, a sign at a community site could read “It’s a five-minute walk to the library.” If local coalitions or the local government are considering wayfinding in the community, a community site could ask to be included as a destination that is highlighted

using these signs. The steps to developing a wayfinding system are outlined in *Move More North Carolina: A Guide to Wayfinding*.

Additionally, when there are accessible, safe spaces for walking or other physical activity in a community, a community site can offer encouragement for people to be more active, through strategies like creating walking routes or leading physical activity challenges (more details in Section 6).

For communities that have limited accessible space for safe and convenient physical activity, local community sites may be able to offer options. Sometimes, community sites have spaces dedicated to physical activity, like a gym or a walking trail. If these facilities have specific hours of operation or scheduled programming, it is impactful to make efforts for these hours to be accessible and convenient for all. Soliciting feedback from community members is a great way to determine preferred hours of operation or even types of programs to offer.



In addition to gyms, trails, and other sites dedicated to physical activity, a site may have an open field, sidewalks, or other spaces that could be used for this purpose. Typically, there are times throughout the day that these facilities are not being used. One strategy to increase utilization of available facilities while improving access to physical activity spaces in the community is called shared use.

Shared use

“Shared use” is a general term describing a situation where an institution or organization, such as a school, allows people outside that institution or organization to use its property, typically in a recreational context.

The Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods (PRCHN) developed a **Shared Use Policy Implementation Guide** that offers strategies, guidelines, and resources to prepare and organize opportunities for shared use within the community. Since all communities are different, it is important to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all method for developing a shared use agreement or policy.

In all cases, the inclusion of community members is a critical step in the planning for shared use initiatives. Community engagement involves identifying local partners and key stakeholders to (1) build support for the initiative; (2) provide education for the community; (3) generate financial support and resources; (4) increase potential impact; and (5) ensure sustainability. Stakeholders can be community site staff members or residents, as well as representatives from businesses, non-profits, faith-based sites, school districts, and community members.

When drafting a shared use policy, it is very important to tailor the policy to the community. Shared use policies or agreements should outline terms and conditions for sharing the use of their facilities. A shared use policy can be as simple as a pledge signed by the property or facility owner which describes the rules and logistics for sharing space. A **shared use policy template** can be a useful place to start when creating or adapting a policy for a community site.

Once a site establishes a shared use arrangement, programming and promotion are key to ensuring that community members take advantage of the facilities. PRCHN also offers a **Guide for Promoting Shared Use** that provides tips for developing a promotional plan using materials like signs, flyers, and social media. When promoting shared use, sites should highlight key information, including:

Who: Who is the organization that is offering the shared use space?

What: What type of space is the site offering? Sites should be specific—is the space suitable for fitness, cooking, or other community programs?

When: When is the space available?

Where: Where is the space located?

Why: If the site has specific community goals or organizational priorities driving the shared use program, they can let community members know.

How: Sites can consider providing contact information in the initial promotions.

How can Steps to Health help?

In addition to working with stakeholders to develop goals and an action plan around increasing physical activity and creating shared use agreements, Steps to Health can also:

1. Provide signage to promote physical activity or shared use of community site facilities. Extension professionals can contact sth-administration@ncsu.edu for more information about available funding.
2. Assist community sites in promoting opportunities for physical activity, such as shared use facilities, throughout the local community.
3. Organize community activities that promote physical activity and make use of the community site's facilities.





3

SECTION 3: Community Engagement

Community engagement is essential to promoting initiatives that improve health and wellness. In order to increase engagement, community sites can partner with local organizations and coalitions. In addition to working with Steps to Health and Cooperative Extension, sites can partner with local nonprofits, county health departments, or hospitals to implement health and wellness initiatives. Often, these groups are able to host free or low-cost nutrition and physical activity programs or other events for community members.

In addition to health and wellness programming, site-wide physical activity challenges are a great way to improve engagement. Sites can consider hosting fitness challenges or walking buddy programs with community members and staff. **WorkWell NC** offers a number of free worksite wellness challenge resources that can be adapted for any community site.

In order to incorporate community voices in a meaningful way, community members themselves should be involved in decision-making processes. Creating a system to gather feedback from community members about the types of programming or activities they would like helps ensure that site offerings represent the desires of the community. One way to involve community members in the decision-making process is to invite them to participate in a health committee (more details in Section 1).

How can Steps to Health help?

In addition to working with stakeholders to develop goals and an action plan around community engagement, Steps to Health can also:

1. Connect sites with potential community partners to offer health and wellness programming or resources.
2. Connect sites with EFNEP programming and resources.
3. Teach Steps to Health's direct education program for adults called Take Control, an eight-week chronic disease prevention program that provides strategies to help adults manage their health.
4. Encourage community sites to invite community members to participate in the site's health committee or the action planning conversations associated with this toolkit.
5. Help Extension professionals create surveys that focus on what community members are interested in addressing at the community site.



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SECTION 4: Promoting Healthy Choices

Most community sites serve food and beverages in some capacity. Sites might sell or provide food in a cafeteria setting, with vending machines, or as snacks during formal programs. Other times, food and beverages are available in a less formal and consistent way, such as for meetings or special events. In all of these situations, sites can implement a variety of strategies that help promote healthier choices.

People consider many factors when deciding what to eat. Sometimes we base choices on factors such as taste, preference, availability, culture, or affordability. Other times our decisions are influenced by cues such as signage, colors, packaging, and product placement. Research by **Cornell University and Feeding America** found that by changing these factors, it is possible to influence the choices people make. Making these subtle environmental changes is often referred to as nudges.

The following examples are ways to implement nudges and make it easier to choose healthy foods:

1. Make healthy foods convenient

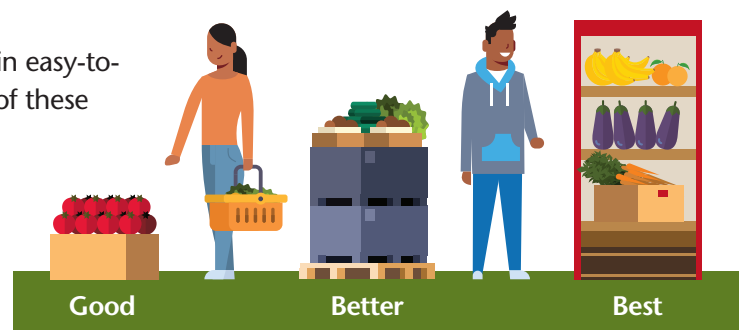
Product placement plays an important role in the likelihood of an individual selecting that item. In order to encourage people to take more of the healthy food and less of

the unhealthy food, sites can place the healthy options, such as fruits and vegetables, in more prominent locations. If people serve themselves by going through a buffet line, fruits and vegetables should be at the front

of the line, and desserts can be placed at the end of the line. Generally, people will begin to fill up their plates with the first options they pass, which will ideally be the healthiest options.

Placing healthy food at eye level and in easy-to-reach locations encourages selection of these items.

Increasing the number of times and locations that a food item is offered, a strategy known as multiple exposures, is another way to increase the likelihood that an individual will choose that item. For example, staff could place a basket of apples at the front of the line and as a centerpiece on tables, or at the front desk and near the exit.



Another technique includes managing portion sizes. This can be done by pre-portioning fruits and vegetables for a fast, easy snack, or by simply reducing the size of a serving spoon.

Offering water in the lobby, during meetings or events, and anytime food is served is a simple way to encourage water consumption. Similarly, it is a good idea to make sure fruits and vegetables are available any time meals or snacks are served. Guidelines like these could be included in a site-wide policy documents developed by a health committee (more details in Section 1).

2. Make less healthy foods inconvenient

On the other hand, product placement can also be used to discourage unhealthy choices. Placing less healthy foods, like baked goods, on the lower shelves, behind other foods, or making them “by request only” can subtly discourage overconsumption of these items. Another option is to decrease the amount or variety of unhealthy options entirely.

3. Make healthy foods appealing

In order to make healthy food more attractive, sites can make simple upgrades to displays, such as placing produce in display baskets. It could also be as simple as making sure any spoiled or rotten produce is removed from displays.

Signage is another important tool for influencing choices. Sites can display colorful, attractive signs near healthy food that highlight healthy items or point out health benefits. It is important to consider the literacy level of people who will be reading the signs. Similarly, if the site serves non-English speakers, they should make efforts to have signs available in multiple languages. Signage is a strategy that can also be used to nudge physical activity, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Staff or volunteers can be trained to gently encourage and promote the healthy options, and all staff can use the power of healthy modeling (more details in Section 5).

Sites could also use stickers or labels to help visually identify healthy choices. For example, green stickers could indicate the options to consume often; yellow could represent the options that should be consumed sometimes; and red could indicate options to choose rarely. For a simpler system, a single icon, such as a star, could be used to draw attention to the healthy options.



Healthy Vending Machines

Many of these strategies, such as placing healthy options at eye level or using labels to identify healthy choices, can also be used in vending machines. The American Heart Association offers a comprehensive look at how to make the transition to healthier vending machines in their **Healthy Community Food and Beverage Toolkit**.



Ideas for healthy, non-refrigerated snacks for vending machines include:

- Popcorn (fat-free or low-fat)
- Whole grain cereal bar
- Whole grain crackers
- Rice cakes
- Pretzels
- Nuts and seeds
- Fruit cup in fruit juice
- Jerky (low sodium)
- 100% fruit juice or low-calorie/no calorie beverages

Plain water is the best beverage to highlight in healthy vending efforts, but sparkling/seltzer water (no added sugar), and fat-free or low-fat dairy are other options that could be promoted.

How can Steps to Health help?

In addition to working with stakeholders to develop goals and an action plan around promoting healthy food and beverage choices, Steps to Health can also:

1. Provide signage that helps encourage healthy choices. See Appendix for examples of available Steps to Health signage.
2. Offer assistance with the implementation of nudges. Extension professionals can work with their Regional Nutrition Extension Associates (RNEAs) for help brainstorming possible interventions for the site.



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SECTION 5: Healthy Modeling

Incorporating nutrition and physical activity into conversations at community sites is one way to encourage people to make healthy choices.

One way to reinforce the healthy messaging is by placing reminders and promotional materials about healthy foods and how to be physically active on the community site's walls and shared spaces. Any visual reminders or cues that encourage people to eat healthy and be physically active might be helpful in sending a clear, consistent message.

Healthy modeling means that staff and volunteers are deliberate about what they choose to eat and drink in front of people. How staff and volunteers react to or engage in physical activity can also influence people's mindsets. For example, when staff and volunteers drink water during their time at the site (even if they drink other beverages at other times), they are demonstrating how important it is to get enough water each day.

For those staff or volunteers who help serve meals at the site, they can encourage people to take healthy selections. They can also discuss the different food options and promote healthy foods and beverages. Engaging people in conversations about the food served at the site can highlight and normalize healthy eating.

As healthy models, staff and volunteers can:

- Eat healthy food in front of each other.
- Pack a healthy lunch and invite others to eat with them during meal time.
- Drink water in front of each other.
- Talk to others about their own physical activity (like sharing that they walked that day, went to the gym, or rode their bike).
- Encourage site leadership to serve healthy food and beverage options at meetings and celebrations.
- Pair up with another staff member or volunteer and walk outside or through the hallways.



How can Steps to Health help?

In addition to working with stakeholders to develop goals and an action plan around healthy modeling by staff and volunteers, Steps to Health can also:

1. Act as healthy role models. Extension professionals can be mindful to drink water and consume healthy foods when they are at the site or with participants.
2. Promote healthy foods that are served at the site.
3. Engage in physical activity alongside participants.
4. Discuss healthy behaviors in an effort to normalize eating healthy and staying active.
5. Steps to Health may be able to help with incentives or rewards.





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SECTION 6: Site Amenities

On-site gardening

Community gardens provide an opportunity for people to learn more about fresh food, health, and physical activity. Gardening regularly encourages people to move and can offer stress relief, all while increasing access to fresh vegetables, herbs, and fruit. Incorporating gardening activities at a community site may engage people and facilitate conversations about nutrition, physical activity, and wellness.

Eat Smart Move More NC's toolkit **Growing Communities Through Gardens** is a great starting place for any site interested in establishing a garden. For those sites that do not have access to the space or resources necessary to build and maintain a garden, container gardening might be a viable option. NC State Extension has all the information about where to start and how to build a container garden for edible plants on their **resource page**. Extension professionals can also collaborate with Extension Master Gardeners and horticulture agents when they are establishing gardening activities. Whether keeping small plants indoors or building several garden beds, gardening activities are a great addition to community sites.



Physical activity opportunities

Even for community sites with few resources, it is possible to offer opportunities for people to take part in physical activity. Hosting regular physical activity events at the community site can help encourage people to move more. When there are group activities or events that utilize site amenities, people can build community while also taking part in healthy behaviors at the site. While grants or other outside funding might be available to invest in infrastructure to increase physical activity, many activities do not require outside resources. Some examples are walking routes, physical activity challenges, and other habit-building challenges. Steps to Health has free resources available for caregivers and youth at www.ncstepstohealth.org.

Walking Routes

Communities Moving Together is a resource from Steps to Health and Faithful Families, Thriving Communities that highlights how to establish a walking route around or near a community site. Even without a track, a site can map and measure a walking route and mark the distance. For example, the site could determine how far it is to walk around the entire building, or the whole block, and then let people know how many laps would be equal to one mile. Then, they could host a weekly group where people walk one or more miles. Walking groups can also be hosted in a gymnasium, or in the halls of a community center.

Physical Activity Challenge

Community sites can create and promote different physical activity challenges to engage people and build excitement. A walking challenge is generally accessible to most people. Sites can encourage people to walk daily for a certain duration of time and track their progress, or complete a virtual walk across North Carolina through a team-based challenge. Sites can adapt walking challenges to their needs, but these are a great way to encourage people to move more and to build in accountability to one another. **WorkWell NC** has more information on a variety of physical activity challenges and information about how to start **walking challenges** specifically.



Habit-building Challenge

Another kind of challenge the site can host is a habit-building challenge. Healthy habits or behaviors can include drinking enough water throughout the day, taking the stairs, or getting enough sleep. Individuals on their own might have trouble adopting these habits, but if the site creates a healthy-habit challenge, then people can be part of a group as they try to change behavior. For example, the site could encourage drinking eight glasses of water per day.

The staff can track their progress and discuss challenges and successes with one another. The site can add different habits, or lengthen the challenge, or even offer prizes for incentives. Sites can ask staff and other groups what kinds of challenges they might be interested in and begin with those.

How can Steps to Health help?

In addition to working with stakeholders to develop goals and an action plan around gardening and other activities at the site, Steps to Health can also:

1. Share gardening resources with the community site, and connect the site with funding resources as they become available.
2. Assist site partners with creating a walking route at or near the community site.
3. Offer Steps to Health funded signage to the community site that directs participants to amenities or events. Extension professionals can contact Elizabeth Gerndt at sth-admin@ncsu.edu for more information about available funding.
4. Engage with site participants to create a fun challenge to encourage healthy behaviors.
5. Work with RNEAs to coordinate efforts with EFNEP, 4-H agents, horticulture agents, and other community.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site

Training Series Overview

Overview

This training series is designed for use with community site staff and volunteers, as well as any stakeholders with an interest in making the community site a healthier place for all. Extension professionals can organize and present these trainings at community sites during or after their direct education programs. These presentations are structured as “Lunch ‘n’ Learn” trainings, which means they can be taught over a thirty-minute lunch or during half an hour of down time. Of course, these trainings can be scheduled any time—after programs, at board meetings, during another training, or after hours—but they are meant to be relatively brief and to encourage engagement and conversation around a set of nutrition and health topics as they relate to a particular community site.

The training series consists of two modules, and each module includes opportunities for discussion. The series is designed to offer flexibility in delivery based on the needs of the site. Each module is approximately thirty minutes, depending on the amount of time allocated for discussion and interaction among staff and volunteers.

The first training, *Cultivating Healthy Environments at Community Sites*, aims to define food and physical activity environments, offers examples of how to make community sites healthier, and outlines ways that staff and volunteers can act as healthy models for visitors and community members. The second training, *Promoting Healthy Choices at Community Sites*, is geared toward staff and volunteers and covers how to make the healthy choice the easy choice at community sites.

PREPARATION

Before scheduling these trainings, we strongly encourage Extension professionals to connect with site leaders or other advocates in the community. Including staff members, volunteers, administrators, and other stakeholders will enrich the discussion and engagement during these trainings. For each training, Extension professionals will distribute action item cards to all training participants. These action item cards can be found immediately following this section, before the speaker notes and slides for the trainings.

We encourage Extension professionals to spend time reviewing the training materials before meeting with and offering the trainings at the community site. If there are questions about the trainings, Extension professionals can reach out their Regional Nutrition Extension Associate (RNEA).

Training 1. Cultivating Healthy Environments at Community Sites

Estimated Duration:
30 minutes

Key Messages

- Improving the site's food and physical activity environments is an important way to improve health and wellness of for staff, visitors, and community members.
- Food and physical activity environments are all around us, and we can use our knowledge to make the healthy choice the easy choice, at home and at community sites.
- Community site staff and volunteers can model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors to create a healthy environment at the site.
- Staff members are seen as role models, so actively demonstrating and encouraging healthy behaviors can affect people's adoption of healthy behaviors.

Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Understand the variety of factors that influence what we choose to eat
- Define food environments and physical activity environments and three different ways to influence them (policy, system, environment)
- Learn strategies to improve food and physical activity environments at a community site
- Understand the importance of healthy modeling and be able to list several examples

Materials and Supplies

- ☐ One action item card per participant
- ☐ Flip chart (optional)

Handout

Food Environments
and Example
Strategies



Steps to Health THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site
TRAINING 1 Cultivating Healthy Environments at Community Sites

Factors that influence what we eat

ACCESSIBILITY	AVAILABILITY	CONVENIENCE	CULTURE
Finances, proximity, geography, transportation	Kitchen, store, school, work	Transportation, time, ease	Familiarity, skills, taste, schedule

What is a food environment?

The food environment is:

- The physical presence of food that affects a person's diet
- A person's proximity to food store locations
- The distribution of food stores, food service, and any physical entity by which food may be obtained
- A connected system that allows access to food

Slide 1



Introduction

Steps to Health is NC State University's SNAP-Education program. The goal of Steps to Health is to improve the likelihood that limited resource people will make healthy food choices and choose physically active lifestyles. Steps to Health teaches nutrition education at this site, and we also work to make the healthy choice the easy choice when it comes to nutrition and physical activity.

Slide 2



Overview of presentation

Today we're going to talk about what factors influence what we eat. We'll talk about how to make healthy eating easier at community sites. We'll also define a *food or physical activity environment* and we'll talk about how to shape these environments so that everyone at community sites can choose to eat healthier and move more.

Lastly we'll discuss how site staff and volunteers can model healthy behaviors for visitors and community members. When staff and volunteers highlight and reinforce healthy behaviors, they can make the site environment healthier for everyone.

Slide 3



What did you eat for breakfast?

To start, I would like each of you to think about what you ate for breakfast this morning.

What are some examples of what you ate?

Extension professional can write breakfast items on flip chart paper if they have it.

Examples: Eggs and toast; sausage or bacon; cereal; granola bar; nothing; smoothie; fruit; nuts; yogurt; leftovers; oatmeal.

Okay, now that we know what you ate for breakfast, let's talk about *why* you chose what you did.

continued

Slide 3 continued

What are some of the reasons that you ate that particular food for breakfast?

Extension professional can write answers on flip chart paper if they have it.

Examples: Easily accessible in the kitchen or pantry; had it on hand; convenient; can drive and eat at the same time; keeps me full; holds me over until lunch; comfort food; can pick it up on the way to work; nutritious.

Slide 4

Factors that influence what we eat			
ACCESSIBILITY	AVAILABILITY	CONVENIENCE	CULTURE
Finances, proximity, geography, transportation	Kitchen, store, school, work	Transportation, time, ease	Familiarity, skills, taste, schedule

Steps to Health | MC ESSE | www.steps-to-health.org | A Healthy Community Site

Factors that influence what we eat

Share out some reasons written on the second list.

Now, we listed out why you chose to eat what you did this morning. Really, what we were listing were some of the factors that influence what people choose to eat. Food choices are not always based solely on our knowledge of nutrition and what is healthy. There are many other factors that influence what we choose to eat each day which have little to do with what we know about nutrition and health.

Here's the key to our approach: We not only want to identify the variety of factors that determine what we eat, we want to *influence* those factors so that eating healthier is easier for everyone.

For example, if you need a breakfast that is convenient to eat on the road, you might choose to pick up a breakfast sandwich from a fast food chain. Our goal then would be to suggest an alternative breakfast choice, say, whole wheat toast with peanut butter and bananas, that is just as convenient to pack up and easy to eat in the car, but is a healthier choice than a breakfast sandwich.

So we might encourage you to make sure that you have a loaf of whole wheat bread in your pantry and bananas and a full jar of peanut butter in your cupboard at the beginning of the week. This is an example of how healthy food could meet the need of convenience. We want to set people up for success when it comes to making the healthy choice, which can require changing what is convenient and easy to eat in the home, on the road, or elsewhere.

Slide 5



What is a food environment?

What is a food environment? The food environment is the physical presence of food that affects a person's diet, a person's proximity to food store locations, the distribution of food stores, food service, and any physical entity by which food may be obtained, or a connected system that allows access to food. For example, your kitchen is a food environment. To make this environment healthier, you could leave a bowl of fruit on the counter, where you are more likely to choose to eat fruit for a snack.

What are some other things you could do to make your food environment healthier?

Examples: Keep less healthy snacks out of sight in a cupboard and healthier snacks in view; practice mindful eating; store food in serving-size containers so they're easier to grab.

These are all examples of how to change the food environment to make healthy eating easier and more likely. There are a lot of places to make change if we want to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

Now we want to go beyond discussing how to alter food and physical activity environments on an individual level, and dive into how to do that in community sites specifically. Our approach to making community sites healthier places includes policy, systems, and environmental change strategies, or PSE. We'll go into each topic in a little more detail now.

Slide 6



How to use policy to influence the food environment

Policies are *written* statements of a position, decision, or course of action. Community sites might have site-wide health policies or committees. The policies in the document can positively influence the food and physical activity environments at the site.

continued

Slide 6 continued

What might be some examples of written policies that can encourage healthy choices at community sites? Do you have any of these policies in place now?

Examples: Establish nutrition policies for mealtimes; regulate food sold in vending machines; create rules on foods served in meetings or in programs; ensure free drinking water is available during meals; draft policies to promote a physically active lifestyle; establish guidelines for family and community engagement in physical activity opportunities at the site; ensure that site leaders are incorporating physical activity breaks during programs or meetings.

Slide 7



How to use system changes to influence the food environment

A system change is an *unwritten, ongoing*, organizational decision or change that results in new activities or new ways of conducting business that reach large proportions of people.

Can you think of any systems changes that might impact nutrition or physical activity at the community site? What have you done to affect the food environment?

Examples: Offer water at all events; increase healthy options in cafeterias; hold walking challenges to encourage physical activity.

Slide 8



How to use environmental changes to influence the food environment

We just discussed environments a little bit, but the environment includes the built or physical environments, which are visible or observable.

Other than the changes we've already discussed, can anyone identify examples of possible environmental changes at community sites? What have you done at this site?

Examples: Promote healthy menu items in desirable locations and good lighting; focus on healthy mealtimes; improve the display of healthy options; model healthy behaviors; start a community garden; implement active transport programs.

Slide 9



What is a physical activity environment?

A physical activity environment is any place where it's possible to engage in physical activity. It's important that being physically active is easy and accessible for people. Sites can implement strategies to encourage physical activity. As with food environments, we can change and improve spaces to make physical activity easier and more appealing for everyone, including residents, staff, and volunteers.

Slide 10



Why is PSE work important in community sites?

Like we talked about with the breakfast example and the kitchen example, even when we know what the healthy choice is, we don't—or can't—always make it. Convenience, access, cost, and many other factors influence what we eat, even if we know how important it is to consume a healthy diet. That's why improving food environments and using PSE strategies are excellent ways to complement and enhance direct nutrition education. Our hope is that these strategies will help create personal and community site environments where making that choice is not only possible, but easy. Additionally, those that work at a site can also be helpful in making the healthy choice the easy choice.

Slide 11



What is healthy modeling?

Healthy modeling is a chance for site staff to subtly teach about healthy eating and physical activity behaviors. Whether staff members realize it or not, visitors and community members take note of their actions. Since visitors and community members might be looking to staff and volunteers for information about health or nutrition, it's important that they see site staff and volunteers showing and sharing healthy behaviors as often as possible.

continued

Slide 11 continued

Healthy modeling is all about being deliberate about the choices that site staff and volunteers make in front of students.

What are some examples of healthy behaviors that site staff members can model in front of others?

Examples: Drinking water instead of soda; eating fruit as a snack during programming; using a reusable water bottle instead of a disposable bottle; eating and praising healthy foods served in the cafeteria or during programming; encouraging people to try new foods; encouraging people to eat fruits or vegetables at meal times; walking around the site grounds for physical activity; taking part in physical activity breaks during meetings or programming.

Slide 12



Why is healthy modeling at community sites important?

Healthy modeling just means that when staff members are in front of participants, they drink water and make other healthy choices.

That's why healthy modeling is so important! People are always learning new things about what is healthy and what is good for their bodies, not just during classes or programs. They are soaking up their environments and taking cues from those around them. For example, if I eat an apple and talk about how delicious apples are, that could influence people in my classes to eat more apples, or fruits generally.

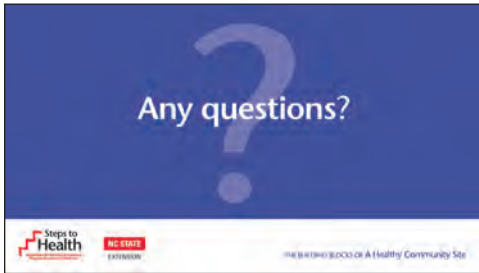
Slide 13



More healthy modeling strategies

Having site staff and volunteers model a set of behaviors is one way to encourage a healthy site environment. Another way to reinforce the healthy messaging is by filling the site walls with reminders and promotional materials about which foods are healthy and how to be physically active. Any visual reminders or cues that might encourage people to eat healthy and be physically active will be helpful in sending a clear, consistent message about healthy behaviors.

Slide 14



Questions about healthy modeling

We've finished the summary of what healthy modeling is and why it's important.

Does anyone have any questions about healthy modeling or anything we've covered today?

If there aren't any more questions, I invite you all to write down on your action item card one way to make your site environment healthier, and one healthy behavior you will model. You can write more than one, but this is meant to be a reminder of today's discussion and a reminder of what a large role you can play in helping people to eat healthier and be more physically active.

Training participants can share what they wrote if they like.

Thank you so much for your participation!

Training 2. Promoting Healthy Choices at Community Sites

Estimated Duration:
30 minutes

Key Messages

- Understand the concept of nudges and be able to identify subtle environmental changes that can influence the choices people make around food and physical activity.
- Identify opportunities to use signage to increase healthy food choices at community sites.
- Internalize key concepts around healthy vending initiatives that may be relevant at community sites.

Objectives

Participants will be able to:

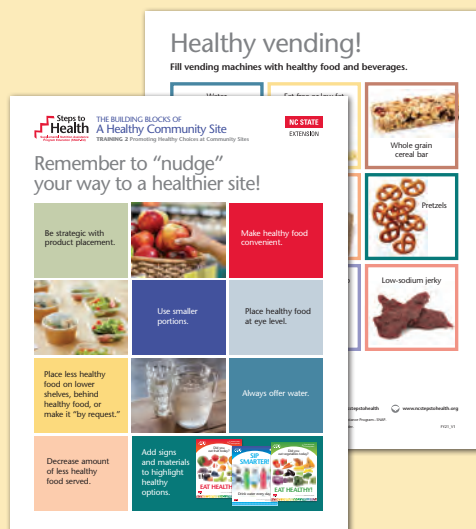
- Recall ways nudges can be used to influence food choices at a particular community site
- Consider how healthy vending initiatives could be implemented at a community site

Materials and Supplies

- ☐ One action item card per participant
- ☐ Flip chart (optional)

Handout

Promoting Healthy Choices at Community Sites



Slide 1



Note: In the following talking points, Extension professionals can replace “community site” with the name of the site where they are working.

Introduction

Steps to Health is NC State University’s SNAP-Education program. The goal of Steps to Health is to improve the likelihood that limited resource people will make healthy food choices and choose physically active lifestyles. Steps to Health teaches nutrition education at this site, and we also work to make the healthy choice the easy choice when it comes to nutrition and physical activity.

Slide 2



Overview of presentation

Today we’re going to talk about how we can make changes at community sites that promote healthy choices. First, we’ll discuss what we mean by “nudges” and how we can change the way that we serve and offer food to encourage healthy choices. Then, we’ll talk about how to integrate signage and promotional materials at a community site to reinforce healthy behaviors. Lastly, we’ll briefly summarize several ways that healthy vending initiatives can be beneficial for community sites.

Slide 3



Food served at community sites

Most community sites serve food and beverages in some capacity.

What kind of food is available at this community site?

Allow participants to respond.

Depending on the participants’ responses, the Extension professional can share the following ways that food might be served at community sites generally:

Sites might sell or provide food in a cafeteria setting, with vending machines, or as snacks during formal programs. Other times, food and beverages are available in a less formal and consistent way, such as at meetings or special events.

continued

Slide 3 continued

Whatever the situation at the site, staff and volunteers can implement a variety of strategies that help promote healthier choices.

Slide 4



Nudges

People use all sorts of information to decide what to eat. Sometimes we base choices on factors such as taste, preference, availability, culture, or affordability. Other times our decisions are influenced by cues such as signage, colors, packaging, and product placement. Research shows that by changing these factors, it is possible to influence the choices people make.

Making these subtle environmental changes is referred to as nudges. In the next few slides, we will be discussing different examples of how to integrate nudges into a community site setting.

Slide 5



Make healthy foods convenient

Product placement plays an important role in the likelihood that someone might choose that item. In order to encourage people to take more of the healthy foods and less of the unhealthy foods, sites can place the healthy options, such as fruits and vegetables, in more prominent locations. If people serve themselves by going through a buffet line, fruits and vegetables should be at the front of the line. You can place desserts at the end of the line. Generally, people will begin to fill up their plates with the first options they pass, which will ideally be the healthiest options.

Placing healthy food at eye level in easy to reach locations is another great way to encourage selections of these items.

Slide 6



Make healthy foods convenient, continued

Increasing the number of times and locations that a food is offered, a strategy known as multiple exposures, is another way to increase the likelihood that an individual will choose that item. For example, you could place a basket of apples at the front of the line and as a centerpiece on tables, or at the front desk and near the exit.

Another technique is pre-cutting fruits and vegetables for a fast, easy snack, or by simply reducing the size of a serving spoon or plate.

Offering safe drinking water in the lobby, during meetings or events, and whenever food is served is a simple way to encourage water consumption. Similarly, it is a good idea to make sure fruits and vegetables are available any time food or snacks are served. Guidelines like these could even be included in a site-wide policy document developed by a health committee.

Slide 7



Make less healthy foods inconvenient

On the other hand, product placement can also be used to discourage unhealthy choices. Placing less healthy foods, like baked goods for example, on the lower shelves, behind other foods, or making them "by request only" can discourage overconsumption of these items. Another option is to decrease the amount or variety of unhealthy options entirely.

Does anyone have examples of how making food more or less convenient may work at your site?

Slide 8



Make healthy foods appealing

In order to make healthy food more attractive, staff and volunteers can make simple upgrades to displays, such as placing produce in display baskets. It could also be as simple as making sure any spoiled or rotten produce is removed from displays.

continued

Slide 8 continued

Signage is also an important tool for making healthy foods appealing and influencing choices. You can display colorful, attractive signs near healthy food that highlight healthy items or point out health benefits. As a note, it is important to consider the literacy level of people who will be reading the signs. Similarly, if your site serves non-English speakers, you can make efforts to have signs available in multiple languages. Signage is a strategy that can also be used to nudge physical activity, like taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

Another option is to use stickers or labels to help visually identify healthy choices. For example, green stickers could indicate the options to consume often; yellow could represent the options that should be consumed sometimes; and red could indicate options to choose rarely. For a simpler system, a single icon, such as a star, could be used to draw attention to the healthy options.

Do you currently use any signage to promote healthy eating?

Slide 9



Healthy vending

Many of these strategies, such as placing healthy options at eye level or using labels to identify healthy choices, can also be used in vending machines.

Ideas for healthy, non-refrigerated snacks for vending machines include:

- Popcorn (fat-free or low-fat)
- Whole grain cereal bar
- Whole grain crackers
- Pretzels
- Nuts and seeds
- Fruit cup in fruit juice
- Jerky (low sodium)
- Low or no calorie beverages

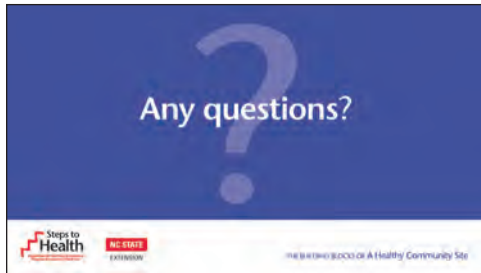
continued

Slide 9 continued

Plain water is the best beverage to highlight in healthy vending efforts, but sparkling/seltzer water (no added sugar), and fat-free or low-fat plain milk are other options that could also be promoted.

Do you all have any vending machines here? Do you know who is responsible for stocking them? Is it possible to increase healthy options?

Slide 10



Questions about today's discussion

We've finished the overview of different ways to nudge people toward healthy eating.

Does anyone have any questions about nudges or anything we've covered today?

If there aren't any more questions, I invite you all to write down on your action item card one nudge strategy you might be able to implement, and one way you could use signage or healthy vending to increase healthy food choices. You can write more than one, but this is meant to be a reminder of today's discussion and a reminder of what a large role you can play in helping people to eat healthier and be more physically active.

Training participants can share what they wrote if they like.

Thank you so much for your participation!

Factors that influence what we eat

ACCESSIBILITY	AVAILABILITY	CONVENIENCE	CULTURE
Finances, proximity, geography, transportation	Kitchen, store, school, work	Transportation, time, ease	Familiarity, skills, taste, schedule

What is a food environment?



The food environment is:

- The physical presence of food that affects a person's diet
- A person's proximity to food store locations
- The distribution of food stores, food service, and any physical entity by which food may be obtained
- A connected system that allows access to food

How community sites can improve their food and physical activity environments

Regulate food sold in vending machines.



Establish nutrition policies for mealtimes.

Create rules on foods served in meetings or in programs.

Increase healthy options in cafeterias.

Draft policies to promote a physically active lifestyle.

Ensure free and safe drinking water is available during meals and events.



Hold walking challenges to encourage physical activity.

Promote healthy menu items in desirable locations and good lighting.

Model healthy behaviors.

Give participants an opportunity for menu input.

Implement active transportation programs.



Start a garden for participants.

Remember to “nudge” your way to a healthier site!

Be strategic with
product placement.



Make healthy food
convenient.



Use smaller
portions.

Place healthy food
at eye level.

Place less healthy
food on lower
shelves, behind
healthy food, or
make it “by request.”



Always offer water.

Decrease amount
of less healthy
food served.

Add signs
and materials
to highlight
healthy
options.



Healthy vending!

Fill vending machines with healthy food and beverages.

Water



Fat-free or low-fat popcorn



Whole grain cereal bar



Whole grain crackers



Pretzels



Nuts and seeds



Fruit cup in fruit juice



Low-sodium jerky



After this training, the first step I will take is...



THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site

A Toolkit from Steps to Health that Helps Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice at Community Sites

This material was funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–SNAP.
This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

After this training, the first step I will take is...



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ACTION PLANNING TOOL

NEED/OPPORTUNITY you are trying to address:

Date: _____

GOAL/OUTCOME you are trying to achieve to address the need/opportunity

Actions to Reach Above Goal	Person(s) Involved	Assets/Strengths	Resources/Support Needed	Target Date for Completion

Action Planning Reminders

1. Involve a variety of stakeholders in the process, such as site leadership, staff, residents, or other site participants.
2. Create goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and timely (SMART).
3. Start with 1–2 goals. You can always create more once those are accomplished.
4. Use your action plan to keep on target to achieve established goals. Follow-up on your plan regularly to evaluate progress and maintain momentum.

 Steps to Health, NCSU SNAP-Ed

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 @ncstepstohealth

 www.ncstepstohealth.org



NC STATE

EXTENSION

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THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site

A Toolkit from Steps to Health that Helps Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice at Community Sites

FOLLOW-UP ASSESSMENT

Extension Professional: _____ Date of Assessment: _____

Site Name: _____

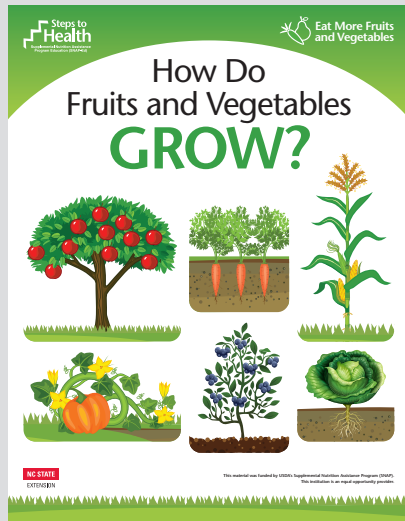
County: _____

Total number of people served per month: _____

	YES – The site is leading the way!	NO – There's room for improvement!
1. Does the community site have an active health committee?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 1 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
2. Does the community site implement guidelines on food and beverages that are served in meetings or during activities?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 1 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
3. Does the community site adapt its hours of operation to improve access to and convenience of programs and facilities?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 2 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
4. Are there on-site physical activity facilities that are open to community members outside of regular hours?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 2 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
5. Does the community site offer staff members accessible and free or low-cost physical activity programs?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 3 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
6. Does the community site offer staff members accessible and free or low-cost health and nutrition programs?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 3 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
7. Does the community site partner with local groups to promote and provide healthy activities for community members?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 3 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
8. Is water framed as the beverage of choice at the community site?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 4 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
9. Has the community site improved appeal, layout, or display of foods to encourage consumption of healthy foods?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 4 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
10. Has the community site improved facilities or equipment to accommodate healthier options?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 4 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
11. Do staff and volunteers model healthy eating and physical activity behaviors at the community site?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 5 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
12. Does the community site provide daily physical activity opportunities for community members?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 6 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.
13. Is there a garden at the community site?	<input type="radio"/> Yes	<input type="radio"/> No – See Section 6 of the Resource Guide for suggestions.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A Healthy Community Site

Promotional Materials



Posters: 17x22 inches



Yard sign: 24x18 inches



Floor decals: 36x30 inches

